

Original Research Article

Constraints in implementation of land reforms policies as perceived by agricultural labourers of Erstwhile Cannanore district of Kerala

ABSTRACT

Kerala state was formed in 1956 by the amalgamation of three political units Travancore, Cochin and Malabar and agrarian relations were developed independently in these three units. Kerala's land reform is the only land reform initiative in South Asia which is close to the land to the tiller model. Land reform resulted in the end of feudalistic production relations and reduction in caste inequality. But the fact is that actual tillers of the soil failed to get benefits from the land reform policies. The study was conducted in Erstwhile Cannanore district of Kerala (Present Kannur, Kasargod and North Wayanad). Thirty agricultural labourers each from five selected blocks of three districts (Kalliasseri, Taliparamba, Kanhangad, Nileswaram and Panamaram) were identified randomly and the total number of respondents was 150. A well-structured interview schedule was used for collecting data from the respondents. The data were tabulated and inferences were drawn after appropriate statistical analysis. The results shows that 'Most beneficiaries of land reforms were from upper part of the society' is having highest score (297) and it is considered as the most severe constraint by the agri. labourers followed by 'Agricultural labourers are not much benefitted by the law' (283) and 'During tenancy reforms, bigger share of benefits went to richer sections than the actual tillers of soil' (273).

Key words: *Land reforms, Erstwhile Cannanore district, Constraints, Agricultural labourers*

INTRODUCTION

Land reforms involve the restructuring and redistributive elements of land, aiming to empower those cultivating the soil by granting them ownership rights. The overarching goal is to promote social justice and enhance agricultural production. In India, the issue of land reforms was brought into the mainstream of rural development actively under seventh five year plan. The land reforms act, 1969 came into force in Kerala on 1st January 1970. It is hailed as the most important legislation that transformed the complex legal, economic and social relations that characterized the feudalistic structure in the agrarian economy of Kerala. Its objectives were to put an end to all feudal relations, abolish exploitation inherent in the Jenmi system, confer ownership of land to the tillers, prescribe ceiling on land holdings, provide for distribution of land among agricultural labourers and to increase agricultural growth and productivity. According to Herring (1983), Kerala land reform was the 'most comprehensive and far reaching reform' which led to a 'radical shift in the balance of rural power'. Balakrishnan (2015) pointed out that the land reforms marked the transition of Kerala's agriculture

from feudalist production relations to capitalism. Land reforms act was a powerful strategy for promoting both economic development and environmental quality (Boyce *et al.*, 2005). One of the important impacts of land reform was the reduction in between the land and caste based inequalities immediately after the land reform. The major landlord castes namboodiri brahmins and other upper castes were the worst affected by the land reform and land concentration in their hands weakened considerably (Franke, 1992; Ramakumar,2006).

In India, Kerala is actually a model in the implementation of land reforms. But there is a growing discussion on the disjuncture between land reforms and equity in land ownership (Krishnaji, 2007; Rammohan, 2008; Raman, 2002). According to Harilal and Kumar (2014), land reforms act did not increase agricultural production and rural employment in the state and one of the visible results of the land reform was the extreme fragmentation of land. Most of the new landlords were shifted to less labour-intensive crops or they were forced to other sectors that could generate additional income. So there was a tendency to leave the land as fallow that resulted in rise in farm wages and drastic fall in employment in the agricultural sector.

The study constraints in implementation of land reforms policies as perceived by agricultural labourers was carried out in Erstwhile Cannanore district of Kerala to identify and analyse the major constraints and problems faced by the agricultural labourers after implementation of land reforms in Kerala. The findings of the study will be helpful for the policy makers for the development of labour friendly land policies.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Erstwhile Cannanore district (present Kannur, Kasargod and North Wayanad districts) of Kerala. Five rice growing tracts (two from Kannur district, two from Kasargod district and one from north Wayanad) were selected based on the maximum area under rice cultivation through proportionate sampling. Thus, a total number of five blocks namely Kalliasseri and Taliparamba from Kannur district, Nileswaram and Kanhangad from Kasargod district and Panamaram from North Wayanad were selected for the study. Thirty agricultural labourers were purposefully selected from each of the five blocks.

So the total number of respondents was one hundred and fifty. A well-structured interview schedule was prepared for collecting the data from respondents.

Constraints in implementation of land reform policies as perceived by agricultural labourers

After discussion with experts a list of constraints were identified and to find out the most significant constraints which influence the respondent, delphi technique was used. After conducting Delphi, out of 22 statements, 16 statements were selected for final data collection.

These 16 statements were depicted in table 1.

Table 1. Constraints identified

SI No	Constraints	
1	Long delay in the implementation of law	
2	Plantations are not included in the ceiling limits	
3	Landlords got time to escape the ceiling provisions by converting the land to plantations, private forests etc.	
4	Administrative delay in distribution of govt. poramboke and forest lands.	
5	Provisions contained for payment of huge compensation to landlords	
6	Absence of adequate allocation for the rehabilitation of landless poor	
7	During tenancy reforms, bigger share of benefits went to richer sections than the actual tillers of soil	
8	Working of land reform implementation machinery was not satisfactory	
9	The expenditure incurred on the administrative side was high	
10	Agricultural labourers are not much benefitted by the law	
11	Most beneficiaries of land reforms were from upper part of the society	
12	Lack of coordination among the administrative members/ personnel involved in the implementation	
13	Wide gap between the proclamation and actual performance of land reform programmes	
14	Lack of proper assessment by the government about the impact of land reforms.	
15	Conflict among the political parties about the formulation and implementation of land reform policies.	
16	Only a fraction of land has been declared surplus and even less actually distributed.	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Constraints in implementation of land reform policies as perceived by agricultural labourers, its total score calculated and ranks were listed in table 2.

Table 2. Constraints perceived by agricultural labourers

SL NO	CONSTRAINTS	TOTAL SCORE	RANK
1	Most beneficiaries of land reforms were from upper part of the society	297	1
2	Agricultural labourers are not much benefitted by the law	280	2
3	During tenancy reforms, bigger share of benefits went to richer sections than the actual tillers of soil	273	3
4	Plantations are not included in the ceiling limits.	269	4

5	Only a fraction of land has been declared surplus and even less actually distributed	257	5
6	Landlords got time to escape the ceiling provisions by converting the land to plantations, private forests etc.	253	6
7	Absence of adequate allocation for the rehabilitation of landless poor	237	7
8	Lack of proper assessment by the government about the impact of land reforms	200	8

The major constraints perceived by agricultural labourers with high score were 'most beneficiaries of land reforms being from upper part of the society(297)', 'agricultural labourers not much benefitted by the law'(280), 'bigger share of benefits to richer sections than the actual tillers of soil'(273), 'plantations are not included in the ceiling limits'(269), 'only a fraction of land was declared surplus and even less actually distributed'(257), 'landlords escaped the ceiling provisions by converting the land to plantations, private forests etc.'(253), 'absence of adequate allocation for the rehabilitation of landless poor'(237) and "Lack of proper assessment by the government about the impact of land reforms'(200).

CONCLUSION

The significance of land reforms in Kerala is twofold, encompassing both intrinsic and instrumental aspects. Intrinsic importance lies in its role in dismantling an oppressive agrarian system, liberating workers from various forms of unfreedom. On an instrumental level, the post-land reform society that emerged proved conducive to improving the social and economic conditions of the less privileged. Kerala's land reform stands as a unique initiative in South Asia, closely resembling the "land to the tiller" model. However, the intended beneficiaries—the actual tillers of the soil—did not realize the anticipated benefits from the redistributive land reforms. The present study summarises that the major constraints perceived by agricultural labourers were 'most beneficiaries of land reforms being from the upper part of the society', 'agricultural labourers not much benefitted by the law', 'bigger share of benefits to richer sections than the actual tillers of the soil' and 'plantations are not included in the ceiling limits'.

REFERENCES

1. Balakrishnan P. Kerala and the rest of India what we can learn from each others development experience. *Econ. Polit. Wkly.* 2015;50(1): 34–41.
2. Boyce JK, Rosset P, and Stanton EA. *Land Reform and Sustainable development.* Political Economy Research Institute, New York.2005. 22p.
3. Franke RW. Land reform versus inequality in Nadur village, Kerala. *J. Anthropol. Res.* 48(2): 81–116.

4. Herring RJ. Abolition of landlordism in Kerala: A redistribution of privilege. *Econ. Polit. Wkly.* 1983;15(26): 59–69.
5. Krishnaji A K. Kerala Milestones: On the parliamentary road to socialism. *Econ. Polit. Wkly.* 2007;24(3): 69-76.
6. Kumar EG and Harilal CC. Land reforms and agrarian relations in the state of Kerala, India- A Socio-economic evaluation. *Indian J. Ecol.*2014;41(2): 344-348.
7. RamakumarR. Public action, agrarian change and the standard of living of agricultural workers: A study of a village in Kerala. *J. Agrarian Change.*2006; 6(3): 306–345.
8. Raman RK. Breaking new ground: adivasi land struggle in Kerala. *Econ. Polit. Wkly.*2002;37(10): 916-919.

UNDER PEER REVIEW