

# A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LAND REFORMS PROGRAMME IN INDIA

**Jyoti Berwal**

Ph. D. Research Scholar

Department of Economics, Panjab University

**ABSTRACT:** Land reforms were one of the foremost priorities of independent India. It was one of the poster boy initiatives of modern India which seek to end the years of malice under British rule. It was a bold step to dismantle the centuries old Zamindari system and ensure socio-economic justice for the poor as enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Land-reform policy in India had two specific objectives. First, to remove such impediments to increase in agricultural production as arise from the agrarian structure inherited from the past. The second objective, which is closely related to the first, is to eliminate all elements of exploitation and social injustice within the agrarian system, to provide security for the tiller of soil and assure equality of status and opportunity to all sections of the rural population.

**KEYWORDS:** Zamindari System, Social Equity, Agricultural Efficiency, Empowerment, Agricultural Technology.

**INTRODUCTION:** Indian food production has crossed the figure of 250 million ton in 2016-17 but on productivity scale, the performance of Indian agricultural sector is not satisfactory. One of the main causes of low productivity is highly fragmented land holdings. Also, more than 80% of the Indian farmers fall in the category of small and marginal farmers with an average size of land holding less than 2 hectares. The land reforms initiated after independence and given push in 1970s gave an effective direction of change in this regard. Though land reforms had limited success due to loopholes in law, corruption; these reforms have changed the shape of Indian agrarian system.

Historical background: Land reforms in communist powered states of Bengal and Kerala were most successful after independence. Bhoodan movement started by Acharya Vinoba Bhave was voluntary started in Telangana; this land could never be sold. Operation Barga 1977 for providing small land plots to landless farmers in Bengal. In J&K also land reforms became successful.

## **LAND REFORMS UNDERTAKEN IN INDIA:**

**Abolition of Zamindari:** This reform in 1950s abolished the zamindari system and acknowledged the 'occupancy rights'(person to whom the land actually belongs) of the peasants. However it failed to recognize the tiller's rights. It became successful in states like West Bengal and Kerala due to political will and strong rural mass social

base. But it got failed in other states due to lack of political will, bureaucratic apathy, corruption and zamindar's big hand in influencing the implementation process.

Tenancy rights: The land reform afterwards observed the rights of tenants, ensuring them tenure, thereby incentive to produce more. This reform did not succeed for its failure to legally register tenants, except in Communist ruled states, where government was proactive in registering them e.g.; Operation Barga in Bengal. Absentee landlordism was also there. Moreover, poor voice of tenants made the reform failed in some areas.

Land ceiling: It has resulted in re-distribution of land and promoted equity. Land was taken from individuals if it is higher than ceiling and given to landless ones. But it got failed in some states because of benamis, poor implementation, lack of proper land records and absentee landlordism.

Redistribution of free lands: this reform started by Vinoba Bhave did not succeed much for the reason that land provided for free was mostly fallow and uncultivable.

Consolidation reforms: Under this, farmers were asked to voluntarily consolidate their land to increase productivity but it got failed because of the fear of farmers of losing their fertile land and probability of getting fallow land. There were also issues like lack of credit and issue of free-riders.

Government should reorient from market led land reforms towards these among which consolidation and cooperative farming are still viable and promising of showing results.

It can be said that land reforms with strict implementation, political will and clear provisions are successful else loopholes are exploited by big landlords to continue the colonial era situation of exploitation.

#### **LAND REFORMS VS ADVANCED AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY:**

Land reforms (LRs) were an institutional strategy to transform relations between land and man. Various objective were kept in mind before their implementation: to enhance farmer's incomes and hence standard of living, to Boost GDP, to increase social justice to all those involved in agriculture like Tenants, marginal farmers and share-croppers and to enhance productivity.

By the beginning of 1970's when food insecurity was threatening the nation, new scientific innovation (HYV rice) and technology which brought in the first Green Revolution along with various major irrigation projects were undertaken. Later we observe great significance was given to organic farming, cooperative farming which can address problems faced by small landholders. ICAR the apex autonomous body has played an important role in promoting agriculture research and new technology to increase productivity. The LPG reforms has seen an increasing demand for food processing industry which has created high demand for various agro products by private parties thus contract farming has come into play in various parts of the nation.

The advent of ITC has caused a great improvement in Indian agricultural sector.

- 1) Digitization of Land records
- 2) E-choupal, E-Nam - Online platform to sell agro products with profitable value
- 3) Empowerment of rural farmers with scientific methods of agriculture.

Thereby with modernization of agricultural activities the nature of land reforms must be coherent. Land reforms must be pro agriculture and pro farmer. With an ambitious plan to double the farmers' income by 2022 adequate land must be made available for irrigation and cultivation purpose. Besides in the age of rapid urbanization and industrialization, government must make holistic and sustainable approach to protect agricultural land and interests of the farming community.

Technology has touched the agricultural practice in India. It has brought manifold advantages to this country (e.g. Green revolution). Land being its basis has to stay in tandem with technological changes for maximum benefits. Technological advancement in field of information dissemination, micro-irrigation, marketing, storage and transportation etc. have provided a unique opportunity to make, otherwise averse, farming an attractive employment esp. for rural youth. Land reformation is required for the following reasons: First, Mechanization of farming by utilizing latest technological tools like tractors, thrashers etc. is not viable for small and declining land size. Also, deploying high cost & water efficient micro-irrigation technology is not feasible for small farms. Second, technology has made price discovery platforms like e-NAM & forward marketing (Negotiating Warehouse Receipts) and storage of produce easier. But land required for these will need easier land acquisition process. Third, boom in FinTech companies - land reforms have expected to make lending to farmers easier by providing land records and land use history. Payment banks in future will also be eligible to lend.

#### **Impediments (Analysis):**

1. Infrastructural constraints such as poor rural connectivity, erratic electricity and supply of fertilizers along with uncertain crops pricing policy are of equal importance.
2. Steps to bridge the rural-urban digital divide must also be taken e.g. utilizing the USOF for faster implementation of Bharat Net Project.
3. The language barrier to access technology must also be adequately addressed.

Thus, the window provided by technological advancement will not benefit farmers unless land reforms aim to infuse them by making land consolidation/leasing a possibility.

The land reforms policy must be in parallel with the current agricultural technologies as this will help in channelizing the focus on issue of land acquisition in a better way:

- 1) Currently the practice of statistics in calculation of productivity is focused on acreage of cultivation but the focus should be brought on productivity per unit area , this will lead to bifurcation of productive and nonproductive land , which can be used for the purpose of industries.
- 2) It has been seen that the compensation given on land acquisition often conflicts the actual prices leading to litigation and distress, instead companies should invest in helping the farmland acquiring modernization of the farmlands of the surrounding area like drip irrigation, tractors, bore well etc.

### **Land Reform and Social Equity:**

Post-independence, intermediate rent collectors were abolished and land was redistributed, mostly in Kerala and West Bengal (through a land ceiling act) and through Bhoodan movement. Land ceiling acts improved social equality as more tillers started owning land and reduced their dependence on landlords. Improvement in agricultural efficiency, though, is questionable because small farmers tend to have less capital. However, intensive farming through subsidized fertilizers and cropping throughout the year improved efficiency. Today, the question of land reforms extends to consolidation too as land holdings became smaller and smaller through generations. Consolidation of holdings brings agricultural efficiency through economies of scale and mechanized farming. On the other hand, social equity might be compromised as it brings separation between landed and landless classes. Hence, what is required is an efficient combination of land ceiling and consolidation so that both agricultural efficiency and social equity can be realized. This might be achieved through cooperative farming (e.g. - Kolkhoz in Russia), recent scheme called Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana which promotes organic farming in clusters of 50 acres is a progressive model. Another aspect of land reform, a very famous model contract farming law brings forth significant aspects like tenancy security and formal contract agreements that even act as collateral for loans. This reform in contract farming improves agricultural efficiency because of fixed terms of contract (security) and provides a sense of ownership of land for the tenant. Also, loans can be easily availed at bank rates. Social equity is ensured because there will be no scope for exploitation of tenant by landlord. Hence, all the states need to put forth these reforms to increase efficiency and also ensure social equity.

### **Impact on Agricultural Efficiency:**

1. Productivity: Increased productivity due to consolidation of fragmented land and cooperative farming promoted.
2. Credit: Access to credit becomes easier due to land ownership under tenancy law.

3. Access to credit & increase in land holdings incentivize farmers to invest in new farming practices.
4. Wastelands were reclaimed and production increased resulting in food sufficiency.

#### **Impact on Social Equity:**

1. Land equity: Marginalized farmers got ownership over more land area and thus increase in social status.
2. Credit access and increased food production > increase in income > filled the gap of income inequality.
3. Abolition of zamindari system curtailed exploitative practices such as beggar, bonded labor.

**CONCLUSION:** An egalitarian society cannot be created until land reforms are undertaken efficiently. With increasing farmer distress, falling productivity levels, and rising suicides, Land reforms, along with weaning away of excess workforce from agriculture is needed to alleviate rural distress. However, this agenda is still unfinished and needs to be effectively revisited by the Indian state.

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