



Agrarian reforms in India: Historical and theoretical perspectives

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Abstract

The article is concerned with reanalysing the concept of agrarian reforms in India. The priority of this article is to examine the political and sociological narratives that have shaped agrarian policies in India. From historical aristocracies to contemporary democratic systems, political actors have designed agrarian policies in the light of societal pressures which highlights societal impacts of agrarian policies. The research arrives to a conclusion that agrarian reforms have always been the centre of political and sociological discourse in India. With that agrarian reforms have always been considered an important agent for enhancing the social status of agricultural community. By understanding how the political and sociological discourses interacted historically, the research will navigate the complexities of agrarian policy making in the present and future.

Keywords: Agrarian reforms, policy making, political narratives, sociological, perspectives

Introduction

As a concept agrarian reform is described as re-formation of agricultural structures, services, infrastructure, redistribution of land and above all the amendment of the whole agricultural system [1]. It is not only concerned with land reforms, which are restricted to land only. According to the sociological perspective, agrarian reforms are perceived as the class character of relation of production, consumption and distribution and how these connect the class structure of the society [2]. In other words, agrarian reforms include changes in political, economic and sociological structure of agriculture. Thus, agrarian reforms are not only limited to agricultural activities but also involves a wide ambit of structures associated with it from society to science [3]. The idea of agrarian reforms finds its roots in rational societies, which itself is the cradle of perspectives like inclusivity, poverty reduction, cultural identity, equitable land distribution, food security and poverty reduction [4]. Therefore, the problems of agriculture are not just the concern of agrarian class but it is also a social nuance, which have a negative impact not only for farmers but also for social and economic surroundings of the whole country [5]. Hence, agricultural challenges also form the central concerns of a state. It leads to poverty, inequality, hunger, farmer suicide, degradation in industrial raw material, unemployment and much more.

Agrarian Reforms as an International Society Perspective

Since, agrarian distress is prevalent around the world and with rising global population the demand for food has also risen but the land under agriculture is declining which is pushing the states for revisiting their agrarian policies and aligning them with societal demand for inclusivity, sufficiency and sustainability in agriculture. However, the hardships in agriculture vary for different states, they are lower in one part to that of other. The foremost necessity for the existence of human civilization is food and to meet up this requirement production of food grain becomes the utmost priority [6]. Since, land being a scarce resource and

soil having its own limitations periodic upscaling in agriculture is required which makes agrarian reforms inevitable [7]. But for reforms to take place we need collective contribution from the society, which itself is limited to a specific area. Thus, to bring reform in agriculture at a wide scale we need a sovereign entity as society is an itself divided entity. Therefore, here comes the role of the state which itself is run by political actors who are the part of society itself.

Agriculture being the backbone of any economy is the source of livelihood for more than 50% of Indian population which makes agriculture indispensable part of Indian society and Indian politics both [8]. Understanding the sociological and political discourses associated with agriculture also provides skill in developing robust policies for agriculture.

Impact of Agriculture on Indian Society

The political impact of agriculture on Indian society is intricately tied to caste dynamics. Historically, agrarian structures have played a significant role in shaping caste relations and power dynamics in rural areas. Land ownership, a key aspect of agriculture, has often been associated with caste, influencing social hierarchies and political representation. Land reforms aimed at addressing historical inequities have sought to mitigate caste-based disparities in landownership. However, the intersection of agriculture and caste continues to influence political mobilization, with caste-based farmer movements advocating for the rights of specific communities. Political parties, recognizing the social significance of agriculture, strategically align themselves with caste-based considerations to secure support in rural constituencies. Thus, the political landscape reflects a complex interplay between agricultural policies, landownership patterns, and caste dynamics, shaping the trajectory of political discourse and representation in India.

Beyond caste, various actors in Indian society contribute to and are influenced by the political ramifications of agriculture. One crucial element is the role of women in agricultural communities. Women, who often form a

substantial part of the agricultural workforce, face specific challenges related to land ownership, access to resources, and socio-economic empowerment. Agricultural policies and political decisions have the potential to either address or perpetuate gender disparities within the farming sector. Additionally, environmental considerations come into play, with the impact of agricultural practices on natural resources influencing political discourse around sustainable farming, climate change policies, and ecological conservation. Industrial and urban interests, reflecting the broader economic landscape, also engage with agricultural policies, affecting the allocation of resources and land-use patterns. Furthermore, the nexus between agriculture and education influences the aspirations and opportunities of the younger generation in rural areas, shaping their engagement in both agricultural practices and political processes

Evolution of Agrarian Reforms in India

Indian agriculture traces its roots from Neolithic age, that dates back to 10000 BCE, when the first evidence of agriculture was found from Mehargarh (undivided India, now Pakistan) from where the evidence of rice cultivation was found^[9]. The archaeological evidences show that, agriculture first started from north & west and then later on expanded too south and east. Excavations in the Indus valley civilization sites have put light on the fact that the people of that time made granaries for storing grains, bandhs on river to stop and divert the flow of water for irrigation^[10]. Then the evidence of agrarian practices of substance level was found from chalcolithic sites in the Deccan plateau and the modern states of Bihar and Odisha, where the ash mound tradition flourished which included the practise of burning cattle dung and mixing it with other things which acted as natural manure for the soil^[11].

Then during the period of mighty Mauryan Empire, a series of reforms were carried out by the Mauryas, which included, construction of dams, soil categorization, meteorological observations. After the Mauryas, the Gupta's made significant contributions in agriculture, as during this period the practise of irrigation became widespread leading to enhancement in the quantity of grains. Further came the golden period of agriculture, with the arrival of mediaeval era. This period witnessed the building of canal system for the development of irrigation, impetus was given to agricultural and land development, administrative cadres were developed for the collection of land revenue and maintenance of land^[12]. After this, in the modern era came the British, who were hardly bothered about improving agrarian structure, there main goal was to exploit agriculture in India for raw material, which was the main fuel for Industrial Revolution in Britain. The British left India in a very pity condition with stagnated land holdings and overburdened agriculture, thus the main goal of the Indian policymakers after independence was to upgrade the structure of agriculture. The first step in this direction were the land reform acts brought out by various states (land is a state subject under schedule VII of the constitution), which were formulated with the main goal of equitable land distribution, eradication of poverty, land ceilings & land for the tiller. Various governments from Nehru to Modi brought out various reforms ranging from banking to technology to improve the condition of agriculture^[13].

Outcome of Agrarian Reforms in India

The agricultural reforms in India have sparked significant changes within the country, particularly from a political perspective. The introduction of new agricultural laws has ignited debates and political discourse, reflecting divergent opinions on their implications^[14]. Supporters argue that these reforms aim to modernize the sector, enhance farmers' income, and attract private investment. However, critics express concerns about potential exploitation by corporate entities and the erosion of traditional support mechanisms for farmers^[15]. The political landscape is witnessing a dynamic interplay of interests as different parties align themselves either in support or opposition to these reforms^[16]. The outcome of this political manoeuvring will inevitably shape the trajectory of Indian agriculture and have lasting repercussions on the socio-political fabric of the nation.

In conclusion, the impact of agricultural reforms in India extends far beyond the fields, permeating the political landscape and influencing the social fabric. The divergent perspectives on these reforms have led to a dynamic and often contentious political discourse. As the nation navigates through this transformation, it becomes evident that the outcomes will not only reshape the agricultural sector but also leave a lasting imprint on the broader political and societal dynamics of India. The interplay of interests and the decisions made in the aftermath of these reforms will define the future trajectory of the country.

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