

Land, Labour and Dalits in Independent India

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This paper attempts to examine the changes in the occupational distribution of workforce and their impact on economic development with special reference to Dalits (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) agricultural workers at the national level in the post-independence period in the context of agrarian reform and agricultural growth. It also explores the linkages between incidence of poverty and extent of dependence on agriculture as landless labourers among the Dalits. The paper is divided into three parts. While the first part deals with the analysis of land, labour and poverty with special reference to Dalits at the macro level, second part presents some micro studies to understand the process of change in rural India. Third part summarises the paper and draws some conclusions.

I Analysis of Land, Labour and Poverty

Agriculture and Dalits

Dalits comprise of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. As per 1991 Census, SCs and STs constitute 16.40 per cent and 18.72 per cent of the total population (excluding Jammu and Kashmir) at all India level. Only 18.72 per cent of SC and 7.39 per cent of ST population live in urban areas as against 25.75 per cent of general population. That is, more than 81 per cent of SC population and about 93 per cent of ST population live in rural areas as against 74 per cent of general population.

The work participation rate of SCs (defined as the percentage of SC population participating in the work to their total population) is 39.25 per cent and that of STs is 49.3 per cent as against 37.46 per cent among general population in 1991. The better participation among SCs and STs is due to higher participation rate among SC and ST women (25.98 per cent and 43.71 per cent respectively) as against 22.25 per cent for the total women population of the country. The female work participation among SCs and STs are much higher in A.P. (46.7 per cent and 50.75 per cent) than at all India level. It is also to be noted that as per 1991 Census, 77 per cent of SC and 90 per cent of ST main workers depend on primary sector as against only 67 per cent that of general population. While the proportion of agricultural labourers among SCs and STs comes to about 49 per cent and 33 per cent of their main workers respectively, it is only 26 per cent in case to the general population (Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 1993, pp.1-10).

In view of the dependence of SCs and STs on agriculture, the analysis of the changes in agrarian structure and relations, in the context of agricultural reforms and growth may reveal in more detail the land and labour situation of Dalits. It could be seen from Table 1 that SC households constituting nearly 20 per cent of total rural households control only about 8 per cent of the total area owned, while other households with 70 per cent of total rural households control 82 per cent of area owned in 1982. By 1992 the SC rural households increased to more than 21 per cent and their share in land also increased to 10 per cent. On the other hand, the proportion of other households declined to 67 per

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