



## Land Reforms : A Process of Agriculture Development and Social Justice in Rural India

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**Abstract** – Institutional reform is one of the important tasks for development with social justice of an economy. As we know, India is a rural dominating economy and people of this area depend upon agriculture for livelihood but distribution of land (land relationship) and productivity of land are not favourable for economic and social transformation. The present paper deals with the issue and need for land reform, steps taken by Government, obstacles of land reforms and finally some suggestions are recommended for poverty alleviation and employment generation with sustainable development through land reforms.

**Keywords** – land relationship, agrarian structure, economic and social transformation, efficiency parameter, agrarian society, absentee landlords, and social justice.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Among the issues that face the modern world today, none are more dangerous than those that arise out of man's relation with the natural resources and that too with land, in particular. Continuous agricultural development can only be expected to occur under certain conditions of agrarian structure and its speed and dimensions will depend upon the extent to which these conditions are present. Agrarian structure refers to the manner in which man-land relationships are governed. It covers the way in which land is held and cultivated and the rights and privileges enjoyed by the different categories of people who have access to land.

The concept of land reforms has been used with different meanings and is open to a large number to interpretations. In view of the diversities existing in different countries of the world as between agrarian structures, political and social aspects, historical conditions and economic objectives and national priorities, it is difficult to adopt a universally acceptable definition of the term "land reform" so as to cover the common elements of the diverse phenomena. Some have defined it broadly to include all policies relating to transformation of the agrarian economy. United Nations in its third progress report on the progress of Land Reform has talked land reforms as "an integrated programme of measures designed to eliminate obstacles to economic and social development arising out of defects in the agrarian structure". It means the pattern of ownership of land has to be just and rational if we are to secure growth with social justice. It may be summarised as the change the land relationship and establish a new agrarian structure for the purpose of increment in productivity, to provide the equal opportunity in agrarian society, to reduce the extent of poverty and inequality, for inducing the investment and

expansion of saving capacity, to best use of resources, to eliminate the dominance (exploitation) of few people and lastly to establish social justice with economic and social transformation as a result of direct intervention of government in agrarian structure.

### II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF LAND REFORMS

In the modern world and in the aftermath of colonialism and the Industrial Revolution, land reform has occurred around the world, from the Mexican Revolution (1917; the revolution began in 1910) to Communist China to Bolivia (1952, 2006) to Zimbabwe and Namibia. Land reform has been especially popular as part of decolonization struggles in Africa and the Arab world, where it was part of the program for African socialism and Arab socialism. Cuba has seen one of the most complete agrarian reforms in Latin America. Land reform was an important step in achieving economic development in many Third World countries since the post-World War II period, especially in the East Asian Tigers and "Tiger Cubs" nations such as Taiwan, South Korea, and Malaysia.

Mainland China's economic reforms led by Deng Xiaoping have also played a key role in the development of the People's Republic of China, with the re-emergence of rich property developers in urban areas (though as in Hong Kong, land in China is not privately owned but leased from the state, typically on very long terms that allow substantial opportunity for private speculative gain). Change the land relationship and establish a new agrarian structure for the purpose of increment in productivity, to provide the equal opportunity in agrarian society, to reduce the extent of poverty and inequality, for inducing the investment and expansion of saving capacity, to best use of resources, to eliminate the dominance (exploitation) of few people and lastly to establish social justice with economic and social transformation as a result of direct intervention of government in agrarian structure.

### III. NEED FOR LAND REFORM IN INDIA

The need for direct intervention in the form of land reform in India emanated from exploitative nature of the land tenure system prevailing during the pre-independence period. At the end of independence, there were three types of land tenure system prevailing in the country-the zamindari system, the mahalwari system, and ryotwari system. The basic difference in these systems was

regarding the mode of payment of land revenue. In zamindari system, land revenue was collected from the farmers by zamindar, in mahalwari system by the village headman on behalf of the whole village, while in ryotwari system the land revenue was paid to the state directly by the farmers. As a result of these system, some features were immersed Pre-independent India like as feudal agrarian structure, exploitation, low agricultural productivity, shortage of food grains and unbalanced cropping pattern. These land systems based on exploitation with difference in degree as decreasing order from zamindari to ryotwari. A small group of large landowners, including absentee landlords had land rights. The vast majority of cultivators did not have any right or had limited rights as tenants or sub-tenants. The poor mostly leased-in land for subsistence. If the tenants used improved seeds, manure or extra labour, they had to share half of the increased produce with the landlords. Even before independence it was widely recognised that the main cause of stagnation and social injustice in economy was the stagnation in the agricultural sector and this stagnation could, to a large extent, be attributed to exploitative agrarian relations. When India became independent, policy makers felt the system of cultivation by tenants had to be overhauled as it was highly exploitative.

Under the Indian Constitution, land reform is the responsibility of individual states so while the federal government provides broad policy guidelines, the nature of land reform legislation, the level of political will and institutional support for land reform and the degree of success in implementing land reform have varied considerably from state to state with the agenda remaining unfinished in most states. Indian officialdom acknowledges its failure to implement land reforms. In India everyone was talking about land reforms but this vital area has taken a back seat with nothing being done," says Dr. K. Venkatasubramanian, member of India's Planning Commission.

#### IV. Measures undertaken for land reforms

After independence Indian government has taken some major steps under land reform. Those are as follows:

- Abolition of intermediaries
- Tenancy reforms: this reforms cover regulation of rent, security of tenure and ownership of tenure,
- Re-organisation of agriculture, for this purpose ceiling on holdings, consolidation of holdings and promotion the co-operative farming were introduced in land reform process.

First two steps have been taken for the purpose of extensive and intensive agriculture to increase in productivity. The third Step was introduced to increase efficiency parameter with social justice in rural India. Although abolition of intermediaries had been passed as Act in every state before the end of the first five year plan and official document claim that zamindari has been completely abolished but fact is that it has only changed

its garb. Presently zamindars are known as big landowners or rural capitalists or absentee landlords. For example, Daniel Thorner found that in post-reform Bihar, there existed estates of 500,700 or even 1000 acres and older structure of landowner. It means feudal rural structure alive in India.

The result was tenancy reforms which aimed to either abolish tenancy or regulate tenancy to ensure fixed tenure, fair rent etc. The whole point of tenancy reforms was to enable the poor tenants to cultivate their land more efficiently and improve their incomes. However the impact of tenancy reforms varied from state to state and from region to region. West Bengal under the "Operation Barga", Karnataka and Kerala has achieved more success than the other states. Most of the states have poor land record and tenants are not in the position to take advantage of tenancy reform because leases are oral or informal. During the past two decades or so, the state of Karnataka in southern India tried to confer occupancy rights to tenants. Many state governments have banned agricultural tenancy but concealed tenancy exists. Many of the affluent states like Punjab and Haryana show a growing tendency towards 'reverse tenancy' in which large farmers lease land from small and marginal ones.

Under re-organisation of agriculture ceiling legislations were enacted by all the states except Goa and north east region due to poor enforcement. Only less than 2% land has been declared surplus and actually distributed 1% of total cultivated area. Ceiling on agricultural holdings vary from state to state as evident from the table-1.

*Table-1: Ceilings on land Holdings*

State	Irrigated Land with two crops (in hectares)	Irrigated Land with one crop (in hectares)	Dry land (in hectares)
Andhra Pradesh	4.05 to 7.28	6.07 to 10.93	14.16 to 21.85
Assam	6.74	6.74	6.74
Bihar	6.07 to 7.28	10.12	12.14 to 18.21
Gujarat	4.05 to 7.29	6.07 to 10.93	8.09 to 21.85
Haryana	7.25	10.90	21.80
Himachal Pradesh	4.05	6.07	12.14 to 28.33
Jammu & Kashmir	3.6 to 5.06	---	5.95 to 9.20
Karnataka	4.05 to 8.10	10.12 to 12.14	21.85
Kerala	4.6 to 6.07	4.86 to 6.07	4.86 to 6.07
Madhya Pradesh	7.28	10.93	21.85
Maharashtra	7.28	10.93	21.85
Manipur	5.00	5.00	6.00
Orissa	4.05	6.07	12.14 to 18.21
Punjab	7.00	11.00	20.50
Rajasthan	7.28	10.93	21.85 to 70.82
Tamil Nadu	4.86	12.14	24.28
Sikkim	5.06	---	20.23
Tripura	4.00	4.00	12.00
Uttar Pradesh	7.00	10.95	10.25
West Bengal	5.00	5.00	7.00
Ceiling Suggested in Natiara	4.05 to 7.28	10.93	21.85
Guidelines of 1972			

*Source: Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi.*

The level of ceiling as mentioned above of different states and different area within same state differed

considerably. This creates a lot of confusions. Ceilings were suggested 4.05 to 7.28 for irrigated land with two crops, 10.93 for one crop and 21.85 hectares for dry land at national level in national guidelines of 1972. At present, there are so many land owners, who have operational holding of land more than ceiling limits of different state in India. It means this Act was not implemented with trueness. Consequences of this, distribution of operational holding has not changed to establish social justice in rural India.

*Table-2: Land reforms and Distribution of surplus land*

Measure of land reforms	Surplus land(million acres)	No. of beneficiaries(million)
Abolition of intermediaries	173	20
Tenancy reforms	6.32	12.42
Reorganization of agriculture	5.40	5.74
Total	184.72	38.16

Total surplus land 184.74 million acres were got through land reforms and distributed it among 38.16 million of tenants. In addition to surplus land, an area of 14.75 million acres of government wasteland has also been distributed among the landless and the poor. This area was not sufficient as facts stand; the progress of distribution of surplus land was probably slow.

*Table-3: The distribution of operational holding at all India level*

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage of respective column total.

Category of Holdings	No of Operational Holdings'000 Numbers		Area Operated in'000 hectares		Average Size of Operational Holdings in hectares	
	1990-91	1995-96	1990-91	1995-96	1990-91	1995-96
Marginal	53389	71179	24894	28121	0.39	0.40
Less than 1 hectare	(59.4)	(61.6)	(5.0)	(17.2)		
Small	20092	21643	28827	30722	1.43	1.42
1.0 to 2.0 hectare (s)	(18.8)	(18.7)	(7.4)	(18.8)		
Semi- Medium	13923	14261	38375	38953	2.76	2.72
2.0 to 4.0 hectare	(13.1)	(12.3)	(23.2)	(23.8)		
Medium	7580	7092	44752	41398	5.90	5.84
4.0 to 10.0 hectare	(7.1)	(6.1)	(27.1)	(25.0)		
Large	1654	1404	28659	24163	17.33	17.21
10.0 hectare and above	(1.6)	(1.2)	(7.3)	(14.8)		
All Holdings	106637	115580	165507	163357	1.57	1.41
	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)		

Source: Agricultural Census Division. Ministry of Agriculture, New Delhi.

Above mentioned data shows that there are five categories of operational holding (Marginal, Small, Semi, Medium and Large) Marginal farms increased from 56.4% in 1980 to 62.5 % in 2001 and their holding area increased from 12% to 18%, while percentage of large farms decreased from 2.4 % to 1% and operated holding also decreased from 23% to 13%. Considerably, these changing of land relations is not appreciable because it may be possible a major role of changing farming concept in Indian society.

## V. NEXUS OF POLITICIANS AND LAND LORDS

In India, land has always been associated with social status and has historically remained in the control of certain social groups. Social stratification is strong in India and is based on the caste system. The main caste groups are Brahmin, Vaishya, Kshatriya and Shudra, and each main group consists of hundreds of sub-castes. Some groups are not included in this classification, especially the tribal and other groups with limited access to productive resources. The caste groups are associated with specific occupations and work; hence, they can be categorized into land-associated castes and other castes. The land-associated castes are usually the traditional cultivators. The social structure in terms of caste itself was geared to the mandatory segregation of groups associated with cultivation, trade, teaching along with priesthood and other services. This segregation of social structure was associated not only with the political base, but also with the landownership pattern in the country. The power relationship derived advantage from this social segregation, and the emergence of political power in the country can be easily associated with caste groups.

Although land reforms became a prominent post-Independence policy initiative (in order to keep the commitment made by many of the leaders of the

independence movement), the land associated caste groups wielded significant political power after Independence, so the very interests of those responsible for lawmaking were tied with the implementation of the law. Naturally, as a result the land reform laws were either not thoroughly implemented or were manipulated with the help of administering institutions.

It is fact that at this time not every land lord has associated with any one political party and hold influential position but also many of bureaucrats related to this type of family. These people show positive sign for land reform but they have no interest in it. Some bureaucrats want to initiate to take bold steps for implementation of land reforms acts. They come back due to wrong transfer policy of bureaucrats. There are some reasons for unsatisfactory land reforms like as-lack of political willpower, inactiveness of administrative bodies, flaws of judiciaries, lack of awareness in rural areas, unsatisfactory and defective definition of personal cultivation, there was not family as a base for ceiling in every state before 1972 and therefore a large number of mala-fide transferred of land, due to inadequate definition of tenant, laws relating to tenancy reform could not be used for protecting their rights, and a wrongful step was taken as voluntary surrender in land reform process etc.

## VI. SUGGESTIONS

Effective implementation of land reform programmes are needed for new agrarian structure in which, increment in productivity, provision of equal opportunity for marginalized class in rural area and inducement of agricultural investment and saving capacity etc should incorporate. So that holistic development may be possible. On the basis of evaluation land reform programmes, some suggestions are emerged for betterment of agrarian structure like State Government should take bold steps for land reform, responsibilities should be fixed on administrative bodies, persons who are engaged in main role of land reform should be trained, monitoring body should be formed at district level, pending matters related to land should be completed within definite time period at every level of honorable courts, land document should be updated with computerization, co-operative farming should be promoted, consolidation of land should be used as a tool in continuous process of land reform, person who is not abide by the rule of land reform, should be debarred in political and economic activities, the nexus between the politicians, administrators and large landowner should be checked.

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