

Land Reforms Legislation in Karnataka – A Study

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Abstract:

This paper presents the land reforms in legislation in Karnataka. In the princely State of Mysore the land was held mostly by three communities namely: Vokkaligas, Lingayats and Brahmins. The Brahmins held mostly *Inam* lands – the lands granted by the erstwhile rulers in appreciation of their services. They were absentee landlords as they moved out to towns and cities in search of education and occupation. Consequently *Inam* lands and *non-Inam* lands were cultivated by tenants who belonged to the cultivating castes such as Vokkaligas and Lingayats. To some extent the backward minority communities and some SCs such as AK and AD also cultivated some *Inam* lands. The *Inam* lands were abolished by the Mysore (Religious and Charitable) *Inams* Abolition Act in 1953. After the reorganisation of the State in 1956, The Karnataka Land Reforms Act, 1961, The Karnataka Land Reforms (Co-operative Farms) Rules 1966, The Karnataka Land Reforms (Legal Assistance to Poor Tenants) Rules 1968 and The Karnataka Land Rules Reforms 1974 were enacted. Some of the important features of the Act of 1974 are 1) Total ban of resumption of leased out land by the landlords, abolition of tenancy except in the case of soldiers and seamen, 2) Reduction of land ceilings to ten standard acres and 3) The Constitution of Land Tribunals in each Taluk consisting of Assistant Commissioners, Thashildars, local MLA and non-official members including SCs and STs (Thimmaiah and Aziz 1984 : 35). As a result of these land legislations the SCs who worked as tenants became the owners of the land.

Keywords; Princely, State, Mysore, land, communities.

Introduction:

During the period 1972-1984, 95644 SC families were allotted the Government land amounting to 277014 acres and 35 guntas under Land Distribution Scheme. During 1982-84, 20591 SC families were granted 53201 acres of Government land. Out of 298026 of surplus land, 151700 acres of land was taken possession of by the government and out of which 60226 acres of land were distributed to 15554 SC persons ever since scheme came into existence. Under the schemes of Assistance to Surplus Land Grantees and Negilu Bhagya surplus land grantees and ex-tenants were confirmed with occupancy rights under Land Reforms Act. There were 6588 beneficiaries during 1980-83. During the year 1983-84 about 23500 persons received benefits under these schemes. During the year 1980-83,

15.20% of the beneficiaries of these schemes belonged to SCs and STs. In the following year (1983-84) the percentage of the SC/ST beneficiaries rose to 28.26% (see Welfare of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Minorities in Karnataka : A Report on Policies, Programmes and Achievements since 1983). As per the 1995-96 Agricultural Census in Karnataka there were 62.21 lakh operational holders. Out of these landholders SCs accounted for 11.68 per cent. Thus the SC landholders form a significant segment in the agrarian structure of Karnataka. Though there is sufficient literature on the SCs in Karnataka, there is hardly any empirical work on the patterns of land holdings among the SCs (see Chapter II for Review of Literature). The present study has been undertaken with a view to fill-up the research gap.

Formulation of Research Problem

The SC land holders who accounted for 11.68 per cent of the total number landholders operated the area of 10.38 lakh hectares out of 121.09 lakh hectares in 1995. However the majority of these landholders are marginal and small farmers. Their socio economic profile is very significant in understanding the changing agrarian structure not only in the State but also in the Country as a whole. The present study attempted to examine not only the patterns of land holdings among the SCs but also their socio-economic profile. The major emphasis is on the explanatory aspect, though analytical and theoretical aspects are integral to it. Though approach is empirical, theoretical insights are sought to be derived from the factual data with a view to provide a comprehensive sociological analysis of the reciprocal relationship between the land holdings and the socio-economic life of the SCs. It is in this context the research problem of the present study has been formulated as “Patterns of Land Holdings among Scheduled Castes : A Study of their Socio-Economic Profile”. Before explaining the methodology to be employed in the study, we shall briefly mention its objectives and its scope.

Objectives

The major objectives of the present study are as follows :

1. To examine the changing Indian agrarian structure and social groups constituting it through time and space.
2. To identify the landholdings among the SCs and determine to which class size they belong.
3. To analyse the demographic composition of the respondents in terms of age, sex and marital status.
4. To analyse the socio-economic background of the respondents with special emphasis on the family, its type and size, caste, education, occupation and income and liabilities if any, residence and native tongue.
5. To analyse the patterns of the landholdings among the respondents with special reference to size and area of operational holdings in India and Karnataka and the landholding size of the respondents in relation to caste,

types of land, source of irrigation, acquisition of land, cropping pattern and lastly landholding as status determinant and self-image of the respondents being SCs.

6. To discover the channel of social mobility among respondents *vis-a-vis* their fathers and grand fathers.
7. To probe into the housing and material questions of the respondents with focus on housing and its type, method of acquisition of house, location of houses and the facilities available in the house like electricity, number of living rooms, drinking water facility and lastly material possessions and
8. To analyse their social and political participation.

Scope and Significance of the Study

Substantially the present study falls within the realm of sociology in general and its sub-fields namely - Sociology of Agrarian Relations, Rural Sociology and Sociology of Rural Development. The sociology of agrarian relations holds much promise as it has not been fully explored by anthropologists and sociologists in India. The study of agrarian system implies something more specific than the study of peasant society and culture. The present study examines the landholding position of the SCs in relation to their social, economic and political status. The approach employed in the present study is both historical and sociological. The historical facts from authentic sources have been extensively used to prove the fact that the caste has played a significant role in the control, utilisation and ownership of land. The SCs denied of land ownership for centuries gradually emerged as a very small-scale landholders in the last one and half a century because of changed social and economic climate. In fact, the SCs have been an integral part of the Indian agrarian structure which has undergone change over the centuries. Now SCs who have small size holding belong to a class of marginal and small farmers and thus constitute the lower structure of the agrarian structure in India. At the outset it is to be made clear that the present study is not concerned with technological arrangements in relation to the management of land. But its major focus is only on social arrangement. That is to say how the caste has played a significant role in the management of land – its utilisation, control and ownership. The SCs, because of their stigmatised caste status, appalling poverty and powerlessness, could not acquire land. It is because of land, not only the upper castes and even the intermediary castes in the caste hierarchy enjoyed social, economic and political power. Thus land acted as status elevator in Indian society. Though some SCs got some land grants as village functionaries in earlier centuries, there was not relative material change in their living conditions because of their stigmatised personality. Though they were an integral part of the Indian village communities, they remained at the bottom of the caste hierarchy for centuries for want of land ownership coupled with a numerable social and cultural disabilities.

During the British period some of the SCs got land due to the creation of new economic, occupational and political opportunities which were in theory free from caste. After Independence some more SCs got land under the Bhoodhan movement and various government schemes. Now the majority of the SCs landholders are marginal and small farmers. Nevertheless, the position is far better than that of agricultural labourers who constitute large segment of working force in India. Now there is caste disparity among the SCs in the distribution of lands. Consequently, there is not only intra-caste rivalry but also inter-caste rivalry among them. The close nexus between caste and agrarian structure is becoming more complex as the landholders based on caste transforming themselves into class. Besides it, the SC landholders constitute an important social group both as caste and class in the changing agrarian structure in India.

The present study is of considerable importance to planners, policy makers and administrators to hammer out the schemes better than those available to elevate the status of the SCs through land grants and by educating them to adopt cropping pattern and suitable techniques keeping in view of the climatic conditions in which their lands are located. Providing suitable credit facilities to the SC landholders, they may be freed from the hands of traditional money lenders, and help them increase their agricultural productivity. Thus the present study contributes significantly to the field of Rural Sociology in general and the sociology of agrarian relations in India in particular.

Methodology

The universe of the present study of consists of SC landholders in Karnataka. The area of present study has been confined to Tumkur Taluk, Tumkur District as it consists of 395 villages with a rural population of 246260. The total number of SC landholders including all size classes were 5603 and the area operated by them was 6031 hectares (Census of India 1991). (Statistical Officer, Tumkur District, Tumkur).

As a preliminary step, the list of 1150 SC landholders living in 27 villages namely : 1) Hebbaka, 2) Heggere, 3) Amalapura, 4) Hobalapura, 5) Thimmalapura, 6) Satymangala, 7) Gangasandra, 8) Chikkasarangi, 9) Banavara, 10) Naraganahalli, 11) Settihalli, 12) Kambhathanahalli, 13) Managi, 14) Mallasandra, 15) Mallenahalli, 16) Kuppur, 17) Hosahalli, 18) Devaraya Pattna, 19) Arakere, 20) Yellapura, 21) Kuchangi, 22) Malekote, 23) Swandanahally, 24) K.Palasandra, 25) Narasapura, 26) Kottihalli and 27) Adalapura located in Tumkur taluk was obtained from the village accountants of the concerned gram panchayats. The list thus obtained constituted the sample frame of the present study. The sample was drawn on the basis of sample random technique (with the provision for replacement). The size of the sample of the respondents was fixed at 222 in view of time and the availability of other resources. The sample size constituted about 20% of the sample frame.

The major tool of collection of primary data has been interview schedule see Appendix 'III'. The researcher approached the respondents in their residences at their convenient time and interviewed them. Besides soliciting comprehensive data through the schedule, the researcher held informal talks with respondents and obtained useful information about their day to day life situations.

The primary data collected from the respondents supplemented by relevant secondary data. The importance sources consulted for this purpose included available empirical studies, historical works, official documents, Census Reports, Agricultural Census Reports, Land Reforms Acts, Statistical brochures and News papers clippings.

The data obtained through interviews were subjected to careful scrutiny for completeness and clarification. Based on frequency counts, the data were categorised and incorporated into the code design. Frequency tables and cross tables were prepared using computers. The relevant tables have been used and analysed in the various chapters of the thesis.

Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into nine chapters including the introductory chapter which places the problem in perspective. At the outset, it describes the agrarian structure and the social groups which composed it. It also traces the origin of castes and untouchables and examines the relationship between caste and land in India. It describes how the SCs constituted the bottom stratum of the Hindu society and how they became agrestic slaves. Further it describes the change that has taken place among the SCs during the British period and thereafter. It also highlights the importance of land reforms and their impact on the SCs. Lastly it brings into focus the problem of research its scope, significance and methodology used for it.

The second chapter reveals the literature on the SCs with special reference to their position in respect of landholdings. It also highlights the research lacuna and makes case for the present study.

The third chapter carefully examines the changes that have taken place in agrarian structure of India from the distant past to the present day.

The fourth chapter presents the profile of the SCs in Karnataka based on the Census reports.

The fifth chapter analyses the demographic composition of the respondents in terms of age, sex and marital status. It describes the social and economic background of the respondents with special emphasis on the family, type and size, caste background, education, occupation and income and liabilities if any, residence and mother tongue.

The chapter sixth examines the patterns of landholdings among the respondents, against the backdrop of the number landholdings and the area of operational holdings both in India and Karnataka state. This chapter also analyses the landholding position of the respondents in terms of size and type of holding, sources of irrigation, lands obtained, cropping pattern and landholding as status determinant and self- image of the respondents being SCs.

The seventh chapter probes into the housing and material possession of the respondents with reference to housing and its type, location of houses, and the facilities available in the house such as drinking water, living rooms, electricity etc.

The eighth chapter analyses the social and political participation of the respondents.

The ninth chapter ties together the whole thesis and comments on the findings which have some implications for the policy, for social action and for further research. The word ‘agrarian’ is derived from the Latin word ‘agrarius’ meaning land. The lexical meaning of the word is “relating to or concerning the land and its ownership, cultivation or tenure or its management or its distribution” (see the American Heritage Dictionary, 1991 : 88; Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary, 1962 : 20). Generally, the concept ‘agrarian social structure’ refers to the group or groups of persons who derive their livelihood from the soil. In other words, it is composed of various groups of persons engaged in the ownership, control and use of land. In fact, social categories or groups that compose agrarian structure differ not only from country to country but also from one region to another within the same country. Thus, there has been diversity in the social composition of the groups through time and space. Consequently there is no agreement among scholars as to who constitute the agrarian structure. Daniel Thorner (1973 : 3) observes, “the agrarian structure is, after all not an external frame work within which various classes function, but rather it is the sum total of

the ways in which each group operates in relation to the other groups. You will find some of these relations are defined and enforced by law. Others are customary. Still others are a flexible or fluctuating character”. The agrarian relation had never been static in India. Rather, they changed periodically, as there was change in the social composition of the groups of persons constituting the agrarian structure. Consequently, there has been no agreement among scholars as to who constitute the agrarian structure. According to Beteille (1974 : 25) the Indian agrarian structure consists of peasant proprietors who subsist mainly by family labour, non-cultivating landowners, sharecroppers and landless labourers. The entire agrarian structure revolves round the utilisation, control and ownership of land. More or less similar is the view of G P Mishra (1977 : 2) who notes that the structure of Indian agriculture with unequal pattern of land ownership distribution is based on three basic agrarian production relations

involving owner cultivator, leased holder and sharecropper. He further defines owner cultivator leased holder and share-cropper as given below:

1. The owner cultivator is one who owns and operates his own land.
2. The leaseholder cultivates land on lease without owning it and pays to the owner of that land either in cash or in kind as per terms of payment fixed by the landlord orally or through documents.
3. The sharecroppers is one who doesn't own land but cultivates it on basis of mutual contract (oral or written) between him and landlord for sharing produce and cost equally between them.

Daniel Thorner (1976) has identified three principal groups constituting the Indian agrarian structure namely proprietors, working peasants and labourers. They are termed as *Malik*, *kisan* and *mazdur* respectively.

Maliks or proprietors derive their agriculture income primarily from property rights in the soil. Their common interest is to keep the level of rents up while keeping the wage level down. They collect rents from tenants, sub tenants and sharecroppers. This class of *maliks* is further divided into two sub groups namely large absentee landlords and smaller proprietors. The former holds rights over large tracts extending over several villages: they are with absolutely no interest in land management or improvement. On the contrary the latter reside personally in the village in which they own land. They usually exercise some degree of management and control over its cultivation. The *maliks*, whether large or small are the receivers of rural rent and chief employers of rural labour.

Conclusion:

Kisans or working peasants - They have a recognised property interest in the land. By and large their legal and customary rights are somewhat inferior to those of the *Maliks* in same village. Furthermore, the class of *kisan* includes small landholder and substantial tenants. The former has holdings sufficient to support a family. They cultivate land with family labour. They do not either employ outside labours (except in harvest) or receive rent. The later hold leases under either big landlords or rich landowners. Their tenurial rights are fairly secured; their size of holding is usually above the sufficiency level (see Dhanagare, 1992 : 271-72.)

Mazdur are labourers form the third rural class. They gain their livelihood primarily working on other people's land. Under this class are included poor tenants and sharecroppers. The poor tenants, indeed, have tenancy rights in the soil or even property rights. Their holdings are small. The income either from cultivating them or from renting them out is less than the earnings from fieldwork. Wages may be received in money or kind. The sharecroppers include tenants-at-will. Especially the tenants-at-will hold leases without security. They cultivate land for others on

sharecropper basis. They have atleast agricultural implements (Dhanagare 1992 : 271-72). Regarding Thorner's classification or categorisation of the agrarian classes in India, Dhanagare (1992 : 272 : 73) remarks as :

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