

Agrarian Reform

Agrarian Reform is very significant for the economy of any country because more than half of the population is employed in the agricultural sector. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood especially for the developing countries. Reforms are important because they protect the rights of the farmers .

Definition of Agrarian Reform

Agrarian Reform could be defined as the rectification of the whole system of agriculture. It is normally done by the government where they redistribute the agricultural land among the farmers of the country. The agrarian reform is concerned with the relation between production and distribution of land among the farmers. It also concerns the processing of the raw materials that are produced by farming the land from the respective industries.

There can be different types of **agrarian reform** measures like credit measures, integration of land and training of the farmers. The measures also focus on securing the rights of the farmers, the rights of the peasants working on leased land and aiding them in availing loans from private sectors. The government must also offer support services to the farmers which complement the other measures. They also run campaigns to increase the camaraderie level between the farmers.

Agrarian Reform in India

Agrarian Reform in India had been adopted to reallocate the agricultural resources among all the people directly connected with agriculture. After independence, the Government of India started the process of building equity in rural population and improvement of the employment rate and productivity. So for this reason the Government had started agrarian reform.

Reasons Behind Agrarian reform:

- Since India had been under several rulers for a long time, i.e right from the beginning of the middle age, that's why it's rural economic policies kept changing. The main focus of those policies was to earn more money by exploiting the poor farmers.
- In the British period the scenario had not changed much. The British Government introduced the "Zamindari" system where the the authority of land had been captured by some big and rich landowners called Zamindar. Moreover they created an intermediate class to collect tax easily.
- This class had no direct relationship with agriculture or land. Those Zamindars could acquire land from the British Government almost free of cost. So the economic security of the poor peasants lost completely. After independence, the Government's main focus

was to remove those intermediate classes and secure a proper land management system. Since India is a large country, the redistribution process was a big challenge for the Government.

Objectives:

According to agrarian reform land was declared as a property of State Government. So agrarian reform varied from state to state. But the main objectives of agrarian reform in India were:

- Setting proper land management,
- Abolition of Intermediaries
- Preventing fragmentation of lands,
- Tenancy reform.

The land policies of different states faced several controversies . In some state the reform measures were biased in favour of th big land owners who could wield their political influence. However, agrarian reform in India had set a healthy socio-economic structure in the rural areas.

International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development

This international conference was held in Brazil from 7-10 March in 2006. The representatives of ninety two countries were present in the conference. The most

significant topic of discussion in the conference was the revival of the rural communities and the reformation of various policies pertaining to agriculture. This initiative was taken primarily with the object of reducing the rate of poverty in various developing countries.

Land Reforms: Meaning, Objectives and Different Measures

Let us make an in-depth study of the subject-matter, meaning, objectives and different measures of land reforms.

Land Reforms:

Land reform constitutes the most important package of measures to improve the economic condition of agricultural tenants.

It aims at the redistribution of land-ownership in favour of the cultivating class (so as to make them feel themselves a part of the rural life), regulation and rationalisation of rent, improving the size of farms and providing security of tenure in order to transfer in traditional agriculture and raise cultivators to new heights.

Land reform also helps landless agricultural tenants.

Thus, two main objectives of land reform are:

(i) to change the agrarian structure in a way as not to obstruct but promote the growth of agriculture; and

(ii) to replace the old land system by a new one, free from the exploitative features which characterised the former.

In short, growth and social justice are the two basic objectives of land reform in India.

Top 6 Objectives of Land Reforms in India

Some of the most important objectives of land reforms in India are as follows: (i) Rational use of Resources (ii) Raising Production Level (iii) Removal of Exploitation (iv) Social Welfare (v) Planned Development (vi) Raising the Standard of Living.

The land reforms is an integral part of the scheme of agricultural development and rural reconstruction since the inception of the economic planning in the country. As put in the words of Second Five Year Plan, the objective of land reform was to create conditions for evolving as speedily as possible the agrarian economy with high levels of efficiency and productivity and to establish an egalitarian a society and eliminate social inequalities. The same objective was repeated in Fifth Five Year Plan Draft.

The objective of land policy has been to remove such motivation and other impediments in agricultural production as arise from the agrarian structure inherited from the past and also to eliminate all elements of exploitation and social injustice within the agrarian system so as to ensure equality of tenurial status and opportunity to all sections of rural population.

From this, we can say that there are two major objectives of land reforms as

(i) **Social justice**

(ii) **Economic efficiency.**

Social justice consists of equality to the agricultural occupation and all cultivators should get fair treatment without any exploitation. On the other side, economic efficiency is related to bring about organisational changes to the maximum of agricultural output. To sum up the discussion we may say that land reforms in India aims at providing security of tenure, fixation of rents, conferment of ownership etc. through the abolition of intermediaries and bringing the actual tiller in direct contact with the state.

The important objectives of land reforms in India are:

(i) **Rational use of Resources:**

The foremost important objective of land reforms in India is to make provision for more rational use of scarce land resources. It can be done by changing the conditions of holdings, ceilings on land holdings. This helps cultivation process in a most economical manner without any wastage of land, labour and capital.

(ii) **Raising Production Level:**

Another important objective of land reforms is to raise the production level of the agricultural sector by

motivating the farmers to raise their output. This is possible by giving incentives.

(iii) **Removal of Exploitation:**

The removal of exploitation of poor farmers is an important objective of land reforms. This can be attained by redistributing agricultural land in favour of less privileged class of farmers and also by improving the terms and conditions for possessing land for cultivation by actual tillers and abolition of intermediaries.

(iv) **Social Welfare:**

Land reforms also aims at promoting social welfare for rural masses and also to end social injustice through equitable distribution of income. It makes arrangement for distributing land to landless cultivators by imposing ceiling on land holdings and also by acquiring ceiling surplus land. Besides by introducing tenancy reforms the level of social welfare of farmers can also be raised.

(v) **Planned Development:**

To attain planned development of agricultural sector on long term basis is another objective of land reforms. Thus, it can pave the way for adopting modern methods of cultivation and farming through consolidation of holdings and also by establishing direct link between government and farmers for the development of agriculture in a planned manner. The Planning Commission of India has rightly observed, "Land reforms have been treated as an integral part

of eradicating poverty, modernisation of agriculture and increasing the agricultural production programme.”

(vi) **Raising the Standard of Living:**

Land reforms helps to raise the standard of living of the rural poor through re- distributive packages and programmes. Upliftment of economic condition of landless agricultural labourers and small and marginal farmers can be made through land reforms. To meet this objective various rural development programmes are also designed to support land reforms as an effective measure to raise the standard of living of rural poor by widening their land base. These programmes are like IRDP, JRY etc.

Different Measures:

Various land reform measures have been adopted in India during the plan period.

These can be classified as follows:

1. Removal of intermediaries between the State and cultivators;
2. Providing security of tenure and owner-ship to the tenants;
3. Rationalisation of the rent structure;

4. Fixation of ceiling on land-holdings and the redistribution of surplus land among landless cultivators; and

5. Consolidation of holdings to transform agriculture into a profitable activity.

1. Abolition of Intermediaries:

The abolition of intermediaries started in India in 1948 with the enactment of legislation in the then Madras (Chennai). Since agriculture is a State subject, no Central legislation could be enacted. Different States have passed different laws from time to time depending on their political environments and the demands of the situation.

Legislation was passed in almost all States except in Assam, Gujarat, Chennai and Maharashtra. West Bengal is perhaps the only State affected by the adverse effects of absentee landlordism and was able to enact legislation for abolition of intermediaries in 1954-55. As a result of the conferment of rights, about 30 lakh tenants and sharecroppers in India acquired ownership rights over a total cultivated area of 62 lakh acres during the entire plan period.

Critics, however, comment that while the basic objective of land reform was to abolish intermediaries between the tiller and the State, in reality, the legislative enactments equated intermediaries with zamindars and, consequently, the legislation left a class of rent-receivers and absentee landlords virtually untouched. The truth

is that the Governments at the Centre and in the States began to give thought to curtailing the power of non-zamindari rentier class only at a subsequent “stage of their agrarian policy.

Up to 1972, when the old ceiling laws were in force, only about 23 lakh acres were declared surplus in India, out of which only about 13 lakh acres were redistributed. It is surprising to note that in four major states, viz., Rajasthan, Karnataka, Orissa and Bihar, no land was declared surplus. So the ceiling legislation could be imposed in those States.

Up to 1992, 75% of the land involved in litigation before the Revenue Courts should have been freed and distributed. But the progress of the distribution of surplus land was very slow and tardy. In fact, between March 1985 and June 1992—a span of more than 7 years—only 7.11 lakh acres could be distributed additionally.

According to National Sample Survey (26th Round, 1971-72), the surplus land should have been 30 million acres and not just 4 million acres, as had officially been declared. The perfunctory manner in which land reform has been dealt with since 1977 makes it quite clear that the basic approach to acquiring surplus land, plugging loop-holes in tenancy cultivation, reducing rent, preparation of land records, and redistribution of land among the landless labourers and marginal farmers continues to be half-hearted, casual and sporadic.

By and large, all intermediary tenures have been eliminated and over 20 million farmers have been

brought into direct relationship with the State. Some of these tenures were of great antiquity and their abolition represents a remarkable transition to modernised agriculture.

2. Tenancy Legislation:

Measures (2) and (3) fall under the broad measure of tenancy reforms. Tenancy legislation has by now been passed in every State to remove the difficulties of tenants, both tenants-at-will and sub-tenants. The living conditions of them are deplorable in so far as they are subject to ruthless exploitation, frequent enhancement of rent, eviction at will, extractions of other kinds and the cruel system of begar. According to one estimate, about 20% of agricultural land are under the system of such non-occupancy tenancy. The National Sample Survey (98th round) puts the figure in different states as varying between 11% and 26%.

Tenancy legislations have taken three main forms:

- (1) Regulation of rent,
- (2) Providing security of tenure and
- (3) Conferring rights of ownership for tenants.

The maximum rates of rent that can be charged have come to be fixed or regulated by such legislations. Before 1951, as much as 50% or more (even 70 to 80% in some cases) of the output was to be paid as rent. Besides, most cultivators had

also to render some free services to the land-owners.

The Planning Commission recommended (during the First and Second Five Year Plans) that land rents should not exceed one-fourth or one-fifth of the gross produce of the land. In the light of this guideline, all the States have enacted laws for fixation of rent payable by cultivating tenants.

However, large inter-State variations exist in the fixation of land rent rates which are different in different places even within the States. While in Orissa and Bihar the rate has been fixed at one-fourth of the gross produce, in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Kerala the maximum rate is one-sixth of the gross produce. In States like Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu the rates are much too high. Thus, we see a lack of uniformity in the fixing of rents of land. The rate normally varies between 20 to 25% of the gross produce of land.

Tenancy legislations have made it clear that in no case the tenants can be evicted except only in the situation where the landlords themselves want to resume cultivation. Tenancy legislations have made it obligatory to leave a minimum area for the tenant. The overall purpose is to confer upon the tenants-at-will the right of permanent occupancy so that they might be enthused in land and agricultural improvement.

Of all the measures to reform the tenancy system, the most important step is the rights of ownership

for tenants. Legislations have been, enacted in most of the States to this end. Clear-cut directives were also given to all States to pass laws in this regard in 1973. But laws are different regarding the manner of acquiring ownership rights, the amount of compensation to be paid to landlords, etc., in different States.

3. **Ceiling on Land-Holding:**

Almost all States have enacted necessary legislations for redistribution of surplus land after determining the ceiling on land holdings. The permissible size of holding varies according to the quality of land. The ceiling legislations were revised on the basis of guidelines formulated in 1972.

Lands are usually divided into different categories on the basis of irrigation, nature of soil, etc. However, a few categories of farms—viz., plantations, orchards and sugarcane farms operated by sugar factories—are exempted from the ceiling.

Farmers who have excess land over the ceiling fixed will have to surrender the surplus amount to the State against due compensation. The surplus land will be vested in the State and will be distributed among the landless labourers and small and marginal farmers with uneconomic holdings.

An Overall Assessment:

Radical transformation of land relations has been recognised as a key to India's economic

development since 1930s. The right to implement the land reform policies is vested in the State Governments. Some States had started the removal of intermediaries even before the First Plan (1951- 56). This had the effect of bringing a vast amount of cultivable waste land and forest land under State proprietorship. Out of it, quite a significant quantity—58 lakh hectares of land—has been distributed among landless cultivators.

The programme of land reform—in terms of the twin objectives of growth and social justice— may be said to have been formulated in the right direction. And land reform measures were conceived boldly but were implemented badly. The basic defect of the Indian land reform policy has been the low pace at which the whole programme moved. Consequently, even after the removal of intermediaries, cultivators have not become owners of the soil, but remained tenants and sub-tenants.

The various legislative measures introduced to this end did not produce any real benefit to the small and marginal farmers. The landlords, the jagirdars and other vested interests got sufficient time to devise ingenious methods to dodge legislative measures. In most of the States, for example, landlords have avoided the law of ceiling on landholding by keeping their land in fictitious names.

The Sixth Plan (1980-85), deploring the slow progress of the land reform laws, notes that “the will to implement this policy has been badly lacking all

along.” As a result, extent of rural poverty was not reduced at all. The growing rural distress has been converting the poorer cultivators into agricultural labourers. The number of agricultural labourers was 31 million in 1964-65 but increased to 73.7 million in 1991. The rise in such labour force has been mainly in States like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, U.P. and West Bengal.

There are also inter-State differences in land reforms in regard to fixing the ceiling on holding, the maximum rate of rent on land, etc. Some States have not given the tillers the optional rights to purchase the land they cultivate. There are also no legislative provisions in some States like U.P., Orissa, Karnataka to prevent mala fide transfers of land (which acts against the policy of distributing land among the landless labourers). There are also the problems of tenants in invoking the support of law against the powerful landlords.

Again, in spite of the laws passed since 1950s, about 22% of land-holders still continue to own about 76% of the land. About 22% own no land at all. Another 25% own fragments of land or less than one acre. In brief, about 61% either own no land, or own economic or marginal holdings of one hectare or less. All of them together own less than 8% of the total area. This reveals a great inequality, despite passing of Ceiling Acts.

With the introduction of HYV technology to step up production and solving rural poverty in the late

1960s, the importance of land reform measures have removed the vestiges of feudalism. And the policy of encouraging capitalism in agriculture got strength in the name of green revolution.

The highly profitable new technology has spread in India and the Government is actively promoting capitalism in agriculture. But feudal type of exploitation still prevails in the country. The growing conflict between landowning classes and poor, backward peasants and cultivators in different States—mainly Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh—is an indication of such exploitation.

Though these conflicts and clashes are branded as clashes between upper castes and backward castes, in fact, the basic reason behind these clashes are nothing but feudal exploitation. “Feudal practices are still in vogue”. A washerman is quoted as saying:” We have to run in front of or behind the bullock cart when the landlord goes anywhere in the village or the town. People of lower status are not permitted to smoke, ride a bicycle, wear shoes or a full length dhoti (cloth) in the presence of the landlord.”

Land Reforms in India after Independence: Purposes and Features

At the time of independence ownership of land was concentrated in the hands of a few. This led to the exploitation of the farmers and was

a major hindrance towards the socio-economic development of the rural population. Equal distribution of land was therefore an area of focus of Independent India's government. Laws for land ceiling were enacted in various states during 50s & 60s which were modified on the directives of central government in 1972.

Under the 1949 Indian constitution, states were granted the powers to enact (and implement) land reforms. This autonomy ensures that there has been significant variation across states and time in terms of the number and types of land reforms that have been enacted. We classify land reform acts into four main categories according to their main purpose.

1. The first category is acts related to tenancy reform. These include attempts to regulate tenancy contracts both via registration and stipulation of contractual terms, such as shares in share tenancy contracts, as well as attempts to abolish tenancy and transfer ownership to tenants.

2. The second category of land reform acts is attempts to abolish intermediaries. These intermediaries who worked under feudal lords (Zamindari) to collect rent for the British were reputed to allow a larger share of the surplus from the land to be extracted from tenants.

Most states had passed legislation to abolish intermediaries prior to 1958.

3. The third category of land reform acts concerned efforts to implement ceilings on land holdings, with a view to redistributing surplus land to the landless.

4. Finally, we have acts which attempted to allow consolidation of disparate land-holdings.' Though these reforms and in particular the latter were justified partly in terms of achieving efficiency gains in agriculture it is clear from the acts themselves and from the political manifestos supporting the acts that the main impetus driving the first three reforms was poverty reduction.

Existing assessments of the effectiveness of these different reforms are highly mixed. Though promoted by the centre in various Five Year Plans, the fact that land reforms were a state subject under the 1949 Constitution meant that enactment and implementation was dependent on the political will of state governments. The perceived oppressive character of the Zamindari and their close alliance with the British galvanized broad political support for the abolition intermediaries and led to widespread implementation of these reforms most of which were complete by the early 1960s. Centre-state alignment on the issue of tenancy reforms was much less pronounced. With many state legislatures

controlled by the landlord class, reforms which harmed this class tended to be blocked, though where tenants had substantial political representation notable successes in implementation were recorded.

Despite the considerable publicity attached to their enactment, political failure to implement was most complete in the case of land ceiling legislation. Here ambivalence in the formulation of policy and numerous loopholes allowed the bulk of landowners to avoid expropriation by distributing surplus land to relations, friends and dependents. As a result of these problems, implementation of both tenancy reform and land ceiling legislation tended to lag well behind the targets set in the Five Year Plans. Land consolidation legislation was enacted less than the other reforms and, owing partly to the sparseness of land records, implementation has been considered to be both sporadic and patchy only affecting a few states in any significant way. Village level studies also offer a very mixed assessment of the poverty impact of different land reforms. Similar reforms seemed to have produced different effects in different areas leaving overall impact indeterminate. There is some consensus that the abolition of intermediaries achieved a limited and variable success both in redistributing land towards the poor and increasing the security of smallholders.

For tenancy reform, however, whereas successes have been recorded, in particular, where tenants are well organized there has also been a range of documented cases of imminent legislation prompting landlords to engage in mass evictions of tenants and of the de jure banning of landlord-tenant relationships pushing tenancy underground and therefore, paradoxically, reducing tenurial security. Land ceiling legislation, in a variety of village studies, is also perceived to have had neutral or negative effects on poverty by inducing landowners from joint families to evict their tenants and to separate their holdings into smaller proprietary units among family members as a means of avoiding expropriation. Land consolidation is also on the whole judged not to have been progressive in its redistributive impact given that richer farmers tend to use their power to obtain improved holdings. There is a considerable variation in overall land reform activity across states with states such as Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu having a lot of activity while Punjab and Rajasthan have very little.

New Agency for Land reforms: Government is planning to establish a separate agency for land reforms & upgradation of wasteland. New agency named; “Jai Prakash Narayan Mission for Land Reforms & Wasteland Management” will work under the ministry of rural development. This body will be authorized for

making policies and implementing them for land reforms & wasteland upgradation.