



Landlessness in India: An Indicator of Increasing Socio-Economic Inequality

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Introduction:

Land continues to be the most important source of livelihood for more than two-thirds of the rural population, especially to the disadvantaged sections of the society. Land distribution structure and tenancy relations in rural India have undergone many changes because of land reforms and under the continuing demographic pressure, technological changes and market transactions. Land reforms were expected to dismantle the acute concentration of land, equalize access to land and improve conditions of tenants and agricultural labourers. But the programme of land reforms made no significant change in the situation. The current pattern of asset holdings in rural India is unequal, and inequality has increased during the 1990s. The bulk of rural asset is kept in land, which suggests that the asset position of the smallest holders is declining in absolute terms. While successive land reforms initiatives have been undertaken by state governments, they have not led to significant equalization of asset holdings (Kensuke Kubo, 2009).

Objectives of Study:

1. To study how socio-economic inequality is connected with ownership of agricultural land.
2. To study the proportion of landlessness in Indian agriculture sector.
3. To study the proportion of inequality in the distribution of agricultural land in India.

Hypothesis:

1. Inequality in agricultural land distribution is increasing in India along with increasing landlessness.
2. Socio-economic inequality is connected with landlessness.

Methodology:

Methodology is textual analysis of selected published works of various authors contributed in the area of land reforms and increasing landlessness in India. The secondary data published by NSSO's Land and Livestock Holdings Survey, Socio-economic and Caste Census of 2011, Draft National Land Reforms Policy, 2013 is also used.

Land Ownership and Socio-economic Status

In rural India ownership of land is not a matter of just property, it is also a matter of social status. In a country like

India there is still huge dependence of population on agriculture, land is central to economy, society and polity. It is not merely the primary means of production, but also confers on the holder economic security, social status, power and even identity (K.B.Saxena, 2011). Land is regarded as a precious, imperishable possession. It implies economic independence, determines people's social status and serves as a modest and permanent means of subsistence. Regardless of its size and quality, land guarantees the landholder an identity and reputation and provides incentives and opportunities for social inclusion (Ajay Kumar Gautam, 2021).

As stated above in the household basket of wealth in India land is considered as most important asset. Bharti (2019) in his article showed that, land consistently contributed more than 60 – 65 % of the total household owned wealth. Land and Building combined from around 90 % of the total household wealth. Financial assets contributes less than 10 % in the household wealth (Nitin Kumar Bharti, 2019). Further in his research Bharti (2019) divided population into three proportions i.e., top 10%, middle 40% and bottom 50%. He stated, top 10% of India's population possess 60% of their wealth in land, 40% middle possess 55%

of wealth in land and bottom 50% population possess 40% of wealth in land.

Roughly, land can be classified as agricultural land and non-agricultural land. Further agricultural land can be classified into three categories. Land with irrigation facility, land without irrigation facilities and land used for plantation. In non-agricultural land type there are residential land plot and land used for other purpose. Up to 2002 out of total land owned by households 94% of land was agricultural land. In non-agricultural land housing takes 4% and remaining 2% used for other non-agricultural purpose. In the year 2012 the share of agricultural land dropped to 89% and the share of land used for housing increased at 5% and 6% is used for other non-agricultural purpose (Bharti, 2019).

It can be concluded that in India land is the most important asset for all the households and ownership of agricultural land plays a significant role in determining socio-economic status. Major proportion of land comes under the category of agricultural land.

Scenario of Land Ownership in India:

The programme of land reforms made no significant change in the distribution of agricultural land among the farmers. Indian agrarian economy is still facing a problem of landlessness. The current pattern of asset holdings in rural India is unequal, and inequality has increased since 1990s. Institutional setup made a largest effect on the land distribution in the country. The main institutional factors which leads to land inequality and concentration of land in India can be prevalence of caste system, colonial land revenue system and post-independence land reform programmes. Historically upper caste is associated with more land ownership. During colonial regime British Government started awarding land titles thereby concretizing the land ownership. They introduced different land revenue systems in different parts of India with the objective of increasing land revenues and rents. After independence India adopted land reforms in three ways: Zamindari abolition, Tenancy laws and land ceiling which helped in reducing land concentration to some extent. However due to various reasons the success in redistribution of land was partial. The policy of land reforms failed in many states mainly because of the politics of land reforms, village level politicisation

association with the process, self aggrandising relationship between bureaucrats and politicians and lack of will on the part of political parties (Datta and Sen, 2018).

Landlessness is becoming increasingly endemic in India's rural belt. Mohanty in his article stated over 56% of rural population has no landholdings. He further stated landless agricultural labour category grew more than fivefold from about 27.3 million people in 1951 to more than 144.3 million in 2011 (Mohanty, 2018). In 2009 the Committee on State Agrarian Relations and the Unfinished Task of Land Reforms pointed out that landlessness has seen a dramatic increase from about 40% in 1991 to about 52 % in 2004-05 (CSARM, 2009). The Socio-economic and Caste Census of 2011 showed that households without land accounted for 56.41% of all rural households, or 101 million landless households. With an average household size of 4.9 persons, rural India is home to more than 494.9 million landless people (SECC 2011).

As per 70th round of NSSO (2013) marginal farmers owning less than 1 hectare of land constitute 82.83 per cent of rural households, including 7.41 per cent of landless persons. The farmers owning 1-2 hectare of land constitute 10 per cent of the farming households. The small and marginal farmers together are 92.83 per cent of farmer households, they own only 53.3 per cent of the operated area. Whereas the number of medium and large farmers constitute only 8.17 per cent of the farmer households but they own 47.34 of the area.³ These results underline the fact that India is a land of marginal and small agricultural households. This data indicates the unequal nature of land distribution even after six decades of land reforms. As per the 70th round of NSSO data the land distribution among the different social groups indicates that the agricultural household with land less than 1.00 hectares were highest among Scheduled Castes i.e. 82.7 percent and lowest among Others (others means upper castes) i.e. 63.6 percent. These results underline the fact that in India majority of scheduled caste people comes under the category of landless class and marginalized farmers.

Conclusion:

In India land is the most important asset for all the households and ownership of agricultural land plays a significant role in

determining socio-economic status. Major proportion of land comes under the category of agricultural land. The programme of land reforms made no significant change in the distribution of agricultural land among the farmers. Indian agrarian economy is still facing a problem of landlessness. The current pattern of asset holdings in rural India is unequal, and inequality has increased since 1990s.

Landlessness is becoming increasingly endemic in India's rural belt. Over 56% of rural population has no landholdings. In rural India ownership of land is not a matter of just property, it is also a matter of social status. In a country like India there is still huge dependence of population on agriculture, land is central to economy, society and polity. Land implies economic independence, determines people's social status and serves as a modest and permanent means of subsistence. Regardless of its size and quality, land guarantees the landholder an identity and reputation and provides incentives and opportunities for social inclusion.

India is a land of marginal and small agricultural households. Unequal nature of land distribution exists in India even after seven decades of planned economic development. In India majority of scheduled caste people comes under the category of landless class and marginalized farmers. Certain dimensions of deprivations are deeply rooted in an Indian society and requires some bold corrective measures by the government.

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