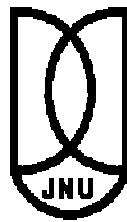


**THE LAND QUESTION UNDER LIBERALIZATION:
RESPONSE OF THE ALL INDIA KISAN SABHA**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of*

Master of Philosophy

VAIBHAV RAAJ



**Centre for Political Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi – 110067
India
2012**

July 27, 2012

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled '**The Land Question Under Liberalization : Response of the All India Kisan Sabha**' submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** is an original research work and has not been submitted so far, in part or full, for any other degree or diploma of any University / Institution.

Vaibhav Raaj

July 27, 2012

CERTIFICATE

This dissertation entitled '**The Land Question Under Liberalization: Response of the All India Kisan Sabha**' submitted by **Vaibhav Raaj** to the **Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University**, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or full, for any other degree or diploma of any University.

We recommend that the dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Prof. Pralay Kanungo
(CHAIRPERSON)

Prof. Valerian Rodrigues
(SUPERVISOR)

Acknowledgements

A word of gratitude is due to a number of individuals whose advice and support were instrumental in the completion of this study.

Foremost to Prof. Valerian Rodrigues for providing scholarly guidance as the supervisor of this study, and for bearing with me through my irregularities and confusions.

To Vijoo Krishnan, Chirashree Dasgupta and R. Ramakumar for providing access to crucial resource materials and theoretical insights.

To my parents and my sister for having suffered my prolonged absence from their lives due to this dissertation and other activities of mine.

To Rashmi.

To Aardra for her experienced guidance in the writing process. To Awanish.

To Arjun for his substantive 'academic hunches' on the subject and to Rohan and Lenin for being around.

To Ranjani, Kriti, Paritosh, Sahil, Bibek, Nishant, KG, Nikhil, Andy and all the others including my classmates, who helped me with the study and the struggle.

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Acknowledgements..... | iv |
| INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY | 3 |
| Rationale and Scope | 5 |
| CHAPTER ONE | 9 |
| LAND RELATIONS IN INDIA TODAY..... | 9 |
| 1.1 Introduction..... | 9 |
| 1.2.The State of Land Reforms | 12 |
| 1.2.1. Ceiling on Land Holdings | 13 |
| 1.2.2. Tenancy reforms | 18 |
| 1.2.3. Homestead Rights | 20 |
| 1.3. Land Rights of Dalits, Tribals and Women..... | 21 |
| 1.3.1. Land rights for Dalits | 21 |
| 1.3.2. Land Rights of the Tribals..... | 24 |
| 1.2.3. Women’s land rights | 27 |
| 1.4.Common Property Resources..... | 31 |
| 1.5.Conflicts and Contemporary discourses on the question of land | 32 |
| 1.6. Land relations in India today..... | 40 |
| CHAPTER TWO | 46 |
| THE LAND QUESTION UNDER LIBERALIZATION | 46 |
| 2.1. Introduction..... | 46 |
| 2.2. The Concept of Class..... | 47 |
| 2.3. The Agrarian Question..... | 50 |
| 2.4. Neoliberal Capitalist Development..... | 54 |
| 2.5. Peasant differentiation in the Agrarian Structure | 56 |
| 2.6. Market-based Land Reforms as Neoliberal Enclosures | 58 |
| 2.7. A General Hypothesis on Neoliberal Capitalist Development in India | 61 |
| 2.7.1. Historic Antecedents of Capitalist Farmers in India | 63 |
| 2.7.2. Agrarian Crisis under the Neoliberal Regime | 64 |
| 2.7.3. Peasant Differentiation in the Agrarian Structure and Semi-proletarianization | 65 |
| 2.8. An Update on the Agrarian Question | 71 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| 2.9. The Land Question in India..... | 74 |
| CHAPTER THREE | 78 |
| RESPONSE OF THE AIKS TO THE LAND QUESTION UNDER LIBERALIZATION | 78 |
| 3.1. Introduction..... | 78 |
| 3.2. The Agrarian and Land Questions for the AIKS: A Historical Overview | 78 |
| 3.2.1. Pre-independence formation and agenda | 78 |
| 3.2.2. Independence and the New Agrarian Programme | 83 |
| 3.3. The Liberalization Phase..... | 87 |
| 3.3.1. Alternative Agricultural Policy of the AIKS and AIAWU | 88 |
| 3.3.2 Land Struggles..... | 91 |
| 3.4. Contradictions in Indian Agriculture Post-Liberalization..... | 93 |
| 3.5. Response of the AIKS to the Land Question | 98 |
| 3.5.1. On Land Reforms..... | 98 |
| 3.5.2. On land rights for dalits tribals and women | 100 |
| 3.5.3. On Neoliberal enclosures | 103 |
| 3.6. Conclusion | 106 |
| CONCLUSION | 109 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 116 |
| APPENDIX..... | 122 |

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to trace the persistence of the old and emergence of new issues in the ownership and access to land by different sections of the population, particularly in agriculture under the policies of liberalization. Further the attempt is to find and apply a theoretical framework that fits the pattern that emerges out of the analysis of the land issues. Finally using this theoretical framework, the study would try to critically evaluate the political approach of a peasant organization to the land issues in contemporary India.

The study would employ certain key concepts in its course, which need a basic introduction here. Wherever possible the terms have been explained within the text of the chapters or through footnotes.

The term land question derives its meaning from the term agrarian question. It stands for the existing conditions of the ownership of and access to land by different classes of the peasantry and the changes that are required in these conditions to facilitate an overall development of capitalism in agriculture. Land relations refer to the specific form of social relations that obtain between different classes of the agrarian structure as a result of a given pattern of distribution of land rights.

Liberalization, neoliberalism and globalization are three words interchangeably used in this study to refer to a set of economic policies that adhere to certain basic principles and assumptions. These policies basically privilege the role of free markets over that of the state assuming the capability of the markets for self-regulation and efficient allocation of resources in the economy at the world level if the states do not intervene to distort the finely balanced interplay of market forces. The meaning and nature of these policies and ideas have subject to a wide debate leading to many interpretations of these terms. However the specific sense in which they have been used here shall be clarified in the course of the study.

Another term used in the study is global South, which in the literature reviewed refers to the countries which have been historically underdeveloped in terms of development of capitalist relations of production due to factors like colonialism. They are numerically dominant in the world, being distinguished from a small set of about fifty seven countries constituting the global North that have undergone successful capitalist industrialization like the U.S., UK., France, Germany, Australia and such. The countries of the global South include developing economies like that Brazil, Columbia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Kenya, Philippines, Vietnam, Iran, Uzbekistan, India, etc. they are marked by medium to low level of human development and have at various stages adopted the path of capitalist development. Of late most of these countries have been adopting the structural development programmes for a neoliberal restructuring of their economies under the guidance of the IMF and the World Bank. General theorization on the nature of development of these countries by a political economic approach would be used in this study to analyze the nature of capitalist development in India under liberalization. This approach utilizes certain concepts that need a basic explanation here. The specific meanings of these concepts as intended in the study would be clarified in the text.

The term exploitation would imply a theoretical meaning as used by Marx and his followers besides general meaning as used in English language. The theoretical meaning refers to the phenomenon in which a surplus, which is generated by the labour of a section of the population, is either used or controlled by another section not directly involved in producing that surplus. Thus the latter section is understood to be exploiting the former most likely due to the sheer ownership of the means that are used by the former class to produce the surplus. This phenomenon is not specific to production in capitalism but takes place in all societies where sections of population can be distinguished from each other on the basis of the ownership of the means of production like land.

Accumulation or more specifically capitalist accumulation is a concept that builds on the theoretical meaning of exploitation as described above implying the processes of

exploitation under the capitalist relations of production which function to preserve and reproduce in an expanded form the surplus value generated by labour.

Rationale and Scope

The land question has come to focus in India of late mostly due to events surrounding the acquisition of land from farmers and tribals for development purposes and private industries. The question has been seen as that of dispossession and displacement of people, and is also raising issues of ecological degradation. A preliminary literature review on land issues in contemporary India suggests that these are the major themes that inform the debate around land at present. However there is a pervasive reference in this literature to the current pattern of development referred to as neoliberalism or capitalism in general. It is contended that the problems of land acquisition and displacement being witnessed today are inherent 'pathologies' of the model of neoliberal development. The trait of unabated expansion of capitalist enterprises at the cost of the interests of the poor and marginalized sections of the society has been a recurrent ground for criticism of the development model. It is argued that the resolution of these problems lies in greater decentralization of the planning and implementation of the development policies.

Another issue that has drawn focus to the question of agriculture and indirectly to land is the high number of farmer suicides in many parts of the country. The literature on this issue again holds the present pattern of lop-sided development responsible for making agriculture an unviable option for many farmers. The policy changes leading to privatization and globalization are seen as reasons for increasing the debts of the farmers that are causing land alienation under distress besides the land that is alienated from the farmers due to land acquisition. Thus the land issues are seen to be increasing the distress of the already burdened farmers in the agricultural sector. Here the ideas of neoliberalism and agrarian crisis find a prominent place in the literature.

This literature, which would form a part of the discussion on the land issues in the first chapter, has highlighted the role of various social movements in taking up the role of critiquing and opposing the present development paradigm. These social movements are

seen to be operating mostly at local levels except for a few attempts to coordinate them nationally as in the case of the National Alliance of People's Movements and the Ekta Parishad. (See Pai 2007 and Walker 2008) The critique offered by these movements while raising disparate issues ranging from ecological degradation to alternative forms of industrialization, does not add up to a comprehensive political programme for transformation of the political economy. For instance their agitations on the agrarian crisis do not present a systematic rebuttal of the agricultural policy rather remaining vague at criticizing the general nature of development in all. Similarly an opposition to big dams does not necessarily take into account the need for rapid industrialization for both absorbing the surplus labour and alternative for meeting the energy requirements of a developing country without relying on the conventional sources of energy. Moreover an idea endorsed by most social movements of the village community tends to obscure the internal contradictions of the rural social structure based on class, caste and gender.

This brings us to revisit the classical peasant movements like the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) that approached these issues from a political economic perspective recognizing the categories of imperialism, class, the agrarian question and the imperative of capitalist development. One of the rallying points of an organization like the AIKS was the demand for radical land redistribution to the poor and landless categories of the population. It is ironical that when the government at present is reviving the issue of land reforms albeit only through many commissioned reports as of now, the AIKS does not find a prominent place in the discussion on the land question in contemporary literature. AIKS has historically led many militant land struggles like the ones in Telangana and Surma Valley of Assam and the Tebhaga struggle. Struggles against the eviction of tribals and tenants from their lands formed a major part of the AIKS's agenda for very long. After independence the AIKS has played a very important role in the success of the land reforms programme in the states of Kerala and West Bengal. However in the last decade or so the only struggle in which one has heard of the AIKS was for homestead land for the poor in some districts of Andhra Pradesh in 2007. (Balagopal, 2007)

In the present context when the land question is regaining importance in the discourse on national development, we need to engage with the exact outcomes of this development for land relations in India, the categories and the concept that inform the discourse on land relations today and the role of an organization like the AIKS which has the potential to engage with the many theoretical and political dimensions of the land question with its vast historical experience on the issues of land reforms and displacement. The present study fulfils this requirement in three important ways.

It will review a very important government report on the incomplete project on land reforms and land relations with the help of other recent literature available on the subject. This is supposed to offer an updated perspective on land relations in India today. Secondly the study attempts to develop a theoretical framework for the analysis of the land problem as a part of the agrarian question. It would help in relating the issues in land with the larger processes of neoliberal globalization and the recent shifts in the agricultural policy of the government following its increased adherence to the policies and guidelines of organizations like the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank since the nineteen nineties. This understanding would be utilized to analyse the approach and politics of the AIKS on the land question under liberalization.

The task of providing a detailed view of the contemporary trends in the processes of land distribution and alienation would be undertaken in the first chapter. The chapter would attempt to systematically review the status of the land reforms programme, address the particular issues of land rights for the historically marginalized categories of dalits, tribals and women, the conditions of access to the common property resources at present and the literature on the contemporary debates on the land issues. The presentation of the national level data will be primarily based on the Government of India Report of 2009. It would be aided by the political and sociological insights offered by other literature on the same subject. Special emphasis would be laid on understanding the nuances of the specific issues of the land rights of the dalits, tribals and women. This would significantly contribute to an understanding of the contemporary land relations in India developed at

the end of the chapter by indicating towards a revision of approach to the land policy in the light of the continuing marginalization of these categories.

The second chapter would draw on both national and international literature on the agrarian question and land issues in an effort to theoretically relate the problem of land with the agrarian crisis. It would also introduce necessary conceptual tools like class, means of production, mode of production, labour, capital, etc. that are crucial to facilitating a political economic discussion on agrarian structure and politics. This chapter would heavily depend on the theoretical formulations of Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2010a and 2010b) on the agrarian question under globalization to highlight the distinguishing features of the liberalization period. It would use the findings of other authors like Ramachandran and Rawal (2011), Walker (2008), Heyer (2010) and Ramakumar and Chavan (2008) to attempt an application of Akram-Lodhi and Kay's theoretical framework on the agrarian political economy of India. With this the chapter would formulate a comprehensive land question as required by the issues and politics of the liberalization period.

The third chapter would carry forward this formulation to evaluate the theoretical understanding and politics of the AIKS in the recent years. A historical overview of the development of the organization and politics of the AIKS would be used to highlight its distinctive position among the peasant movements of the country. A close scrutiny of its response to the objective changes witnessed in the process of peasant differentiation would be undertaken to assess if the AIKS understanding of the land question as reflected in its struggles corresponds to the formulation of land question as is arrived at in the second chapter. Possible dissonance between the understanding developed in the study and that of the AIKS would be highlighted and explained to conclude the evaluation. The concluding remarks sum up the larger argument made by the three chapters together. It would also highlight the limitations of the study on certain aspects of the problem while suggesting scope for further research on this subject.

CHAPTER ONE

LAND RELATIONS IN INDIA TODAY

1.1 Introduction

Studying land relations in India after the onset of liberalization in governmental policies in the early 1990s is an exercise in the assessment of indicators of continuity and change in the social structure. Land being the universal object of labour in a country with a predominantly agrarian workforce, the centrality of land to questions of social transformation or development, to poverty reduction, gender equity, overcoming of caste-based exploitation and even to the question of ‘inclusive growth’ cannot be denied. For the present study, the focus remains the rural society, since the formulation of land question conceived herein is also as a component of the larger agrarian question. The land question forms the theoretical nucleus of the agrarian question, the resolution of which has been instrumental in shaping the developed societies as we see them today. An understanding of the existing land relations based on empirical data is indispensable to the formulation of the land question in the society. The present chapter attempts to bring forth such an understanding of the land relations in contemporary India.

The phrase ‘land relations’ stands for an analytical description of the extent and conditions of ownership and access to land for various social groups collectively engaged in the production system, that is mainly production in agriculture, for the purposes of this study. India has historically had an inequitable distribution of land ownership that has barred a majority of cultivators and agricultural workers from acquiring proprietary rights to the primary means of production. It means that those who have had the capacity to invest their skills and labour power for production have been historically dependent on a minority of big landholders for gaining access to land to realize their productive potential in agriculture. The terms of such access have mostly been exploitative, not merely by virtue of the inequity in ownership but also due to other factors like caste and gender discrimination. The role of these factors in maintaining the exploitative rural agrarian

landscape has been well documented and theorized for postcolonial India.¹ However these attempts at studying the land relations from a socially transformatory perspective have lost currency² in the face of structural adjustment programmes being implemented after the GATT and other such international agreements that have gradually opened up the Indian agrarian economy to international trade and markets.³

It was a reflection of the changing agenda of agrarian politics that the New Farmers Movements took up the cause of resisting the neoliberal onslaught on 'rural India' or *Bharat*⁴, or began bargaining for a better deal in the emerging free market economy⁵. The alternative version of the debate on the rural society today is articulated under the leadership of the social movements⁶ that have come to replace in many senses, the dominance of both the classical class based peasant organizations as well as the New Farmers' Movements. At the policy level there has been a rejuvenation of interest in the question of land, understandably spurred by the many protests and movements centred around land rights that India has been witnessing of late⁷. However the renewed interest as of now remains confined to policy documents and reports. There is little palpable government action to restructure the land relations on the lines of the historic (incomplete) land reforms project. In this context, while the new discourse deals with crucial questions of development and displacement, the point remains, have the earlier questions related to abolition of concentration in land holdings, based on caste, gender and class been resolved with any movement to a more egalitarian structure of land relations?

¹ See Thorner, A. (1982a; 1982b; 1982c) for a review of the Mode of Production Debate on the Indian agriculture. For the role of caste in the agrarian structure see for example Chakravarti, A. 2001 and Vaddiraju, A.K. 1999. For the position of women in the agrarian structure see for example Agarwal 1988 and also, Tharakan and Tharakan 1975.

² What is conspicuously amiss is the continuation of the mode of production debate on Indian agriculture backed by a systematic study of the agrarian relations in the last two decades.

³ See Ghosh 1992 and Reddy, Singh and Arora 2002.

⁴ See Balagopal 1987 for a detailed criticism of the *Bharat*-India discourse of propagated by the Sharad Joshi and some others.

⁵ See Brass 1994 for a characterization of the new farmers' movements.

⁶ See Section 1.5 for a typical representation of the debate.

⁷ See for instance Banerjee, P. 2006, Pai, S. 2007 and Balagopal 2007

The following review of data on issues in land that face the Indian society today, attempts to look into such questions. What has come of the promise of redistributive land reforms? Has landlordism and its attendant impact on the power relations in the villages of India been done away with? Is tenancy in agriculture based on free contractual agreements or in practice do tenancies still sustain the exploitative hierarchy of caste and class? Has the general development of agriculture in many parts of the country with or without land reforms altered the pattern of land rights to favour the categories of dalits, tribals and women in any way? Has the government been able to protect the communal benefits derived out of the common property resources for the landless and marginalized groups? What are the emerging forms of conflicts around land rights with increasing privatization and industrialization post-liberalization?

In answering these questions the present chapter would try to develop a schema of themes, categories, and concepts that inform the salient features of the contemporary land relations in India. The formulation of the land question in Chapter 2 would draw from the discussion of facts as well as the persisting and the emerging trends in land relations presented in this chapter.

The present chapter deals with the status of the implementation of policies of land reform across the Indian states in Section 1.2. It is discussed under three separate components of the land reforms package, which are land ceilings (1.2.1), tenancy reforms (1.2.2) and homestead rights (1.2.3). Section 1.3 looks into the condition of the three socio-economically marginalized categories of dalits, tribals and women with regards their ownership and accessibility to land. Section 1.4 focuses on the issues related to the management of the common property resources. Section 1.5 is meant as an entry point into the analysis of the contemporary conflicts of interests between agriculture and industry as also the state and the people on matters of land transfer for non-agricultural purposes.

A major reference point for the discussion on issues of land is a recent report of the Ministry of Rural Development called the ‘Report of the Committee on State Agrarian

Relations and the Unfinished task in Land Reforms’⁸ (henceforth CALR). The constitution of this committee whose report has been published on the Ministry of Rural Development’s (henceforth MoRD) website in 2009, is testimony to a renewed interest of the government in the issue of land relations. However further discussions on the policy approach to persisting problems in the implementation of land reforms, in the following sections, as also in the discussion taken up in Chapter 2 would throw better light on the politics of this renewed interest of the government.

1.2.The State of Land Reforms

As was mentioned earlier, the long standing issue of completing the project of redistributive land reforms is revisited in the context of rising unrest in the rural and tribal belts of the country. The non-implementation of land reforms, continuing hold of the landlord and usurer classes in the rural society, the apathy of the state towards infrastructural development in the agrarian sector and rampant corporate overtaking of agricultural land are seen by the CALR as potential grounds for popular mobilization in support of the radical movements like that of the Maoists. (MoRD 2009: 62) The inequity in the distribution of land remains high in India even today. The NSSO data presented in Rawal (2008) underscores the inequality permeating land relations in the country. (See Appendix Table 1.1)The Gini Coefficient (an indicator of inequality) for the distribution of ownership holdings of land has been found to be very high across all the Indian states, particularly in Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh (> 0.8). The overall measure of inequality for land ownership in India is as high as 0.76, in terms of Gini coefficient. (ibid.) A social category-wise analysis of the NSS Land and Livestock Survey data presents a dismal picture of the Dalit and Adivasi groups in the country. About 57% Dalits in India do not own any land other than homesteads. Similarly about 36% of the Adivasi households in the country are devoid of any land holdings besides their homesteads. Overall more than 40% of the households across all categories are near-landless (Bakshi 2008). Such persistence of inequality in the land relations in India even

⁸ Constituted in response to popular mobilizations for land rights, the Committee was chaired by the Minister of Rural Development Dr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh. It was also accompanied by the formation of the National Council for Land Reforms under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in January, 2008.

after six decades of independence makes it imperative to reconsider the question of redistributive land reforms with utmost urgency.

The Report highlights that the total land area declared surplus by December 2007, after the implementation of the land ceilings in the country, is a mere 1.86% of the net sown area. Another 13.18 million hectares (mha) i.e. 4.3% of the total geographical area of the country comes under the category of cultivable wasteland which is lying undistributed due to the lack of governmental initiative. These facts are indicative of the larger problem of the magnificent failure of the land reforms agenda that makes a review of the present status of the land reforms project imperative for any meaningful discussion on issues in land relations.

The policy of redistribution of land is constituted of three main components: land ceiling, tenancy reforms and homestead rights. The following is an update on the issues in the implementation of land reforms legislations under the aforementioned components.

1.2.1. Ceiling on Land Holdings

Land being a state subject, since the 1950's the different states of India have been trying to develop a legal framework to put a cap on the amount of land that can be owned and cultivated by a cultivator household. The CALR divides the evolution period of the land reforms policies into two phases: the first from independence till the late 1960's, and the second from 1972 onwards. (MoRD 2009: 64) The first phase has been read as a response to the commitments of providing land to the tiller, of the freedom struggle. According to the very first Plan document of the Nehru government, land reforms were meant to be the backbone of the national development with the breaking away from the exploitative feudal past rooted in systems like Zamindari. (Koshy 1974). However scholars contend that the hesitant implementation of land reforms in this period, and even later, comprised of mostly piecemeal measures to consolidate the bourgeois-landlord ruling alliance in the countryside, with the notable exceptions of West Bengal and Kerala. (Chattopadhyay 1973; Radhakrishnan 1990) The second phase beginning in 1972 is seen by the CALR as an attempt to revitalize the failing project of land reforms by plugging the legislative

loopholes that had earlier allowed the circumvention of the ceiling laws by landed interests. (MoRD 2009: 65)

By imposing ceiling limits on land held by individuals and not by the entire household, the legislations allowed large-scale subversion of the ceiling through intra-family division of lands and 'benami' holdings during the first phase of land reforms. This error took almost two decades to be corrected at the beginning of the second phase of the ceiling policy. (Lieten 1990) Most state governments on the other hand showed resilient reluctance in implementing the land reform laws (Jannuzi 1974). The other factors that aided retention of land monopolies in different ways was the exemption granted to 'tea, coffee, rubber, cardamom and cocoa plantations and land held by religious institutions and charitable institutions; fake transfers; misclassification of lands; and non-application of appropriate ceiling for lands newly irrigated by public investment' even after the rectifications in the second phase. (MoRD 2009: 65) The acquisition and retention of large tracts of land by declaring them as plantations aided the maintenance of land monopolies in states like Kerala. (Sreerekha 2010; Isaac and Tharakan 1995) Such anomalies in exempting different kinds of land holdings from ceiling laws, as also the challenges in identifying proper ownership rights of the existing holdings have proven detrimental to the task of land redistribution. While uniform ceiling limits could pose their own problems in a terrain as diverse as India, the implementation of variable ceilings along with a complex classification of the holdings in states like Bihar, provided for ample scope for manipulation and subversion of the Act by the landed interests. (MoRD 2009: 65) Ramachandran (2011) has cited the work of Vikas Rawal, based on the Survey on Land and Livestock Holdings (2002-03) by the NSSO (National Sample Survey Organisation) that reveals that the current extent of ceiling-surplus land is more than three times the extent of land that has ever been redistributed under land reform. However it has been observed that not only in India but across the world the projects of state-led redistributive land reforms have gradually declined after the phase of 'developmentalism' of the 1970's gave way to neoliberal regimes. (Bernstein 2002)

This stagnation of the agenda of land reforms in India is reflected in the CALR's findings. The Report compares the data on ceiling surplus land and its redistribution in

2002 and 2007. This period of five years did not witness any increase in the area declared surplus, at the same time seeing only a 1% increase in the land distributed to the SC & ST categories. (MoRD 2009: 65) Such a bleak picture of the implementation of land reforms in India has even led some scholars like T. N. Srinivasan (2007) to believe that the idea of imposing a land ceiling itself was fundamentally flawed and hence its failure should come as no surprise. The CALR, by clearly identifying the roots of the non-implementation as lying in the lack of political will of the ruling classes combined with the ideologically motivated indifference of the bureaucracy, takes a clear position against such cynical opinions on the potential scope of the land reform policies.⁹

It goes on to further observe that due to the outdated and ill-organized land records coupled with wrong determinations on the part of the land reforms authorities in many cases, about 17% of the total surplus land declared is caught up in litigation and hence unfit for redistribution.¹⁰ It is a problem that stands testimony to the bureaucratic lethargy and indifference to the issue of land reforms. Such attitude in the implementing authorities has continued to prevail since independence in the absence of any punitive measures in the Act to deter failed or faulty implementation of the provisions. Thus rent-seeking and coercive restoration of the holdings to the previous owners, are commonplace phenomena, as the CALR notes. (MoRD 2009: 68)

While the CALR does get into the details of how legal and extra-legal means are employed to subvert the implementation of the land reforms legislations, it seems to have overlooked the recent legislative efforts of state governments to reverse the pro-poor provisions of the land reforms acts themselves. With international finance aggressively seeking ever-new avenues for investment, states like Karnataka and Maharashtra have made amendments to the existing land reforms acts to raise the ceiling limits to facilitate

⁹ On the extent of estimated availability of ceiling surplus land for redistribution at present, see Rawal 2008 and Mishra 2007. On the ideological bias of the government leading to major issues in the implementation of land reform legislations see Balagopal 2007, Chattopadhyay 1973, Radhakrishnan 1990, etc.

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion on the system of land titles in India and the maintenance and issues with the land records in the country, see Wadhwa, D. C. 2002. Guaranteeing Title to Land. *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 37. No. 47.

large-scale acquisition by private enterprises¹¹. Ramachandran and Ramakumar (2000) have discussed this emerging trend of legislative efforts for the reversal of land reforms by various state governments. It has been seen as a major outcome of liberalization and integration of agriculture to the global markets. (Ramachandran and Rawal 2009)

1.1.1.1. Wastelands

Besides the agricultural lands, the CALR has also looked into the issues in the potential for utilizing the available wastelands with the government in overcoming landlessness among the poor. Wastelands cover 20.17% of the total geographical area of the country, including land with or without scrub, underutilized/degraded notified forest land, sand/inland and coastal area, waterlogged and marshy lands and the degraded pastures and grazing lands. These lands are not suitable for regular forms of cultivation but nevertheless serve crucial purposes in the rural and forest ecologies. Till March, 2002 only 5.97 mha of the total of 63.85 mha of wastelands had been redistributed in the country. (MoRD 2009: 75) The little success in redistribution of land to the landless has been in the category of wastelands with Andhra Pradesh leading the list of states which redistributed significant areas of wastelands till 2002. (Athreya 2003) The simultaneous failure in taking possession of and redistributing ceiling surplus land indicates that with the given level of political commitment of the governments, it is relatively easier to redistribute wastelands. It goes on to show that if at least the category of wasteland is committed to the ideal of 'land to the tiller', it would bring considerable relief to millions of landless people in the country. However Athreya further contends that simply focusing on wastelands would not help in reducing land concentration. (ibid.)

Wastelands can be seen as belonging to a 'pool of state land' which can be distributed to the landless with relative ease and minimal legal hassles. (Thorat 2009) However even in a densely populated country like India, most encroachments of wastelands by the land hungry multitude of dalits and tribals have been seen as a problem for the states. Instead of recognizing many of these encroachments by homeless people as a desperate

¹¹ See Lobo 2002, Nair 1996, Pillai 2003

articulation of a basic need for a shelter, state governments have taken other approaches of planning the utilization of wastelands not for redistributive land reforms but in other directions.

These approaches are quite often in contravention to the provisions of the Land Reforms Acts, as in Tamil Nadu's Comprehensive Wasteland Development Programme of 2003. (MoRD 2009: 75) In Gujarat, "The BJP government has re-introduced the circular allowing industry to be set up on not just village pastoral land, but all 'wasteland' in May 2005. The circular indicates the government's intention to allot 4600,000 hectares of government wasteland to the corporate sector for establishing industries and to large farmers for technology-intensive and corporate farming. 1984,000 hectares of this 'wasteland' is deemed fit for cultivation." (Sud 2007: 633, 634) In Andhra Pradesh the state government has tried to tackle the allocation of leases to Lanka Lands in unsatisfactory ways. In the 1970's and 80's, vast tracts of government wastelands were taken over by the Forest Department taking them out of the ambit of the Central Government's control and posing difficulties to the existing cultivators of those lands.

While the CALR does not take up the issues in wastelands in great details, the other literature on the matter brings out two clear points. Firstly, the variety in types and the geographically scattered nature of the wastelands needs to be addressed in localized ways through decentralized planning. Secondly, the current approach of various state governments is suggestive of a shift in approach to utilization of wastelands. The governments seem keen on handing over these land resources to the private sector for profit-making enterprises instead of using these resources to bring relief to the land deprived masses of the country.

1.1.1.2. Bhoodan Land

On the other hand, the tale of the Bhoodan Movement started in Bihar in the 1950's has been disappointing on the national level. As per the most recent national-level data available on Bhoodan lands, that is from the Revenue Ministers' Conference of 1992, 45.90 lakh acres had been donated till date of which half was distributed and of the distributed land only half was fit for cultivation. The CALR, based on the information it received from the government, found that the approach of the government towards the

Bhoodan Yagna Committee is indicative of its lackadaisical attitude and disinterest in the whole project. (MoRD 2009: 79) The Report has recommended the fixing of a time-frame for the completion of this project while providing adequate resources to the implementing authorities.

1.2.2. Tenancy reforms

The historical practice of multiple levels of sub-infeudation of the cultivated land by the rural land-owning classes has been seen as a source of exploitation and low productivity in agriculture. The various land tenure systems instituted during the British period, such as zamindari, mahalwari, ryotwari, etc, facilitated the formal concentration of land in the hands of a few. Absentee cultivation by such class of big landholders had bred long chains of numerous intermediaries. Such intermediaries have thrived as common practice in regions with varying tenurial systems from the colonial era and even before. (Bandhopadhyay, R. 1993) The post-colonial state took upon itself to abolish the intermediaries in agricultural production system simultaneously with the agenda of redistribution of land. The purported goals of poverty reduction and economic self-reliance under the Five Year Plans were sought to be achieved through the policy tools of land reforms. (Koshy 1974) This aspect of land reforms has achieved success in terms of formally abolishing titles and systems like zamindari, thereby simplifying the tenurial system to a great extent. However as has been discussed previously, the failures in implementation of ceiling laws meant that such classes of big landholders could retain their control of the agrarian society even with state-granted titles.

The positive side of the abolition of intermediaries and colonial tenure systems has been that the tenants, at least de jure, came to be directly accountable to the state instead of the zamindar or jagirdar. About 20 to 25 million tenants came into direct relationship with the state as a result of these legislations. (Hanstad 2005) However the more widespread impact of these legislations has been found to be negative. A large number of tenants (most of them on informal/oral leases) were evicted by the landlords to evade the clause of adverse possession in the laws. Also the clause allowing resumption of personal

cultivation facilitated retention of lands and eviction of tenants in a big way. Moreover studies have revealed that ‘concealed tenancies’ on a large scale still perpetuate relations between big landholders and tenants that are akin to the zamindari system in many parts of the country.

Informal tenancy is a euphemism for landlord-tenant relationship remaining entirely out of reach of tenancy legislation for security, fair rents and transfer of land to actual tillers. Its growing extent is a revealing symptom of how an adverse socio-economic context could frustrate reformist measures. (Rao, 1992: A51)

The CALR has observed that despite numerous legislations for regulating tenancy and rent practices in agriculture, (see Appendix Tables 1.3 and 1.4 ¹²) the incidence of exploitative tenancies remain significantly present across the country. (MoRD 2009: 92) Fair rent norms are far from being effectively imposed in most states, while the NSSO data shows that nearly 7% of the operated area in agriculture is leased in. The Report believes the degree of incidence could be as high as 35% as some other studies point out.

The CALR cites various studies on leasing trends in Uttar Pradesh to highlight that absentee landowners and management problems lead to leasing out of land to the landless and marginal cultivators in general. (MoRD 2009: 93) Leasing of land beyond legal limits is dominant in some parts of the state with informal and temporary arrangements based on natural and socio-economic context of the region. However such informal land rental markets have been found beneficial to the livelihood interests of the poor and women’s self-help groups in Andhra Pradesh by other scholars.

It is evident that the prevalent practices of leasing of agricultural land are not in consonance with the legislative efforts. In a study on some areas in Odisha, Swain (1999) has concluded that leasing in and leasing out of land, mostly by small and marginal farmers are due to structural compulsions:

¹² The nature and implementation of the tenancy legislations have been discussed in great details by many authors. See for instance, Saxena, N.C. <http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/articles/ncsxna/index.php?repts=leasing.htm> Planning Commission of India. The tables have been provided for a brief overview of the contents of the legislations.

In regard to the causes of share tenancy the main reason for leasing-in as reported by the share tenants is 'lack of alternative employment opportunity'. The prime reason for leasing out as expressed by the lessors is 'no able adult male in the family to supervise' due to migration of family head to urban areas for employment. Thus, tenancy considered from the viewpoint of both lessees and lessors is a compulsive contractual choice arising from certain social contingencies. (ibid: 2666)

In an illuminating paper on the question of tenancy reforms Saxena¹³ has qualified understanding of the tendency among small and marginal farmers to lease in and lease out land. Based on his observations of empirical data, he is of the opinion that informal tenancies in areas of backward agricultural and underdeveloped markets, such as eastern U.P. adversely impacts the interests of the lessee since rent extraction is the primary motive for the leasing out of land to smaller farmers. Thus the existing tenancy reforms should be implemented more rigorously in such areas. However he argues for reconsidering the need to liberalise the land rental markets in areas of developed capitalist agriculture as in Punjab or Haryana. In these regions, in the words of Ravi Srivastava, as cited by Saxena, "From leasing as a means of rental appropriation, landlords have moved to leasing as a means of control over labour power, the appropriation of its produce, and as a means of further accumulation." (Ibid.)

The CALR (MoRD 2009: 95) has found that the lack of a vibrant political mobilization of the masses for claiming tenancy rights makes the problem of recording tenancies (on the lines of Operation Barga in West Bengal) intractable. In this scenario it is through the empowerment of the Gram Sabha/Panchayat along with less restrictive leasing and rent provisions that do not threaten the interests of the lessor can possibly see some progress on regularizing fair tenancies and rents.

1.2.3. Homestead Rights

Comparative data from over 30 countries as well as Indian states of Karnataka, West Bengal and Kerala show that provision of amply large (roughly 6500 square feet)

¹³ Saxena, op. cit.

homestead plots has helped make substantial contribution to poverty reduction (Hanstad, Brown and Prosterman 2002). It has been seen as a viable alternative framework for the now largely 'moribund' agenda of land reforms. The homestead plots supplement the family income and nutrition in a significant way, also raising the status and economic security of the households.

The CALR underscores the imperative of providing dwelling units to every citizen as has been intended in the 11th Five Year Plan. In rural India, while 10% of the households are landless, another 5.5% do not even have a dwelling unit. The Committee provides a detailed statewise breakup of the incidence of such landlessness in the following table.

In further discussion of the issue, the CALR mentions that provision of homestead was often clubbed with the land reform laws in most states, whereas a few like West Bengal and Bihar had separate laws. However as in the Vasundhara Scheme of Orissa, the homestead plots provided are generally too small. If the land size provided could be up to 10 cents, the CALR believes that the poor families would be able to supplement their incomes through some gardening, cattle rearing and poultry farms. In this light the move to provide homestead plots to households under the Indira Awas Yojna can work as a good example. The CALR has briefly discussed some other initiatives taken in this regard in various states like Karnataka, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. (MoRD 2009: 97)

1.3. Land Rights of Dalits, Tribals and Women

1.3.1. Land rights for Dalits

The attention paid on the complexity of landlessness amongst dalit groups in India has been scant in the CALR report. The CALR has observed that reliable data with respect to landlessness among dalits is hard to come by. According a 1992 NSS Report, absolute landless among Dalits was as high as 13.34% and among the tribals, 11.50%. However the accuracy of these numbers too needs to be cross-checked in the backdrop of the numerous studies that have been conducted on the historic and persisting caste-based exclusion of dalits from access to land. The CALR nevertheless acknowledges a correlation between caste and class based on the pattern of land distribution in most parts

of the country: “large landowners invariably belong to the upper castes, the cultivators belong to the middle castes, and the agricultural workers are largely dalits and tribals”. (MoRD 2009: 126)

It is important to take note of the widespread pattern of exclusion of dalits from land rights. Based on recent academic literature, one can point out certain salient features of dalit landlessness in the country. Based on the NSS Land and Livestock Holdings Survey, the facts and the observations of the Report can be updated to time of 2004-05. Even after considering the possible methodological inconsistencies of such comparison, the analysis by Bakshi (2008) shows that landlessness has increased among the deprived sections of the populations from 1992 to 2003. The following table offers a glimpse into persisting denial of land rights to the SC and ST categories even after 5 decades of land reforms.

Table 1.6 points out that even in states where land reforms have seen moderate success, the extent of near landlessness (i.e. not owning any operational holdings but only homestead land) is remarkably high. For instance, in West Bengal, near landlessness among dalits is as high as 54 percent. In Kerala, dalits constitute about 9 percent of the population out of which about 85 percent have no operational holdings. It is also worth noting that in states which are agriculturally advanced, like Punjab and Haryana, near landlessness among dalits remains extremely high at 84 percent and 89 percent respectively.

The landholdings of dalits who have any land are generally very small. For instance, Trivedi (2010) has observed that about two thirds of the land holdings of the dalits in Uttar Pradesh are smaller than 0.5 ha. According to the 1991 Census Data around 87 percent of the dalits belong to the category of the small and marginal farmers. As a consequence in order to meet subsistence requirements the dalits have to hire out most of their labour. It is mostly done as agricultural workers- 64 percent of the country’s dalits are agricultural labourers. The land hunger among the dalits drives them into exploitative tenancy relations¹⁴. In practice such tenancy relations are marked by unequal

¹⁴ See for instance Vikas Rawal’s work, Economic Policies, Tenancy Relations and Household Incomes: Insights from Three Selected Villages in India. Social and Policy Research Institute, University of Ulster.

arrangements where caste domination of the landed classes facilitates exploitation of the lessee, particularly in regions dominated by semi-feudal relations in agriculture. (Trivedi 2010) Such conditions of tenancy relations deflate the idea that free leasing would benefit the landless in getting productive operational access to land. It should be noted that even on the exploitative terms of tenancy the operational area that dalits have been able to get access to, is far less than their proportion in the population in different states. (Mohanty 2001)

Unable to redistribute more ceiling surplus due various reasons as have been observed before, many state governments have allotted wastelands to landless dalits. (Athreya 2003) There are many problems with this approach. Firstly it is an evasion of implementing the ceiling legislations while trying to appease the land hunger of the landless to contain unrest. Secondly the soil of the wastelands is generally degraded requiring significant initial investment to make it productive. Dalits have historically lacked access to formal credit, more so after the withdrawal of social banking under the liberalized regime. (Chavan 2005) Thus the allotted land tends to become a liability rather than being an asset. The dalits have to continue relying on hiring out their labour for subsistence, thereby continuing in a relationship of subordination with the landed castes. Thirdly the nature of tenancy relations or conditions of agricultural work denies the dalits any scope to sufficiently invest either their labour or any capital to improve the productivity of their own marginal landholdings. (Trivedi 2010) Many dalits actually end up leasing out their land to upper caste cultivators in instances of reverse tenancy. (See footnote 15)

Guru (1997) has observed that such distribution of wastelands in Maharashtra might have created a false impression of the betterment of the dalit condition.¹⁵ Moreover he has argued that the upper castes in Maharashtra have been indifferent to such allocation of land to dalits as it does not upset their control over dalit labour in any significant way. In other places like Bihar, any claims on the part of the dalits to land rights continue to be met with violent resistance from the dominant castes. (Chakravarti 2001)

¹⁵ See Bokil (1997).

Besides agricultural land, the homestead rights of the dalits have faced a peculiar problem. The historic practice of untouchability in most parts of the country has ordained the physical segregation of dalit settlements from the rest of the village. The studies of the 'Slater villages' have found the continuation of this trend in Tamil Nadu till now. (Harriss, Jeyaranjan and Nagaraj, 2010) The redistribution and consolidation of land holdings under the land reforms legislations has done nothing to bring an end to this discriminatory social practice.

1.3.2. Land Rights of the Tribals

Taking up the issue of tribal land alienation in detail the CALR highlights that most traditional tribal-majority areas in central India have seen this section being reduced to a marginalized minority in their native region due to unmitigated in-migration of non-tribal people. The north-east Indian states have been protected to some extent due to curbs on such in-migration. Even in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand that were formed as tribal majority states, significant sections of the tribal population have been pushed to the lower plains and hilly areas with poor soils and low productivity leading to their economic and social marginalization. (MoRD 2009: 128) The CALR further takes a critical note of the fact that in the nine states where the application of PESA grants exceptional powers to the heads of the executive, they have failed to serve the interests of the tribal populations in any way. (Ibid.) Moreover the presence of minerals in the Schedule V areas has also contributed to the displacement of tribals for mining and other projects reducing them to being 'ecological refugees'. The CALR feels that such continued discrimination against the tribals in these areas have created favourable grounds for popular endorsement of extremist-left wing politics and parties like the Naxalites in large belt of Central Indian states.

The modern laws concerning the welfare of tribals have been built on vestiges of colonial legislations like the Santhal Parghanas Tenancy Act in 1854 and the Chhota Nagpur Tenancy Act in 1924. The legal framework set up by such laws failed to prevent the alienation of tribal lands even after independence. This failure stimulated various state

governments to pass a plethora of legislations for protection tribal rights but as the CALR observes, to no avail. (MoRD 2009: 129)

The CALR substantiates its observation by citing the example of Kerala which is widely recognized as a progressive state government in such regards. The Govt. of Kerala is currently caught in a legal battle arguing for the revocation of a 1975 law of restoration of tribal land on the grounds that eviction of encroachers from the tribal lands might cause law and order problems. Such cases reflect the political choice made by many state governments to retain their electoral bases by avoiding antagonism with the dominant groups in the region. (MoRD 2009: 131) The Committee concludes that “the present schematic and legal arrangement for the restoration of tribal lands has not been successful on account of a number of factors including the political ramifications of such steps, the ineffective and inefficient revenue machinery and the convergence of interests amongst the political groups, the bureaucracy and the classes alienating the tribal lands”. (MoRD 2009: 132) Besides this, high number of instances of the unrecorded tenancies of the tribal agricultural workers leads to their eviction in the wake of land reform laws.

The CALR further discusses some major forms of tribal land alienation. The first one is due to the state sponsored processes of acquisition and collateral land alienation, wherein destructive mining activities have led to the degradation of tribal areas and their subsequent displacement. In this the CALR recommends the effective implementation of the Samta Judgment, inclusion of the ‘Prior Informed Consent’ clause during acquisition and approval for projects and land compensation for the displaced tribals. The State also contributes indirectly to tribal land alienation through the infirmities and corruption in the functioning of revenue authorities, survey agencies and local administrations particularly in PESA areas as well as the studied indifference of the state governments. The solution to this in the Committee’s view lies more effective decentralization of land management to the level of the Gram Sabha’s with sufficient autonomy.

The unrest among the tribal population has elicited some response in the enactment of The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. The CALR makes a comprehensive and contextualized review of this Act.

India has a recorded forest area of 76.52 million hectares of which the area under forest cover is 63.72 million hectares. 38.79 million hectares of this area, i.e. about 60% of the total, has been categorized as degraded while another 24.93 million hectares remains dense. A mere 1.9% i.e. 1.25 million hectares has been found as under encroachment by people. The CALR cites an assessment of the Centre for Equity Studies (2007) in estimating that about 40 lakh people inhabit what are called the country's protected areas.

The state's approach to the question of forest conservation and the rights of tribals and other forest dwellers shows continuity from the colonial times as traced in the CALR's observations. (MoRD 2009: 85) As seen in the Indian Forests Act of 1927, the idea behind restricting the rights of the tribals to the use of forest areas as Common Property Resources (CPR) was to expand the state control over land rights in order to serve the commercial and expansionist interests of business. (Ibid.) The 1952 National Forest Policy went on to evoke 'national interest' and 'public benefit' to limit and in cases of conflict, override the interests of the tribals. Agriculture by tribals in forest areas was to be contained to a minimum while traditional practices like that of shifting cultivation were to be actively discouraged. Ironically, the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976, while making environmental protection the constitutional duty of every citizen, also sought to recognize and protect the 'relationship between the forest communities and the forest'. (MoRD 2009: 86)

The Supreme Court, the intent of the aforementioned Amendment Act notwithstanding, has come down heavily on the authorities failing to prevent the 'illegal' use of forest resources by people and through an Empowered Committee in 2004, has gone on to recommend encroachment of forest area as a serious law and order problem to be dealt with through police action, if necessary. (Ibid.)

In the wake of this hardline attitude on forest conservation being exhibited by the different arms of the state, comes the Forest Rights Act, 2006. The Act seeks to decentralize the role of the state in protecting the rights of the Scheduled Tribes vis-à-vis their traditional claims to access various forest resources through the Gram Sabha's and other district and state-level bodies. The Act functions in a legal environment constructed by prior legislations like the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act (WLPA) 2002, the

Indian Forest Act 1927, and the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) 1980. Such a legislation had become imperative in a context where the tribal people have been suffering the onslaught of multifarious commercial and expansionist interests taking over their natural resources and causing their displacement and pauperization on a mass scale. However the CALR highlights many legal and procedural anomalies in the provisions of the Act that make its implementation contentious. The Act lacks clarity on many crucial terms like 'sustainable use' of resources, 'Community Forest Resource', protection of 'traditional knowledge', 'ecological' concerns and most significantly whether the rights of the people will prevail even if they can be deemed as destructive to the ecology. (MoRD 2009: 88) The CALR has advocated the inclusion of a clause requiring the 'Prior Informed Consent' of the affected communities in cases where any major developmental projects like dams, mines, industries, etc. are being sanctioned in or near forested and protected areas. (Ibid.) The lack of a nuanced understanding of the concerns of ecology, various legislations have failed to check the mass displacement of the tribals without any immediate relief.

1.2.3. Women's land rights

The percentage of rural workers in agriculture has declined from 84 to 76 percent from the 1970's to the beginning of the 21st century mostly due to the outmigration of male workers. 85 percent of the rural female workers still work in agriculture. Agarwal (2003) has noted a trend of feminization of agriculture in line with a similar phenomenon observed in the Southeast Asian countries in the 1970's. However women from agriculture were gradually absorbed in the non-farm sector in the latter case which looks unlikely in the Indian condition where there is stagnation in the growth of non-farm opportunities. Various studies and the Government surveys have noted that "a large percentage of India's rural households are de facto female-headed, due to widowhood, marital breakdown or male outmigration, estimates ranging from 20 per cent (Buvinic and Youssef 1978) to 35 per cent (Government of India 1988)". (Ibid: 193) Thus there is trend of gender divergence in dependence on agriculture. In the light of these empirical facts, women have come to occupy the central focus of agrarian society in crucial ways. So issues of access to land are increasingly issues of access to land for women.

Most women do have access to land but it is contingent upon their relationship to the men of the household as will be discussed further in this section. There are three main sources for women's access to land, family, state and the market. Most of the Indian society follows patrilineal systems of inheritance of property except in the North-eastern and South-western parts of the country which have traditional matrilineal norms. This logic of patriliney has seeped into the understanding of the state as well as is reflected in most policies on land that are biased in favour of the male members of the family. The markets too have a tendency of reinforcing the existing social inequities in the absence of any specific state interventions.

A significant example of this biased approach against women is reflected in the land reforms policy itself. Gupta (2002) has meticulously studied the society of West Bengal which has seen quite successful implementation of the land reforms in the past to underscore the systemic exclusion of women from land rights even in a programme that is meant to redress issues of social justice. In matters of inheritance of agricultural land, states have their own policies which often do not do justice to women's rights as individual claimants to property. The matters of inheritance are left to the personal laws of the respective communities which have been historically patrilineal and where they have not been so, have come under major influence of patrilineal trends prevalent in other parts of the country. Thus while the land rights in redistribution have been given in the name of male members of the family on the assumption that the rest of the household unit comes under the care of the male head who would ensure equitable intra-family distribution of resources and nutrition, the state has failed to account for those numerous cases where the woman of the family is widowed, divorced, deserted or simply falls victim to patriarchal exploitation of various forms within the family, after the redistribution. She is left to fend for herself as the inheritance laws fall under the purview of the communities' traditional laws. This loophole in the land reforms policy framework has come to be fully exploited in the Bengali society where dowry has become a potent and pervasive medium for transferring the control of the redistributed land from the woman's family to the groom's. It is done through informal mortgaging of the barga, khas or patta lands where selling or mortgaging is not legally allowed. It has also been through the sale and purchase of the raiyat lands. In such social transactions women act

as a mere medium with nothing to gain out of these arrangements. Once dowry has been paid women lose all stake in their family property and even a right of residence in their family home.

Having been an integral part of the movement for land rights in West Bengal, women's interests have been betrayed by simply subsuming their demands for land in the unit of the household. The West Bengal Government tried to correct this lacuna by incorporating the provision of joint titles following the Revenue Ministers' Conference of 1992. But the amendment was not made effective on the land that had already been distributed and since most of the redistribution of land had happened before the 1990's a large number of potential beneficiaries of this progressive change in the policy were left out. Gupta has also noted that the Operation Barga too did not recognize female sharecroppers as potential beneficiaries of the project. (Ibid.)

The CALR observes in its findings from the field that the many subversions of concerns of gender equity in the formulation and implementation of policies by the governments is an abject manifestation of the deeply-seated cultures of patrilineal inheritance, patrilocal residence, the gender division of labour, the gender segregation of public spaces, and the discouragement of widow remarriage. (MoRD 2009: 82) The problem with the approach of the government in recognizing women as producers lies in two understandings that inform its policies. Firstly, the interpretation of the slogan "land to the tiller" has been that a tiller is someone undertaking all the four activities of cultivation viz. ploughing, sowing, weeding and harvesting. (Gupta 2002) Women have been traditionally barred from undertaking the ploughing of fields due to cultural beliefs. This makes for their exclusion from the category of cultivators in government definition despite the fact that they are involved in most of the other activities in agriculture at times more intensively than the male members. Secondly, it has been assumed that the distributive norms within the household are based on equity and altruism on the part of the male head of the family. Many studies have pointed out that the assumption of the property status and associated well-being automatically being transferred to all members of the household stands contradicted by empirical data. (Agarwal 2003) In addition, as has been highlighted by Gupta (2002) considering women as individual claimants of land rights was considered

inimical to the class unity of the land rights movement in West Bengal. However it must be noted that identification of other categories like the SC and ST was not opposed by the same logic. Not only this, a similar logic considers that demanding individual land rights for women within the household would jeopardize the stability of the family and the security of the women themselves as their rights generally are not legally documented making the denial of their present access to land of their family, a possible consequence. (Rao 2005)

A more detailed critique of the above logic will be taken up in the next chapter. It must suffice to say that empirical data from most developing countries proves that such assumptions are not true about the relation between the individuation of women and the well-being of their families. Studies in India have shown that there is a positive correlation between asset ownership of the mother and health and educational well being of the children of the household. (Agarwal 2003)

Of late there seems to be a surge in academic engagement with the issues of land rights for women. The above discussion can help highlight pertinent themes in the challenges before gender equity in land rights. The foremost of these themes is the unproblematized acceptance of a male-headed household remaining the dominant unit in research and analysis of the Indian society. From the NSS to the land reforms policies, all are subject to the ideological dominance of the traditional gender unequal construct of the household. Besides this, the cultural bias to against the social and economic individuation of women limits them to secondary place to the male gender. The CALR has raised these issues in the Report. The CALR observes in its findings from the field that the many subversions of concerns of gender equity in the formulation and implementation of policies by the governments is an abject manifestation of the deeply-seated cultures of patrilineal inheritance, patrilocal residence, the gender division of labour, the gender segregation of public spaces, and the discouragement of widow remarriage. (MoRD 2009: 82)

From the Sixth Plan (1980-85) onwards through the recommendations of the National Perspective Plan for Women (1998-2000), the state has sought to rectify this flawed approach by allocating land rights to women or to the husband-wife jointly in government programmes like that of redistribution of ceiling surplus lands. (MoRD,

2009: 81) Later the Eighth Plan instructed on the distribution of 40 percent of the surplus land to women and the rest jointly. The Ninth Plan has laid major emphasis on land reforms as a poverty reduction strategy. However it does not come as much of a surprise given the past record of implementation of the land reforms that these directives too are yet to see the light of implementation. (Agarwal 2003)

The CALR highlights that in both the Land Acquisition Act (Amendment Bill), 2008 and the Resettlement & Rehabilitation Bill, 2007, the conception of the “family” fails to recognize, besides other issues, the adult, unmarried females as equal claimants of rights and responsibilities towards the property of the family. (MoRD, 2009: 83) Due to this lacuna the women of the displaced community are refused employment and other benefits provided for by the 2007 Act. The government thereby is also oblivious of the particular livelihood and safety needs of the women in the locations of rehabilitation. The system of male-headed households and women’s critical dependence on men is thus sustained in the formulation of these Acts. The CALR finds this omission of women as a socially distinct category and their subsequent subsumption into patriarchal conceptions of ‘family’ or household in both policy and government research as the biggest impediment in realizing the equitable land rights for women. (MoRD, 2009: 84)

1.4.Common Property Resources

A 1999 NSS Report defines Common Property Resources (CPR) as "Rural common property resources are broadly defined as resources to which all members of an identifiable community have inalienable use rights. In the Indian context CPRs include community pastures, community forests, Government Wastelands, common dumping and threshing grounds, watershed drainages, village ponds and rivers etc. The first three resources are particularly important because of their large area and their contribution to people's sustenance." (MoRD 2009: 206)

The NSSO data looks at the CPR in two ways De Jure and De Facto. The former approach includes resources which have well defined rights of access for a community, for instance by the ownership of the village panchayat. The latter includes all resources which are not the private property of anyone and hence are utilized by all in practice.

Based on the de jure approach the NSSO estimates the following about rural CPR in India:

The CALR further discusses the legal ownership rights on the CPR that are vested with different government bodies like the Forest Department, Revenue Department, agriculture department, etc. While the Forest Rights Act, 2006 gives ownership rights to forest dwellers for self use purposes, the gram panchayats in general have little control over CPR.

With the aforementioned outlook towards the issues of CPR, the CALR goes on to discuss in great detail the significance of the CPR to the traditional and marginalized communities and the misappropriation causing the subsequent degradation and reduction in CPR. The Committee has lot of recommendations to make in this regard. Some of them include “defining CPR according to the situation prevailing in a state, including CPR in the concurrent list, capping minimum CPR area in each village, banning diversion of capped CPR area, evolving long term perspective on land through developing land use plan and setting up proper institutional arrangements to govern CPRs”. (MoRD 2009: 227) The Committee further recommends the “enumeration of CPR in every NSS round, initiating fast track and time bound processes for resolving disputes on CPRs, making functional existing land use boards of the states, removing inconsistencies in land records, reclassifying the land-use, protecting existing de jure CPRs, creating greater public awareness and improving land administration” as implementable measures. (Ibid.)

1.5. Conflicts and Contemporary discourses on the question of land

It is under the heading of governance issues and the conversion of agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes where CALR draws attention to the new forms of interventions by the state and market, often in collusion, which are taking land away from the agrarian classes and the tribals. The approach of the Report involves highlighting the specific measures for industrialization that the government has undertaken which impinge on the existing land rights of the poor and marginalized. In doing so the CALR also problematizes the dominant paradigm of development as being detrimental to the well

being of the masses. The variations in land policies across the states have allowed evasion of the ceiling limit on landholdings by landlords.¹⁶ (MoRD 2009: 106) The environmental clearances given to a number of projects like industrial estates, parks, complexes, Export Promotion Zones, SEZs etc under the Schedule I of the EIA notification, 2006 do account for any kind of democratic say that the stakeholders should have in such transformation of their landscape. The legal and procedural bypassing of public consultations on such clearances, particularly in the case of SEZs has worked against the interests of the people. (MoRD 2009: 107) The bias of the state in favour of industrial capital has gone to the extent of undermining special protective constitutional provisions for the Scheduled Areas as in the PESA. (MoRD 2009: 110)

The CALR points to an alarming rate of land transfer from the country's cultivators to other non-agricultural interests like mining. Over the period of 1990 to 2003, as the Ministry of Agriculture has found, more than 21 lakh hectares of land has been taken away from agricultural use.

The Committee sees the growing unviability of agriculture over the years as a major reason for pushing cultivators to give up on farming as occupation and their lands. Over the last two decades of the globalization policy, the pattern of industrialization and urbanization that has set foot in India has further spiked the demand and subsequently the prices of land. On the one hand, the state is playing an instrumental role in transferring huge tracts of agricultural land to private projects, Special Economic Zones, development projects, etc. on the other hand, the still high demand has majorly expanded the illegal land sales market in the country. The CALR has also observed that the industrial boom has opened floodgates of opportunities of employment making out-migration from rural areas and subsequently agriculture a lucrative option¹⁷. (MoRD 2009: 231)

¹⁶ It must also be noticed that there are various state governments' legislations seeking to reverse the policies of land reforms through the raising of land ceilings etc as discussed before in this chapter.

¹⁷ The notion of a general agrarian crisis in India affecting all classes of the peasantry is contested by Ramachandran (2011): "any view that the two-decade period from 1991 to the present was a period of undifferentiated crisis – that is, of deceleration, a general absence of dynamism and even retrogression across all classes, regions, crops and years – is not supported by direct observation or statistical data."

As an outcome of such trends in the economy and society at present, diversion of land from agricultural to other purposes can be explained. However the CALR highlights certain alarming consequences of this pattern of change in land use. Firstly it has led to a decline in the country's food grain production over the period of liberalization. (MoRD 2009: 228) The marginalized sections of the society dependent on agriculture and land as their primary means of livelihood have been most adversely affected. About 40million people, of which 40% are tribals and 25% dalits, have been displaced since 1950 due to large development projects alone. Moreover the growing disparities in the share of benefits of the new development pattern couple with apathetic state attitude towards issues of compensation and rehabilitation of the displaced have contributed to the growing social unrest throughout the country. (MoRD 2009: 230)

The above discussion alludes to some specific themes permeating the land question. They are the themes of 'development', displacement and ecological degradation, as also conflicting interests of industrialization and the politically marginalized masses of people like the dalits and the tribals. These themes are prominently present in the recent literature on the issues of land alienation. The following viewpoints of various scholars on the matter can help provide a perspective on the problem of land alienation as discussed in the CALR.

K.B. Saxena (2008), an interlocutor of sorts between the state and the struggles against land alienation of the tribals sees the development-induced displacement as a principal problem facing the peasantry. Also a member of the CALR, he presents a more elaborate view on what has been called the two-sided stress on agriculture today- on one hand, liberalization has made farming an unviable source of livelihood, and on the other even this sparse resource is also being snatched away by the state through land acquisition¹⁸. Saxena focuses on the latter form of stress resulting from continuing land acquisition. He is of the opinion that the large-scale industrialization strategy followed from the time of

¹⁸ However this phenomenon of monopolized exploitation natural resources is not unique to the cases of corporate land grab, but is a function of inequity in land ownership and capital in general. The landed classes with better access to credit and technology are better placed in tapping most of the groundwater in the villages leaving a depleted water table for the naturally irrigated marginal plots of land. See Walker (2008: 571)

independence is only a continuation of the colonial legacy. Continuing with the same legal-administrative framework, it provides no break from the exploitative past for the weaker sections of the tribals and Dalits.

Alienation of land from the weaker section sections was a regular feature of the colonial regime, only reinforced in the post independence period by two substantial modifications of the framework of acquisition. Firstly, land under the common communal ownership of tribal communities, with no individual titles, was claimed by the state by the principle of 'eminent domain'. Secondly, for the privately owned land, the new legal framework did not recognize traditional or customary rights and went ahead to only deal with those having legal rights to a property. This left in lurch a vast majority of population that was directly or indirectly dependent on such property to which they had no legal claims. As per Saxena, this came to vest in the state unprecedented power over the people and traditional communities.

On the impact of liberalization, Saxena considers the private sector as a far more aggressive and intractable challenge compared to the developmental state which still had some kind of legitimacy and accountability to the people. Since 1984, with the private firms being incorporated into the Land Acquisition Act, as those who can acquire and use land for 'public purpose', the scale of land acquisition has only risen sharply. The constraints of the capital-deficient state were overcome with liberalization of the economy opening the flood gates for massive inflow of capital. Over time, the contradiction between the two interests, expansive big capital and agrarian classes, has become acute with violent responses from both sides. Saxena argues that alienation from land becomes the final frontier of defense of their livelihoods for most people devoid of any alternative resources. This is the reason that the resistance to land acquisition has been fierce and widespread across the country.

Kothari (1996) concurs with Saxena's analysis of the problem at most points but takes the critique forward to questioning the role of the entire socio-political structure in breeding such exploitation. He argues that justice in even the resettlement and rehabilitation

processes that is often seen as an immediate solution to the problem is only a mirage in the top-heavy polity. Effective resettlement and rehabilitation is only possible, as per Kothari, in democratized socio-political setup that does not impose upon the people the vagaries of centralized planning. (Ibid) Centralized planned development for him is a manifestation of excessive concentration of power in the hands of the state. The bias for capital-intensive, large-scale, ecologically-destructive projects logically follows from such centralized authority. The authorities in such systems inevitably become oblivious to the particular needs, grievances and aspirations of the people at the grassroots. In turn people from the weaker and marginalized sections end up on the losing end of the whole process, as it is only the elites who are capable of cornering large share of the benefits of such development. This is in effect a betrayal of the constitutional principle of prioritizing the interests of the historically and socially underprivileged. Restoration of the political right to participate in the processes of decision-making at all levels- from the conception and implementation to the overseeing of existing projects- is the only viable solution

Kothari is wary of the vague discourses of ‘national interest’, ‘progress’ and ‘public good’ running over the fundamental rights of ordinary people- their right to a life of dignity, right to a minimum level of economic well-being etc. The marginalization of certain sections of population in such discourses on development should come as no surprise in an inegalitarian social structure where the ‘universal interests’ are fundamentally the interests of a minority political, landed and business elites. The dismal track record of the state in providing resettlement to project-affected populations only substantiates Kothari’s argument for a deep structural reformation of the polity.

Besides this, Kothari draws our attention to the fact that development projects of the day are mostly being seen as commercial enterprises whose viability is judged only on the basis of a ‘cost-benefit analysis’. The problem with this tendency is two-fold. One, the economic analysis tends to grossly underestimate the economic loss of the subject populations for most of them have been traditionally devoid of any legal claims to the land. Thus sections of tribal communities, agricultural wage labourers, women peasants,

landless Dalit households and tenants who are mostly working under informal bonds, gain nothing out of the compensation package despite being directly affected by the project. The land acquisition laws take no cognizance of such traditional dependence of people on land.

The limited commercial outlook of the state towards issues of land acquisition poses a deeper socio-cultural crisis for the affected population. Displacement sunders the historical social ties and disrupts existing cultural social formations. Communities are torn apart and forced to dissociate in the lookout for possible avenues of subsistence where in most of the cases the resettlement plans do not materialize. Also this displacement occurs with or without any fair compensation for the economic loss. Even in cases where compensation is received, the rupturing of communal ties takes its toll on the social well being of the people. The challenges of settling in a new place having little or no shared history or culture are steep. Many a times the response of the host community is one of hostility. As a tragic consequence there might be further displacement even from the new areas of resettlement. As per Kothari, the vagaries of such ill-conceived resettlement and rehabilitation programmes are not anomalies but regular features of the contemporary development paradigm. The tragedy remains that the state has proved incapable and unwilling to deal with such complex issues of development.

In drawing attention to the destruction of the traditional life-worlds of the peasant and tribal communities, Kothari expands the debate seeking the integration of the economic question to the larger ecological problem. The view underpinning this approach to the debate is that the existence of agrarian and tribal communities hinges on a finely balanced ecological relationship between human activities and the natural environment. The modern development projects, in their bid to alter the landscape for 'public good', are wreaking havoc on this harmonious relationship. It is making certain traditional ways of life permanently unviable, pushing many to an uncertain future- that given the current trajectory of development has only bleak prospects of well-being.

Oommen (2006) is of the opinion that such development pathologies as displacement, disparity, discrimination and distress, are intrinsic to the current project of development that aspires to fall in line with the outlook of the developed world. He argues that while displacement is what has been much talked about, the other three pathologies need to be rescued from 'cognitive blackouts' within academia. Disparity is the systemic inequalities between the rich and the poor- people and nations- that are generated and sustained by the current development patterns. Such development has also fed into the exploitation based on pre-existing unequal social stratifications like the caste hierarchies, leading to discrimination. The grim prospects of well being stemming out of the combination of the three pathologies contributes increasing distress marked by rising deviant behavior as seen in more and more cases of 'suicides, rapes, murders, drug addiction, etc.' in this Oommen characterizes the issues of contemporary development and demands a review of the exclusive focus on displacement. Interrogating the whole of the contemporary model of development, in ways resonating Kothari's views, is seen as the need of the hour. In elaborating on such interrogation, Oommen (1992) has elsewhere pointed out, that the problem of dealing with development is that of the intractability of the question of technology. In this he emphasizes on the need to contextualize the role of technology to make a fair assessment of its merits and demerits. However, not an open advocate for large-scale industrialization, he argues that the appropriateness of any technology cannot be determined independent of the framework governing its usage. Thus an adequate reading of the issues of development, as per Oommen require a thorough contextualization of the events in real-time with an eye for identifying the genesis and ramifications of the development pathologies.

The bent of academic literature on the issues of displacement has thus been to expand the scope of interrogation from the economic to the cultural-ecological domain. Basu (2007) has tried to achieve this holistic framework by seeking an advance over the traditional Marxian framework and linking it up with the contradiction between brute economics and resurgent traditional ethics. He argues that with the rapid rise in mechanized production in the developed world since the 1970's, the cost of hiring more expensive technical labour began eating up into the profits of the firms in a significant way. With declining

profits and expanding production, the drive to sustain and increase accumulation had to seek avenues outside profits. Thus was propelled the internationalization of capital which sought the compensation for declining profits in the acquisition and exploitation of natural resources in the developing world. This historically explains the contemporary drive for aggressive land acquisition by national and foreign capital in countries like India.

Laying the theoretical framework of his argument Basu invokes the concept of land, as is used in the Marxian framework to refer to the surplus extracted from sheer ownership of property which is immobile. He contends that in contemporary capitalism even knowledge and labour have been rendered immobile artificially through instruments of intellectual property rights, etc. Thus the surplus generated out of these resources can also be termed as rent. Global capitalism has come to depend crucially on such forms of surplus extraction with increasing mobility of finance and growing artificial constraints of labour mobility.

This phenomenon involves an initial drive by a minority to gain control of property rights. This is not necessarily accomplished through market mechanisms but often through the process of primitive accumulation. Basu seeks to update this classical Marxian category of primitive accumulation contending that as rent extraction has come to be a constant feature of current capitalism, it cannot be denied that primitive accumulation is an intrinsic character of advancing global capitalism. Land acquisition for industrial development is thus seen by Basu as an instance of primitive accumulation, which provides the emerging capitalists property rights for rent extraction while simultaneously causing the proletarianization of the displaced masses.

However Basu does not end with an economic critique of capitalist development in the third world. Elsewhere he has argued that instances of land acquisition are also instances of intrusion of the culture of global community into the hitherto non-commoditized ethical community of the displaced. (Ibid) Nandigram and Singur are seen as sites of such cultural assaults. The resistance, as per Basu, was not merely driven by economic needs

of livelihood but as a strong opposition from 'ethical' system based on solidarity of the capital-led intrusion of commodity culture. Thus was brought to fore the conflict between the global and the local. The universalist capitalist development (with a necessary component of industrial development) came in contradiction with nature (embodied in agricultural land) which is necessarily particular. Thus the resistance to global capitalism has to be led by upholding the local whose uniqueness must be preserved.

1.6. Land relations in India today

Land relations in the Indian society have been historically marked by acute levels of inequity in ownership and exploitative conditions of tenancy. After six decades of the existence of land reform policies and myriad social and political movements for the rights of the tribals and dalits, the scenario is not very different at present. The issue of land rights for women has just about emerged on the horizons of policy and academic discussions in India. The foregoing discussion does make it clear that historically oppressive categories of caste, gender and the socio-economic marginalization of tribals are very much a part of the reality. An overview of land issues, particularly in the light of the literature review in the previous section makes it easy to see that the non-implementation of land reforms and the massive handover of agricultural and forest lands to the corporate sector are very much a part of the neo-liberal plan of development. The Prime Minister who assumed the chairmanship of the Land Reforms Council in 2008 has opined earlier:

Agrarian India must be transformed into a modern, viable economy... However, it has to be appreciated that the scope for a successful classical land reform involving large-scale redistribution of land is very limited. Manmohan Singh (2004)

It is difficult to find a meeting point between the Prime Minister's views and the purpose of the Land Reforms Council if it is to follow the recommendations of the CALR. However if past experience of land reform initiatives of the government are to go by, the Council does not offer much hope.

In the last decade the available ceiling surplus land has remained stagnant when estimates suggest that three times the area of land that has already been distributed remains to be tapped with stricter implementation of existing ceiling laws. The most developed states like Punjab and Haryana have very high inequality in land ownership. Even where land reforms have been moderately successful, as in West Bengal, landlessness among dalits is close to 50 percent. Women have remained outside the category of potential beneficiaries of land reform legislations. Corrective measures to accommodate gender concerns in the 1990s and 2000s have remained mere legislative recommendations. Tribals are facing massive displacement and destitution due to unrestrained penetration of industrial forces into the Scheduled Areas of the country. The special provisions for the protection of tribal interests in the Schedule V of the Constitution have remained unexploited to the detriment of tribal land interests. The continuity of an exploitative social structure from the past based on unequal land relations is unmistakable. The change, with the new facilitator role of the government for private capital, has meant further deterioration of the status of the historically marginalized landless classes.

The unfinished task of redistributive land reforms needs a thorough revisiting. With the Indian economy getting more and more integrated to the world market under globalization, it is important to discern possible changes in the land question. A critical method for such reassessment has to inevitably deal with transformations in the agrarian question post liberalization. The CALR has maintained a narrow view of land relations, not drawing the critical linkages between changes in the agrarian and rural society and its impact on land relations. For instance, increasing trends of reverse tenancy are indicative of the increasing penetration of capitalist contract farming. High levels of mechanization and serious emphasis on exploiting the economies of scale are characteristic of such change. They have direct implications for the on-farm employment opportunities of the rural labour on one hand, while necessitating a concentration of land holding with capitalist farmers either through reverse tenancy or direct acquisition of large tracts of land. Similarly the withdrawal of social banking by the government has caused the return of highly exploitative usury practices where informal moneylenders have regained powerful status in the villages through mortgaging of land in lieu consumption and other loans. A general reference to the worsening state of the agricultural sector, as the CALR

has opted for, does not help in the understanding of such critical linkages between the emerging trends in agriculture and their impact on land relations.

Moreover it should be noted that the unqualified advocacy in the CALR for liberalizing the tenancy and fair rent laws to be worked according to the logic of the free market betrays an overlooking of ground realities. The social reality of tenancy relations between the landed and marginal classes is still very much marked by feudal-type exploitation. The extra-economic coercive relations in tenancy cannot be simply written off with time without the caste-based land distribution being systematically and significantly restructured. There cannot be a free exchange between two unequal actors in a 'free market'. While it is understood that in the absence of a radical shuffling of land titles, tenancy remains a key medium for the landless and marginal classes to gain access to operational holdings; it cannot be overlooked that such access, which has been there for a long time, has not in any way altered the social status of the tenants in the long run. Even if the risk sharing in the lease agreement is technically equal between members of landed and marginal classes, the vulnerability of the lessee is higher owing to their lower access to facilities of credit, irrigation, etc and their economic existence already borders on subsistence or destitution to begin with. Thus lease agreements between the powerful landed classes and the small and marginal cultivators need to be mediated by protective legislations minimizing the risk of the more vulnerable classes, particularly in regions of volatile agricultural conditions. Thus the need of the hour is not to abandon protective tenancy and rent legislations but to revise them for greater efficacy in protecting the marginal agrarian interests against the rampage of big capital in agriculture.

At the cost of repetition, it needs to be emphasized that the specific concerns of dalits, tribals and women need to be redressed in any future rejuvenation of the land reforms programme. The ideological biases of the implementing authorities have kept these sections away from the little benefits they could have achieved in the hitherto limited implementation of land reforms. It is surprising how the CALR has so little to say on the conditions of dalits and women in its report. On the one hand, the CALR recognizes the thriving of the caste system on the upper and middle castes' control over land; it fails to deploy the historic land hunger of the dalits in making a persuasive case for reviving the

land reforms. While there is occasional mention of the role of the Maoist movement in keeping the land agenda afloat, there is no comment on the apparent absence of land rights from the agenda of popular identity-based dalit movements. The cases of Kerala and West Bengal, the two progressive states that have not lived up to the expectations of social justice in land relations when it comes to dalits, are instructive on the need for laying special emphasis on the dalit category in the land reforms schema.

The neglect of gender concerns in government land policies as well as in the social movements for land rights is being increasingly recognized and addressed in academia of late. However the redressal of the concerns raised has been more in principle than in practice by the government. The CALR too makes a token representation of the problem. The neglect is seen to be emanating from the rootedness of patriarchy and patrilineal systems of property transfer in the society. The social bias does deeply permeate the bureaucracy and obstructs the implementation of the few progressive legislations that come occasionally. However there is a grave lack of sociological insights in the CALR as to why even progressive social movements have failed to accommodate the concerns of gender equity. There is little discussion in the report on the different forms of social practices like that of dowry in West Bengal have worked to subvert the positive impact of land redistribution tilting the balance in land relations in favour of patriarchal forces. Any attempt at revision of the land reforms programme to better its implementation is incomplete without guaranteeing equal benefits to women in the outcome of the programme.

The treatment of the problem of tribal land rights has been commendable in the CALR. It takes a comprehensive view of both the concerns articulated by social movements on the question of tribal land alienation and how the policy of the government has attempted to respond to them. The lacunae in various recent acts of the government in recognizing the democratic aspirations of the tribal people have been forcefully highlighted. However the emerging conflict of tribal interests with that of the expansive plans of private capital particularly in the Scheduled Areas needs to be read in the backdrop of the larger political economy of 'national development'. The CALR does not lay out a comprehensive criticism of the present development paradigm of the state which according to its own

findings is responsible for the land alienation among tribals. The sense that is obtained from the report is that the tribal interests can be protected by a more sincere and democratically decentralized implementation of the protective legislations of the state, while at the same time continuing with the neoliberal model of development is not a contradiction in principle. A further discussion on this conflict in Chapter Two is due.

The concerns about the environment and ecology salient in the discussion on tribal land alienation have been developed in the debate surveyed in Section 1.5 of this chapter. The proposition that there have been social systems existing in harmonious relationship with the environment without influences of market or any modern interventions is debatable. However it cannot be denied that traditional tribal forms of living have been ecologically more sustainable than the current form of capitalist exploitation of natural resources. Thus reconciliation between the traditional and the modern for the preservation of the environment and certain forms of indigenous cultures is a central issue in challenging the contemporary development paradigm. On the other hand it should also be noted that the environmental concerns expressed by the CALR have stuck to a traditional framework. They do not take into account the pressing challenges of climate change for instance. In foreseeable future global warming is highly likely to alter the production conditions in agriculture in most parts of the country. The impact of such changes in the natural environment can be adverse for a majority of the population, the socio-economically marginalized being the most vulnerable to such risks¹⁹.

In such a context the arguments for the restructuring of land relations in the CALR could have been more forceful if the vulnerability of the deprived sections to economic and natural shocks were emphasized more²⁰. CPR is a major natural cushion for the poor of the society. The CALR offers an overview of the problem of different kinds of CPR and their expropriation by the state and the private interests. The expropriation of the CPR is another feature of the conflict between private capital and the interests of the deprived sections of the population. If the role of the CPR in supplementing the livelihood needs of

¹⁹ See Raaj (2010).

²⁰ Patnaik (1998: 13) has argued, "When we consider in addition the fact that class-differentiation within agriculture inevitably results in a disproportionate distribution of the burden of such income fluctuations among the agricultural classes, with the rural poor becoming the worst-affected victims, the necessity for state intervention in the market becomes even more pronounced".

the poor has to be preserved, it again requires a revaluation and revision of the current model of development led by market forces.

The present chapter has mapped out the contemporary distribution of land rights across various social groups in the country. It has attempted to study and explain the factors leading to the continuation of inequitable patterns of distribution. It also sheds light on new phenomena in the countryside that can have significant bearing on altering the land relations in future. However it is necessary to draw theoretical insights to arrive at what we have called the land question in the light of the data and analysis presented here. It is important that the main contradictions between different claims on land rights in a transforming economy are brought forth. It is also imperative to identify the main actors who are responsible for the continuities and changes in the land relations. As has been mentioned before, a comprehensive view of land relations is not possible without locating the land question in the larger agrarian question. The changed role of the state with increasing penetration of private capital into the Indian economy cannot but lead to a significant restructuring of the agrarian question and therefore the land question. While the historic concerns of social justice and increasing agricultural productivity attached with land reforms are still awaiting resolution, there are new concerns like the conflict between rising industrial demand for land and persistent land hunger of the poor alongside the increasing environmental concerns about the sustainability of the current model of development. The next chapter attempts to take forward the discussion in this chapter by theoretically and conceptually building on the preliminary findings presented herein.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LAND QUESTION UNDER LIBERALIZATION

2.1. Introduction

The first chapter is an empirical description of the issues in land relations in contemporary India. A factual presentation of data as in the first chapter needs to be put in a critical perspective to arrive at a theoretical formulation of the land question in this chapter. Since this study is attempting to understand the land problem as a part of the agrarian question, it is important that the conceptual framework of the agrarian question particularly as under processes of liberalization is understood and related to the problem of land. Moreover as the first chapter works to highlight specific trends in changes being witnessed in the land relations and points to an intensification of patterns of land alienation among certain sections of the population, it is required that we try to explain the political economic changes that are inducing these trends in the land relations. The second chapter works in this direction to offer a political economic framework for the land question in India.

The chapter begins with an introduction to the concept of class as required in the subsequent discussions. Section 2.3 establishes the theoretical linkages of the land problem with the classical formulation of the agrarian question. Section 2.4 highlights the distinctive features of neoliberal approach to the development of capitalism in countries of the global South. Section 2.4 attempts to theorize the processes and outcomes of peasant differentiation as induced by neoliberal development drawing from the theoretical formulations of A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi, Cristobal Kay and others. Section 2.5 uses the critique of market-based land reforms to highlight the limitations of neoliberal policies in the context of social formations where pre-capitalist structures like caste play a dominant role in social transactions. Section 2.6 attempts to extend the theoretical framework developed in the previous sections to the data on the Indian agrarian and land situation. It tries to understand the character of the contemporary capitalist class in agriculture by historically tracing its origin. Then the section presents

the nature of agrarian crisis being witnessed in India at present. The last part of this section argues that the impact of neoliberal policies on Indian agriculture have not been universally adverse for all classes. In a brief discussion on the pattern of peasant differentiation in the Indian agrarian structure this section contends that Akram-Lodhi and Kay's model of 'bifurcated' agrarian structure can be applied to India. In the light of these arguments, section 2.7 revises the understanding of the agrarian question in India under liberalization. The chapter concludes with a formulation of the land question under liberalization.

2.2. The Concept of Class

The populations of the categories of caste, gender and tribes are unified as actors in the processes of production, which predominantly pertains to agricultural activities in the rural Indian landscape. Dalits and women have historically been key constituents of the labour force in agriculture. Moreover the historic assimilation of tribes into the social mainstream further accelerated by heightened levels of their dislocation from their traditional realms of livelihood has brought them into the fold of the agrarian class structure. However the participation of these people in agricultural production has in the least been on an equal footing with the traditionally powerful classes owning the means of production. As demonstrated before the social and economic marginalization of these categories in the agrarian society has been a function of their lack of access to land which is the primary means of production in agriculture.

To understand the significance of land as a determinant of social hierarchy in the production system of agriculture it is imperative that the concept of class is examined as an overarching category of social analysis. There are many contentions that come in the way of class analysis of the Indian society that lead to larger questions of development of capitalism in Indian agriculture and so on.²¹ However, keeping in mind the limited scope of the present study a general elucidation of the class stratification of the Indian agrarian structure would be taken up.

²¹ See Alice Thorner's contributions to the Mode of Production debate

Lenin (1981) defined social classes as “large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it”. The means of production in the Marxist framework of analysis constitute of two kinds of resources, the objects of labour and the instruments of labour. The objects of labour are generally the naturally obtained resources like land, minerals, etc and the processed materials that can be called the raw materials like yarn in textile production, metals, plastics, etc. the instruments of labour are a wide variety of technological apparatus ranging from the simplest of hammers to the complex assembly lines, along with various infrastructural factors like factory buildings, railways, granaries, etc. (Volkov, 1985)

Among these the object of interest for this study is the universal object of labour, i.e. land. Land being a most critical means of production, particularly for production in agriculture, has paramount significance in determining the relations of production. Ownership or access to land is a precondition for participation in the production process in agriculture. Thus comes to fore the centrality of property relations in the larger framework of relations of production. By virtue of such centrality, the property relations play a crucial role in determining the existence of various classes and social groups, their status and conditions of life in society. (Abalkin, Dzarasov and Kulikov, 1983) However a very important clarification in order here is that inequality in access to land is not the sole determinant of class formation. Rather as Lenin (1977) has elucidated in his criticism of the Narodniks, there is a process of dynamic differentiation and reconfiguration among the classic peasantry influenced not only by property inequality but also as much by the extent of pervasiveness of the commodity and capitalist economy.²²

The import of the above clarification comes out clearly in understanding Kautsky (1988) who distinguishes between the size of the land holding and the potential of capitalist farming in his work ‘The Agrarian Question’. The quality of land- wet or dry, the

²² A systematic and updated criticism of the populist and the neo-classical populist views on agrarian political economy has been taken up in the Journal of Agrarian Change, Vol. 4. Nos. 1 and 2. 2004.

application of technology- fertilizers, tractors, etc, the intensity of labour use and other such factors have to be taken into account in assessing the economic productivity of a given landholding. Thus a bigger land holding may not necessarily be a superior economic enterprise. This explains that there is a centrality of, but not identity, between property relations and relations of production. Since class formation is determined by the relations of production, the identification of classes needs to take into account other factors besides the ownership and access to land.

In this light, the class structure in Indian agriculture can be studied by employing a synthesis of the approaches of Lenin and Mao which can be found in the method of Utsa Patnaik (1999). Patnaik has used two indices of labour exploitation and rent exploitation to achieve an empirical classification of households into various social classes.²³ Based on this method, the agrarian society can be classified in the following manner.

1. Landlords: They are owners of big land holdings who might be feudal or capitalist in their manner of operation. They stand apart from the rest of the classes by completely relying on hired labour and avoiding any form of family labour in farm operations. The capitalist ones among them are the ones who hire the labour directly and rely on the profits of the production predominantly more than on land rent. The feudal ones rely mainly on income through land rent while hiring labour indirectly through intermediaries.
2. Rich Peasants: They can be owners of sizeable farm lands and engage in some manual labour in the farm activities which distinguishes them from the landlords. They form the top stratum of the peasants who exploit hired labour directly or indirectly and appropriate a major share of the surplus. The ones who predominantly hire labour can be identified as proto-capitalists, whereas the ones still dependant mainly on the extraction of rent as proto-feudal.
3. Middle Peasants: The middle peasants are a category of cultivators which can be sub-divided into an upper and a lower level. The upper middle peasants are net

²³ A detailed elaboration of Patnaik's method can be found in her work *Ascertaining the Economic Characteristics of Peasant Classes-in-Themselves in Rural India: A Methodological and Empirical Exercise*, Journal of Peasant Studies. Vol. 15. No. 3. 1999.

- exploiters of labour as they hire in more labour in their limited agricultural enterprises than they hire out themselves to other farms. They are able to produce marginally more surplus than is required for subsistence. On the other hand the lower level of middle peasants operates on mostly family labour without hiring any outside labour. In order to overcome the crisis of subsistence in addition to cultivating their own farms, they have to work on other farms.
4. **Poor Peasants:** This stratum is populated by both the agricultural labourer and the petty tenant. The marginal nature of land holdings of this stratum of peasants compels them to hire out a large part of their labour to other farms. They often need to lease in land from other peasants at exorbitant rates of rent to sustain an economically viable enterprise in agriculture. For the agricultural workers the mainstay of their livelihood is the labour they hire out which exceeds the rent. For the petty tenant the rent exceeds the hired out labour. In either case, their consumption levels remain depressed below the normal resulting in a crisis of subsistence.
 5. **Landless Agriculture Workers:** This stratum of the agrarian populace is composed of agricultural labourers, some of whom might own tiny pieces of land. These workers survive on their wages. The ones who own any land are generally disinclined to cultivate it due to various reasons like the lack of investible funds, irrigation facility or the bad quality of the land itself making cultivation an absolutely unviable option. The minimal resources available to them make the leasing in of better plots of land impossible. They mostly live on the verge of destitution far below levels of subsistence.

2.3. The Agrarian Question

If Karl Kautsky's definition of the agrarian question is read with that of T. J. Byres', the agrarian question concerns itself with the development of capitalism in agriculture which involves the overthrow of old production and property relations in order to necessitate the arrival of the new at the same time removing all other obstacles to the process of capitalist development. (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2010a) This understanding of agrarian

transformation need not be deterministic as the nature of conflict of capital with the older mode of production depends upon the form and extent of control the older production relations hold over the means of production. Capital can bring about a substantive change in the ways of production, at times without altering the existing power structures in the agrarian countryside. That is, if the producers have the potential to respond to the new demands of emerging capital by revolutionizing the process of production they might not actually act as obstacles but as carriers of capitalism in the countryside. Moreover if the existing structures of domination are capable of accelerating the penetration of capital through primitive accumulation under the neoliberal imperative, they can prove to be conducive to the needs of capital. It is implied here that the transformative role of capital need not necessarily mirror the pattern of overthrow of feudalism as it happened in the classical case of England. In the words of Marx, “the history of this expropriation assumes different aspects in different countries, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different historical epochs.” (cited in Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2010a: 182) Thus capital does not impose a path-dependence in the processes of agrarian transformation across historical epochs in regions with diverse social conditions. However political economic analyses are capable of identifying certain general tendencies, if not laws of determination in such processes of social change.

The imperative of capitalist development can articulate itself in two ways. Firstly, the imperative of capital necessitates that producers drastically and constantly improve upon their processes of production in order to ensure regular multiplication of surplus and lowering costs of unit production over productive cycles to remain competitive in the market. It implies the embracement of new and technically more efficient forms of organization of production by leveraging new technologies and reducing the cost of labour. It also presumes that the farmers have unbridled access to capital in terms of land, technology, forward and backward linkages in the market for production and sales and of course, to labour power. In cases where such access is absent or constrained, the primary task of capital becomes to create conditions for it through the market which is considered a domain of free exchange.

A complementary articulation of the imperative of capitalist development can be through the imperative of labour. In conditions of limited access to capital, producers can put themselves to labour on more intensive cultivation in order to increase the relative surplus generated on their small holdings. Similarly those with no productively meaningful access to land are incorporated into the labour market as wage labourers. The market imperative is supposed to constantly push these categories of labourers to acquire access to capital and compete with the capitalist farmers. As for the wage labourers, they are expected to be freed from old forms of bondage in unproductive employments and seek to sell their labour power in the market.

While the former category of producers with access to capital can ideally include the capitalist landlords, rich peasants and the upper level of middle peasants, the other category more intensively involved in the labour market is likely to include the lower rung of the middle peasants, along with the poor peasants and landless agricultural workers. However at this point it is necessary to clarify that the aforementioned scheme of differentiation of the peasant classes is not so neat. The capacity of responding to the imperative of capital is crucially shaped by multifarious specificities of local conditions. The conditional mobility offered by capital to labour power does induce social transformation in the form of substantive changes in conditions of production process, with or without a change in the local structures of power.

The chances of being able to adjust to the demands of capitalism in agriculture are not determined only by access to land. If land were to be seen in isolation, the size of the holding would be a sufficient criterion for studying the differentiation of the peasantry. But as Kautsky and Lenin both point out that the crucial factor of differentiation is the scope and extent to which the process of production itself is improved through new methods of cultivation, quality of inputs like seed and fertilizers, mechanization and the character of livestock farming. (Ibid: 190) Thus the significance of land for the rural agrarian populace cannot be understood without locating the land problem in the larger question of agrarian transformation. With this insight it is imperative to look at the role of three important instruments of capital that can induce change in agrarian production: scale economies, changes in tenancy relations and debt.

As has been noted above the scale of economies in agriculture, with the development of capitalism, can become relatively autonomous of the size of landholding instead responding more to the nature of organization of farm production. This explains what we have called the conditional mobility that is offered to peasants under capitalism. If a middle peasant is better able to harness the economies of scale, their relative as well as absolute surplus could overtake the production of an outdated feudal landlord's farm. Moreover by this logic, the development of capitalism in agriculture need not necessarily entail the dispossession of small and marginal peasants. (Ibid: 191)

However dispossession is indeed an integral feature of the development of capitalism in countries like India. This distinction in the nature of capitalist development that is at variance with the classical analysis of capitalism by the likes of Lenin and Kautsky originates from the character of neoliberalism- which will be dealt with a little later in this section. On the questions of tenancy relations and debt, Marxist political economy has a few more crucial insights to offer. Lenin has argued that tenancy is bound to acquire a necessary place in the process of capitalist development. The exploitation of economies of scale necessitates efficient allocation of resources. Therefore large landholders are likely to lease out the unused portions of their holdings to competitive tenants who conversely need the land to increase their surplus. However unequal distribution of land ownership in unreformed agrarian economies would inflate the price/rent of landholdings owing to the massive land hunger of the majority. (ibid.)

Also the skewed distribution of capital leads to a differentiation of debts taken by cultivators. Lenin has argued that there is higher indebtedness among small and marginal peasants owing to their low or negligible surplus generation and subsequent dependence on credit for consumption goods. (Ibid: 192) On the other hand the capitalist farmers access the credit markets for financing the supply of production-oriented goods. Therefore the former kind of debt procured by small and marginal peasants can be a sign of precarious economic existence whereas debts accruing to the capitalist farmers can indicate greater investment in production and subsequent capitalization.

The above generalized theoretical sketch of developing capitalism would facilitate a more coherent reading of the Indian condition. The sketch is based more on classical readings

of the agrarian question, mainly of Marx, Lenin and Kautsky. It is important to update the reading of the development pattern of capitalism in the light of more recent trends observed in the global South. The last three decades broadly represent the coming to dominance of the neoliberal model of capitalism. Globalization of international production and trade is a most significant feature of this new era. The following subsection takes up the task of identifying structural changes in the agricultural sector adding to the above analysis two major concepts of neoliberal enclosures and semi-proletarianization.

2.4. Neoliberal Capitalist Development

Capital is not a thing but a system of social relations where the direct producers are divorced from the means of production to work as 'free' wage-labourers while the means of production get concentrated in the hands of a few who extract surplus value from the labour of others. In this light capital accumulation does not refer to the mere accumulation of resources by a few but the accumulation of social relations of production. The development of capitalism shifts the control over the production process in the hands of capitalists. The process of capitalist accumulation is aimed at expanding this control to ever new territories and spaces of social life in order to maintain and reproduce capitalist relations. (Akram-Lodhi, 2007) Such expansion is meant to produce enclosures which historically refer to the expropriation of public resources for private use. Enclosures perform the historic task of redistributing the means of production from the direct producers to the capitalist class while simultaneously creating the mass of wage labourers.

As comes out in the discussion on land acquisition and displacement presented in the first chapter, besides the economic, land embodies social, cultural and ecological value. Land acquisition, which is a form of territorial enclosure thus not only appropriates the economic resource of land but decisively alters the power structures of the society in affecting the related social, cultural and ecological variables. Thus the impact of enclosures works beyond the physical or geographical dimensions. It consolidates or brings to the disposal of the dominant class the capacity to exercise extra-economic

power to further the accumulation process, thereby facilitating primitive accumulation as a continuous characteristic of capitalist development. Thus legal and extra-legal means are deployed in bringing such domains of public life into the ambit of capital that were hitherto unexploited by capital. An object can be exploited by capital only if it is available as commodity for exchange in the market. In this sense, the process of enclosing culminates into the commodification of land and labour power.

The process of commodification cannot be achieved by mere territorial expansion. It is carried out through complex machinations around the processes that condition the access to land and labour power. For instance mortgage debts have been a potent medium to alienate land from the peasants and make it available in the land market for sale or rent. The commodification of labour power cannot be complete as long as the workers receive a share of social wealth, in terms of subsidized food or fuel, 'without a corresponding expenditure of work'. (Ibid: 1444). Thus public provision of social security is a natural casualty in the process of enclosing and commodification. The CPR's and other communally held property also act as obstacles to commodification that need to be overcome by enclosures. A counter to this logic of enclosures and commodification lies in the state provisioning of services and goods. Akram-Lodhi has argued that in particular state-led redistributive land reforms are precisely what can be called as counter-enclosures.

The arrival of neoliberalism in the 1980's happened in a context when capitalism had penetrated most of the global South in some way or the other. In countries like India state-policies for a long time protected and groomed the nascent capitalist classes through trade barriers and subsidies. Akram-Lodhi argues that at this historical juncture enclosures do not have to establish capitalist relations but have to extend the reach of already existing capitalism in the countries of the global South. Globalization has integrated the economies of most of the countries into the circuit of international capital. States have become subservient to the hegemony of international capital. In this, neoliberal enclosures function by enlarging the reach of market forces and capitalist economic rationality to new regions, commodities, production sectors and property relations. The lack of production incentives in underdeveloped national markets is sought

to be compensated by linking production to the demands of international markets. Thus production for use gradually gives way to production for exchange in the market, domestic or international. The role of trans-national agro-food capital in inducing the development of export-oriented capitalist farming is particularly significant for the transformation of the agrarian sector in developing countries today.

2.5. Peasant differentiation in the Agrarian Structure

The penetration of market forces with the neoliberal enclosures operating in a globalized economy gives rise to a 'bifurcated' agrarian structure according to Akram-Lodhi (2007). The significance of this bifurcated structure is to explain how capitalism under the neoliberal regime operates in a terrain of skewed agrarian relations. The integration with the global agro-food market provides the impetus for improving the productive capacities of the dominant classes in agriculture that had been missing in the closed underdeveloped national market. It leads to the formation of two sub-sectors within the agrarian structure. One is the export-oriented capitalist sub-sector that thrives on the concentration of the means of production by the dominant classes and the opportunities presented by the international circuit of agro-food capital. The other is the peasant sub-sector that represents the classic peasant production, part of which strives hard to catch up with the other sub-sector while the other part tries its best to remain afloat under the combined imperative of capital and labour in the market. A nuanced understanding of such differentiation as is offered by Akram-Lodhi points out to a category of semi-proletarians who struggle under the weight of an emerging highly competitive economy to retain their agrarian past through tiny pieces of land while diversifying their income sources through casual on farm and non-farm labour to meet subsistence needs.

The two sub-sectors are not distinguished on the lines of an understanding of efficiency or the dominant mode of production in either of them. Both respond to market imperatives of capital and labour albeit in a differential manner owing to their specific economic capabilities. The distinction between the two is based on that, whether production takes place for use or exchange, i.e. commodification, and the extent to which

this commodification has taken place making them predominantly subject to the market imperative of capital or of labour.

The export-oriented capitalist sub-sector predominantly responds to the market imperative of capital by being more capital-intensive and less labour-absorbing, harnessing the available economies of scale in order to principally but not exclusively cater to the demand of the export markets mostly located in the global North. Access to land is a crucial but not the sole factor allowing entry into this sub-sector. The international export markets are heavily regulated by the transnational agro-food capital controlling the domains of production, processing, distribution, retailing and finance. Forging linkages in such export markets leads this sub-sector to embrace 'capitalism from above'. (Ibid: 1448) The likelihood of forging such linkages depends on the capacity of the producer to access social networks on a competitive footing. Since access to social networks is available mostly to the dominant classes of the agrarian structure wielding both economic and political power, entry into this subsector is most likely for them. The small and marginal peasantry finds it very difficult to compete with those above them in power structure, more so as their access to the means of production, particularly land is controlled in many ways by the landed classes.

The peasant sub-sector remarkably differs from the former sub-sector in being more labour-intensive and less capable of harnessing economies of scale while catering at best to the domestic markets that are regulated by the dominant classes. The production is for use, as well in some sections for exchange. However the greater rootedness of this sub-sector in the local social relations without an impetus from the international capital for autonomous capitalist growth makes it operate under the aegis of the dominant classes' regulation of the target market. This leads to an expropriation of their surplus by the dominant classes in turn impeding a development of 'capitalism from below' in this sub-sector. (Ibid: 1450) On the other hand the peasants in this sub-sector who are less integrated with the market, crucially rely on their access to land. Their dependence on the landowners for such access ensures that they operate in a labour market controlled by the dominant classes. Resultantly in their case too, the classes in control ensure that the surplus generated by their labour power is expropriated and there is no accumulation of

surplus by these peasants. Both categories of peasants in this sub-sector, those striving to remain competitive in the local markets and those accessing land through tenancy and other means to retain their productive role in the agrarian sector, are very much dependent on agriculture as their primary source of employment and livelihood.

However neoliberal enclosures in agriculture through the relentless imperatives of capital and labour are bound to exclude a large section of peasantry from their engagement with agriculture as producers. It happens through taking over of land resources by more productive farmers, limiting or denying credit to the uncompetitive lot and radically transforming the sector's productive processes in such a way that many tied to old forms of production fail to cope with it and are torn apart from agriculture as their primary occupation. The peasants falling in this category are excluded from the productive sub-sectors as producers and forced to sell their labour power to employers within and outside the agricultural sector. They constitute the category of semi-proletarians. They resist complete 'de-agrarianization' as Akram-Lodhi calls it, by holding on to tiny plots of land, owned or rented, a lot of times for food security reasons, as vestiges of their agrarian past. (Ibid: 1450) Nevertheless they have to constantly compete in the labour market to diversify their sources of income in order to survive. With their meager or negligible access to the means of production they cannot be included in the previously described sub-sectors of the agrarian structure. But they can remain relevant to the process of capitalist development in the countryside by joining the reserve army of labour that works under the imperative of the market.

2.6. Market-based Land Reforms as Neoliberal Enclosures

The deepening of capitalist relations cannot take place without 'efficient allocation' of productive resources like land. In other words, the successful deployment of the market imperatives by the trans-national agro-food capital in agriculture requires the existence or creation of a suitable structure of property relations. It is only when resources like land can be freely transferred from the unproductive to the more productive and market-oriented actors that the development of capitalism through the exploitation of economies of scale can be envisaged. In this scenario, land reforms form an integral part of the

overall neoliberal restructuring of agrarian relations in the global South. Such land reforms cannot give primacy to the concerns of social justice or ecological concerns, but have to primarily cater to the need for creation of a liberal market where profitable exchanges can take place. In this sense the land reforms project of the neoliberal regimes are bound to be inconsistent with the traditional developmentalist models of land reforms that served larger agenda goals of social transformation.

Thus a return of the land question on the neoliberal agenda is not without a dramatic twist. It is based on certain revision of ideas on the meaning of land and the purpose of land reforms in general. While some aspects of the embeddedness of land in social relations are acknowledged by neoclassical theorists there is a rather clear admission that such social dimensions of land cannot guide a successful policy framework for transformation. This admission is not of incompetence by the neoclassical theorists as they predicate it on the historic failures of various regimes to bring about socially just transformations the state-led land reforms. It is argued that it is only the economic dimension of land that can be a subject of policy implementations. (Ibid: 1439) Thus in the new framework of land reforms land is dealt with as exclusively an economic resource to be managed by the forces of free market. It should be understood that focussing on the economic value of land is consistent with using land reforms as a tool of poverty reduction- a fact that provides some social legitimacy to the agenda of market-based land reforms.

Akram-Lodhi has argued that market-based land reforms are basically a part of the neoliberal enclosure movement whose primary purpose is the commodification of land (ibid.). It is about bringing land into the force field of the market, where the imperatives of capital and labour would ensure that the control of land lies more and more with the classes that owe allegiance to capitalist market rationality in a globalized system. It is here that we are introduced to the model of 'willing buyer and willing seller' in the land markets. This model is in line with the neoclassical belief that in a system of free interplay of the forces of demand and supply- unencumbered by the distorting intervention of non-market institutions of the state and society- the price of land comes to

embody its true value thereby facilitating an economically fruitful exchange between the willing buyer and the willing seller. (Ibid: 1440)

The problem with the above model lies in the primary misconception of the meaning of land in any social formation and the assumption about perfect markets. A critique of market-based land reforms extends to a critique of the whole model of neoliberal development. As has been underscored preciously in this chapter the access to land in rural agrarian society is crucially mediated by identities like caste and gender. It is a reflection of the social and cultural embeddedness of land. It is also an obstacle in the functioning of markets in ways described above. In the absence of a level playing field, the price of access to land embodies not only the economic value of land but is also significantly determined by the relations of structural power exercised by the dominant classes. The experience of implementing tenancy reform legislation in India for instance, is an example of this distorted reality of land rental markets. The solution of this problem cannot be arrived at by overlooking the roots of formation of repressive identities, which happens in the case of focussing exclusively on the economic value of land. Even if concerns of social justice are put aside, it is not clear how in a setting that is socio-culturally skewed in favour of land monopolies of the dominant classes, competitive prices of land can be achieved for 'free' land transfers from the willing buyer to the willing seller.

Using the insights of Marx and Mackintosh, Akram-Lodhi lays forth a comprehensive theoretical challenge to the idea of market-based land reforms. As has been mentioned above the claim of market exchanges being voluntary in a setting where cultural identities dominate most social transactions in significant ways, cannot be held up in countries like India. In such settings the terms of entry into the markets are determined by the dominant classes that control most of the production and distribution in the sector owing to their monopolistic control over the means of production. In addition, information asymmetry in the market as a widely acknowledged imperfection can be a prescient challenge to the free functioning of markets in the developing countries. Recognition of the reality of socio-economic differentials guiding access to knowledge in such societies logically implies that information asymmetry is likely to prevail in the developing markets. Thus it

might not be possible to ‘get the prices right’ in such markets. An overcoming of this problem necessitates interventions by non-market institutions of the household, community, farms, firms and the state, which are originally considered distortionary for the market. Moreover as production precedes exchange and in the domain of production the role of the aforementioned non-market institutions cannot be simply wished away, particularly in developing economies, the possibility of building perfect markets in the neoclassical sense in developing countries itself stands challenged.

2.7. A General Hypothesis on Neoliberal Capitalist Development in India

From the above theoretical description of neoliberal capitalist development, a general set of tendencies of social transformation can be drawn out. The nature of the agrarian question in the contemporary scenario has to deal with the forms and means by which global capital seeks to exploit existing social relations in developing economies so as to deepen the hold of capitalism and with it that of the international market. It is distinct from the classic forms of capitalist development in that that there is no fundamental compulsion to alter pre-capitalist property relations wherever they are amenable to the needs of capital accumulation. This distinction is possible because the developmentalist imperative on the state to develop national markets in order to propel capitalist transformation has been taken over by the market imperatives offered by integrated global trade. Thus the transformation of the erstwhile feudal classes with concentration of the means of production including land in their hands, into capitalist producers is now occurring under the stimulus of trans-national capital. However the origin of capitalist trends in agriculture owe to the history of state-led capitalism of the developmentalist era in the Third World countries²⁴. The task of neoliberalism then is to strengthen and expand the hold of such capitalist trends in alliance with the dominant classes of the respective countries. Such nature and configuration of alliances between international capital and the national dominant classes are contingent upon how the existing social relations of production in a given agrarian economy bring about peasant differentiation in response to capitalist imperatives.

²⁴ See Walker (2008)

Globalization is a process of increasing incorporation of national economies into the circuit of international capitalist production and trade. However this incorporation results in uneven capitalist development across regions, classes, commodities and markets. A necessary consequence of this fact is the differentiation in the peasantry that is explained by the bifurcated agrarian structure. An exclusively economic outlook of neoliberal restructuring is quite ironically capable of accommodating not only economic but other structures of inequality which can be social and cultural in form. Thus the concomitant project of market-based land reforms can work to the advantage of dominant groups in existing social hierarchies as long as it serves the purpose of increasing capitalist accumulation. The processes of liberalization and privatization ensure that the state's interventions for dispensing social justice are replaced by the redistributive mechanisms of the market that are unlikely to account for such concerns.

With the above theoretical framework, we can try to identify the nature and possible direction of capitalist development of Indian agriculture in India under the neoliberal regime. The formal advent of neoliberal policies in Indian agriculture is associated with the signing of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) in 1994. In consonance with the aforementioned assumptions of the neoclassical economics, it was argued that liberalization of agricultural trade with the simultaneous freeing up of the agricultural markets would cause a pro-agricultural sector shift in the domestic inter-sectoral terms of trade along with offering price incentives for growth in investment and output. However it was necessary for this the restrictions on imports were lifted and the currency was devalued so as to make agricultural exports more remunerative. (See Chandrashekhar and Ghosh 2002; and Ghosh 1992) Input and food subsidies being given by the government were considered disincentivizing growth and distorting prices and therefore were supposed to be done away with under the Agreement on Agriculture (AOA). (Reddy 2002) Thus agricultural policy in India since the 1990's sought convergence with the liberalized world trade regime under the directions of the IMF and other international multilateral trade institutions.

The outcome of this change in policy framework has been interpreted as

the reversal of policies of administered agricultural input costs and output prices, cutbacks in public investment in rural physical and social infrastructure, the dismantling of the institutional structure of social and development banking, the withdrawal of quantitative restrictions on the import of agricultural products, cutbacks in the public distribution system, and the undermining of national systems of research, extension and the protection of national plant and other biological wealth. (Ramachandran and Rawal 2010: 57).

2.7.1. Historic Antecedents of Capitalist Farmers in India

Before any analysis of the present state of agrarian relations can be offered it is important to discern the character of the emerging urban and rural bourgeoisie. Walker (2008) has offered an illuminating hypothesis on the origins of the Indian capitalist class in agriculture. It is amply clear by now that the largely failed implementation of land reform laws in most parts of the country has allowed the upper caste elites to retain their land monopolies till today. There are three aspects of the Indian state's attempt at agrarian transformation in the early decades of independence that allowed the feudal classes to not only retain large landholdings but also transform themselves into the rural bourgeoisie.

The large amounts of monetary compensation given by the government for the acquisition of ceiling surplus lands under the land reforms programme endowed the landlords with a starting capital for investment in agriculture and non-agricultural profitable enterprises. Walker argues this stimulus led many of the rural elites to invest in emerging industrial sector, which gradually transformed them into an urban bourgeoisie. However it is also well known that a haphazard implementation of ceiling laws along with the clause of 'resumption for personal cultivation' in the land reforms legislations made many absentee landlords to return to agriculture. The subsequent eviction of tenants to avert the possibility of reverse possession of land by the tenants under the new laws, resulted in the hiring of wage labour on the landlords' farms. It must be clarified here that concealed tenancy nonetheless continued on exploitative terms. The wage labour too was unfree under the persistence of the caste structure of exploitation.

Secondly, the substantive state support provided to agriculture before the liberalization encouraged greater private investment by the landed elite. The protective trade laws in agriculture coupled with a network of agricultural support through input subsidies, research and extension services, procurement and market facilities, universal public distribution system for food, etc. by the state before 1990's incubated capitalist growth during this period. Moreover the introduction of Green Revolution technologies during the 1970's which are known to favour specific crops, classes and regions broke the 'rent barrier' for the absentee landlords turning them into capitalist farmers.

Thirdly, the limited gain of land reforms accrued to the erstwhile middle peasants mostly hailing from the middle castes, also referred to as OBC, who had the incentive of taking over more land through redistribution for capitalist farming. Their traditional hands-on involvement in agricultural activities was key to making them efficient producers in competitive markets.

Thus by the 1990's a complex interplay of historical factors gave birth to a rural bourgeoisie that hailed mostly from the upper and middle castes. The Green Revolution period had already exposed them to capital-intensive methods of agriculture. However by the 1980's the scope of utilization of the Green revolution technologies got exhausted and agriculture was coming face to face with a crisis (ibid.). Even though the introduction of the policies of liberalization, privatization and globalization in the 1990's was not a direct response to the demands of the capitalist farmers, many sections of the capitalist peasantry welcomed the change in the policy regime. Landlordism and caste-based exploitation of labour were very much features of the agricultural capitalism in the India at the beginning of the neoliberal era.

2.7.2. Agrarian Crisis under the Neoliberal Regime

However what followed after the signing of GATT and other free trade agreements proved harmful for the agricultural sector. Gross capital formation in agriculture and allied activities as a proportion of gross capital formation in all activities declined since the 1980's to a low of 5.7 percent in 2000-2001 from a level of 15.6 percent in 1980-81. (Ramachandran and Rawal, 2010) The decline in gross value of output led to a

compression of farm incomes. (Ramakumar 2010). The integration of the sector with the international market with liberalized imports led to a fall in commodity prices and a rise in input costs making farming unviable for a large section of small and marginal peasantry who greatly depended on the state support. (Ramachandran and Rawal, 2010) For most of them the net income from agriculture became negative with the situation being worse for dalit and tribal households. (ibid.) Food security has been the other casualty of the new policy regime. The rate of food grain production has become lower than the rate of population growth making it unlikely for the economy to meet the estimate food grain requirement for the year 2020. (Ramakumar 2010)

The situation of rural credit is particularly telling of the regressive impact of the neoliberal policies in agriculture. The policy shift in the 1990's led to a gradual phasing out of social and development banking in rural areas. The banking sector was to be made competitive and profitable at par with the global banking norms. Resultantly public sector bank branches were shut down in rural areas since 1995. (Ramakumar, 2009) Credit provision from the remaining of the rural public banking sector sharply fell from 1991 to 2004. It brought about a regional unevenness in the availability of credit for agriculture. It had a direct impact on credit-availability to the small and marginal farmers and particularly, on the dalit and tribal households in rural areas. (Ramachandran and Rawal, 2010) This policy change compelled the rural poor to turn back to the usurious moneylenders. (Chavan, 2007) Exploitative debt relations are a major factor in the increasing number of farmer suicides in the countryside. However a shift in the trend of public investment in agriculture and formal rural credit since the early 2000's indicates that this crisis has not uniformly affected the peasantry.

2.7.3. Peasant Differentiation in the Agrarian Structure and Semi-proletarianization

By 2006-07 the gross capital formation in agriculture and allied activities as a proportion of gross capital formation in all activities rose to 7.9 percent. Ramakumar and Chavan (2008) have further noted a significant increase in the supply of rural credit alongside a halt in the closing down of rural bank branches. It is in the explanation of this reversal of trend that we can find signs of emergence of a capitalist sub-sector on the lines of Akram-

Lodhi's hypothesis. Ramakumar and Chavan have presented data to suggest that the revival in supply of rural credit since the late 1990's was an outcome of definitional changes made to favour large-scale indirect financing by rural banks. "These definitional changes broadly involved (a) the addition of new forms of financing commercial, export-oriented and capital-intensive agriculture; and (b) raising the credit limit of many existing forms of indirect financing." (Ibid: 63) It has been deduced from the available data on rural financing by public sector banks that a large proportion of the credit-supply went into financing agro-business enterprises oriented towards exports as well as big cultivators owning five acres of land or more.

In addition, Ramachandran and Rawal (2010) have pointed out to trends of privatization in the agricultural sector wherein 100 percent foreign equity has been allowed in the seed industry along with the introduction of the Intellectual Property Rights regime in research and extension services. Athreya (2011) elaborates on the entry of trans-national agro-food capital in Indian agriculture through the example of the revised Seed Bill of 2010. The Bill paves the way for monopoly control by big agribusiness of the seed industry without protecting the rights of the peasants to freely use this natural biological wealth in agriculture. It is seen as the tightening control of the WTO regime through the TRIPS agreement on Indian agriculture. The government has made major cuts in fertilizer subsidies which makes the farmers increasingly dependent on high-priced fertilizer supply from international firms. The government is further pushing for the introduction of the futures trade in agriculture that would increase the hold of speculative international finance capital.

In this context where the neoliberal policies are breeding an undoubtedly adverse condition for the small and marginal peasants in agriculture, Ramachandran (2011) makes a strong case for the upper strata of peasantry benefitting from the globalization process. Presenting data on increased sales of agricultural machinery he has argued that such increase in investment in agriculture indicates rising profitability for sections of the big peasantry. His argument is substantiated by the analysis of the rise in credit supply discussed above. Moreover both Rawal and Ramachandran cite the findings of village studies carried out under the Project on Agrarian Relations in India (PARI) to back the

argument that the agrarian crisis is not uniformly hurting the interests of all classes of the peasantry.

In the light of the above discussion it can be argued with some degree of confidence that there is, what Akram-Lodhi calls, an export-oriented capitalist subsector within Indian agriculture. Its presence is indirectly evidenced in the trends being witnessed in the agricultural sector since the last decade. A more concrete analysis of the relevant economic data on agriculture can reveal the extent and nature of the development of this sub-sector. However it can be argued with certainty that the caste composition of this sector is bound to reflect the monopoly of the upper and middle castes in the land relations. In others words agrarian capitalism has developed over a structure of caste hierarchy that favours the upper and middle castes against the lower strata of dalits and tribals in the agrarian structure.

On the other hand, as Ramakumar (2010) notes, there is a large section of peasants who cannot produce marketable surplus. Various micro studies referred to in the course of this study also point out that many middle and small peasant mainly produce for household consumption. With the concentration of land in the hands of the upper and middle castes, these peasants have to depend on the dominant classes for sustained access to land for agriculture. The dominant classes combine their economic power with the traditional caste hierarchy to extract agricultural labour from these peasants. So besides working on their own farms, these peasants also work the fields of the big farmers. However it is noteworthy that this section primarily depends on agriculture for their livelihood. It has been noted by authors that these small and middle peasants seek to improve their productivity by entering into tenancy relations with the landed classes. Such dependence has been further increased with the decline of the state support system of input subsidies, direct agricultural credit, procurement and marketing facilities, etc. Rawal notes that the aforementioned conditions of the neoliberal policies along with increasing landlessness and declining wage employment, has strengthened exploitative tenancy relations and labour regimes. Thus this sector of small and middle peasants appears to be representing Akram-Lodhi's peasant subsector where production takes place largely for use and any possible integration with the market happens under the control of the dominant classes

who expropriate most of the surplus through the exploitative tenancy and labour relations thereby impeding chances of accumulation for the peasants in this subsector.

A clearer configuration of the two subsectors requires a more comprehensive analysis of the economic data on agriculture. However the tendency of semi-proletarianization among the lower strata of marginal peasants and agricultural workers is more evident. Ramachadran (2011) subsumes the category of agricultural workers in a broader category of manual workers. It is done in recognition of the fact that exclusive reliance on agricultural work by the landless and poor is insufficient to meet their consumption needs. There is a growing trend of income diversification among the rural poor who engage in a wide array of manual works also outside the farm activities. However their social and economic location in the village economy along with a reluctance to let go of agriculture and any available small land plots in their possession prevents the completion of the proletarianization process. Agarwal's (2003) observation of feminization of small scale agriculture is a testimony to the fact that even migratory male workers are not ready leave their tiny farms by keeping their family engaged in agriculture while they seek supplementary wages outside agriculture. The diversification of income resources is a proof of the insufficiency of their meager landholdings to produce even a subsistence income.

The caste composition of this semi-proletarian category is generally of dalit and region-specific oppressed caste households. The socio-cultural confinement of dalits to manual labour and degrading forms of employment like scavenging persists till today. This reality uniformly shapes the miserable lives of dalits across the country, from the agriculturally advanced Punjab (See Jodhka, 2004), to Uttar Pradesh (Trivedi 2003), Bihar (Chakravarti, 2001), Tamil Nadu (Heyer, 2010) and almost all states of India. Heyer (2010) goes on to argue that Indian capitalism deploys caste to keep the working class divided and avert any claims from their side for better living conditions. Drawing insights from her village studies in the Coimbatore region of Tamil Nadu, Heyer has argued that greater integration into the agrarian production system came at the cost of unfreedom for the dalit households who had to completely depend on the landed upper castes for sustaining their livelihoods. (Ibid: 232) On the other hand their caste position

constrained their occupational mobility where even within the emerging industrial sector in the region, upper caste members of the working class found easier employment. A change from traditional occupation for the dalits does not necessarily mean an escape from drudgery. They have been confined to manual labour mostly in all possible sectors of employment. The trends in occupational diversity for the dalit and non-dalit poor indicate that entry into the labour market does not happen from a level playing field, but is significantly influenced by caste structures. (Ibid: 236)

Heyer's data from the Coimbatore region corroborates Agarwal's (2003) observation of the feminization agriculture. Heyer (2010: 234) found that non-farm employment was difficult to come by for women and girls of her study villages thus confining them to agriculture for livelihood needs. Ramachandran (2011) further refines the understanding of female semi-proletarianization. He observes four specific trends to women's participation in the labour market. First, there is a feminization of agricultural labour as the absolute number of female agricultural workers is higher than male agricultural workers; agricultural labour dominates the work profile of rural women and in the total number of labour days in agricultural work, the share of female work days is higher. Secondly, it can be argued on the basis of some micro studies in Andhra Pradesh that with the monetization of piece-rate employment in different crop operations, men are taking over women even in tasks that were traditionally carried out by women like transplanting and harvesting. Thirdly, female labour is being sought by niche fields of non-cereal production like the floriculture sector in Maharashtra, but the employment generated in these fields is too small to significantly improve the overall nature and conditions of female employment. The fourth trend pertains to a socio-cultural limitation placed on the work participation of women, particularly from the caste Hindu households. Manual labour by women in many such households is considered an adverse reflection on the status of the family. This results in the curbing of employment opportunities for many women in the patriarchal setup.

Thus the unfreedom of female workers in agriculture preventing their complete proletarianization does not originate merely from concerns of food security that ties them to small plots of land and agriculture. It is an outcome of a patriarchal social structure

that that binds them with compulsory household work constraining their geographical and occupational mobility. Further the discrimination against women, both in the agricultural and non-farm employment opportunities confines them to positions of traditional socio-economic subservience. In the light of these observations, female semi-proletarianization needs to be studied as a distinctive phenomenon in the process of the development of capitalism.

The gist of the above analysis can be understood as follows. Unreformed land relations have favoured the dominance of the upper caste elites in the agrarian sector. The manipulation of land reforms policies to their advantage along with comprehensive state support institutions for agriculture in the pre-liberalization period contributed to the transformation of the erstwhile feudal classes into capitalist farmers. The limited gains of land reforms have added a section of middle peasantry mostly from the category of Other Backward Classes (OBC) to the emerging capitalist subsector. Despite a persistent crisis in the agricultural sector for over a decade now, these classes have continued to grow as reflected in the rise of gross capital formation aided by renewed supply of rural credit to big farmers and agribusinesses. This anomalous growth of the capitalist section of the peasantry owes crucially to their monopolistic control of land resources and subsequently over other means of production. There has been a rise in the concentration of land with these classes as neoliberal enclosures have dispossessed numerous small and marginal peasants of their lands. In effect the deepening of capitalist relations under neoliberalism in India has meant a consolidation of the social, economic and political power of the rural bourgeoisie. Thus landlordism and casteism remain the distinguishing features of Indian capitalism.

However as the trends in rural credit supply and state policy changes suggest that the alliance between capitalists of this subsector and the international agro-food capital is still in its formative phase. Moreover in the last decades Indian agriculture has seen an inconsistent growth trajectory owing to global food and economic crises as also to political instability of coalition governments at the centre. (Athreya 2011) The uncertainties of the global markets and the political scene in India have made it all the

more important for the dominant classes to retain tight control over their land monopolies that offer a cushion against economic shocks.

The unreformed agrarian class structure allows for the deployment of extra-economic institutions of caste and patriarchy for accentuating capital accumulation. The withdrawal of state support from agriculture has increased the dependence of the smaller peasants and agricultural labour on the dominant classes. In addition the state is facilitating land acquisition for non-agricultural purposes. It represents a deliberate dereliction of the land reforms programme by the state. At present, petty peasant production is increasingly becoming unviable compelling the poor households, particularly those of dalits and tribals, to move out of agriculture as wage labourers. However caste-based discrimination in the labour markets confines these wage labourers in a loop of permanent subsistence crisis. The condition of female workers is particularly bad as they are treated as unequal to their male counterparts. Even those who have control over operational landholdings cannot access credit or other facilities as they are denied individual land rights as owners or tenants.

2.8. An Update on the Agrarian Question

Following Bernstein, the classical agrarian question can be broken down into three problematics of accumulation, production and politics. In the second part of their survey of the agrarian question under globalization, Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2010b) have revised these problematics to address the problems arising of the diverse forms of development of capitalism in the countries of the global South. Drawing from the foregoing discussion on the specificities of trends in contemporary Indian agriculture, an attempt can be made to apply the revised understanding of the agrarian question to India.

The problematic of accumulation deals with the capacity or constraints of the agrarian sector to generate investible surplus for its own capitalist development as well as for the developing in industrial sector. However the discourse of national development has been taken over by globalization undermining the accumulation problematic. In a liberalized trade environment the stress on efficiency can compel the state to forego the transformation of the agrarian sector by the classical route of land reforms and public

investments in order to build a national market for the emerging capitalist sectors both in agriculture and industry. What matters is that accumulation should take place. In the neoliberal schema, the role of the national market has been substituted by export markets to provide the stimulus for capitalist growth. The consequent increase in the rate of capitalist accumulation has thereby sharpened the differentiation in the peasantry under globalization. It has happened to the extent of formation of two characteristically distinct subsectors catering to the needs of international capital. In addition a large mass of semi-proletarians form an amorphous mass of labour force.

However Akram-Lodhi and Kay qualify and add to the above understanding of the accumulation problematic in a very significant manner. They have shown that capitalist accumulation in agriculture of the global South is crucial to the needs of the rapidly growing industrial economies like that of China. The international agro-food capital directs the agricultural surpluses of developing countries to catering to the requirement of cheap food imports for countries like China. Cheap food for the working class is major requirement if the cost of production is to be kept low and competitiveness has to be increased. Thus it can be said that the problematic of accumulation in its ideal formulation may have been undermined with the undermining of the national boundaries by globalization, but it remains critically important to an integrated global economy.

Such impacts of globalization on the accumulation problematic imply that the problematic of production does not remain unchanged, particularly in developing social formations like India. The two basic conditions of development of capitalism, as in a generalized rural wage labour and reform of the predatory property relations, are unsettled in the peculiar nature of development of capitalism in Indian agriculture. For the classes engaged in rural labour in the agricultural sector of India, the reality of caste and gender makes an unmistakable dent on the classical notion of 'free wage labour' under capitalism. The unfreedom wrought upon the rural working class by the persistence of structural domination of caste and patriarchy even in the most developed regions of the country adds a forever-intriguing riddle to the historical puzzle of capitalist development in India. It makes a case for necessary engagement with the caste and gender dimensions of peasant class differentiation. Moreover the undermining of a nationalist accumulation

imperative akin to that of the pre-globalization era, has led Bernstein (2002) to argue that agricultural surpluses of the sector, which can be in terms of fragmented marginal landholdings of the rural poor or the rural poor themselves forever expanding the reserve army of labour, have become dispensable for international capital. So much so, that in Bernstein's opinion the agrarian question of the global South has become redundant for international capital. What remains is the agrarian question of labour which basically means how labour will overcome the unfreedom imposed by the persisting features of pre-capitalist relations of production under neoliberalism. This proposition of Bernstein is contestable on the grounds of certain crucial realities of the Indian agrarian structure. However the critique of this proposition comes later in this chapter.

In the light of the amendments to the former problematic of accumulation and production under globalization, there are necessary implications for the third problematic of politics. A clear understanding of processes and outcomes of peasant differentiation in changing agrarian economies is critical to a comprehension of emerging trajectories of converging or diverging class interests within the agrarian class structure. "...following the debate on the transition from feudalism to capitalism...the balance of class forces and class struggle should be placed at the heart of the rural politics problematic. This should be done in order to make clear the dynamic tensions that exist between prevailing structures of domination, subordination and surplus appropriation and the capacity of individuals and social classes to express agency in order to transform and transcend these structures." (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2010b: 256) Therefore it is of utmost importance that theoretical schema like that of a 'bifurcating' (in the Indian case, still evolving) agrarian structure should inform the analyses and programmes of political formations seeking to intervene in the process of agrarian transition from a class perspective. For instance a failure to recognize a tacit or nascent support base for the policies of liberalization among the dominant classes of the capitalist subsector can possibly sustain false alliances of such classes with the exploited others. At the same time it must be recognized that the complex correlation of caste and class in India has the potential of obscuring fault lines based on concrete material difference of interests within a differentiating peasantry, particularly with the rise of identity politics. Akram-Lodhi and Kay have further argued: "A critical variable in understanding a specific path of agrarian transition is, as emphasised by

Brenner (1986) and Byres (2009), class struggle, both between dominant and subordinate classes and within subordinate classes undergoing processes of socio-economic differentiation, and the role of the state in shaping or succumbing to class struggle.” (Ibid: 258)

2.9. The Land Question in India

In the Indian case the category of dominant classes are constituted by the landlords, capitalist farmers, moneylenders and traders. The cultivators in this category mostly belong to the socially and politically powerful upper and middle castes. They have monopolistic control over land and other means of production. The state shows close allegiance to the interests of these categories as is evidenced in the lop-sided nature of state-led capitalist development in agriculture over the Green Revolution period and later. The members of this category are most likely to belong to the export-oriented capitalist subsector. The other category of the subordinate classes is constituted of the small and poor peasants along with the agricultural workers. This category also corresponds to the lower strata of the caste hierarchy including the dalits. Tribal cultivators, not traditionally a part of the caste structure, are also most likely to belong to this category. The small and poor peasants are crucially dependent on the dominant classes for access to land and other means of production. Moreover the traders and the moneylenders as part of the dominant classes also control the sale and distribution of their agricultural produce. On the other hand the agricultural workers are mostly bound by caste structures in a relationship of subservience to the dominant classes. The state remains indifferent to their historic land hunger by now completely abandoning the programme of redistributive land reforms.

The classic agrarian question broadly stands for development of capitalism in production relations and a formation of free wage labour where the two are mediated by perfect market of capital and labour. The update on the agrarian question adds four new dimensions to the agrarian question, which are to be necessarily addressed if a resolution of the agrarian question is sought. Firstly, as it has been argued above neoliberal development tends to impede the development of capitalism from below in the peasant

subsector that consists of the majority of farmers in India. This tendency is obtained as a result of the monopolistic control of the dominant classes over the means of production and markets. This control is historically owed to the skewed land relations in India favouring the dominant classes.

Secondly the persistence of structures of caste and patriarchy obstruct the process of proletarianization. The agricultural workers operating under the exploitative relations of caste and gender are not entitled to a position of free wage labourers in India. Their relation with the employers is critically mediated by caste and gender identities. Moreover large sections of small and marginal peasants are subjected to the conditions of semi-proletarianization. This condition owes to features of the present agricultural sector in India. The shifting cropping patterns with a drastic decrease in the reach of the public distribution system for food grains, has induced a food crisis for the poor in India. In addition a lop-sided development of the industrial sector has failed to absorb the surplus labour from the agricultural sector thereby increasing unemployment in the rural poor. In this situation it becomes imperative for a large section of the rural poor to hold on to their small land plots to ensure to some degree a livelihood and a minimal access to food.

Thirdly as demonstrated in the section on 'market-based land reforms as neoliberal enclosures', as the assumptions of neoliberal theory do not hold true in the reality of the markets of global South, it is near impossible to build perfect markets in the prevailing conditions in India. Here again the identities of caste and gender make the determination of right prices an impossible proposition. Moreover the monopolistic control of the dominant classes in production and distribution of the surplus makes the markets far from perfect. Since building perfect markets is an essential feature of capitalist development, the agrarian question cannot be resolved as long as social identities dominate economic transactions in a market controlled by monopolist forces.

In this sense it is being argued here that neoliberalism obstructs the resolution of the agrarian question in India. It is the alliance between neoliberalism and the dominant classes that makes possible a skewed and accelerated capital accumulation without overcoming the pre-capitalist relations of production in the agrarian political economy. This alliance crucially hinges on the dominance of the landlords and capitalist farmers

and their allies in the agrarian sector. The domination of these classes in turn historically stems from the inequity in land relations which also sustains the exploitative structures of caste and gender. Thus an overcoming of neoliberalism is not possible without the weakening of the dominant position of the landlords and capitalist farmers.

This brings us to the land question. Given the above features of neoliberal development the land question under liberalization is constituted of three parts. First is the completion of redistributive land reforms that is necessary to break the monopolist position of the dominant classes and induce competitiveness in agricultural production. It follows that the state must undertake the implementation of ceiling laws that will generate a land surplus to be redistributed among poor peasants and landless workers. Tenancy reforms need to be revised and implemented to guarantee a security of tenure and curtail the role of caste and gender in setting exploitative conditions for accessing land. Homestead land must be granted to the absolutely landless sections in order to reduce their compulsive dependence on the dominant classes.

The second part pertains to the peculiar problems of caste, gender and tribes engaged in agriculture. The past approaches to redistributive land reforms have failed to recognize and address the specific forms of exclusion faced by these categories in India. It is evident in the present condition of land rights of these categories in states, which have registered relatively successful case of implementation of the land reform policies. Moreover the intensifying control of the dominant classes with the growing influence of neoliberal policies is likely to worsen their condition further. In this light it is imperative that these categories receive special attention in the resolution of the land question.

The third part of the land question deals with the alienation of land due to neoliberal enclosures. Land acquisition for industry and other purposes has emerged as a burning issue in India of late. While the need for land acquisition and the form of industrialization causing the large scale dispossession of peasantry from land are questions for deliberation, the terms of the present form of land acquisition are starkly skewed against the interests of the weaker classes. In addition the withdrawal of state support to agriculture, privatization of input and output markets for agriculture, growing indebtedness among the peasantry and the advent of contract and corporate farming are

some of the prominent features of liberalization policies that can be said to indirectly effect land alienation among the weaker sections. However the very adoption and perpetuation of this policy framework is happening with the political and economic support of the dominant classes. Hence the third part of resisting neoliberal enclosures is intrinsically linked with the first two parts.

A resolution of the land question articulated as above lies in addressing it in all its three manifestations. However historical experience with land reforms in India suggests that the state is politically unwilling to undertake radical land reforms. As highlighted in the politics problematic of the agrarian question, such unwillingness of the state can be read as the balance of class forces being in favour of the dominant classes. Hence it is necessary to shift this balance against the dominant classes through an organized movement of the subordinate classes. The All India Kisan Sabha is one such organization in India that has historically raised the slogan of radical land reforms from the colonial times. The following chapter is a critical review of the approach of the Kisan Sabha to the land question under liberalization.

CHAPTER THREE

RESPONSE OF THE AIKS TO THE LAND QUESTION UNDER LIBERALIZATION

3.1. Introduction

This chapter is a critical study and evaluation of the theoretical positions, policies and politics of the All India Kisan Sabha²⁵ (AIKS) on the land question in the period of liberalization in India. The chapter begins by tracing the historical evolution of the agrarian and the land questions in the understanding and struggles of the AIKS. Section 3.2 describes the developments in organization and politics of the AIKS from the pre-independence period to the 1980's. Section 3.3 deals with the change in the strategies and the political response of the AIKS to the inauguration of the liberalization policy regime. This is done through a study of the alternative agricultural policy of the AIKS offered as a critique of the new policies of the government and the struggles led by the AIKS with this understanding. Section 3.4 takes up the critique of the theoretical formulation of the AIKS of the contradictions in agriculture under liberalization. Section 3.5 critically analyses the subsequent response of the AIKS on the three components of the land question, land reforms, land rights of dalits, tribals and women and the neoliberal enclosures. The chapter concludes with a summary of the arguments presented in critiquing the AIKS's response to the land question.

3.2. The Agrarian and Land Questions for the AIKS: A Historical Overview

3.2.1. Pre-independence formation and agenda

Before India's independence the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was a national platform of left-leaning intellectuals and politicians. The unique problems of the peasantry and their increasing significance in the independence struggle led members of the CSP to recognize the need for an autonomous organization of the peasants. The role of such an

²⁵ It is the AIKS with its office on 4, Askoka Road, New Delhi. The address is used to distinguish it from another organization with the same name.

organization was supposed to be to highlight and integrate the many diverse peasant movements and their specific agendas in the country into a national programme for the resolution of the problems ailing Indian agriculture as a whole. It would also provide a perspective on the role and interests of the peasantry in participating in the national movement for freedom from British imperialist rule. Such a perspective was supposed to make a necessary amendment to the meaning of the goal of independence for India. It was understood that the plight of the peasantry in particular did not solely owe to the exploitation by the imperialist British rule. The overthrow of the exploitative regime of the landlords in the countryside which had monopolized most of the land resources with the help of the British rulers was seen as an equally prominent and immediate concern of the vast mass of Indian peasantry. It was believed by the leaders of the CSP that the mass of the peasantry which was engaged in daily, localized struggles against the oppressive regime of the landlords could not have been brought into the fold of the struggle for national liberation without recognizing this concern. Taking cognizance of this crucial imperative N. G. Ranga and Jaiprakash Narayan were entrusted with the responsibility of floating a national organization of the peasants in the Meerut National Conference of the CSP in January, 1936.

It led to the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha²⁶ or the AIKS whose first all India conference was held in Lucknow in April, 1936. As an organization the AIKS was a conglomeration of various peasant movements from across the country holding diverse viewpoints. Many prominent leaders of the Indian National Congress like Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel sympathized with this new formation. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati as the first president of the organization stressed that landlordism was the primary enemy of the Indian peasantry and there can be no compromise with the landlords. It was also recognized by Sohan Singh Josh that the success of any decisive struggle against landlordism cannot be thought of without the achievement of national independence as a pre-condition. (Rasul 1989: 5) The three resolutions adopted in the first session summed up the objectives of the AIKS. First and foremost, the AIKS stood for the achievement of a comprehensive end to all forms of economic and political

²⁶ The name of the organization was initially the All India Kisan Congress or All India Kisan Sangh. The present name, AIKS, was formally adopted in the Niyamatpur Session held in Gaya, Bihar in July, 1937.

oppression of the peasantry through active peasant participation in the struggle for India's independence. Secondly the AIKS sought the abolition of all systems of exploitative landlordism with a final vesting of land rights in the name of actual cultivators. And thirdly, the AIKS demanded a radical overhaul of the oppressive systems of land revenue like the Ryotwari with the introduction of a graduated land tax for farmers with incomes above a certain minimum level.

The AIKS professed a pronounced socialist vision in its understanding of the Indian society as well as in the conceptualization of a new one. It superseded the goals of the Congress in already envisioning an agrarian revolution following the achievement of national independence which would establish "a democratic state of the Indian people leading ultimately leading to the realization of a Kisan-Mazdoor Raj (sic), which in effect is nothing but People's Democracy leading to Socialism, a state and society in which class exploitation of the peasantry as well as the working class will be put to an end." (Ibid: 56) The Gaya session of the AIKS in April, 1939, thus set a clear leftist line for the organization. Thorough engagements with the ideas of anti-imperialism and bourgeois democratic revolution emerged as the hallmark of the AIKS's programmes and struggles. Solidarity was regularly expressed with the trade union movement of the country as well as with the numerous working class struggles internationally. The demand for land reforms by the AIKS effectively a call for a social reorganization of land system as the resolution of the agrarian question, in the understanding of a leading intellectual of the AIKS, Rahula Sanskritayan. (Ibid: 69)

It was this political vision that made it necessary for the AIKS to assert its autonomy from the then all-encompassing umbrella of the Congress party. The autonomy was bred in a critical and gradual maturing of the AIKS's critique of the class character of Congress and its attempts to tame the revolutionary agenda of the AIKS. Gandhi's open criticism of Swami Sahajanand's politics in the newspaper *Harijan* compromised the position of Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose as sympathizers of the AIKS. (Ibid: 19) Regular attempts to sabotage the struggles and programmes of the AIKS and continuous negative propaganda against the organization by the landlord-dominated regional units of the Congress led the AIKS to identify the party with interests of the landlords and

moneylenders. A pronounced indifference to the peasant issues accompanied by the failure of the provisional state governments led by the Congress to initiate any measures of land reforms to avoid antagonizing the landed classes was seen as the party's divorce from revolutionary politics in favour of a reformist parliamentary approach. (Ibid: 63) According to the AIKS it was a class collaborationist approach that undermined the pressing interests of the peasantry. However the AIKS remained consistent in its support for anti-imperialist struggles even if they were led by the Congress.

The AIKS also faced a challenge from the Muslim League which sought to project itself as a sole representative of all the Muslims including the peasants. The League led a vigorous campaign against the AIKS during the latter's Comilla (Tripura) session of May, 1938. However Rasul found that the AIKS was successful in thwarting this threat and retain the support of the Muslim peasants in this session. (Ibid: 37)

On the other hand, a dominant section of the AIKS leadership sympathized with the then banned Communist Party of India (CPI). The AIKS demanded the legalization of the CPI in 1938. However not being a parliamentary party, the AIKS was populated by members of both the Congress and the CPI. There was growing discontent of the visible closeness between the AIKS and the CPI. A prominent leader of the organization, Indulal Yagnik protested against the domination of the AIKS by communists in the Bhakna (Punjab) session in April, 1943. A clarification was then made on the part of the organization that the functioning of the AIKS was to remain autonomous of the programmatic positions of the CPI. (Ibid: 112) Thus despite many pulls and pressures the AIKS remained an autonomous organization of the peasants with a socialist outlook accommodating members with different political affiliations.

Yet the political understanding of the organization as a whole reflected a remarkable coherence and a sophisticated class-based approach to studying the Indian reality. A brilliant exposition of the AIKS's understanding of the agrarian question and the role of imperialism can be found in the words of Rahula Sanskritayan which were read out at the Palasa (Andhra Pradesh) session of March, 1940. (Ibid: 69) Sankritayan argued that the sole interest of British imperialism was to advance accumulation by increasing agricultural productivity with an active support from the Indian landlords. Along with the

landlords, the emerging capitalist class was seen as an ally of British imperialism. Sanskritayan made a keen observation on the peculiar nature of the “young Indian bourgeoisie” in its seeking an alliance with the feudal classes in order to use the latter’s political prowess to its own advantage. In doing so the Indian bourgeois class has abandoned its historic role of overthrowing feudalism for the development of capitalism. Hence according to Sanskritayan, it fell upon the Indian peasantry and working class to undertake the historic task of bringing a bourgeois-democratic revolution in the country. The particular historic juncture in this light ruled out any class collaboration with the landlords and the bourgeoisie as was being propagated by the Congress. In this context it must be reiterated that given the class orientation of the Congress and the imperialist state, solitary focus on parliamentary politics was seen as an insufficient means of social transformation.

This understanding on the nature of imperialist rule and its alliance with the dominant classes of the country had informed the positions of the AIKS from the beginning. A very significant import of the perspective enunciated above is that the struggle against landlordism was not inconsistent with the logic of the anti-imperialist struggle. (Ibid: 46) It also forms the basis of exposing the bourgeois-landlord character of Congress in its class collaborationist approach. Thus the threat of imperialist exploitation was no justification for tolerating the existing structure of exploitative property relations within the agrarian economy. While the AIKS consistently advocated the formation of a broadest possible alliance against imperialist rule, the aforementioned arguments sharply exclude the landed elites and capitalist classes from the category of potential allies. (Ibid: 20)

Making another crucial clarification on the process of peasant differentiation and semi-proletarianization, Swami Sahajanand emphasized on a dynamic unity of interests of the small peasantry and agricultural workers. (Ibid: 29) He argued that with no security of tenure and their livelihoods bordering on subsistence, there was a circulation of the agrarian population between the categories of small peasant and agricultural workers. Any political demarcation between these two categories can only be artificial and temporary, as well as being certainly antithetical to the interest of the agrarian revolution.

Thus in the AIKS's understanding the small peasantry along with the agricultural workers formed the revolutionary vanguard of the movement.

In the light of this understanding the primary agenda of the AIKS was an egalitarian restructuring of land relations through the agency of the state. The principles of redistributive land reforms as have been discussed in previous chapters owe their introduction in India as such to this pre-independence phase of peasant movement. A crucial difference in the demands of this phase was that the AIKS was categorically opposed to the provision for compensating landlords for the alienation of their ceiling surplus lands. Another distinctive feature of the AIKS's demands in this period was the emphasis on progressive taxation of agricultural income. Land rights of the tribals found a prominent place in the organization's demands. However dalits found only nominal reference as special potential beneficiaries of land reforms. Similarly the discourse around women's land rights was conspicuous by its absence though demands for equal wages for women were raised by the AIKS in this period.

3.2.2. Independence and the New Agrarian Programme

The social and political upheaval surrounding the events of independence and partition of India threw the organizational activities of the AIKS into disarray. Normalization of activities could only begin with a meeting of the Central Kisan Council of the AIKS in 1952 in Patna (Bihar). The meeting was significant for its criticism of the First Five Year Plan's proposal to seek technical and planning support from U.S. experts under the Community Project. The AIKS was firm in its understanding that U.S. represented an imperialist power and any intervention from its part cannot but serve the purpose of strengthening the control of imperialist capitalism over the Indian economy at the cost of the welfare of the mass of peasantry. (Ibid: 154)

The attitude and approach of the AIKS after independence is more comprehensively summed up in a policy statement released in April, 1953. The statement unequivocally condemned India's new foreign policy stance that sought allegiance and patronage from imperialist countries like the U.S. (Ibid: 306) It argued that the fundamental struggle against landlordism was being compromised by such international alliances which have

always found support among the landed classes. The economically dominant classes were to benefit from policies of trade liberalization that were being pushed by the U.S. and other such forces and therefore liberalization stood as antithetical to the historic task of restructuring the exploitative land relations. It also posed a threat to the nation's food security as agricultural surpluses would be siphoned off to international markets while simultaneously deflating the real incomes of the Indian working classes. The attendant benefits that accrued to the landed elites also put them in a position to corner the gains of increases in public investment in agricultural infrastructure and facilities like irrigation and input subsidies. With the Congress's anticipated circumvention of the goal of redistributive land reforms, such policy was seen as the instrument for turning landlords into capitalists. (Ibid: 172) The Cannanore (Kerala) session of the AIKS in March, 1953 saw the signs of Congress' class collaborationist approach continuing in the initiation of the Bhoodan movement. (Ibid: 162) By the late 1960's the food crisis along with the growing concentration of land with the landlords who were gradually moving towards capitalist methods of production vindicated the understanding of the AIKS.

The AIKS maintained that radical land redistribution to the deprived classes by the state was the only possible way to release the full productive potential of labour and capital in agriculture. This position was the mainstay of the new constitution of the organization adopted by the AIKS in April, 1954. (Ibid: 314, 315) The AIKS gave itself a three-fold task in the newly formed nation-state of India. Foremost it committed itself to the basic as well as the immediate demands of the peasantry that included the abolition of landlordism without compensation to the landlords; redistribution of ceiling surplus lands and wastelands among agricultural workers and poor peasants; replacing usurious moneylenders with cheap state-provided credit facilities and such additional steps by the state to support small and marginal peasants; as also struggle against untouchability and for equality of women. Secondly the AIKS called for protection of national freedom and sovereignty by demanding rejection of such international ties that effectively made India subservient to imperialist interests; protecting the interests of national industry and agriculture; and resolution of internal conflicts and promoting harmony between diverse cultures. Lastly, the AIKS stood unequivocally against war and for international peace.

Two features of the above formulation of tasks by the AIKS are noteworthy. One, land reforms without any compromise with the interests of the landlords remained the most prominent demand of the AIKS. And two, the issues relating to dalits and women found a place in its agenda though the articulation has no direct allusions to their land rights but a rather social reformist view. However the organizational disarray was proving difficult to overcome for the AIKS. As the successive reports of the general secretaries of the AIKS in later sessions of Sikar (1974), Varanasi (1979), Midnapur (1982) and Patna (1986) reflect, the political developments in the country along with the vagaries and compulsions of parliamentary politics posed new challenges to the agenda and outreach of the AIKS. The impacts and response of the AIKS to these developments has been summed up in a statement of policy of the Central Kisan Committee of the AIKS in 1986.

It was observed that the capitalist-landlord alliance had strengthened over the previous decades. The bourgeois model of agrarian reforms had successfully transformed many landlords in the countryside into capitalist farmers which served a two-fold purpose for the bourgeoisie. Firstly, it consolidated the power and electoral base of the bourgeois parliamentary parties like the Congress in the countryside. And secondly, the consequent increase in capitalist production, particularly after the Green revolution provided the food supply for the growing urban centres of the country. (AIKS, 1986: 76) Moreover the monetization trend in the agrarian economy brought even the small and poor peasants into the fold of the market as they had to sell their produce to traders and later spent the money thus obtained for meeting their own needs including that of food. Thus with the penetration of the market and capitalism in Indian agriculture over the decades of 1970's and 1980's, the imperatives of neoliberal market logic had already set onto the Indian scene. It was reflected in the state's refusal to offer remunerative prices for the produce, near-total abandonment of the land reforms in most parts of the country and subsequent pauperization of vast masses of peasantry and agricultural workers. (Ibid: 77)

The policy statement of the AIKS here makes a very crucial admission that the strength of the peasant movement had been majorly curtailed with the advent of the neoliberal offensive. The only successful movements of the AIKS began to get concentrated in the states which ruled by the Left, viz. Kerala and West Bengal. In states like Bihar it became

extremely difficult for the AIKS to go beyond the identification of the ceiling surplus land to actually being able to ensure the redistribution. (Ibid: 78) Thus on one side the peasants, small, poor and middle level, were facing the wrath of declining state support and on the other the landless and poor workers were losing hope of gaining any access to land through the state. In a sense, the AIKS argued that the whole of agrarian sector was under distress and the only possible way out was a larger unity of the peasants and the workers. But this unity was further being threatened by the emergence of casteist and communal politics. The task of defending peasant unity in the face of such divisive politics seemed daunting to the AIKS.

In the wake of such developments, the AIKS called for a broader unity between agrarian classes and with other peasant organizations across the country. The founding principle of this united front was supposed to be the struggle against imperialism, the fight against communal and casteist forces and the slogan of radical land reforms. (Ibid: 82) Two very significant clarifications were made to accommodate the concerns of this new approach of the AIKS. The first and most important was that the slogan of land reforms no more constituted the immediate agenda for action unless it was called for by specific local situations. Thus land reform was to be made the propaganda slogan of the AIKS serving as a large goal or vision for agrarian transformation. (Ibid: 79) The AIKS activists were supposed to engage with the day to day issues of the masses to expand the by then stagnating membership of the organization. Social issues of caste, gender and communalism were to be taken up actively to make forays into hitherto weak bases of the organization such as Gujarat, Rajasthan, etc. This new strategy broadened the horizon of the AIKS as something more than a class-based peasant organization.

The second clarification was basically a reiteration of the long-held principled position of the AIKS being a mass organization open to all sections of the peasantry. It was clearly stated that despite having communists as members and leaders, the AIKS was not a communist organization. (Ibid: 84) This clarification along with the previous one became necessary as the prolonged concentration of the AIKS's membership in communist-ruled states had made it appear as an organ of the communist party. This feature in the understanding of the AIKS was also responsible in the stagnation of the membership base

of the organization. With repeated appeals for joint actions with other organizations it was necessary for the AIKS to declare a flexible approach towards an accommodation of diverse opinions.

3.3. The Liberalization Phase

By the 1990 the situation in the country had changed enough to see the AIKS taking up a different mode of struggle. As land reforms remained the central slogan, the focus of the AIKS shifted to claiming welfarist measures from the government. This change in tactic was justified as the AIKS argued that exclusive emphasis on class-politics was preventing the masses from identifying with them and hence it was important that the immediate issues of communalism, casteism and separatism in some parts of the country were seriously engaged with. (AIKS 1990: 42) This was also a time when new political organizations like the Indian People's Front, the Bahujan Samajwadi Party and Bhartiya Kisan Union had started making inroads into the traditional mass base of the AIKS. Rich peasant-led peasant organizations were successfully propagating a new discourse of rural versus urban which according to the AIKS was antithetical to their solidarity with urban working class organized in trade unions. (Ibid: 76) Moreover the new farmers' movements were seen as trying to hijack the agenda of the basic classes of small peasants and workers by portraying their demands as the demands of the entire peasantry through their organizations. (Ibid: 28)

Thus a multi-pronged challenge was being posed to the AIKS movement. The onslaught of neoliberal policies which got increasingly intense in the following years had the AIKS scrambling to defend their past gains, particularly those of land reforms and state support to agriculture. However as the new rival organizations of the AIKS built up new discourses around identity, environment, gender, region and numerous other local issues, the class-based approach of the AIKS was proving insufficient to contribute to any organizational growth. Moreover the obscuring of the class politics with the new discourses also made it difficult to pursue a militant demand for radical land reforms as now their inter-class ties based on new identities of caste, region and religion. Thus the demand for land reforms was reduced to a propaganda slogan with sporadic struggles in

different parts of the country. All this meant that the phase of neoliberal globalization in the 1990's brought to the AIKS many new challenges besides the intensifying pressure of the policies liberalization, privatization and globalization.

3.3.1. Alternative Agricultural Policy of the AIKS and AIAWU

It is significant to note that the liberalization trend in the Indian economy had been recognized and critiqued by the AIKS much before the LPG programme found a definitive articulation in the 1990's. Resistance to the policies of liberalization had already been gaining prominence in the struggles and agenda of the AIKS since the 1980's. Based on this experience the AIKS and AIAWU released a document of Alternative Agricultural policy in September, 1993 which was revised a decade later in 2003. The 1993 document is significant in the sense that it was able to anticipate the negative outcomes of the structural adjustment programme for the peasantry with great accuracy. It dealt with issues of the reversal of land reforms, decline in public investment in crucial agricultural needs like irrigation and scientific research, reduction of subsidies for agricultural inputs like fertilizer, the new export-orientation of the economy leading to major shifts in cropping patterns thereby threatening food security of the country and also the opening of the agricultural sector to capital-intensive enterprises of transnational agro-business corporations. The transformed approach of the government to agriculture had exposed the struggling peasants to the vagaries of the international market without any protection from the state. Besides this the new policies in rejecting the agenda of redistributive land reforms and ignoring the pressing need of social security cover for the agricultural labour, the agricultural workers were bound to be pushed to more precarious living conditions. Moreover with the AIKS deemed the participation of people at the grassroots particularly crucial to democratic decision-making. This understanding was related to the case of tribals who had historically been evicted from their lands through high-handed government decrees. The alternative policy document saw this trend intensifying in the lack of adequate measures of decentralization from the central government.

Thus in this document the AIKS and AIAWU formulated a comprehensive anti-liberalization programme for their struggles with a prominent place for protection and redistribution of land rights to the rural poor. The agrarian and land questions were located in the larger political economy of the country. The long-standing demands of the peasants were linked to a revitalization of the welfare role of the state emphasizing on the necessity of decentralization of policy and planning through Panchayati Raj, opposing the unbridled takeover of the agrarian economy by the multi-national big business corporations while arguing for the development of agro-based industries to supplement and invigorate agricultural production with a simultaneous voicing of tribal concerns of land, rehabilitation and environment. (AIKS and AIAWU 1993: 9) This effectively was a build-up for the AIKS's struggle against India's total acceptance of the LPG programme in the Dunkel Draft leading up to the GATT agreements of 1994. However all these efforts could not prevent the Indian government from signing the GATT agreements and gradually adopting an open market regime over the coming years through the WTO and other such platforms.

The anticipated fallout of this shift in the government policies has been recorded in the revised document of the alternative agricultural policy of the AIKS and AIAWU in 2003. The document notes that the new economic policies have spelt disaster for the agricultural sector with large scale suicides by indebted farmers across the country reflecting the gravity of the situation. Moreover reports of severe malnutrition and starvation deaths in the population point to a worsening situation. (AIKS and AIAWU 2003: 7) The AIKS has noted that a crisis of food security is imminent by the given trends in agriculture. (AIKS 2003: 36) Moreover uneven growth pattern across sectors and regions has contributed to increasing poverty, marginalization of rural poor and migration of peasants and agricultural workers causing social tension.

Overall the AIKS finds a general crisis in agriculture wrought upon most sections of the peasantry by the advent of the liberalization policies. (AIKS and AIAWU 2003: 8) The crisis is read as the decline in the growth rate of agriculture with a subsequent decline in the production of crops and food grains. The share of agriculture in the GDP has radically declined with the share of the population that is dependent on agriculture for livelihood

only marginally reducing to a still very high 69 percent. In this context the proportion of landless agricultural workers is rapidly rising. With the gradual withdrawal of state support, severe dearth of formal credit for the small and marginal farmers and crashing of prices for cash crops has caused land alienation and pauperization among the vulnerable sections of the peasantry. The amendment of the Patent Act has allowed for the creation of private monopolies over seeds and plants with large multi-national corporations controlling the seed, pesticides and fertilizer industries for Indian agriculture. The food grain market has also been opened up for MNC's like Cargill.

However the AIKS clarifies in the alternative policy document as in other places that this agrarian crisis is not entirely a product of the 1990's shift in policy which nonetheless sharpened the impact of the LPG approach. According to the AIKS the roots of this crisis lie in the state-led capitalism of the pre-1990's period ever since when the state's policies have been oriented towards benefitting the rural rich. (Ibid: 3; AIKS 2003: 36) The earlier documents of the AIKS also show a keen premonition of this crisis. According to the AIKS, capitalist development in India has been historically imposed on a set of pre-capitalist relations that made possible the continuance of the exploitative structures of caste and gender. (AIKS and AIAWU 2003: 3) However it believes that even then the phase of state-led capitalist development has some positives in supporting and protecting agriculture from international markets, even though the gains were cornered by the dominant classes. (Ibid: 4) The negation of these positives by the LPG reforms has intensified the contradictions in the rural economy.

In this context it can be seen that the present agenda of the AIKS is overwhelmed by the demand for the reversal of neoliberal policies. Issues like decline in public investment, withdrawal of subsidies, crunch in rural credit, falling prices of outputs, decline in rural employment, income and agricultural growth, the rise of corporate farming, increasing agricultural imports, crop insurance, free trade agreements and such now form the core of the AIKS's concerns. (AIKS 2003, 2006, 2010) Also very significantly the issues of dalits, tribal and women now find a much more prominent place in the agenda of the AIKS compared to the earlier decades. The extremely high proportion of agricultural labourers and marginal cultivators belonging to the SC and ST category is given serious

emphasis. The articulation of the problems of these categories is in the language of social justice where atrocities and social discrimination against dalits and tribals are seen as a major issue. Such divisive culture is also seen as antithetical to the goal of peasant unity. On the other hand in the case of women, their day to day problems are recognized as issues alongside upholding a principled position of gender equality in access to facilities and land rights. However the treatment of women at par with male peasants and therefore their rights being crucial to peasant unity does not seem to have found a place in the AIKS discourse.

3.3.2 Land Struggles

In all this the land question retains a place in the agenda of the AIKS but of a diminished prominence. The alternative policy document of 2003 reiterates the demand for completion of the land reforms project. (AIKS and AIAWU, 2003: 15) Successive documents of the national conferences of the AIKS highlight the state's abandonment of the land reforms and simultaneous attempts at reversing the gains of the limited land reforms that have occurred in the past. The neoliberal enclosing of land through the raising of land ceilings, reintroduction of free land leasing and conversion of agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes along with the commercialization of waste and forest lands are identified as pressing issues. (AIKS 2006: 47) The issue of misuse and flawed conceptualization of legal frameworks of the Land Acquisition Act, the Forest Rights Act, the Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, SEZ Act etc. is emphasized upon. (AIKS 2010: 31) However as can be seen in the available documents, the AIKS's stance on the land question is defensive in a pronounced manner- much in line with the change of approach in 1986. (AIKS 1986: 79) The agenda on land has shifted to protecting the rights of those who have it rather than pushing for radical redistribution of land in a comprehensive manner.

The new focus of the AIKS to fight liberalization policies is reflected in the content of its major struggles. The documents of the AIKS mention many national and local level struggles on the issues of prices, irrigation, NREGA, PDS and overall neoliberal policies,

there is a clear weakness in land struggles over the past decade²⁷. The most prominent struggles on land appear to be led on the Forest Rights Act and in general on the issue of displacement of tribals. (AIKS 2003: 55; 2010: 44) The 2003 report of the national conference of the AIKS admits that there were no big land struggles in the recent period. (AIKS 2003: 55) Smaller localized struggles with limited outcomes were reported. In August 2000, the AIKS occupied 7000 acres of land in Bihar. In Tamil Nadu, a legal struggle was launched against the government proposal of privatizing 50 lakh acres of wastelands in 1999. In collaboration with the CPI (M) and the AIAWU, the AIKS led a struggle for vesting of land rights to tribal cultivators, grazing land and house sites in 2002 that brought the issue to government and court's notice. The state of Madhya Pradesh in 2000 saw a struggle for retention of 3000 acres of SC/ST land.

The 2006 report mentions the struggle of the AIKS in Maharashtra that was successful in preventing the eviction of large number of tribals from forest lands under the new government orders. Tamil Nadu saw the AIKS joining a spontaneous struggle against slum demolition in Chennai later expanding the agenda to demand patta for house sites in the city and some other districts. In Andhra Pradesh, a movement was launched against the displacement of people by a large number of irrigation projects announced by the government. The AIKS continued with the land occupation movement in Bihar raising demands for pattas on over 40 thousand acres of land for the poor.

In 2007 Andhra Pradesh witnessed a militant movement by the AIKS occupying about 1.5 lakh acres of land for house sites. It was followed by building of hutments in many of these locations in the face of violent state repression. This movement received considerable national and international attention.²⁸ In addition the AIKS in Tamil Nadu has been leading a sustained and widespread struggle for distribution of waste and khas lands to the landless since 2006. About 6.5 lakh pattas as a result are claimed to have been allotted by the government. In Bihar the AIKS continued the movement for

²⁷ The details of the struggles of the AIKS over the last decade presented in this study are based on the published reports of the AIKS national conferences. An objective confirmation of the claims of the AIKS regarding the outcomes and reach of these struggles could be made through reports of regional and national news media. However various constraints of the researcher in the present study have not allowed making such confirmations.

²⁸ See Balagopal 2007 and Walker 2008

claiming rights on the land occupied while demanding 4 decimals of land for house sites for the landless people.

Some crucial observations on the nature and limitations of these struggles are due to be taken up in the later section. For now, it must be noted that none of these struggles have received a national or even broader regional platform as have the struggles against liberalization policies. While the documents of the AIKS talk about extensive endeavours to integrate local struggles for remunerative prices, irrigation, etc. into a national level alliance, it is difficult to find a mention of such endeavours on the issue of land except for few state level conventions organized in Bihar and Tamil Nadu.

3.4. Contradictions in Indian Agriculture Post-Liberalization

The liberalization period in India has spelt many crucial changes for the political economy of the Indian society and subsequently for the politics of the AIKS. The simultaneous rise of identity politics and other peasant organizations like the BKU as noted above induced a change of tactics and priorities in the agenda of the AIKS. It is also clear that the advent of liberalization in India was a gradual process initiated particularly in the late 1970's and 80's. Active involvement with the peasant struggles helped the AIKS to anticipate the trajectory that Indian agriculture was about to take with the advent of the LPG regime in the 1990's. Documents from as early as 1986, had begun to hint at the need for a change of tactics in the light of the developments taking place. The present section aims at tracing the theoretical and strategic changes in the working of the AIKS over the period of liberalization. To achieve this it is important to study the views of the AIKS on the peasant class differentiation obtaining from the political economic transition under liberalization. Moreover it is the attitude of the peasant organization to the class contradictions emerging out of the differentiation process that determines the form and content of its politics.

The critique of the AIKS's formulation of contradictions in the agrarian question will be developed on the following formulation of the AIKS. The AIKS analysis of the agrarian situation brings it to the conclusion that:

The present situation in Indian agriculture is characterized by two important contradictions. The first is the sharp division between the rural rich comprising landlords, big capitalist farmers, large traders and moneylenders and their allies on the one hand and the mass of peasantry, comprising agricultural workers, poor and middle peasants and rural artisans on the other. The second is the growing opposition to imperialist driven policies of the government not only from the mass of peasantry but also from sections of rural rich. (AIKS 2010: 26)

The above formulation is a reiteration of the position adopted and suggested by many previous documents of the AIKS including the alternative agricultural policy document of 2003 (pp. 12). In the light of this understanding the AIKS has sought to build a peasant unity centred around agricultural workers and poor peasants while also drawing in middle peasants and sections of the rural rich. This alliance has to commit itself to the task of reversing the liberalization policies while upholding the fundamental slogan of radical land reforms. This position of the AIKS is wrought with a grave internal contradiction based on the formulation of the land question in the second chapter. An exposition of this internal contradiction can be presented as follows.

The analysis of the problems of the agricultural sector by the AIKS suggests that there can be a broad concurrence between their understanding and that of a 'bifurcating' model of the agrarian sector as developed in the second chapter. The AIKS has noted that there is a concentration of productive assets along with the land in the hands of the historically dominant classes. (AIKS and AIAWU 2003: 8) In the understanding of the AIKS bourgeois agrarian reforms are meant to strengthen the political base of the ruling classes. (AIKS 1986: 76) The growing power of the neoliberal regime with the simultaneous weakening of peasant movements is indicative of the consolidation of the alliance between the protagonist institutions and classes of neoliberal globalization and the rural political elite mostly hailing from upper caste landed classes. As argued in the previous chapter this class of rural elites forms the legitimizing social base of the liberalization regime. In recognizing the shifting focus of the agricultural policy towards agro-processing, foreign investments and exports, the AIKS conforms to the idea that there is an emerging capitalist subsector in Indian agriculture. (AIKS 2003: 21)

The rest of the peasantry engaged in agriculture operates in conditions determined by the dominant classes even more so with the withdrawal of state support. The AIKS has observed the increasing power of the traders and moneylenders in the agrarian sector. Increasing monetization of agriculture has meant that even small farmers have to sell their produce to the market and then buy food for their own needs. (AIKS 1986: 77) The decline in supply of formal credit particularly to the small and marginal peasants pushes these sections closer to the moneylenders and traders. (AIKS 2006: 43) In addition the basic inequity in land relation remains to keep these cultivating sections dependent on the dominant classes. The dependent has further increased as the monopolist private control over agricultural inputs like seeds and fertilizers since liberalization makes it all the more difficult for the poor to undertake agricultural activity without the sharing the costs with the dominant classes on leased in lands.

Thus a bifurcated agrarian structure is under construction in Indian agriculture even if we go by the data presented in the AIKS documents. If it is so then the agrarian political economy must also exhibit certain essential features of such bifurcated agrarian structures as discussed in chapter two. Firstly accumulation in this economy does not happen only by the means of capitalist economic enterprises but also through pre-capitalist structures of caste and gender. Secondly neoliberal policies work to deepen the control of the dominant classes, thereby sharpening the internal contradiction of the agrarian class structure. Thirdly the dominant classes in turn logically form the support base of neoliberalism in the agrarian structure. Fourthly the small and middle peasantry constituting the peasant subsector is intricately dependent and subservient to the interests of the dominant classes. And lastly the further development of this bifurcated structure is accompanied by processes of semi-proletarianization adversely affecting the livelihoods of the lowest and numerically largest strata of the agrarian class structure.

The formulation of the twin contradictions of the agrarian sector by the AIKS needs to be examined in the light of the above arguments. The first contradiction between the rural rich comprising landlords, big capitalist farmers, large traders and moneylenders and their allies on the one hand and the mass of peasantry, comprising agricultural workers, poor and middle peasants and rural artisans on the other, can be articulated at three levels

in the present historical context. First and foremost, the contradiction emanates from the historically unequal distribution of land between classes. Secondly the contradiction can also be expressed as the former category's operation under the market imperative of capital in contrast with the latter's subjection to the market imperative of labour. Alternatively a third articulation can be in terms of caste equations. Given the bifurcated structure's nature to persist with pre-capitalist structures of exploitation and the close correlation of caste and class at least in agrarian relations in India, the former category is most likely to belong to the upper and middle castes whereas the latter category is constituted of socially and economically oppressed backward castes, dalits and tribals.

The link between the first and the second articulation should not be assumed as automatic and category-wise superimposable. It means that the historical and material specificity of location of the landlords and the rich peasants is crucial to their capacity to translate the control over land into capitalist enterprise. For instance a shift in cropping pattern demanded by the export market might not be viable even for landlords and rich peasants in some areas owing to specific climatic conditions or availability of technology, etc. In such cases even the landlords and rich peasants can fail to respond to the market imperative and thus not automatically fit into the first category of the second articulation based on market imperatives. However being a historically dominant class, the landlords also do not fall to the imperative of labour as the accumulated social and political power at their disposal can facilitate primitive accumulation.

As for the case of the rich peasants who fail the market imperative of labour, the third articulation based on caste assumes importance. As discussed above the rich peasants are most likely to belong to the upper or middle castes. Even if their failure subjects them to the imperative of labour, they can still distinguish themselves from the rest of the working class on caste lines. It must be underscored that this distinction is not merely cultural but has an economic basis. Heyer's (2010) work on Coimbatore shows that a higher position in the caste hierarchy offers better inter-class mobility to the members of the working class as their social networks among the members of the dominant classes can afford them better economic opportunities. Thus the failed rich peasants' affiliation to the working class can at best be temporary and always aspirationally distinct from the

rest. Their objective socio-economic position makes them a natural ally of the dominant classes.

The elaboration of the first contradiction as above already rejects the AIKS's understanding that the rural rich can be allies of the workers and smaller peasants in the fight against neoliberalism. As class allies of the landlords, they also form the support base of neoliberal policies. Their discontent and opposition to these policies is more likely to be issue-based and open to reconciliation. A basic truth about the rural rich is that they are rich either because they retained their historically accumulated wealth most possibly through land monopolies or they are the newly rich who have benefitted out of the liberalization policies. If they belong to the historically rich class, they can never agree to the idea of redistributive land reforms as their riches are based on the continuation of the skewed land relations. If they belong to the new rich class their aspirations are more likely to be served by liberalization than radical land reforms.

Moreover as has been elaborately argued in the formulation of the land question, the struggle against neoliberalism essentially involves weakening the class base of the liberalization policies that exists among the landlords and rural rich. Therefore the articulation of the second contradiction between liberalization policies and the peasantry requires a necessary and explicit qualification that the landlords and the rich peasants are not potential allies in the struggle against neoliberalism. In fact the struggle against neoliberalism is not distinct from the struggle against landlordism and its allies. The dominant position of the landlords in a democratic polity like that of India's is that of the carrier of liberalization policies. In this sense the resolution of the second contradiction is not possible with the resolution of the first. However the resolution of the basic contradiction of landlordism entails the overcoming of the liberalization policies. Thus it is logically implied here that the second contradiction be subsumed in the first.

Hence the formulation of the basic contradictions of the agrarian question by the AIKS can be challenged on two grounds. Firstly the two contradictions are one and the same in a political economic understanding of the Indian agriculture as bifurcated class structure. And secondly the rural rich cannot be potential allies in the struggle against liberalization policies as they owe their 'rich' status to these very policies.

3.5. Response of the AIKS to the Land Question

A subsequent critique of the AIKS's response to the land question can be developed as follows.

3.5.1. On Land Reforms

By the mid 1980's the AIKS was faced with a changed correlation of class forces within the peasantry which was proving unresponsive to its politics. The AIKS noted that unlike in the pre-independence period, the rich and middle peasants (as distinct from the powerful landlord class) were no more interested in seizing the surplus land and demanding its redistribution. Moreover a large majority of the landless and poor peasants had also become indifferent to the call for radical land reforms. (AIKS 1986: 78) There was an aversion among them to confront the powerful landed elite as they were content with small actions to seize government wastelands, cultivable forestlands, etc.

Having identified the advent of liberalization policies in the 1980's the AIKS failed to read or anticipate the positive outcomes of liberalization policies for sections of the rich and middle peasantry. The new paradigm has shifted their interests closer to those of the landlord classes away from the working class. In addition, the prolonged failure of the state in implementing the land reform policies coupled with the growing distress in agriculture was bound to bring about a general disillusionment about the possibility of radical land reforms. The small peasantry and agricultural workers on the other hand had been subdued by the growing distress in agriculture as also with the betterment of position of the upper caste-class groups. The cost of confrontation with the dominant classes had started rising for the economically and socially vulnerable classes. Moreover the growing influence of caste and religion based politics had created new fissures within the peasantry. Thus in sum the peasant unity sought to be built was undermined by the intensifying class differentiation and other socio-cultural phenomena of casteism and communalism.

The AIKS faced an objective difficulty of mobilizing larger masses against the rising influence of neoliberalism when the policy regime resorted to a revision of strategy.

Land reform was pushed down the priority list of immediate concerns of the peasantry for the sake of a broader class alliance against neoliberalism. The liberalization policies evidently intensified their adverse impact on agriculture since the 1990's. However the theoretical misconception on the relationship between landlordism and neoliberalism led the AIKS to open a new front to comprehensively target the changed regime. The broader front of all peasant unity did draw some sections of the rich classes though with a negative fallout. The AIKS noted that there had come a tendency of taking up demands and struggles as class-neutral thereby undermining the focus on the issues of the poor peasants. (AIKS 2003: 62) In the same review it is also stressed that there is a contradiction between imperialism and the entire peasantry. If it was so then imperialism is supposed to harm all classes of the peasantry uniformly and there was no need to focus on any specific class at least in tackling this contradiction. But the self-critical review of the AIKS itself reveals that the interests of the rich peasantry were distinct from those of the poor even with regards to neoliberal policies. It means that the broader peasant unity is not based on commonality of material interests but merely for a numerical expansion of the mass front.

This necessity of numerically expanding the mass base of the AIKS even through means of class collaboration rather than class conflict can be explained by another phenomenon troubling the AIKS. It was being observed that the membership and struggles of the AIKS were getting confined to the two Left-ruled states of Kerala and West Bengal. Militant action against landlords was seen to take place only in these two states. Both the membership and the struggles of the AIKS were failing to expand and make any significant impact in states ruled by other political parties which were seen as pro-landlord. This led the AIKS to believe that state power was very crucial to the success of its campaigns and future organizational growth. Moreover forces of communalism and casteism operating through different political parties needed a counter if peasant unity were to be saved and class politics restored. This understanding led the AIKS to shed inhibitions about being identified with the CPI(M). The numerical expansion of the mass base of the AIKS was also meant to contribute to the electoral strength of the CPI(M). A greater presence of a sympathetic parliamentary force in the legislature is expected to raise the efficacy of struggle against the liberalization policies. The AIKS is so strongly

inclined towards the CPI(M) that one cannot find a single critical remark on the violence perpetrated on peasants in Nandigram in the AIKS documents. On the contrary, the AIKS has in tune with the CPI(M) refused to take any responsibility for the peasant discontent and violence in Nandigram and Singur, squarely holding opposition forces like the Maoists and TMC responsible. (AIKS, 2010: 94)

In sum a failure to read the implications of intensifying class differentiation for the identification of allies, seeing neoliberalism as a distinct contradiction confronting the entire peasantry and an increasing reliance on parliamentary politics are three major reasons for the decline of land reforms on the AIKS agenda. It is reflected in the AIKS directing its demands towards the state irrespective of the class character of the state. It also suggests a flawed assumption of the AIKS about the relative autonomy of the state from the force field of class struggle. The entire history of the implementation of land reform policies in India is a testimony of its entrenchment in the bourgeois-landlord interests. Thus without the intensification of the class struggle with the landlord classes leading to a shift of balance of class forces in favour of a militant peasantry it is futile to expect any radical change in the policy regime from the state.

3.5.2. On land rights for dalits tribals and women

Tribal land rights have been an area of consistent focus for the AIKS. Since its inception it has taken up the issues of vesting the land rights of traditionally cultivated forest lands in the tribal peasants. Recent years have also seen considerably greater attention to the issues of enclosing of tribal land by capitalist expansion.

Dispossession of tribals from their traditional land resources has been as continuing since the colonial times. According to the AIKS the present regimes have only carried forward and intensified the implementation of such undemocratic laws that entail tribal land alienation in the name of conservation. The intensified implementation of the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 under the NDA rule in 2002 is cited as an example. (AIKS 2003: 92)

Tribals are seen as the direct victims of the processes of pauperization and semi-proletarianization unleashed by liberalization policies. They are being pushed into the category of landless workers and marginal cultivators in ever greater numbers. (AIKS 2006: 49) Recent cases of atrocities and violence against the tribals by state forces are also linked to issues of displacement and rehabilitation as in the case of Kalinganagar police firing on tribals. (Ibid: 50) The AIKS has raised similar concerns as the CALR about land acquisition in Schedule V areas of the country. (Ibid: 115) Amendments to the Scheduled Tribes Bill, 2005 were further demanded in line with the interests of the tribals to allow them to retain their customary land rights, their cultural identity, and their right to fair compensation and rehabilitation in cases of necessary displacement and their access to government welfare measures. (Ibid: 125) The AIKS also claims to have taken up the issue of the implementation the Forest Rights Act, 2006 with some success and based on a concrete critique of the lacunae and implementation of the Act. (AIKS 2010: 40, 103) However the AIKS does not have a blanket position against land acquisition as long as it is done under constitutional framework with proper resettlement and rehabilitation of the affected people (AIKS 2006: 115; AIKS 2010: 88). It can also be seen in the struggles of the AIKS as briefly presented in the previous section, that the issue of tribal land alienation finds a significant place in their agenda.

The last two decades have seen an increased focus of the AIKS on the issues of atrocities and social exclusion of dalits. The emphasis has been on a discourse of social justice condemning and opposing violence and discrimination against dalits, particularly as they constitute a significant proportion of agricultural workers. However dalits or the category of caste itself does not find due attention as a unique variable when it comes to land rights. The previous chapters have discussed how caste continues to play a crucial role in determining access to land as well as limiting the life chances of people in the agrarian sector. It has also been noted that in the much appreciated successful model of land reforms in West Bengal dalit landlessness remains very high warranting exclusive attention within the land reforms policies. The continued oppression of dalits in India today is a testimony to the sharpening of the primary contradiction of landlordism in the agrarian question. Struggles directed at the state which can be seen as an occasional benefactor of the dalits cannot replace struggles of direct confrontation with their

immediate oppressors, the upper and middle caste landlords and rich peasants. Struggles for remunerative prices, subsidies, irrigation, etc. for peasants do not address the pressing land hunger of the dalits, who mostly being landless labourers or marginal peasants hardly ever produce a marketable surplus. Moreover the strategy of reaching out to sections of the non-dalit rich and middle peasantry of the AIKS cannot happen without obscuring the primary contradiction between the landed and the marginal and landless caste-class groups. The artificial division of the primary contradiction into two has led to the failure to address the contradiction of landlordism in any effective way as the AIKS itself admits. (AIKS 2010:87) The AIKS links this failure to the undeveloped class consciousness of the laboring classes that includes dalits. It has also been argued that the increasing influence of casteist and communal forces has adversely impacted the class unity. (AIKS 1986: 78) However the problem of declining class consciousness cannot be remedied by an artificial reconstruction of the agrarian question that splits the primary contradiction into two separate contradictions. In this sense it can be argued that taking up the many issues of social discrimination against the dalits without addressing the question their land rights is a superficial and populist approach aimed a numerical expansion of the mass base. It is not being meant here that the issues of social discrimination are antithetical to the land question but it is being argued that it is an incomplete approach to take up the symptoms of discrimination without attacking its material base in the land relations.

Similarly on the question of women's rights, the AIKS has consistent positions advocating equality through the equal wages and joint pattas for the husband and wife of the household. The AIKS has criticized the flawed interpretation of the slogan of 'land to the tiller' that discounts women peasants. (AIKS 2010: 39) Yet the problem remains that these positions are not backed up by concrete criticisms of existing land policies. For instance the failure of the West Bengal government in implementing the allocation of joint pattas on the basis of the guidelines of the 1992 Revenue Ministers' Conference has not been taken up. The participation of women in the struggles of the AIKS has been low by its own admission. (AIKS 2003: 83) It has got more to do with the content of struggles than the consciousness of women of their own rights, it can be argued. The struggles of the AIKS as described in their own documents have failed to take up the exclusive issues

of women peasants and workers. The emphasis in this case again has been to voice slogans of social reform without addressing the question of land rights for women in concrete struggles.

In sum, it can be said that the AIKS has been relatively successful in taking up issues of tribal land rights. However even while acknowledging the limitations of exclusively class-based politics the AIKS has failed to address the concerns of the socially oppressed categories of dalits and women from a materialist perspective. It leads one to believe that the accommodation of these categories in the discourse of the AIKS politics has more to do with the challenges posed by new social movements and organizations rallying masses on issues of caste and gender, than with a positive recognition of the specific nature of problems faced by these categories. It appears to be yet again an attempt to consolidate and expand the numerical strength of the mass base.

3.5.3. On Neoliberal enclosures

Akram-Lodhi (2007) has contended that neoliberal enclosures can be opposed by formation of counter-enclosures through greater state intervention for public welfare and by the protection and creation of common property as well as equitable distribution of landholdings by breaking monopolies of ownership. It is understood also in the case of Indian agriculture that small holdings cannot undertake viable agricultural operation without state support. Therefore the two modes of forming counter-enclosures are mutually inter-dependent reflecting the unity of the twin contradictions that the AIKS might read into this understanding. However based on the artificial separation of the two the AIKS has focused on the demands pertaining to the former mode accompanied by sporadic interventions in the struggles for the latter.

It should be reiterated that neoliberal enclosures by the above understanding operate not only by physically bounding space for private profit but also by bringing increasing spheres of social and economic life in the force field of the market. Thus while on the one hand India has witnessed an increasing concentration of land through acquisition by the private industrial sector as well as by the landlord and rural rich classes, the dismantling of the public welfare institutions has also been orchestrated by the liberalization policy to

bring greater masses to depend on the market for fulfilling their daily needs of food and livelihood.

The main focus of the AIKS has been on the latter phenomena of privatization of public services and support systems with the state-supported entry of big capital into the various spheres of agricultural production. The AIKS has done well to develop a comprehensive critique and larger struggles on this front²⁹. Many national level agitations have been led by the AIKS to oppose the entire package of the LPG reforms. (For instance see the report on Campaign against LPG and for Drought Relief, AIKS, 2003: 52) These initiatives have also included educating the masses about the alternative agricultural policy built on the critique of the liberalization package through workshops and seminars. (AIKS, 2006: 58) It is also collaborating with the Foundation for Agrarian Studies, Kolkata to generate a knowledge base on the changing agrarian situation in the country. All India Jathas, strikes and rallies are regularly organized by the AIKS to protest the continuation of the neoliberal regime and its drastic impact on the peasantry. Alongside the numerous sources of the agrarian crisis like the falling output prices, declining public investment, constrained rural credit supply, declining irrigation and infrastructural facilities including research and extension services, freeing of imports, dismantling of the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the government procurement systems, etc. are rigorously studied and opposed by the AIKS in their struggles. The increasing privatization of spheres of agricultural production and distribution is thoroughly scrutinized and critiqued. The AIKS has opposed the entry of multinational corporations in the food grains market, the change in patent laws allowing monopoly private control over seeds and genetic biodiversity, the Seed Bill of 2004, the Model Act for Agricultural Markets and the many free trade agreements signed under the aegis of the WTO. Besides this, specific sections of cultivators like the coffee and tea planters and fishermen have been organized against the liberalization policies. At the same time, attempts by monopolist lobbies like that in the sugar industry to manipulate the markets to their advantage have also been opposed. These and many more issues against liberalization build a commendable portfolio for the AIKS on the front against neoliberalism.

²⁹ See the AIKS Alternative Agricultural Policy statement, 2003 for instance.

On the other aspect of forming counter-enclosures through the creation of common property and land redistribution to break monopolies, the work the AIKS falls short due to reasons discussed above. Although there are scattered local struggles for the occupation of waste and forest lands as well as demands for provision of land for house sites, these struggles do not take the size and shape of those being led by the AIKS on issues of neoliberal policies. It is an obvious manifestation of the suppression of the landlordism contradiction by the contradiction between neoliberalism and the peasantry as a whole as AIKS puts it. It can also be said that the weaknesses of the AIKS movement on these two fronts against neoliberalism and landlordism basically stem from their artificial delinking. The limitations of the movements can be read into two crucial outcomes of the AIKS policy and politics.

Firstly the confinement of the AIKS's mass base to two or three states significantly hampers its capacity to build national level platforms. The AIKS has been aware of this limitation which also pushed them to modify their politics in order to expand outreach. However the modified politics has also not been able to make significant inroads in most of the other states. It is argued here the overt emphasis on engaging with local issues of the people in an apparent class neutral approach while foregoing the radical class agenda of land reforms makes the AIKS a direct competitor of other bourgeois liberal parties. The other parties in this context are better placed regionally, nationally and politically to tackle these issues than the AIKS. Hence the approach of class neutral politics works to compromise the distinctive character of a class based peasant organization that the AIKS is. The subsequent weakening of their political strength has undermined the attempts of the AIKS to build countrywide movements against neoliberalism.

Secondly it should also be understood that the abandonment of the land reforms by the state has strengthened the landlord classes who form the support base of the political parties that are votaries of liberalization. The AIKS failing to match up to the growing power of the rural elites with larger mobilizations is a consequence of this reality.

Thus it can be summarily argued that the AIKS's opposition to neoliberalism on a separate front that seeks to forge class alliances between historical class-caste adversaries is not likely to work. It has already been sufficiently stressed that this approach stems

from the flawed two-fold reconstruction of the contradictions in the agrarian economy. The solution to this problem of the AIKS lies in revisiting the agrarian question under globalization and correcting the flawed formulation of the contradictions.

3.6. Conclusion

Notwithstanding the theoretical and organizational limitations the AIKS has offered a comprehensive response to the land question under liberalization as one of the largest peasant organization of India. Its historical experience with the imperialist rule and its continued domination in the years after independence helped the AIKS to anticipate the advent of liberalization policies much before they were formally institutionalized in the 1990's. The documents of the AIKS published before the 1990's show a keen analysis of developing neoliberal traits in Indian policy framework. The document on the alternative policy statement by the AIKS and AIAWU offers a concise and sharp criticism of the liberalization policies. Most of the negative outcomes of liberalization in agriculture as predicted by the AIKS from the threat to food security to the reversal of land reforms have been realized with the Indian state's persistence with neoliberal policies. In fact a reading of the facts presented in the AIKS documents adds up to a very comprehensive analysis of the situation in Indian agriculture.

While the empirical observations of the AIKS on the agrarian question are quite accurate, the present study has been able to highlight some crucial theoretical and political lacunae in the politics of the AIKS. The first relates to a misreading of the process of peasant differentiation. In its criticism of the neoliberal policies the AIKS seems to have underestimated of the reach of its positive outcomes for some significant sections of the peasantry. It has been noted that the rural rich have historically benefitted from the policies of the Indian state which were instrumental in bringing about capitalist development in agriculture. The AIKS also notes that this development has been peculiar as it has harbored the persistence of pre-capitalist structures of social exclusion for dalits, tribals and women. Also being led by the free-market ideology such development remains plagued with economic uncertainties and crises.

Here the AIKS underestimates the role of important features of the political economy of neoliberal agricultural development that allow for coping with the vagaries of the free market. Firstly it believes that the cycle of economic crises in agriculture has the potential of debilitating the position of a significant section of rich peasants thereby putting them in opposition to neoliberal policies. However experience has shown that though the rich peasants have suffered economic shocks in the course of this development, the recovery has been sought within the framework of neoliberal political economy. Thus the antagonism of rich peasants with the neoliberal state has not been sustained and anti-systemic in character. Moreover the hegemony of the dominant landlord and big capitalist classes has shown utmost resilience in maintaining alliance with these rich peasants forming a pro-liberalization peasant block. As the AIKS itself acknowledges that the hegemony of the dominant classes is a historical product of state policy and has not been threatened by the advent of neoliberalism. Secondly the AIKS has still not been able to fully assess the crucial role of caste in sustaining this hegemony. The consistency of caste with neoliberalism is not merely a socio-cultural feature of Indian capitalism. The prevalence of caste structures substantially contributes to the primitive accumulation of capital by the dominant classes. Such accumulation also offers an economic cushion in times of crises when the burden of falling surplus is passed on to the lower caste-class strata by expropriating surplus through non-capitalist institutions and mechanisms. The prevalence of exploitative tenancy relations and unfree wage labour are cases in point. Thus the AIKS's attempts at forging alliance with the rural rich and their non-economic treatment of caste, i.e. not dealing with the land question facing them, are confounded.

Moreover even as the alliance between the bourgeois classes and the landlord classes is obvious to the AIKS, it fails to see that the latter's continued hegemony is the legitimizing factor for neoliberal policies even in the face of an agrarian crisis. The liberalization regime stands to benefit all those sections which are economically and in the Indian case, socially capable of responding to the market imperative of capital. It means as argued before, that it is not only the landlord classes but also sections of rich and middle peasantry which are likely to root for liberalization. Thus in leaving the social and political base of neoliberalism uncompromised by the not attacking the rural rich through radical land reforms, the AIKS's offensive against neoliberalism lacks system-

transcending capacity. This is to say that the segregation of contradictions as formulated by the AIKS is flawed. The contradiction between neoliberalism and the peasantry is not a contradiction between neoliberalism and the dominant rural classes and their allies. The only contradiction that needs resolution is the contradiction within the agrarian structure between the landlords, rich peasants and their allies on the one hand and the small and marginal peasantry along with the agricultural labour on the other. The resolution of this contradiction entails the uprooting of the social base of neoliberalism. Assuming the continuation of a democratic polity it would be difficult for international capital to build its hegemony in the Indian society with its domestic class allies weakened or obliterated.

It follows that the resolution of the land question under liberalization has to take place for all the three components, that is, redistributive land reforms, land rights for the dalits, tribals and women, and the opposition to neoliberal enclosures. Focussing solely on the third component as the AIKS is doing is both theoretically and politically a misplaced approach to the land question.

CONCLUSION

The study performs three tasks of studying the problems of equity and social justice in the present pattern of distribution of land ownership and access, applying a political economic theoretical framework for understanding the underlying causes of continuities and changes in the observed pattern of land distribution under liberalization and finally using the theoretical framework to analyze the approach of the AIKS in addressing the land question.

The first chapter has reviewed a significant report of the Government of India on the contemporary land issues along with other recent literature. It has been shown that the pattern of land distribution has remained acutely skewed against certain social categories while the new trends in the economy affecting the land relations have only reinforced this pattern. The data on land reforms reveals that the project has been virtually abandoned over the last decade or so. For instance the amount of land available surplus for redistribution through the implementation of the ceiling laws remains stagnant. On the other hand the redistribution of the available ceiling surplus land has also been marred by bureaucratic indifference and legal complications in most cases. The major outcome of this failure of the government has been the continuation and consolidation of land monopolies of the rural rich mostly hailing from upper and middle castes. It has been found that many state governments under the imperative of private capitalist interests have raised the land ceilings to facilitate further concentration of land with private interests. This change in the government approach to land policy is also reflected in the large scale handover of wastelands and other common property resources to the private sector for profitable enterprises. Under the land reform laws these lands are supposed to be redistributed among the landless and poor households.

The other important component of the land reforms package are the tenancy reform laws which remain partially or fully unimplemented in most parts of the country. Resultantly the terms of access to land has continued to be biased against the rural poor. It is understood that in the absence of radical land reforms tenancy remains a feasible mechanism for increasing access to land of the middle and small peasants. However

studies from across the country have revealed that this access is conditioned by caste and gender structures that reinforce exploitation in lieu of subsistence incomes in most cases. In contrast, trends of reverse tenancy which increase the concentration operational holdings with the capitalist farmers have been on the rise. Thus it has been argued that relaxing the tenancy laws is not likely to increase the access of the poor to land resources. On the contrary these laws must be implemented in a revised form in the light of the various forms of exploitative tenancy relations prevalent in agriculture.

The data also reveals that the number of households without dwelling units is considerably high in India. The government report lays considerable emphasis on providing these households with small plots of land that can afford them a house along with a small kitchen garden which has been found to be a nutritionally and economically beneficial resource for poor households in many other countries. The report takes note of the different schemes of the government to provide shelter to the economically weaker sections but those attempts have been scattered and need considerable improvement.

Besides looking at the state of land reforms the chapter pays specific attention to the peculiar nature of the problem of land rights of the historically oppressed sections of dalits, tribals and women. The chapter points out that the CALR's review of the problem of dalit landlessness lacks serious engagement. It is in the other literature reviewed for the chapter that the social and cultural aspects of dalit exclusion from land rights can be found. It has been highlighted that landlessness among dalits is a significant factor in compromising their social and economic status which confines them to oppressive occupations and living conditions. The denial of land rights has historically made this category dependent on the landed classes for livelihood needs.

The land rights of tribals have received considerable attention in contemporary literature particularly in the context of their displacement from their traditional habitations by government and private actors seeking to undertake profitable and development enterprises on their land. As the CALR points out, there is an elaborate legislative framework for the protection of tribal land rights. However evidence from the ground presented in the report indicates gross failure of this legislative framework. Much new

legislation that has been proposed by the government to cope with the new challenges under the liberalization policies have been deemed inadequate by the CALR.

However in the case of women's land rights the CALR has again fallen short of addressing the issue with the required seriousness. There has been a historical male bias in addressing the issue of landlessness. The women have forever been subsumed in the patriarchal constructs of the family and the household not only in the society but also in government planning. A gendered division of labour both within and outside the household has diluted the claim of women on land rights by allotting them a permanent dependent status. The cultural mores further deploy the gender bias in using traditions like dowry and religious inheritance laws to deny land rights that are due to women. It has been noted by the CALR that the new legislations on issues of land acquisition, resettlement and rehabilitation too have failed to correct this bias.

Another area of contention in land relations is the increasing enclosure of common property resources by the state and private actors. Community, pastures, wastelands, forests, ponds, rivers, etc. are increasingly becoming inaccessible for the common people. The different laws on forest conservation, protection of wildlife and environment are being used to create enclosures that deny communal access to these natural resources. Moreover the growing land hunger of the private sector is being satiated by the state through government wastelands and other such resources hitherto available for common use mostly by the poor and landless people. At the same time the private industries like mining are being offered easy and cheap access to such by relaxing the same laws. The CALR has made crucial recommendations to arrest such trends in land alienation from the poor.

Many authors have contributed to the debate on characterizing these trends in contemporary land relations. The first chapter offers a brief overview of some important perspectives in this debate. It has been argued that the pattern of land distribution and the recent changes in it are an inherent feature of the present development paradigm, often referred to as neoliberalism or simply capitalism in the literature. This development paradigm has proved detrimental to the concerns of social justice and ecological conservation. On the one hand agricultural occupations are becoming increasingly

unviable for the poor majority and on the other the limited access to land that most people have is being threatened by aggressive land acquisition and growing power of the rural elites. There is negligible attempt on the part of the state to address the longstanding issues of dalits, tribals and women. It has led to further marginalization of these categories in the policy discourse as in the society. The state suffers from a myopic economic-commercial outlook on resources like land failing to take into account, the adverse cultural and social ramifications of the present development paradigm. The oppressed state of the numerical majority of the population is facilitating primitive accumulation of capital by the dominant classes. This development paradigm is exclusionary for the historically oppressed as the commodification process does not only subsume land but also knowledge as intellectual property.

This debate brings us to look at the land relations from a much wider perspective of how liberalization is affecting the social relations at large and land in particular. In this light the second chapter argues that it is necessary to locate the land problem in the agrarian question if we are to arrive at a meaningful formulation of the land question. A political economic perspective allows us to identify the distinctive features of neoliberalism which effect such trends in land relations as have been described in the first chapter. The process of globalization has transformed the agrarian question in very important ways. The process of peasant differentiation has led to a bifurcation of the agrarian sector into two subsectors. The first is the export-oriented capitalist subsector that benefits from the integration of the agrarian sector to the international agro-food market. In doing so the capitalist farmers who are also the dominant classes of the agrarian sector develop economic linkages with the trans-national agro-food capital. The developing capitalist class and the international capitalist sector in agriculture thus enter into an alliance to mutually benefit each other in the political economic context provided by the liberalization policies. The social and political power obtained through the monopolistic control of land resources by the dominant classes play a crucial role in sustaining this alliance.

Moreover the power of the dominant classes allows them to control the conditions of production and distribution in agriculture. Thus the development of markets in neoliberal

capitalism is encumbered by monopolist control of the dominant classes instrumentalizing structures of caste and gender. Such markets suffer from numerous imperfections of information asymmetry, incorrect pricing, lack of competition, etc. It is in this setting that the remaining majority of the peasantry operates on their smaller landholdings. Although access to more land is still possible through tenancy but it is again manipulated by the dominant classes to their own advantage. This remaining majority of the peasantry constitutes the peasant subsector that is more labour-intensive and in which production happens mostly for self-consumption or sale to the domestic market. Since the markets are also controlled by the larger monopoly producers the agricultural surplus produced in this subsector is largely expropriated by the dominant classes thus impeding the development of capitalism in this subsector. The relations of production here are refracted through social relations of caste and gender. Thus labour relations are mediated by identities of caste and gender.

This extra-economic aspect of social production also extends to the category of agricultural workers whose life chances are determined by their position in the caste hierarchy or gender relations. Wage-labour is thereby rendered unfree by the continuing dominance of pre-capitalist structures. The process of proletarianization as in the classic formulation of capitalist development is further obstructed by the lack of food security and non-farm employment opportunities under the liberalization policies. The compulsion to diversify income sources for the rural poor is met with a simultaneous compulsion to hold on to agriculture through tiny landholdings. This is the phenomenon of semi-proletarianization that is a by-product of neoliberal development paradigm.

An application of this theoretical understanding of neoliberal capitalist development to the Indian situation offers crucial insights into the contradictions developing in Indian agriculture. Despite fluctuating pattern of agricultural growth over the past two decades the dominant classes in the agrarian sector constituted of the landlords, capitalist farmers, moneylenders and traders have gained from the implementation of neoliberal policies. They have greater access to formal credit and technology that enables them to respond to the market imperatives of capital. Belonging to the upper and middle castes they are also able to exploit social hierarchies in undertaking primitive accumulation of capital. It

provides them with an economic cushion against the vagaries of the free market and therefore it of utmost importance to them that these pre-capitalist structures of exploitation are retained and consolidated. The liberalization policies are keen on privatizing the different spheres of production and distribution in agriculture. The dominant classes having benefitted from the liberalization policies are the most likely allies of international capital that is eager to penetrate into Indian agriculture.

A marketable surplus still eludes the production capacity of a majority of the Indian peasantry who still remain dependent on the dominant castes and classes for access to land and other means of production. The withdrawal of state support with the opening up of the agricultural markets and privatization of industries supplying crucial inputs like seeds and fertilizers have further debilitated the position of the small and poor peasantry. Continuing with agriculture for livelihood can only come with a dependence on the dominant classes. Trends of seasonal migration and feminization of agriculture indicate towards processes of semi-proletarianization.

Thus liberalization policies in India are facilitating capitalist accumulation without a development of capitalist relations of production. The majority of peasants in the peasant subsector are denied accumulation opportunities due to the dominance of the landlord and capitalist classes. It obstructs capitalist development in this subsector. Moreover the prevalence of caste and gender discrimination in the labour market along with the phenomenon of semi-proletarianization prevents the formation of a free-wage labour in the economy. As these impediments to capitalist development indicate that such a social context cannot allow the development perfect markets which are a necessary feature of a capitalist economy.

It is therefore that the agrarian question in India remains unresolved till date. By the understanding developed in this study the resolution of the agrarian question in India comes to critically depend upon the resolution of the land question. The introduction and implementation of the neoliberal policies operates through the alliance between international capital and the dominant classes in India. The reversal of neoliberal policies can only happen by rupturing this linkage. It is only by weakening the dominant position of the landlords and big capitalist farmers that their alliance with international capital be

broken. As has been shown the dominance of these classes stems from their monopolistic control over land resources as also their powerful position in the caste hierarchy. The resolution of the land question in order to create favourable conditions for an overall capitalist development in agriculture thus requires its articulation and resolution in the abovementioned manner.

However it must be duly admitted here that the conclusion drawn at the end of this study remains a preliminary one owing to the scope and limitations of the literature reviewed here. For instance the report of the CALR is a very important and updated document on the state of land relations in India but not the only one. Its findings need to be further refined on the basis of many regional and international reports on the issue of land relations that have come of late- the Bandhopadhyay Commission Report³⁰ on the agrarian relations in Bihar which remains unpublished but is responsible for a rejuvenated debate on land reforms in Bihar is a case in point. Moreover the issues of common property resources and tribal land rights need a more detailed focus. Secondly a wider engagement is sought with the possible criticisms of the theoretical formulation of Akram-Lodhi and Kay used in the second chapter. As pointed out within the text of that chapter, the evidence of the formation of an export-orient subsector needs greater and direct substantiation by a survey of economic data on agriculture. The problem of female semi-proletarianization in India has distinctive features from the general theoretical explanation offered by Akram-Lodhi and Kay. This can form the subject of a separate study. It must also be recognized that the analysis of the AIKS's response to liberalization in the last chapter is completely based on the documents published by the AIKS itself. Further corroboration of the claims of the AIKS as well as its activities that do not find a mention in the reviewed documents is required. Also it has been left unanswered as to what could have been an alternative response in real political terms to the objective situations where the peasants and agricultural workers were refusing to undertake militant actions for land redistribution. These limitations of the study put forth a set of possible subjects for further research.

³⁰ See Bihar: Implement Bandhopadhyay Commission's Recommendations for Land Reforms, Mainstream, Vol. 47. No. 33.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

AIKS and AIAWU.1993. *Alternative Agricultural Policy*. New Delhi:S Ramachandran Pillai on behalf of AIKS and AIAWU.

AIKS and AIAWU.2003. *Alternative Agricultural Policy*. New Delhi:S Ramachandran Pillai on behalf of AIKS and AIAWU.

AIKS.1986. *Towards Country-Wide Peasant Struggles*. New Delhi: P.K.Tandon on behalf of AIKS.

AIKS.1990.*Towards a Pro-Rural Poor Agrarian Policy*. New Delhi: P.K.Tandon on behalf of AIKS.

AIKS.2003.*Documents of the 30th Conference of All India Kisan Sabha*. New Delhi: AIKS.

AIKS.2006.*Documents of the 31st Conference of All India Kisan Sabha*. New Delhi: AIKS.

AIKS.2006.*General Secretary's Report, AIKS 31st Conference*. New Delhi: AIKS.

AIKS.2010.*All India Kisan Sabha 32nd Conference Documents*. New Delhi:AIKS.

Government of India. 2009. *Report of the Committee on State Agrarian Relations and the Unfinished Task of land Reforms*. Department of Land Resources. Ministry of Rural Development. New Delhi.

Other References

Agarwal, B. 1988. "Who sows? Who reaps? Women and land rights in India". *Journal of Peasant Studies*. Vol. 15. No. 4. 531 — 581

Agarwal, B. 2003. "Gender and Land Rights Revisited: Exploring New Prospects via the State, Family and Market". *Journal of Agrarian Change*. Vol. 3. Nos.1 and 2.pp 184-224.

Akram-Lodhi, A. Haroon and Kay, Cristóbal. 2010. "Surveying the agrarian question (part 1): Unearthing foundations, exploring diversity". *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37: 1, 177 — 202

Akram-Lodhi, A. Haroon and Kay, Cristóbal.2010. 'Surveying the agrarian question (part 2): current debates and beyond'. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37: 2, 255 — 284

- Akram-Lodhi, A. Haroon.2007. "Land, Markets and Neoliberal Enclosure: An Agrarian Political Economy Perspective".*Third World Quarterly*. Vol. 28, No. 8, pp. 1437-1456.
- Athreya, V. 2003. "Redistributive Land Reforms in India: Some Reflections in the Current Context". Paper presented in the All-India Conference On Agriculture And Rural Society In Contemporary India, at Barddhaman, December 17 To 20, 2003.
- Athreya, Venkatesh.2011. Some notes on the Agrarian scenario. *The Marxist*. Vol 27, No 1-2. pp 90-96.
- Bakshi, A. 2008. "Social Inequality in Land Ownership in India: A Study with Particular Reference to West Bengal". *Social Scientist*. Vol. 39 (9-10).pp 95-116.
- Balagopal, K. 2007. "Land Unrest in Andhra Pradesh-I: Ceiling surpluses and public lands". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 42. No. 38.pp 3829-3833.
- Balagopal, K.1987. "An Ideology for the Propertied Class", *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 5-12. Pp 1544-1547.
- Bandhopadhyay, R. 1993. "Land System in India: A Historical Review". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 28. No. 52. pp. A149-A155
- Banerjee, P. 2006. "West Bengal: Land Acquisition and Peasant Resistance at Singur". *Economic and Political Weekly*. November 18. pp 4718-4720.
- Basu, P.K. 2007., "Political Economy of Land Grab", *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 7, pp 1281-1287.
- Bernstein, Henry. 2002. "Land reform: Taking a Long(er) View". *Journal of Agrarian Change*. Vol. 2 No. 4.pp 433-463.
- Bokil, M.S. 1997. "Agrarian Issues: Contradictions or Confusions?". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 32. No. 46. 2975-2976.
- Chakravarti, A. 2001. "Caste and Agrarian Class: A View from Bihar". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 36. No. 17. pp. 1449-1462
- Chattopadhyay, S. 1973., "On the Class Nature of Land Reforms in India since Independence", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp 3-24.
- Chavan, Pallavi 2005. "Banking Sector Liberalization and the Growth and Regional Distribution of Rural Banking", in Ramachandran, V. K and Swaminathan, Madhura (eds.), *Financial Liberalization and Rural Credit in India*, Tulika Books, New Delhi.

D.Narasimha Reddy, Surjit Singh and Dolly Arora (Eds.), *Political Economy of WTO Regime: Some Aspects of Globalisation and Governance*, Indian Political Economy Association, Rainbow Publishers, New Delhi, 2002, pp 3-15.

Gupta, J. 2002. "Women Second in the Land Agenda". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 37. No. 18. pp. 1746-1754.

Guru, Gopal. 1997. "Dalit Land Question and Agrarian Contradictions". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 32. No. 36. pp. 2295-2296.

Hanstad, T. 2005. "Improving Land Access For India's Rural Poor A Review Of Past Efforts And Recommendations For The Road Ahead". A paper prepared for the National Seminar on Reforms in Land Policy for Accelerated Growth (New Delhi, January 5-6, 2006)

Hanstad, T. Brown, J. and Prosterman, R. 2002. "Larger Homestead Plots as Land Reform? International Experience and Analysis from Karnataka". *Economic and Political Weekly*. July 20. pp 3053-3062.

Harriss, J. Jeyaranjan, J. and Nagaraj, K. 2010. 'Land, Labour and Caste Politics in Rural Tamil Nadu in the 20th Century: Iruvelpattu (1916-2008)'. *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 45. No. 31. Pp 47-61.

Isaac, T.M. Thomas & Tharakan, P.K. Michael. 1995. "Kerala: Towards a New Agenda". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 30. No. 31/32. pp. 1993-2004

Jannuzi, F. T. 1974. *Agrarian Crisis in India: The Case of Bihar*, Austin, Texas.

Jayati Ghosh, "Twelve Theses on Agricultural Prices", *Social Scientist*, vol.20, Number 11, November 1992, p-20-25.

Jodhka, S.S.2004. "Sikhism and the Caste question: Dalits and their politics in contemporary Punjab". *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. 38: 165

Koshy, V. C. 1974. Land Reforms in India under the Plans. *Social Scientist*. Vol. 2. No. 12. pp 43-61.

Kothari, S. 1996. "Whose Nation? The Displaced as Victims of Development", *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 15, 1476.

Lieten, G.K. 1990. "Depeasantisation Discontinued: Land Reforms in West Bengal". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 25. No. 40. pp. 2265-2271.

Lobo, B. 2002. "Maharashtra Land Reforms: Turning the Clock Back". *Economic and Political Weekly*. February 9. pp529-532.

Mishra, S. K. 2007. "On Agrarian transition in West Bengal". *The Marxist*. Vol. 23. No. 2. pp 1-22.

Mohanty, B. B.2001. "Land Distribution among Scheduled Castes and Tribes". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 36. No. 40.pp 3857-3868.

Nair, Janaki. 1996. "Predatory Capitalism and Legalised Landgrab: Karnataka Land Reforms". *Economic and Political Weekly*.pp 251-252.

Oommen, T. K. 1992. "Restructuring Development through Technological Pluralism". *International Sociology*. Vol. 7, 131.

Oommen, T. K. 2006. "Coping with Development Pathologies: Resistance to Displacement", *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol 55, No.2, 267–80.

Pai, S. 2007. "Janadesh 2007: the Land Question".*Economic and Political Weekly*. November 17.pp 10-17.

Patnaik, Utsa.1999. "Ascertaining the Economic Characteristics of Peasant Classes-in-Themselves in Rural India: A Methodological and Empirical Exercise". *Journal of Peasant Studies*, pp-211.

Pillai, S.R. 2003. "Certain Aspects Of The Agrarian Situation And Alternative Policies". *The Marxist*.

Prabhat Patnaik, "Impact of Globalisation on Indian Agriculture" in *Crisis in Agriculture and Response- Seminar Proceedings, 23 August 1998*, Uddharaju Ramam Memorial Foundation and Andhra Pradesh Rythu Sangham, Hyderabad, 1998, pp 1-13

Raaj, V. 2010. "Vulnerability to Climate Change: An Assessment Of Socio-Economic Aspects Of Vulnerability To Climate Change At The Local Level In Maharashtra". M.A. Dissertation submitted to the Centre for Development Studies, School of Social Sciences, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

Radhakrishnan, P. 1990. "Land Reforms: Rhetoric and Reality". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 25, No. 4. pp. 2617-2621

Ramachandran, V. K. and Ramakumar, R. 2000, 'Agrarian Reforms and Rural Development Policies in India: A Note', paper presented at the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development organized by the Department of Agrarian Reform, Government of the Philippines and the Philippines Development Academy, Tagaytay City, 5-8 December 2000.

Ramachandran, V.K. 2011. "The state of agrarian relations in India today". *The Marxist*. Vol. 27.pp 52-89.

Ramachandran, V.K. and Rawal, V. 2009. "The Impact of Liberalization and Globalization on India's Agrarian Economy". *Global Labour Journal*. Vol.1. Issue 1.pp 56-91.

Ramakumar, R. 2010. "Continuity and Change: Notes on Agriculture in New India" in D' Costa, Anthony.(Ed.). *A New India? Critical Perspectives in the long Twentieth Century*. 2010. London: Anthem Press.

Rasul, M.A.1989. *A History of the All India Kisan Sabha*. Calcutta: National Book Agency.

Rawal, Vikas. 2008. "Ownership Holdings of Land in Rural India: Putting the Record Straight". *Economic and Political Weekly*. pp 43-47.

Reddy, A.P.G. Krishna. 2002. "New Populism and Liberalisation: Regime Shift under Chandrababu Naidu". *Economic and Political Weekly*.pp 871-883.

Saxena, K.B, 2008. "Development, Displacement and Resistance: The Law and Policy on Land Acquisition", *Social Change*, No. 38, 351-410.

Singh, Manmohan. 2001. Interview with V. N. Balasubramanyam, in Balasubramanyam,V. N., *Conversations with Indian Economists*, New Delhi: MacMillan India Ltd.

- 2004. 'India: The next decade', Speech at The Indira Gandhi Conference, New Delhi, November 19, available at <http://pmindia.nic.in/speech/content4print.asp?id=47>.

Sreerekha, M.S. 2010. "Challenges Before Kerala's Landless: The Story of Aralam Farm". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. XLV. No. 21. Pp 55-62.

Srinivasan, T. N. 2007. "Development Strategy: the State and Agriculture since Independence".pp 1-47.

Sud, N. 2007. "From Land to the Tiller to Land Liberalisation: The Political Economy of Gujarat's Shifting Land Policy". *Modern Asian Studies*. Vol. 41. No. 3.pp 603-637.

Swain, M. 1999. "Agricultural Tenancy and Interlinked Transactions: I: Neoclassical and Marxist Approaches". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 34. No. 37. pp. 2657-2659+2661-2666

Tharakan, S. M. and Tharakan, M. 1975. "Status of Women in India: A Historical Perspective". *Social Scientist*. Vol. 4. No. 4/5.pp 115-123

Thorat, S. 2009., *Dalits in India. Search for a Common Destiny*, Sage, New Delhi.

Thorner, Alice. 1982a. "Semi-Feudalism or Capitalism? Contemporary Debate on Classes and Modes of Production in India". *Economic and political Weekly*. Vol. 17. No. 49. pp. 1961-1968.

- 1982b. "Semi-Feudalism or Capitalism? Contemporary Debate on Classes and Modes of Production in India". *Economic and political Weekly*. Vol. 17. No. 50. pp. 1993-1999
- 1982c. "Semi-Feudalism or Capitalism? Contemporary Debate on Classes and Modes of Production in India". *Economic and political Weekly*. Vol. 17. No. 51. pp. 2061-2066

Trivedi, P. K. 2010. "Sociology of Land Reforms and Dalits in Uttar Pradesh: Reflections on the World Bank's Report on Land Policies". *Social Change* 40:213-219.

Vaddiraju, A. K. 1999. "Emergence of Backward Castes in South Telengana: Agrarian Change and Grass Roots Politics". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 34. No. 7. pp. 425-430

Walker, Kathy Le Mons. 2008. "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India: Predatory Growth, Agrarian Crisis, Internal Colonization, and the Intensification of Class Struggle". *Journal of Peasant Studies*. Vol. 35. No.4. pp 557-620.

APPENDIX

Table 1.1 Proportion of Households that do not own land (2003-04, in %) (Rawal, 2008)

| State | Official Estimates (Households That Do Not Own Any Land Including Homestead) | Households That Do Not Own Any Land Other Than Homestead | Households That Neither Own Any Land Other Than Homestead Nor Cultivate on Owned Homestead Land |
|-------------------|---|---|--|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Jammu and Kashmir | 3.29 | 10.97 | 7.29 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 15 | 22.68 | 21.87 |
| Punjab | 4.57 | 56.89 | 29.51 |
| Uttarakhand | 10.64 | 26.4 | 21.15 |
| Haryana | 9.21 | 49.49 | 25.96 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 3.82 | 26.2 | 16.31 |
| Rajasthan | 5.65 | 19.95 | 12.73 |
| Chhattisgarh | 12.09 | 27.31 | 20.8 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 12.05 | 31.81 | 22.76 |
| Gujarat | 13.6 | 44.11 | 35.37 |
| Maharashtra | 17.66 | 44.78 | 38.27 |
| Andhra Pradesh | 14.33 | 53.19 | 48.75 |
| Karnataka | 14.09 | 40.47 | 30.76 |
| Kerala | 4.8 | 68.36 | 36.74 |
| Tamil Nadu | 16.55 | 64.52 | 55.43 |
| Bihar | 7.6 | 38.8 | 31.01 |
| West Bengal | 6.15 | 46.52 | 34.69 |
| Jharkhand | 4.8 | 39.25 | 18.43 |
| Orissa | 9.56 | 38.48 | 31.07 |
| Sikkim | 30.67 | 44.4 | 37.96 |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 21.59 | 23.5 | 22.59 |
| Nagaland | 8.02 | 15.45 | 10.85 |
| Manipur | 2.68 | 30.3 | 13.53 |
| Mizoram | 2.34 | 14.1 | 6.67 |
| Tripura | 8.69 | 59.52 | 33.22 |
| Meghalaya | 6.7 | 29.01 | 19.93 |
| Assam | 8.05 | 40.3 | 23 |
| India | 10.04 | 41.63 | 31.12 |

Table 1.2 Restrictive Nature of Tenancy Laws in Various States (MoRD 2009: 99)

| Category of States | Nature of Restrictions in Tenancy Laws |
|---|---|
| 1. Kerala and Jammu & Kashmir | Leasing out of agricultural land is legally prohibited without any exception |
| 2. Telangana Area of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Chattishgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Orissa | Leasing out of agricultural land is allowed only by certain categories of land owners such as disabled, minors, widows, defense personnel etc. |
| 3. Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Assam | Leasing out of agricultural land is not specifically banned, but the tenant acquires right to purchase the tenanted land after a specific period of creation of tenancy. |
| 4. Andhra area of Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal | There are no restrictions on land leasing, although in West Bengal only share cropping leases are legally permitted. |
| 5. In Scheduled tribe areas of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra | Transfer of land from tribal to non-tribal even on lease basis can be permitted only by a competent authority. The idea is to prevent alienation of land from tribal to non-tribal. |

Table 1.3 Fixation of Fair Rents by the States (MoRD 2009: 99)

| State | The rate of rent by states |
|-----------------------|---|
| Andhra Pradesh | |
| (i) Andhra region | 25 to 30 per cent of produce |
| (ii) Telengana region | 1/4 to 1/5 of produce or 3 to 5 times the land revenue |
| Assam | 1/4 to 1/5 of produce or less than 3 times the land revenue |
| Bihar | 18 seers (16.80 kg) per maund |
| Gujarat | 2 to 5 times the land revenue, subject to a limit of Rs. 20 per acre |
| Haryana | 1/3 of produce or value thereof |
| Himachal Pradesh | 1/4 of crop of land or value thereof |
| Jammu and Kashmir | Tenancy has been banned and therefore, no provision of fair rent has been made. |
| Karnataka | 1/4 to 1/5 of produce or the value thereof, but not exceeding 10 times the land revenue plus irrigation charges |
| Madhya Pradesh | 2 to 4 times the land revenue |
| Maharashtra | 2 to 5 times the land revenue, subject to a limit of Rs. 20 per acre |
| Orissa | 1/4 of produce or value thereof |
| Punjab | 1/3 of produce or value thereof |
| Rajasthan | 1/4 to 1/6 of produce or 1 ½ to 3 times the amount assessed as land revenue |
| Tamil Nadu | 1/2 to 1/3 of produce or value thereof |
| Uttar Pradesh | Rent as agreed upon between the tenant and his landlord or the gaon sabha |
| West Bengal | 1/2 to 1/4 of produce (1/2 of produce if the landowner supplies plough, cattle, manures and seeds) |

Table 1.4 Proportion of Landless and Homeless Families in Rural Areas (MoRD 2009: 104)

| States | Percentage of landless households | Percentage of Households not owning any dwelling units*** | Total Number of Households not having any dwelling unit of their own (number in 1000) |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Andhra Pradesh | 14.3 | 10.8 | 1373 |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 21.6 | 21.5 | 35 |
| Assam | 8.0 | 5.3 | 214 |
| Bihar | 7.6 | 0.6 | 66 |
| Chattisgrah | 12.1 | 4.3 | 150 |
| Gujarat | 13.6 | 8.5 | 522 |
| Haryana | 9.2 | 3.1 | 81 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 15.0 | 8.9 | 101 |
| Jammu & Kashmir | 3.3 | 3.1 | 34 |
| Jharkhand | 4.8 | 1.7 | 62 |
| Karnataka | 14.1 | 10.6 | 738 |
| Kerala | 4.8 | 6.7 | 351 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 12.0 | 2.2 | 186 |
| Maharashtra | 17.7 | 7.9 | 930 |
| Manipur | 2.7 | 2.1 | 6 |
| Meghalaya | 6.7 | NA | 100 (NE) |
| Mizoram | 2.3 | NA | |
| Nagaland | 8.0 | NA | |
| Sikkim | 30.7 | NA | |
| Orissa | 9.6 | 3.7 | 238 |
| Punjab | 4.6 | 3.1 | 91 |
| Rajasthan | 5.6 | 2.1 | 156 |
| Tamil Nadu | 16.6 | 13.1 | 1345 |
| Tripura | 8.7 | 3.8 | 23 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 3.8 | 1.7 | 371 |
| Uttaranchal | 10.6 | - | NA |
| West Bengal | 6.2 | 3.5 | 427 |
| UTS | 40.2 | 40.0 | 97 |
| All India | 10.0 | 5.5 | 7876 |

Source: * = Based on NSSO, 59th Round, 2003.

** = Based on NSSO, 60th Round, 2004.

Note: NE indicates total of North eastern states other than Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh

Table 1.5 Households that do not own any land other than homesteads as a proportion of all households, by social groups, rural India, 2003 in percent (Bakshi, 2008)

| States | Adivasi | Dalit | Non Dalit/Adivasi | All |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|
| Andhra Pradesh | 48.7 | 64.5 | 49.6 | 53.2 |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 4.5 | 53.6 | 93.8 | 23.5 |
| Assam | 27.6 | 49.8 | 40.9 | 40.3 |
| Bihar | 22.1 | 72.3 | 35.3 | 43.7 |
| Chattisgarh | 18.4 | 31.5 | 31.0 | 26.2 |
| Delhi | 100.0 | 99.7 | 97.3 | 98.1 |
| Goa | 0.0 | | 59.0 | 57.1 |
| Gujarat | 34.3 | 67.0 | 43.1 | 44.1 |
| Haryana | 100.0 | 84.1 | 34.9 | 49.5 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 14.5 | 22.7 | 23.5 | 22.7 |
| Jammu & Kashmir | 44.1 | 21.8 | 8.9 | 11.0 |
| Jharkhand | 18.7 | 41.7 | 24.9 | 24.7 |
| Karnataka | 54.0 | 57.5 | 34.7 | 40.4 |
| Kerala | 66.1 | 85.4 | 66.1 | 68.3 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 41.1 | 35.6 | 30.8 | 34.0 |
| Maharashtra | 61.2 | 69.6 | 35.5 | 44.8 |
| Manipur | 11.0 | 41.6 | 45.6 | 30.2 |
| Meghalaya | 25.4 | 59.2 | 60.9 | 29.0 |
| Mizoram | 15.0 | 100.0 | 6.0 | 14.9 |
| Nagaland | 9.3 | | 100.0 | 15.5 |
| Orissa | 33.3 | 52.8 | 35.9 | 38.5 |
| Punjab | 98.9 | 88.9 | 36.5 | 56.9 |
| Rajasthan | 6.8 | 39.3 | 17.0 | 19.6 |
| Sikkim | 35.5 | 65.1 | 46.7 | 44.4 |
| Tamil Nadu | 66.7 | 78.7 | 59.5 | 64.5 |
| Tripura | 48.5 | 67.4 | 62.1 | 59.4 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 51.8 | 33.9 | 23.2 | 26.3 |
| Uttaranchal | 60.9 | 33.7 | 25.2 | 27.7 |
| West Bengal | 48.8 | 54.1 | 42.8 | 46.5 |
| India | 35.5 | 56.5 | 37.8 | 41.6 |

Source: Computed from unit level data, NSS Land and Livestock Holdings Survey, 59th Round

Table 1.6 Legislations for Protection of Tribal Land (MoRD 2009: 129)

| S No | State | Legislation in force | Main features |
|------|---------------------------|--|---|
| 1 | Andhra Pradesh | (a) The Andhra Pradesh (Scheduled Areas) Land Transfer Regulation, 1959, amended by The Andhra Pradesh (Scheduled Areas) Land Transfer (Amendment) regulation, 1970, 1971, and 1978. | Prohibits all transfer of land to non-tribals in Scheduled Areas. Authorizes government to acquire land in case a tribal purchaser is not available. There is, however, no legal protection to ST land outside the scheduled areas. |
| | Assam | The Assam Land and Revenue Regulations 1886, amended in 1981. | Chapter X of regulation prohibits alienation of land in tribal belts and blocks. |
| 2 | Arunachal Pradesh | Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, as amended. | Prohibit transfer of tribal land |
| 3 | Andaman & Nicobar Islands | Andaman and Nicobar islands (protection of aboriginals' tribes) regulation, 1956. | Protects tribal interest in lands. |
| 4 | Bihar Jharkhand | (a) Chhota Nagpur Tenancy act, 1908. (b) Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act, (supplementary provision) 1940. (c) Bihar Scheduled Areas Regulation, 1969. | Prohibits alienation of tribal land and provide for restoration of alienated land. |
| 5 | Chattishgarh | (a) Sec 165 & 170 of Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code, 1959. (b) Madhya Pradesh Land Distribution Regulation Act, 1964. | Sections 165 and 170B of the code protect STs against land alienation. The 1964 Act is in force in the scheduled areas. |
| 6 | Dadra & Nagar Haveli | Dadra & Nagar Haveli Land Reform Regulation, 1971. | Protects tribal interest in lands |
| 7 | Gujarat | Bombay Land revenue (Gujarat Second Amendment) Act, 1980. | Prohibits transfer of tribal land and provides for restoration of alienated land. |
| 8 | Himachal Pradesh | The Himachal Pradesh Transfer of Land (Regulation) Act, 1968. | Act prohibits transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals. |
| 9 | Karnataka | The Karnataka Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes(Prohibition of Transfer of Certain Lands)Act, 1975. | Act prohibits transfer of land assigned to SCs and STs by government. No provision to safeguard SC/ST interest in other lands. |
| 10 | Kerala | The Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Regulation of Transfer of Land and Restoration of Alienated land) Act, 1975. | Ac of 1975 made applicable with effect from 1 st June, 1982 by notification of January, 1986 prohibits transfer of land of tribals and provides for its restoration. |

| | | | |
|----|----------------------------|--|--|
| 11 | Lakshadweep | Lakshadweep(Protection of Scheduled Tribes) Regulation, 1964 | Prohibits transfer of tribal land. |
| 12 | Madhya Pradesh | (a) Sec 165 & 170 of Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code, 1959. (b) Madhya Pradesh Land Distribution Regulation Act, 1964. | Sections 165 and 170B of the code protect STs against land alienation. In the scheduled area of Madhya Pradesh and Chattishgarh, the 1964 act is in force. |
| 13 | Maharashtra | (a) The Maharashtra Land Revenue Code, 1966, as amended in 1974. (b) The Maharashtra (Restoration of Lands to Scheduled Tribes) Act, 1974. | Prohibits alienation of tribal land and provides for restoration of both illegally and legally transferred lands of a ST. |
| 14 | Manipur | The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960. | Section 153 forbids transfer of land of STs to non- STs without permission of DC. Act not been extended to hill areas and hill area tribals not covered. |
| 15 | Meghalaya | Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) Act, 1971. | Prohibits alienation of tribal land |
| 16 | Nagaland | Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 and Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1866, as amended vide Nagaland Land and Revenue Regulation (Amendment) Act 1978. | Prohibition of land transfer of tribal's. |
| 17 | Orissa | The Orissa Scheduled Areas Transfer of Immovable Property (STs) Regulation, 1956. The Orissa Land Reforms Act, 1960, | Prohibits transfer of ST land and provides for its restoration. |
| 18 | Rajasthan | The Rajasthan Tenancy Act, 1955, The Rajasthan Land Revenue Act, 1956. | Section 175 and 183B specifically protects tribal interest in land and provides for restoration of alienated land to them. |
| 19 | Sikkim | Revenue Order no. 1 of 1917 The Sikkim Agricultural Land Ceiling and Reform Act, 1977 | Order of 1917 still in force. Chapter 7 of 1977 restricts on alienation of lands by STs but is not in force. |
| 20 | Tamil Nadu | Standing Orders of the Revenue Board BSO 15-40. Law against land alienation not enacted. | BSO 15-40 applies only to Malayali and Soliga tribes. Prohibits transfer of assigned land without approval of DC. |
| 21 | Tripura | Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reform Act, 1960, as amended in 1974. | Act prohibits transfer of ST land to others without permission of DC. the collector. Only lands transfer after 1.1.1969 are covered under restoration provision. |
| 22 | Uttar Pradesh/ Uttarakhand | U.P. Land Laws (Amendment) Act, 1981, amending Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms act, 1950. | Provide protection of tribal land. But amending act is not applied and stayed by Allahabad High Court in Swaran Singh Vs State Govt 1981. |
| 23 | West Bengal | West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1955, as amended | Chapter II-A prohibits alienation of tribal land and provides for restoration. |

