Chapter 2

LAND, CASTE AND POWER IN INDIA
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The present chapter will explore the interrelationship between land, caste and power at all India level. Land not only has economic connotation, rather land in rural areas reflects the power and prestige aspects. This chapter will show that despite the different land reform measures initiated by the state, the land is still not distributed in a true sense of term. The upper castes still possess the maximum area of land. The upper castes still possess the maximum proportion of land in the rural areas, which promote the exploitation of the deprived castes and classes.

Land, caste and power are the three factors in rural India, which help to understand and analyze the dynamics of rural social structure in general and agrarian power structure in particular. Land and caste in rural India are closely linked with each other and, land distribution in India closely follows social hierarchy. While the large landowners invariably belong to the upper castes, the cultivators belong to middle castes and the agricultural workers mostly belong to the scheduled castes. Land being the important socially valued asset. As it is a valued asset, its unequal distribution helps maintain the hierarchal structure and strengthen the basis of dominance of the privileged groups by
perpetuating inequality and deprivation in various socio-economic spheres.

According to the census of India (2001), 72.2 percent of population lives in rural India, and about 70 percent of rural population directly or indirectly live upon land and its produce. The hierarchal arrangement in the social structure largely corresponds to the relative size of the chunk of land the people own and control in the rural areas. It is a clear fact that those who own and control land, use it more as an instrument of power and domination over those who have less of it or do not have it at all. Therefore, land has a power aspect particularly in rural areas.¹

Land and caste tends to produce an agrarian situation-giving rise to a specific pattern of power structure with a distributive normative set of rule and regulations for the promotion, emergence and eventually perpetuation of the elite population at the top of the social structure pushing the rest of the segment and strata of the majority population below. Normative rules have a tendency to create built in structural background for the emergence and legitimating of social inequalities in the rural areas. Almost all rural studies in India suggest the trend of

social inequality in the rural areas and demonstrate the overlap between the systems of land distribution with that of distribution of power among the people. Land therefore in the rural setting is the main instrument of power and domination.

Betellie writes that the most important material basis of inequality in rural society is the distribution of land. There is a small class of people who own or control much of the land. The numerically significant class of landless agricultural labourers is a class of people who own or control much of the land. These tenancy relations of a bewildering variety are widely practiced even discouraged by the law. The relations between landlords and the tenants are governed by certain orientations in which the social inequality is accepted as one of the given human conditions.²

In a traditional rural economy, the landowners not only have higher income than the landless but the traditional ties of dominance and dependence enable the former to control the lives of the latter in a variety of ways. One important feature of the traditional hierarchy on landownership was the inverse relationship of the latter with the performance of labour, in particular manual labour. Large Landowners could afford to abstain from manual labour but in many conceptions of status prevented even quite small landowners belonging to the Brahmins and Rajput castes. There was ritual sanction again

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² Andre Betellie, Studies in Agrarian Social Structure, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1974
use of plough. At the other hand, the most onerous physical tasks were the preserves of the lowest among the low. Inequalities in the distribution of land are closely related to the inequalities of income. As land is the only source of sustenance in rural India, the land relation keeps a special significance. Either, in fact the basic agricultural workers, the agricultural labourers-who form more than one fourth of the rural population, do not own any land or land owned by them is very nominal. Thus vast working population being bereft of land, can have little stake in raising the productivity of land, as bulk of the land is owned by a few at the top who generally do not belong to traditional agricultural castes.

Land continues to be the pivotal property in terms of both income and employment, around which socio-economic privileges and deprivation revolves. Rural Indian society is based on caste and landlord relations. In the words of Parry, the encompassing ideology of hierarchy permeates every sphere of social life and even the subordination of tenants to his landlords and of the subjects to his rules is expressed in the same symbolic language. Inequalities and domination are treated as the basis of social relationship. The lower castes as per their place in social hierarchy, are supposed to serve the dominant castes, and remain loyal.

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1 ibid
to them. Landed proprietors in India were largely, merely rentiers, who held landed property without ever being the manager of large-scale agricultural enterprises. Thus, land and caste in rural India closely resembles the notion of superiority and inferiority type of relationships. The higher and intermediate castes possess much of land with them and thus the higher castes still have dominant position in Indian rural social structure.

A key factor in the relation among the families and jatis of a village is the nature of the landownership. In his listing of the dominant castes in India, Baines classified them as a special kind of landholders. The families of the dominant jati-group control a good proportion of the village land. The ruling landowners tend to feel that they only are entitled to rule village and all others in it are only their dependents, because they control the principal means of production, the dominant families can dispossess other villagers of their livelihood.5

**Inequalities in Landholdings**

In the year 1955, for the period of July 1954-march 55 the Indian statistical institute had undertaken a national sample survey of landholdings. It summed up its report as follows.6 Forty-seven percent of

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5 Athelstane Baines, Ethnography (castes and tribal), Strasburg: Turner Verlag, 1912.
the households in rural India owned (no land or) less than one acre of land and their share of total land was only one percent. Seventy-four percent of households owned (no land or) less than five acres of land and had only seventeen percent of the total land area under ownership. Another thirteen percent of households owning between five and ten acres of land had nineteen percent of total land under their ownership. The remaining nineteen percent of total land are under their ownership. The remaining thirteen percent of households has ownership holding of size bigger than ten acres and among themselves sixty-four percent of total land owned. Five percent of households each of whose ownership holding size was more than twenty acres of land owned altogether forty two percent of total land. Furthermore, the share of two and half percent of households each owning over thirty acres of land amounted to twenty eight percent of total land or one- fourteenth of total households were owning much more than a quarter of total areas.
TABLE-2-(i)

OPERATIONAL HOLDINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of households</th>
<th>Possession</th>
<th>Percentage of total acres in their possession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Less than 1 acres</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Less than 5 acres</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.1/2</td>
<td>More than 10 acres</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1/2</td>
<td>Above 20 acres</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Above 25 acres</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: NSS, 8th round, table; 6.6

This gives us the picture of steep concentration of land. From the above picture, it is almost clear that the upper strata in the ladder own the major share in the surplus land. We will now examine and analyze how land, caste reflected power in India during pre independence and post independence period in India.

Neale says that the Indian view of family was political. The Indian who acquired political power almost inevitably acquired control of land, which was the main source of wealth or income. The ideal condition for an Indian interested in power was to be a leader of the dominant faction of the dominant caste in a village.7

7 Walter C. Neale(1979), Land is to Rule, in Frankenberg, R.E.(eds), Land control and social structure in Indian History. Manohar publications, New Delhi.
Zamindari System

When Britishers consolidated their hold in India, they started modifying the pattern of land distribution with the aim of maximizing their profit. They introduced zamindari system and the zamindaris were frequently sold by public auction to the highest bidder. The sole aim was to collect the largest amount of money in the shortest possible time. The aim of permanent settlement was to induce the moneyed men to invest capital in agriculture. The peasant was totally ignored and the hereditary occupancy right he had always enjoyed was annulled. The large numbers of peasants were reduced to the status of bonded labourers. The actual tillers of the land were deprived of all their traditional rights including the security of tenure.

Mahalwari System

William Bentick in Agra and Oudh introduced this system. It was later extended to Madhya Pradesh and Punjab. In this system, the whole village was treated, as a unit as far as payment of land revenue is concerned. The responsibility for collecting land revenue and depositing it in the treasury was of the village headman. The ownership of land under this system was collective.
**Ryotwari System**

Under this system, every registered landlord and the owners of the land was recognized as the proprietor of the land. The proprietor was the responsible for the payment of the land revenue directly to the state. The ryot had full rights regarding sale, transfer, and leasing of land and could not be evicted from the land as long as he paid the rent to the state. Under this system, the moneylenders started granting loans to poor farmers and small cultivators by mortgaging their lands. Soon substantial portion of land slipped out of cultivators’ hold and became the property of moneylenders. The latter started giving land for cultivation on lease and soon a new zamindar class started developing in the rural areas.

Under this system, there were no intermediaries between ryot and the state. The settlement of the land revenue under the ryotwari system was done on a temporary basis, but this system was also exploitative in character.

As stated above, the zamindari system was based on exploitation. It created a class of zamindars who did not do any work but snatched away whatever surplus above the minimum the cultivators produced. The poor cultivators were mostly the lower castes and some middle castes.
TABLE-2(ii)
COMPOSITION OF AGRARIAN SOCIETY IN INDIA, 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social composition</th>
<th>Population in millions</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total agricultural working population</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent receiver</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers cultivating more than 5 acres of which:</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner cultivators.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) tenants</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwarf- holding labourers of which:</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) petty proprietor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) share- croppers</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landless agricultural labourers of which :</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) bonded labourers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) underemployed labourers</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) full time free labourers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Surendra J. Patel, Agricultural labourers in modern India and Pakistan.

We can see from the table number 2(ii), that about 70 percent of the agricultural population was landless in 1931. They were mostly the people from the deprived castes and classes. They were at the helm of affairs at the village level. Most of the bounded labourers were product of the money—lending at the village level. The money—lenders were mostly
from landowners’ class, who were normally from the higher and dominant castes. It is this slavery, which has given a sort of stability in the Indian caste system. The scheduled castes or the depressed classes particularly in the south are the most victimized lot in this slavery system.\(^8\)

**TABLE-2(iii)**

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RURAL FAMILIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zones (as in 1951)</th>
<th>Agricultural families with land</th>
<th>Agricultural families without land</th>
<th>Labourer without land</th>
<th>Non-Agricultural families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North India</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East India</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South India</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West India</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central India</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-west India</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All India</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


From table number 2(iii), it can be deduced that approximately 30 percent of the rural population in India were agricultural labourers. The table also reveals that the agricultural population is broadly divided into peasants possessing land and agricultural labourers with or without

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\(^8\) Bhawani Sen, *Evolution of Agrarian Relations in India*, People’s publishing house, New Delhi, 1962.
land. They together constitute about 80 percent of the rural population of which 50 percent are peasants and 20 percent are agricultural labourers.

**TABLE-2(iv)**

**PROPORTION OF LANDLESS AND SEMI- LANDLESS HOUSEHOLDS IN RURAL AREA**

All India:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Estimated number of households (00)</td>
<td>116,4058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Estimated area owned (00 hectares)</td>
<td>117,3537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Estimated number of landless households (00)</td>
<td>13,0889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Estimated number of semi-landless households (00)</td>
<td>36,2643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Percentage of landless households</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Percentage of semi-landless households</td>
<td>31.2 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


From the table number 2(iv), it is amply clear that a large number of households are landless or semi landless. If we combine both approximately, 42.5 percent of the households in rural India are living in landlessness condition practically they are still dependent on their sale of labour. They are highly indebted in monetary terms to the landowning castes and classes.
From the above table, it is clear that the share of the bottom 60 percent of the operational holdings in the total operated area has progressively declined over the three decades. As against this, the shares of both the top 10 percent and 5 percent groups of holdings have grown, though at a low rate, during this period. It shows that the land holdings are highly unequal after overall land reforms. The distribution of old land in present day India is extremely concentrated with a small minority owning most of the land.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group of Operational Holding</th>
<th>Percentage Share of Operated Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>61-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom 30 %</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom 60 %</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom 10 %</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 5 %</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 17th, 26th and 37th rounds: NSS Report, No., 144, 215 and 331.
Before the abolition of intermediaries, ownership of land was generally vested in heterogeneous caste/classes of intermediaries and was very uneven and highly concentrated. As it is stated earlier that the real producers were the poor cultivators, but the intermediaries were the main profit takers from the produce of land. As a result, while the state acquired ownership, the zamindars also retained large areas, as evenly distributed as before. In addition, not many tenants acquired ownership rights by paying compensation; consequently, no significant change in the distribution of owned land took place after the abolition of zamindari system.

Now because of abolition of zamindari, deprived of land and prohibited from leasing out land, the old landlords and zamindars, took the way of direct cultivation of land, and lastly converted themselves into peasant proprietor or capitalist farmers, depending on the size of their holdings and their social and economic position. The zamindars after converting themselves gradually into entrepreneurial farmers have lost their earlier over lordship of farm labour. They now changed their mode and form of exploitation. They now seek to increase the productivity of the farm workers by employing more and better farm and capital equipments. It is also a well-known fact that the several benefits of community development projects have chiefly gone in the favour of large landholders.
Land, Caste and Power: Interdependent Variables

Before, the abolition of zamindari system the power structure of the villages was based on the landlordism. As the land became commodity and the means for capitalistic farming, its economic and political influence increased with time after the abolition of zamindari. Agriculture being the main economic enterprise of the villages, the nature of the rights in land represented the nature of the mastery of the economic expectation of different castes by a person or a group of person who held that right in rural India. Thus the landownership is a vital role to play in the power structure of the villages so much so that it itself and some times it also defined the role of the caste and community panchayats in the villages.  

Again Singh writes that the origin of the over lordship and feudal socio-economic social structure had taken roots long before the zaminari system was formally recognized by the British through revenue settlements. This over lordship of the upper castes and classes had taken place some four hundred years ago and most of these overlords were Rajputs, or the Muslims who were at the head of the rural society. The domination of these castes over the original tillers of soil both from the economic and from social point of view vested enormous power into their

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Yogendra Singh, the changing power structure of village community: A case study of six villages in Eastern U.P., in Desai AR (eds), Rural sociology in India, Manohar publications, 1959.
hands. The nature of the power, which the landlords wielded over the other groups in the village community, was primarily based on his judicial rights in land ownership.\textsuperscript{10}

The landlord had not only the economic and feudal power over their tenants but enjoyed the privilege of holding over all other castes into a subjugative feudatory relationship based on the economic and social reciprocation and obligation. Thus, Y. Singh writes that their economic status or the proprietary rights in the land were a fundamental source of power institution in the village.\textsuperscript{11} However, this relationship, which was the result of the economic power of the landlord, had given shape to a regular power structure in the villages. To the extent that caste and land control are closely connected, the material life chances of the landless in a predominantly agrarian economy would inevitably be controlled by the dominant castes. Thus, one's birth in a lower caste and landless class would be the major determinant for being at the receiving end of the relationship of exploitation.\textsuperscript{12}

Largely the landlords and the tenure holders belong to the upper castes, the majority of whom were Brahmins, bhumihars and rajputs.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} ibid
\textsuperscript{11} ibid
\textsuperscript{12} ibid
\textsuperscript{13} Manoshi Mitra, (1985), Agrarian Social Structure: continuity and change in Bihar, 1786-1820, Manohar publications, Delhi.
The upper layer of tenancy was largely drawn from the upper layer of Ahirs, Koiries and Kurmies and other backward castes and classes.

Land, caste and power tends to produce an agrarian situation-giving rise to a specific pattern in the rural society. Almost all rural studies in India suggest the trend of social inequalities related with caste and classes in the countryside and demonstrate the overlapping between the systems of the land distribution with that of the power among the people. All studies beyond any doubt prove the fact that rural power holders are dominant castes and upper castes in different regions in India, as they control disproportionately larger areas of land and are wealthier than the rest of the peasantry. Thus a small minority of people those who own land in countryside, dominates over the rest of the majority population.

The nexus between landlords and the lower caste landless people reflects a clear notion of subordination and super ordination. To understand this we have to analyze the notion of the landless and landlord dominant castes and class in historical perspective. In fact the history of land and those who lived on it was the history of the landlords and the exploitation of the landless. It is the landlord’s advantageous position at the top, which tends to enables them effectively exercise, control over the rural people.
In the power dimensions, the ex-zamindars and neo-elites dominate the village community in general. The landlords not only are economically better, but also hold high social and political status. On the other hand, the landless agricultural labourers are not only living under utter economic poverty, but they are socially outcastes, untouchables and unclean. They have to live under the great physical, emotional and social torture of the landlords. Coercive power of the landlords is the common mode of dominance.

In general, the ownership and control of land constitute the immediate source of economic power and since the land had been unequally distributed, the landlords have not only the higher incomes than the landless, but the traditional ties of dominance and dependence enables the former to control the lives of the latter in multitudes of ways. The relations of tenants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers with the landlords, continue to be governed by the traditional marks of deference.

Social distance is also one of the significant dimensions of inequalities in agrarian structure, as landowners and landless generally belongs to higher and lower castes respectively. According to Andre Betellie, one important feature of traditional hierarchy based on land-ownership was the inverse relationship of landlords with the performance of the labour. Large land holders (Brahmins, rajputs), could afford to
abstain from manual labour. Labour itself was elaborately graded and the more onerous form of it such as digging, hoeing and carrying are still related with the lowest strata among the landless such as chamars, Berwa, Koli and Seharia etc.\textsuperscript{14} K.L. Sharma writes that the hierarchies of caste, class and power coincide to a great extent in the village power structure. By and large, the sharecroppers and the agricultural labourers continue to be at the bottom of the power hierarchy.\textsuperscript{15} We can say that agrarian social structure prevailing in India is conditioned by property structure on land.

According to Bailey, when the British came to India, the rich landowning castes who were politically and economically powerful were the warrior castes. The wealth and land of this caste came with the conquest of Bisipara, and the conquest immediately became economic affluence. Conversely, under British rule, the new opportunities to earn a money income provided increasing wealth for persons who were not members of the warrior castes, but while wealth could be earned and turned into landholding, wealth and landholdings were not so easily turned into political power.\textsuperscript{16} Even after century of British rule, the non-warrior castes in the village were still unable to acquire the necessary ritual prestige to displace the warriors as the politically dominant castes.

\textsuperscript{14} Andre Betelie (1983), Studies in Agrarian Social Structure, Oxford University Press, Delhi.
\textsuperscript{16} F.G. Bailey (1957), caste and Economic frontiers, Manchester.
The historic relationship between wealth and political power were all parts of the Indians perceptions of land and its meaning.\textsuperscript{17} In India, since beginning the landowning castes who were normally from the higher castes and from some intermediaries castes were the main leaders of those respective villages. They controlled most of the village and caste affairs of those respective villages.

Under the British rule a new class of landowning castes emerged who controlled almost every political affair of the region. With the emergence of this new class of landlords, the small cultivators and smaller intermediaries became economically and politically less significant. Many cultivators lost their hereditary rights to cultivate particular land and tenants at will increased. In addition, artisans, like weavers, potters, blacksmiths and carpenters, who supplied limited non-agricultural products needed in the village community were ruined and improvised because of the increased supply of British manufactured goods. Village servants such as water carriers, chamars, barbers, priests lost their clientele. All these supposedly linked changes are assumed to have turned the village community into a headless, disorganized body with most of the population poor, degraded and helpless.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item ibid
\item Bernard S Cohen, Structural changes in Indian Rural society (1526-1885), in Frankenberg, R.E.(eds), Land control and Social structure in Indian History, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1979.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
As land became salable, with the sale of their property, the legal position of the traditional zamindars changed; but in many cases economic, social and political positions of the traditional zamindars changed; but in many cases their economic, social and political positions within their villages and taluks was little affected, particularly from the perspective of those inside the village or taluks. It did not bother those landless workers, cultivators, whether the rajputs, those who dominated previously were their legal ruler or not.\textsuperscript{19} Therefore, we can see, land acquisition in rural India is visible in terms of caste and class.

India got independence in 1947 and subsequently tried to adopt the socialistic path of development. However, when it comes to the analysis of land reform, we do not see a true sense of socialistic pattern. We will discuss the issue of land reforms and will subsequently try to analyze the situation of land relations in rural India in general after the implementation of land reforms and various issues of land reforms.

Landholders keep an influential place in political and economic arena of Indian rural society. In economic terms, land reforms aim at not only greater equity and social justice but also at providing an incentive to the owners and tillers for increasing agricultural efficiency, leading to increased productivity. The upper castes and upper class landholders in agrarian structure always oppose the agrarian reforms. In 1979, the then

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
The Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi said, "land reform is the most
important and crucial test which our political system must pass in order
to survive." Article 39 of the constitution of India, specially directs the
states to distribute ownership and control of material resources of the
community for the common good of society. Thus, agrarian reforms are
contemplated under the directive principles. Independent India took land
reforms in the areas of:

- Abolition of intermediary tenures
- Tenancy right
- Fixation of ceiling of landholding
- Consolidation of holdings

Approximately 57% area of the country was under the Zamindari system on the eve of the independence. The process of initiating,
debating, amending, and finally passing the bill for Zamindari abolition
mostly took a very long time. The legal battle between the Zamindari and
the state government took an unduly long time. In the laws of Zamindari
abolition, there were several loopholes, which ultimately benefited the
landholders. Though officially it is claimed that Zamindari system is
completely abolished, yet the fact is that it has only changed its colour.
The previous Zamindars are now designated as big landholders, and
along with the rich peasantry, have formed a new and dominant class of
rural farmers and peasants. As a result of abolition of Zamindari and in
view of the proposed tenancy reforms, many intermediaries have now become owners-cultivators. These earst-while intermediaries who have evicted many of their small tenants and are now medium cultivators who have better holding power than small farmers who have been evicted.\textsuperscript{20}

The rights of resumption granted to the landholders not only deprive many tillers of the benefits of land reforms; they have also become victims of evictions. The zamindari abolition acts have not benefited the landless as such because the landlords evict the tenants and declare that the land in question is self-cultivated. Rich peasant and big landlords take advantage of the loopholes of the law to protect and preserve their land. Both these sections have strengthened their position by using the provision of land laws against the poor peasants. Protections granted to the unprotected tillers have thus become its opposite.\textsuperscript{21}

In this regards the observation of the panel on land reforms, of planning commission is remarkable. It observes, “The landlord class includes moneylenders and tradesmen upon whom the tenants have frequently depended for credit and other necessities of life. Socially, the tenants belong to the scheduled castes and backward classes and are

\textsuperscript{20} Report of food grain Enquiry committee(Ashok Mehta committee)
\textsuperscript{21} Bhowani Sen, Evolution of Agrarian relations in India, peoples publishing house, New Delhi, 1962
afraid of exercising their rights against the higher castes and classes. If the tenancy laws are top, be effective, it is necessary that they should be very simple and behind them, there must be an administrative support to counter acts and effects of the social and economic weaknesses of tenants. On the contrary, in many states, there are no administrative machinery within easy reach of tenants and in case of conflicting evidence, there is a greater tendency to believe the landlord than tenants, the presumption being that a poor man is more likely to speak untruth with a view to obtain some land than the rich landlords who having already enough land, may not be under immediate pressure to do so”.

So long, with the abolition of intermediaries, certain amendments to the existing tenancy laws were made to protect the interest of the tenants of former intermediaries. However, this process of tenancy protection resulted in the rise of a contradictory social process, namely that of mass eviction of tenants, sub tenants and sharecroppers through various legal and extra legal means. The landlord in this work resorted to coercion, intimidation, violence and the facade of “voluntary surrenders” to achieve displacement of tenants. Thus, the so-called first phase of land reforms adversely affected the interests of the weaker sections of tenants, who formed very large sections of tenants. It is a fact that if

\[\text{Planning commission panel report.}\]
institutional arrangements are not reformed, the gains of improved productivity are likely to be distributed unevenly.

In India, the new agricultural strategies mostly benefit the big farmers and disparity has risen to the rate of technological reforms. Therefore, we can see the problems of land reforms along with the socio-political considerations. The green revolution has widened the gap between landlords and tenants, between the government and the governed. The big farmers have not been increasing but multiplying their incomes, in some instances by as much as six times, the situation of many small farmers is essentially unchanged.\(^{23}\)

In India, structural arrangements in agriculture have not been changed and consequently the norms of distributonal justice are not realized properly. The so-called green revolution has been followed with frustration and mounting tensions on the system of agrarian relations. Politicians further misuse this social tension, Frankel, while considering the economic gains and political costs of India's green revolution has come to observe that rural stability has been endangered due to tense relationship among the landowners and sharecroppers and landless labourers.\(^{24}\) To quote Frankel, "The potential impact on rural stability is all the more serious because the radical parties openly proclaim their

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intentions of transforming social tensions into political conflict between
the minority of prosperous landowners and the landless labourers.25

The big farmers belonging to the upper castes and classes are mostly of the “parasitic type” and bear the traits of feudality. Working on agricultural farm is supposed still by the sophisticated segments to be a non-prestigious work. The caste, land and power, thus is being intertwined in rural India. After land reforms, the allotment of land to backward communities leads to several atrocities on deprived and landless castes by the powerful among the rural oligarchy. The strong dominance and organized resistance accounts for poor performance of land reforms and land distribution in several states. Until the end of March 1995, only 2.06 million hectare of government wasteland has been officially transferred from the ex land lords which constitute less than 4.6 percent of the total arable land of India.26

At the all India level percentage share of scheduled tribes and scheduled castes and other households in total for 1982-1992 were found to be 9.75, 19.71 and 70.54 against their share in the total area owned being 10.10 percent, 7.89 percent and 82.01 percent respectively. Obviously, average size of household ownership was highest for other households and lowest for the scheduled caste households. For the

25 F. Frankel India's green revolution; Economic gains and political costs, oxford university press, Bombay.
26 Ibid.
country as a whole, absolute landlessness was highest (17.12 percent) for the scheduled tribes and the lowest (7.65 percent) for the other households. In respect of near-landlessness, however the position of scheduled caste was worst with 57.5 percent households having ultra marginal ownership holdings.\textsuperscript{27}

Denial Thorner has given description of the social conditions of deprived castes in India in the following passage.\textsuperscript{28}

"The kisans are drawn primarily from cultivating or artisan castes; the mazdoors lag primarily from harijans, scheduled, deprived and depressed or backward classes. Certain types of works locally considered degrading, such as ploughing in eastern U.P., are reserved for lowly servitors. The rare chamars, mahar, Panchama or other untouchables who prospers economically and attempts to secure a foothold for his family by buying land may find insurmountable obstacles in the way of the purchase. For he is up against the deeply entrenched tradition of rural inequality- a tradition which goes back to centuries if not millennia. To a considerable extent, the belief that low castes are born to labour with their hands, and high castes to enjoy the fruits of other's labour is accepted by the former as well as the latter. The separation between proprietorship and physical

\textsuperscript{27} Alice Jacob, Land Reform and rural change, IASSI, Institute of applied manpower research, New Delhi.

\textsuperscript{28} Thorner Daniel, The Agrarian Prospects in India. Delhi School Of Economics, Delhi, 1956
The existence of caste and casteism is an important element, which keeps the standard of living of agricultural workers at a level more depressed than other rural families. This low level living on their part preserves the integrity of the caste structure in Indian rural society. Under the impact of industrial development, this caste structure becomes undermined, but to the extent agriculture remains sunk in the old feudal mud. Thus, the disintegration of the caste structure is prevented. This is one of the reasons why parasitic elements are able to retain landownership.29

The power system of the agrarian set up is changing gradually. The power of the big landowners has been progressively curbed over the last several decades. Previously most of the villagers looked up to landlords for their livelihood and for help and guidance on a variety of matters. In addition to farmers, the artisans and servicing castes dependent largely on the patronage of the landlords and on big farmers.

In Haryana and Utter Pradesh, the kulaks have made a determined bid for political power. They have partially succeeded and till recently were on political control of the state. In Bihar, because of the influence of the neighboring state of Utter Pradesh (where the jats of the upper castes

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29 Bhowani Sen, op.cit.
Hindus set the middle castes- Hindus are the main constituents of the kulak formation), the caste –class continuum helps the middle castes to wield political power at the state level even when the capitalist transformations of agriculture is at a low key. That is why in Bihar, it is the feudalized upper stratum of the middle castes, rather than kulaks, who dominate the scene. The landless are generally drawn from the lower middle castes and scheduled castes who are also the main constituent of the poor peasantry.30

Since the lower castes were most often not among the big landholder, land reforms generally did not affect their own pattern of interactions, but a sizable chunk of land was snatched by the state from upper caste landholders. This is enough to cause changes in the established patterns of rural relationships which were largely, dominated by the caste factors. Nevertheless, more than anything it is an established fact that land is no more an exclusive property in the hands of the upper castes.

According to the annual report 1994-1995 of ministry of rural development, so far under the old and revised land ceiling laws, 2.66 million hectares of land had been distributed until 31 marches 1995, which is less than 1.5 percent of the total agricultural land. Out of the

30 Pradhan Prasad H., Land Reforms and Rural Change, IASSI, Institute of Applied Manpower Research, New Delhi.
total 4.949 million recipients of the said land, at least 5 percent had not reportedly received the physical possession of the allotted land. Moreover, most of such allotted land was of poor quality and only less than ½ million beneficiaries were able to receive less than 0.3 hectares of land and hence such holdings could not provide economic sustenance to the concerned farm households. Therefore, we can say that despite all legislative efforts, the ultimate shift of agricultural land to tillers was quite insignificant.

Thus, while at the bottom about 3/4th of all rural households own less than 1/6th of the total area owned. On the top, one/fourth all rural households holds 83.68 percent of the total area in size groups above 5 acres. Thus, ownership of land has remained highly concentrated despite the abolition of intermediaries.31 Before the abolition of intermediaries, ownership of land was generally vested in a heterogeneous class of intermediaries and was very uneven and highly concentrated.

Land reform laws ostensibly passed for the benefits of the underprivileged have not altered India's village structure. The small minority of oligarchs has had wit of resources enough to get around the laws in which, in any event, the loopholes were so large as to give them ample maneuvering ground. By passing themselves off, whether legally or

31 That the abolition of intermediaries did not make much difference in the concentration of own land is amply revealed in a study of land reforms in Utter Pradesh, by Professor Baljit Singh and Dr. Sridhar Mishra.
illegally, as tillers and cultivators, the village oligarchs have gone on running India's rural life. The un-interrupted presence in power means that the force of the depressor continues to operate strongly in the countryside.\textsuperscript{32}

In post-independence period, the surplus generating peasant castes and classes have consolidated their dominant social status in the rural society and in the process have emerged as a powerful independent factor in the Indian politics.\textsuperscript{33} Caste affiliations and common interests provided the binding force behind the realignment of middle peasants broadly tended to coincide with that of big landlords in the post green revolution period.

In the 'semi-feudal democracy' the landlords and local magnates continued to usurp the monopoly of violence and control local resources including land, labour and credit as well as government funds spent locally, use of administrative and police powers and often private armies. It was noted that these simply resembled as an extension of traditional power exercised through caste-domination against subordinate castes. The rural scene has been riddled with injustice, lawlessness and a great deal of violence-introduced from above. The poor peasant generally found the authorities in their own locality against the law and on the side of the

\textsuperscript{32} Danial Thomer, Land Reforms in Desai A.R.(eds), Rural Sociology in India, Indian Society of Agricultural Economics, New Delhi.
\textsuperscript{33} C.P. Bhambri (1996), March to capitalist farmers, Hindustan Times, August 25, New Delhi.
economic power holders. Law and order machinery went further in harassing them at the instance of landlords by framing false cases and fake accusations. Even the judiciary has not been free from the criticism in the cases of peasant agitation and particularly unhelpful in land reforms cases (GOI, April 1990). As a reciprocal effect, the dominated sections of the agrarian communities got organized too often in the name of caste community solidarity. It is argued that even when caste taboos and community exclusiveness broke down at the level of individual social behaviour they were able to restart themselves at the political level.34

The agrarian violence is rooted in the actual social and economic disparities in the rural India. There is a consensus that widespread rural poverty is the major cause of growing rural unrest. Rural poverty has been high and remained unabated around 50 percent for decades. Decades of development planning could not make any substantial dent on poverty/unemployment situation.35

Land hunger has often been cited as major cause for agrarian unrest. The implementation of land reforms has been tardy. The ceiling imposed by the states were high, the exemption too many which ultimately defeated the main purpose of the legislation. The total

34 Amiya Kumar Bagchi, (1993). Rent seeking new political economy and negation politics, Economic and political weekly Volume 27, Number 34, August 21.
35 C. Chandmohan (1998), Political economy of agrarian conflicts in India, Economic and Political weekly, October 10.
declared surplus has been 2 percent of the cultivated areas and the areas actually distributed accounted for 60 percent of the declared surplus and the rest being held up due to litigation. The halfhearted distributive policy could do very little to reduce the iniquitous distribution of the basic assets in the rural areas. It has been observed that the class mobilization is congruence between class and other social solidarities.\textsuperscript{36}

Over the years caste based politics has been meticulously cultivated and interwoven in Indian democratic process right from the panchayat to the parliament. Caste identity and loyalty is an important reference point of rural society and caste-based politics is a normal activity of peasant leaders and parties.\textsuperscript{37}

Present agricultural structure despite formal acceptance and land reforms laws during the 1950s shows uneven and skewed pattern of land-ownership. On the one hand, monopolistic concentration of land has not been checked and on the other hand, the number of landless classes has been progressively increasing. Income differentials are not checked from growing further because the macro phasing of the government policy and plans is completed mainly with production-increasing considerations. Instead of socialistic patterns of society or

\textsuperscript{36} ibid
\textsuperscript{37} Bhambari, op. cit.
class less society, India’s dualistic social system is more apparent with developing affluent society and the deteriorating weaker sections.

We can conclude by saying that the land, caste and power are closely linked with each other in rural India. Despite several land reform measures, the land is concentrated in a few upper and wealthy castes and classes. The zamindari system and the dominance of the upper castes were the main determinants of the Indian rural power structure. The ownership of land created a special kind of relationship between the landlord and the landless. This relationship also gave rise to a new network of relationship with other castes which affect in several ways the inter and intra-caste ties. Those castes, which controlled land, were at the top of the power hierarchy. The agrarian violence is the result of the unequal distribution of land in the rural areas to a great extent. The land beyond any doubt is concentrated in a few hand and the land reforms measures are not adequate. The possession of large chunk of land has not only the economic connotations but it has the socio-psychological connotations too.