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OPERATIONAL HOLDINGS OF LAND AMONG SCHEDULED TRIBES: TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Inequality in land holdings due to socio-economic disparities curtails economic independence of the under privileged groups like Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Lack of knowledge about land ownership rights among STs has mainly led to their economic subjugation. Over the years, operational holdings of STs has improved and in fact their average size of holdings is better than all social groups but then the before mentioned statement cannot be generalized for all the states in India. In this backdrop, the paper makes an attempt to study state wise trends and patterns of land holdings among the STs with the help of Agriculture Census report on operational holdings. The study finds out that there exist inter-state variations and not only that it highlights negative trend in the case of 'medium' and 'large' size land holdings for the targeted group. The paper also examines household ownership of landholdings for STs, most importantly to understand landless ST households in the rural areas by using NSS report on 'Household ownership and operational holdings in India'. It is startling to find that the percentage distribution of landless ST households is higher than other social groups. To an extent, the study throws light on gender wise distribution of operational holdings for STs exclusively. There is still scope for land redistribution in spite of enacting laws like Forest Rights Act (FRA) and the biggest challenge is to bring down the incidence of land alienation among tribal farmers as it will enhance their accessibility to institutional credit which will eventually strengthen tribal's livelihood.

Keywords: land, operational, holdings, STs, gender, social groups

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Introduction

About 70 per cent of the rural households in India are primarily dependent on agriculture for their livelihood but at the same time, number of landless agricultural labourers increased to 14.43 crore in 2011 from 10.67 crore in 2001 (Census, 2011). Ownership of land formed the basis of two distinct categories in India, those who own and those who do not own any significant amount of land namely 'landless' (Jagadeesh and Amara, 2014). Land inequality ceases to be a source of policy disparities and income gaps (Adamopoulos, 2008) and leads to low agricultural productivity, low growth, high rates of poverty, and oppressive social relations (Faguet *et al*., 2016). And, above all it curtails economic independence of the landless and leads to concentration of political power (Cinnirella and Hornung, 2016). Inequality in land holdings is not a new phenomenon for India and even after the implementation of land reforms policy, it continues from 20th to 21st century (Ray, 2014). It may be said that major portion of landless agricultural labourers belongs to under privileged groups like Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) due to the prevalence of inherent socio-economic disparities (Mungekar, 1999; Thorat, 2002). Despite the fact land is the only resource for tribal people (Prabhakar, 1989) percentage of tribal cultivators declined by more than 10 per cent in 2011 when compared with 2001 census data whereas percentage of ST agricultural labourers increased by about 9 per cent (Statistical profile of scheduled tribes in India, 2013). Therefore, this study aims to focus on the state wise trends and patterns of land holdings among the STs with the help of Agriculture Census report on operational holdings. The paper also examines household ownership of landholdings for STs, most importantly to understand landless ST households in the rural areas by using NSS report on 'Household ownership and operational holdings in India'. And, to an extent, the study throws light on gender wise distribution of operational holdings for STs exclusively.

Landlessness and land holdings among Scheduled Tribes

Nationwide Survey on Land and Livestock holdings conducted by National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO 70th round) in 2013 provides information on household ownership and operational holdings for the rural areas of the country. The survey covered equal number of sample villages of about 4529 (First Stage Units) and the Second Stage Units (SSU) were the households (randomly selected) numbering about

70,941. It collected information on whether the household operated any land for agricultural activities during the last 365 days. The report highlights that 7.41 percent of rural households were landless owning either no land or less than 0.002 hectares. Among the social groups, landless households are higher among STs (9.41 %) and landlessness is lowest among the OBCs (6.98 %). This warrants a study on operational holdings of land among STs. In Table – 1, percentage distribution of households by size of land holdings for each social category (SC / ST / OBC / Others / All Social Groups) is presented. Across all the household social groups, highest proportion of households belonged to the 'marginal' land holding size and lowest proportion of households belonged to 'large' land holding size. It is interesting to note that the proportion of households in 'small' land holding size was higher among STs (14.64 %) than the remaining social groups. As regards 'semi-medium' land holding size, ST households (5.74 %) come second best to 'Others' (7.18 %). However, the proportion of households in 'large' land holding size was lowest among SC/ST households (0.03 %). But the ratio differed between ST (68.83 %) and SCs (85.70 %) by about 17 percentage points in case of 'marginal' land holding size. It is also seen that the proportion of households in 'small' and 'semi-medium' was higher among STs (more than 20 %) highlighting the fact that its distribution pattern is far from same across social groups.

Table – 1

Percentage distribution of households by size of land holdings across social groups

Size of Land Holding (in ha.)	ST	SC	OBC	Others	All Social Groups
Landless (<= 0.002)	9.41	7.18	6.98	7.40	7.41
[illegible]	68.83	85.70	75.25	70.22	75.42
Small (1.000 – 2.000)	14.64	4.77	10.43	11.31	10.00
Semi-medium (2.000 – 4.000)	5.74	1.84	5.12	7.18	5.01
Medium (4.000 – 10.000)	1.36	0.48	1.99	3.34	1.93
Large (> 10.000)	0.03	0.03	0.23	0.55	0.24
All Size Classes	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Source: NSS report on Household ownership and operational holdings in India, 2013

Distribution of land owned in rural India by different social groups is shown in Table – 2. As seen from the corresponding table, percentage of estimated households was lowest for STs (11.89 %) but in terms of estimated total area of land owned, ST households are better off than SCs. The highest percentage share of land was owned by OBCs (45.68 %) followed by 'Others' (32.03 %) and STs (13.06 %) and lowest for SCs (9.23 %). As far as average area owned per household is concerned, highest recorded for 'Others' (0.816 ha) and again lowest for SCs (0.272 ha) whereas ST households average (0.650 ha) is second only to 'Others' by bettering OBCs (0.603 ha) distribution pattern of land ownership. This particular fact necessitates a study on average size of holdings of STs in comparison with remaining social groups.

Table – 2
Distribution of land owned per household by social group

Indicators	ST	SC	OBC	Others	All Social Groups
Percentage of households	11.89	20.06	44.82	23.23	100.00
Estimated total area of land owned (mha)	12.06	8.52	42.19	29.58	92.36
Percentage area of land owned	13.06	9.23	45.68	32.03	100.00
Average area (ha) owned per household	0.650	0.272	0.603	0.816	0.592

Source: NSS report on Household ownership and operational holdings in India, 2013

Table – 3 provides average size of holdings across social groups at all India level for the period 1980 – 81 to 2010 – 11. As per Agriculture Census, 2001 – 11, average size of holdings for STs is the highest (1.52 ha) across social groups and not only that the same pattern can be observed in all other previous agriculture census reports. However, average size of operational holdings has declined during the study period and this trend is not only seen in STs; but also in the remaining social groups. In this backdrop, the paper makes an attempt to study state wise trends and patterns of land holdings among the STs with the help of Agriculture Census report on operational holdings.

Table – 3
Average size of holdings across social groups

Agriculture Census	ST	SC	All Social Groups
1980 – 1981	2.44	1.15	1.84
1985 – 1986	2.25	1.05	1.69
1990 – 1991	2.07	0.98	1.55
1995 – 1996	1.84	0.91	1.41
2000 – 2001*	1.76	0.86	1.33
2005 – 2006*	1.64	0.83	1.23
2010 – 2011	1.52	0.80	1.15

*Source: Compiled from Agricultural Census 2010-11; * excluding Jharkhand*

State wise trends and patterns of land holdings among Scheduled Tribes

The following section deals with state-wise number and area of operational holdings for Scheduled Tribes (Table – 4) with the help of Agricultural Census Report, 2010 – 11. The table also reveals state-wise percentage variation of the two parameters under study for the period 2005 – 06 to 2010 – 11. It may be noted here that the percentage variation is based on absolute figures. At all India level, the percentage increase in 2010-11 over 2005-06 for number of operational holdings revealed an increase of around 16 % whereas for area of operational holdings, the percentage increase was seen to above 8 %. On comparison with 2005-06 it is seen that during 2010-11 states like Jammu & Kashmir, Maharashtra and Uttarakhand are showing decline in percentage for operational holdings (number) as against their national trend. It is also seen that except for Chhattisgarh, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Lakshadweep, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhand, the percentage variation of area operated for all other states has risen steadily. Percentage increase in number of operational holdings was highest in Uttar Pradesh (27.58 %) followed by Himachal Pradesh (25.01 %) and Sikkim (20.95 %). For all other states, percentage increase not only lower than overall rate of change (16 %) but also there exist a big difference in percentage points between top three states and the remaining states which reveals inter- state variation. The same kind of conclusion can be drawn for area operated with Goa recording maximum percentage increase (78.55 %) whereas 12 States/UTs showing declining trend.

Table – 4

State-wise Number and Area of Operational holdings for Scheduled Tribes

Sl. No.	STATES/UTs	2005-06		2010-11		% Variation	
		Number	Area	Number	Area	Number	Area
.	A&N Islands	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	Andhra Pradesh	927	1212	1059	1248	14.32	2.98
3	Arunachal Pradesh	106	352	107	380	0.15	8.16
4	Assam	438	490	438	517	0.06	5.42
5	Bihar	191	99	212	106	11.31	6.07
6	Chandigarh	0	0	0	0	0	0
7	Chhattisgarh	1105	2210	1177	2159	6.46	-2.33
8	D & N Haveli	13	17	13	17	1.32	-1.6
9	Daman & Diu	1	Neg.	1	Neg.	17.2	8.45
10	Delhi	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	Goa	12	8	14	14	15.87	78.55
12	Gujarat	488	969	491	977	0.81	0.83
13	Haryana	0	0	0	0	0	0
14	Himachal Pradesh	45	43	56	50	25.01	17.2
15	Jammu & Kashmir	184	144	181	130	-1.67	-9.56
16	Jharkhand	NA	NA	967	1431	NA	NA
17	Karnataka	439	725	473	705	7.62	-2.72
18	Kerala	87	30	95	34	9	14.06
19	Lakshadweep	9	2	9	2	0.46	-1.22
20	Madhya Pradesh	1627	3233	1782	3171	9.52	-1.94
21	Maharashtra	880	1529	864	1612	-1.84	5.46
22	Manipur	64	79	64	79	0.23	0.1
23	Meghalaya	203	238	209	286	3.05	20.36
24	Mizoram	90	107	92	105	2.31	-2.17
25	Nagaland	169	1170	177	1063	5	-9.09
26	Odisha	1407	1748	1426	1615	1.29	-7.64
27	Puducherry	0	0	0	0	0	0
28	Punjab	0	0	0	0	0	0
29	Rajasthan	967	1766	1120	1785	15.76	1.08
30	Sikkim	30	57	37	57	20.95	-0.11
31	Tamil Nadu	69	75	74	74	8.07	-1.94
32	Tripura	156	113	173	153	11.03	36.09
33	Uttar Pradesh	56	70	71	80	27.58	13.67
34	Uttarakhand	30	48	30	48	-0.17	-0.7
35	West Bengal	552	396	582	397	5.56	0.22
	TOTAL	10343	16929	11993	18294	15.95	8.06

Source: Agricultural Census 2010-11

Neg. = Negligible (less than 500 units/hectare)

NA = Not Available

A similar kind of analysis has been carried out for area of operational holdings (Table – 6). According to Agriculture Census 2011, operated area includes both cultivated and uncultivated area, provided part of it is put to agricultural production during the reference period. Between 2005-06 and 2010-11, percentage of operated area declines

for relatively higher categories of land holdings viz., 'semi-medium', 'medium' and 'large'. Among all the states/UTs, Kerala is the only state which is showing increasing trend in those three categories of land holdings whereas Arunachal Pradesh has the same kind of trend under number of operational holdings (Table – 5). A further analysis shows that with the exception of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Goa, Kerala, Lakshadweep, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and Uttarakhand all other states/UTs shows increasing trend for 'marginal' holdings of operated area. Similar trend can be seen in 'small' holdings of operated area excluding Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Daman & Diu, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Table – 6

State-wise percentage distribution of area operated by operational holdings for Scheduled Tribes

Sl. No.	STATES/UTs	2005-06					2010-11				
		Marginal	Small	Semi-Medium	Medium	Large	Marginal	Small	Semi-Medium	Medium	Large
1	A&N Islands	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	Andhra Pradesh	20.45	26.94	29.69	19.28	3.63	24.31	29.54	27.79	15.27	3.09
3	Arunachal Pradesh	3.08	9.21	23.96	47.71	16.04	2.86	6.71	24.6	40.6	25.22
4	Assam	23.86	29.75	29.1	16.13	1.15	22.42	26.25	33.17	17.03	1.14
5	Bihar	54.41	21.05	15.9	7.05	1.59	52.83	21.56	19.5	5.57	0.54
6	Chandigarh	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	Chhattisgarh	10.12	17.37	27.98	29.96	14.56	11.73	19.6	28.28	27.75	12.64
8	D & N Haveli	20.68	28.32	25.78	20.03	5.18	21.74	29.1	25.33	19.28	4.55
9	Daman & Diu	65.25	29.44	5.31	0	0	67.24	24.22	4.75	3.78	0
10	Delhi	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	Goa	39.4	23.38	16.32	14.96	5.95	26.73	23.18	27.01	19.55	3.53
12	Gujarat	8.96	20.11	30.91	30.96	9.06	9.08	20	30.03	28.87	12.01
13	Haryana	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
14	Himachal Pradesh	30.08	28.55	26.15	12.85	2.38	32.15	29.04	25.93	10.91	1.97
15	Jammu & Kashmir	37.27	26.92	24.12	10.69	1.01	39.82	28.97	22.13	8.14	0.95
16	Jharkhand	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	18.31	16.74	24.75	26.91	13.3
17	Karnataka	13.41	26.45	29.7	23.74	6.7	15.76	28.71	29.31	20.66	5.56
18	Kerala	54.42	26.66	13.43	4.55	0.94	49.82	23.39	17.82	6.69	2.28
19	Lakshadweep	69.31	13.87	11.3	5.09	0.42	68.94	14.04	11.44	5.16	0.43
20	Madhya Pradesh	9.78	20.31	28.83	31.7	9.37	12.07	22.86	29.63	28.06	7.38
21	Maharashtra	10.9	25.85	32.3	26.15	4.8	10.53	25.52	29.61	24.36	9.98
22	Manipur	19.99	34.01	38.57	7.43	0	20.09	34.04	38.48	7.39	0
23	Meghalaya	22.86	30.84	30.69	14.23	1.39	21.33	33.63	30.64	13.01	1.38

24	Mizoram	25.05	38.17	29.89	6.45	0.44	28.81	36.05	22.99	8.43	3.72
25	Nagaland	0.49	1.34	7.91	39.71	50.54	0.36	2.18	11.4	44.66	41.4
26	Odisha	24.77	33.21	26.82	12.99	2.22	36.21	33.68	21.36	7.57	1.19
27	Puducherry	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
28	Punjab	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
29	Rajasthan	12.33	18.65	27.18	28.89	12.96	15.66	20.88	26.35	25.7	11.41
30	Sikkim	9.92	16.09	23.26	31.52	19.21	12.29	15.35	23.75	34.06	14.55
31	Tamil Nadu	25.73	32.39	27.76	12.35	1.78	29.59	32.51	24.23	11.71	1.96
32	Tripura	37.63	31.54	25.33	5.04	0.46	29.75	29.48	30.99	9.45	0.33
33	Uttar Pradesh	20.04	24.46	24.43	22.99	8.07	23.98	24.33	22.39	21.4	7.9
34	Uttarakhand	13.13	12.67	26.67	40.65	6.88	12.73	13.44	27.32	39.66	6.86
35	West Bengal	54.34	30.24	13.79	1.62	0	59.24	28.02	11.79	0.95	0
	All India	14.58	21.81	26.83	25.97	10.81	17.26	22.6	26.27	23.76	10.11

Source: Agricultural Census 2010-11
NA = Not Available

Gender inequities in Land Holdings among Scheduled Tribes

Law of inheritance resulted in poor land holding pattern of the female population in the country. Gender bias is slightly higher among STs than remaining social groups for 'All Size Classes' (Arun, 2017) and for this compelling reason, the study throws light on gender wise distribution of operational holdings and operated area for STs exclusively (Table – 7). It is seen, there exist major gender differences in the operational holdings of STs for all land holding size. In particular, under 'medium' and 'large' categories of land holdings, gender disparities are higher for both operational holdings and operated area.

Table – 7
All India Number and Area of Operational Holdings by Gender: Scheduled Tribes

SI. No.	Size Class (in ha.)		No. of Operational Holdings	Area Operated
		.	5698	2786
		.	772	358
1.	**Marginal**	**T**	6470	3144
		M	2552	3662
		F	325	457
2.	**Small**	**T**	2877	4119
		M	1601	4335
		F	186	496
3.	**Semi Medium**	**T**	1787	4831
		M	693	3984
		F	67	380
4.	**Medium**	**T**	760	4363
		M	102	1628
		F	8	135
5.	**Large**	**T**	111	1763
		M	10646	16395
		F	1359	1826
6.	**All Classes**	**T**	12005	18221

Source: Compiled from Agricultural Census 2010-11
Note: Total may not tally due to rounding off.
M=Male/ F=Female/ T=Total

Major Findings, Challenges and Conclusion

The study reveals that landless households are higher among Scheduled Tribes and highest proportion of its households belonged to the 'marginal' land holding size. Higher the size of land holdings; lower is the proportion of ST households which is a common feature in most of the states barring Kerala and Arunachal Pradesh as they recorded increasing trend in number and area of operational holdings respectively during the period of study. Another important outcome of the study is that gender disparities are higher under relatively higher land holdings for both operational holdings and operated area. The study is limited in the sense that it restricts itself to its objective i.e. trends of land holdings among STs and hence causes of the outcome are not explored in detail.

Major problem faced by Scheduled Tribes relating to land is its alienation to non-tribals. Therefore, the biggest challenge is to bring down the incidence of land alienation among tribal farmers. Want of capital to adopt better techniques of cultivation is one of the reasons for mortgaging land to money lenders and non-repayment of these debts will eventually result in transfer of land to non-STs. Proper implementation of land reforms act and improved accessibility to institutional credit are the ways and means of achieving the objective but lack of knowledge about banking operations and absence of other lending agencies act as a hindrance. Apart from this, willingness on the part of government in acquiring and redistributing surplus land to the landless STs will go a long way in safeguarding their livelihood. There is still scope for land redistribution in spite of enacting laws like Forest Rights Act (FRA) in the sense that land allotted to STs are mostly of inferior quality. Consequently, it requires a lot of money to reclaim and to avoid this state government should bear the cost of reclamation before redistributing the lands. In addition to this, distribution of land should be reserved to ST agricultural labourers to the extent of their proportion among agricultural labourers. The major reason for gender bias in land holding pattern is probably due to poor implementation of the already existing policies on property entitlement and creating awareness by conducting campaigns through NGOs among the tribal women will bridge the barrier.

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