

## ACCESS OF LAND, SUSTAINABILITY OF DEPRIVED CLASSES : A STUDY OF MARATHWADA (MAHARASHTRA)

MANOJ MARKENDEYRAO WAHANE

Ph.D. Scholar, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

### ABSTRACT

The articles mainly emphasize on Dalits land struggle of rural Marathwada where Dalits of Marathwada region of Maharashtra occupied unauthorized grazing land (Gairan) for their livelihood and sustenance. Today, an issue of landlessness is having serious concerns. Dalits are more vulnerable in terms of landholding; their situation is more pitiable compare to other landholding communities. In our country still 74.25 per cent population depends on agriculture to accomplish their basic needs as well as to enhance their socioeconomic status. As per 2001 census about 61.39 per cent SCs (Dalits) still bound to less paid agriculture work due to landlessness and lack of sustainable resources. Those who owns land, owns less than one hectare, their socio-economic condition is more or less the same throughout India. In Maharashtra Dr. B R Ambedkar and later his followers motivated deprived classes to fight for ownership of land. Since then series of movements and campaigns have emerged to hold landless Dalits. The state has failure to implement land reforms policies and day-to-day humiliation, discrimination forced Dalit to acquire the grazing land. The then, Dalits began tilling and started claim over land. The Campaign for Human Rights formed by Dalit youths in 1991 and about 100 NGOs worked towards gaining access to land to the landless Dalits. This brought significant sustainable change socio-economic change in their lives.

**Keywords:** Dalits, land, rights, struggle, grazing, movement, landholding, ownership, access, landless(ness), discrimination, exploitation, subjugation, sustainable, development.

### INTRODUCTION

In India land is a symbol of economic power, independence, and a potential means to advance one's social status as well. It is also the hope for educational advancement for the most of the rural masses in general and for the Scheduled Castes - SCs (Dalits) in particular. Though land is an important factor capable of determining one's social status, particularly his/her caste status, often determines his landholding status, meaning that there is close link between one's caste or social status and his land holding status. According to 2001 census, the total population of SCs in India was 166 million, constituting 16.2 per cent of the total Indian population. About 80 per cent of the SCs in particular live in rural areas, they mainly depend on agriculture and allied activities to earn their livelihood. They are worst victims of Indian caste system, facing inhuman forms of discrimination, untouchability, atrocities, economic deprivation, and political marginalization. Thus, even today most of the Dalits remain deprived of land and other assets, and live under perpetual threat to their livelihood and to their life itself.

### LAND AND INEQUALITY

"Land distribution in India closely follows social hierarchy, while the large landowners invariably belong to the upper castes; the cultivators belong to the middle caste and the agricultural workers largely to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes" (Mohanty, 2001: 3858).

The land is fundamental to the lives of Dalits because it ensures them to sustain livelihood, it helps to improve socio-economic condition, and also it widens their scope for better employment. It is one of important medium to overcome the problem of caste discrimination and caste based atrocities that they are subjected to and to protect their self-respect and dignity. The SCs households who owned less than half (0.40) hectare of land was about 50 per cent in 1987-88, it increased to 53.6 per cent in 1993-94, 65 per cent in 1999-2000, and 72.2 in 2004-05. There was hardly any change in the per cent of SC households who possessed half to one hectare of land (Ramaiah A., 2009: 6-7). In Maharashtra, the number of SC persons with operational holdings accounted for 6.81 per cent in 1980-81 and 8.00 per cent in 1990-91, and the areas operated by the SCs was 4.48 per

cent and 6.00 for the respective periods (Mohanty B.B., 2001: 3865). After the adoption of new economic policy by the central government, the state, corporate bodies, and the private parties are grabbing thousand acres of land. The middle and large landowners are losing their land, but in Marathwada where Dalits occupied the grazing land<sup>3</sup> in the villages. The experience of Marathwada is a unique example in the Maharashtra. The outcomes after possession of common land (CPR) are quite satisfactory according to the mass leader Adv. Eknath Awad (Dalit leader working in all eight district of Marathwada region and also leading Campaign for Human Rights)

During Buddha's time, the Mahars were well developed and they had their own land. After defeating the followers of Buddha, the Brahmins physically and forcefully captured all possible land belonging to Buddhist people. During Islamic period they were appointed in the Muslim's army. They were rewarded by the Muslim King of Bidar with 52 various rights first to Amrutnak (Mahar), after these rights were given to all Mahars (Ganvir R., 2008: 10).

Only few Kings extended their support to the landless and marginal farmers to improve their socio-economic status. Some of them distributed land to the weaker section of the society. However, during the era of Kings, the Dalits were not benefited much. After defeating the kingdoms, the British had established control over existing land revenue system. During the British period, Mahars served as constables in the revenue department and assisted in collecting the land revenue. The Mahars also worked in survey department. But, they were not directly appointed to collect the land revenue.

In the British rule, they introduced Zamindari, Ryotwari and Mahalwari land revenue system to collect the land revenue. The British administration didn't show any interest in implementing the acts related to land, because the provisions of the various acts related to land were actually affecting the interest of the upper caste elites, who were mostly landlord. The Moneylenders, and other intermediaries of various kinds and the agents of British administration in India. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Philosophy and Land Reform

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar challenged the Indian caste system, social stratification and various types of injustices meted out to Dalits. This included denial of land rights and right to cultivate. One-fifth of the Marathwada's population is Dalit (SC) and due to their socio-economically

backwardness, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar started to mobilise the Mahar and Mang (second largest population of SCs in the Marathwada) to leave their traditional practices. They continuously raised the land issues on several conferences. In the year 1927, Dr. Ambedkar had written five articles in 'Bahishkrut Bharat' and cleared his critical views about the 'Maharwatan'. On May 31, 1936, in Mumbai area, in January 10, 1938, in December 16, 1939, and in several historical conferences Dr. B.R. Ambedkar addressed to the masses to give-up their Watan, but should not give-up the land which they have. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in his dream concept of 'State Socialism', demanded that government should nationalized the 'uncultivated land', 'natural resources', and further government should redistribute these natural resources to the needy, landless and marginal sections of the society to improve their live and provide them an alternative option of sustainable livelihood.

In 1944 Dr. Ambedkar demanded to Nizam of Hyderabad that they should distribute Gairan to the landless and needy Mahars for cultivation. Then Nizam passed one resolution and quantum of 'Watani' and 'Inami' land were distributed to Dalits in 1947 (Kamble B., 2002:5). After Independence in 1956, the waste land brought Village Panchayat (local governance) as Common Property Resources (NCAS, 2005: 12).

After the sad demise of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on December 6, 1956, his followers Rao Bahadur N. Shivraj, Karmaveer Dadasaheb Gaikwad and several other community leaders mobilised landless, Dalits to engage in their land struggle. In a historical 'Bhoomiheen Satyagraha' in Delhi, was organized by Rao Bahadur N. Shivraj and Karmaveer Dadasaheb Gaikwad, till December 31, 1964 out of 1,43,500 landless Dalit Satyagrahis 1,01,000 were arrested under 'Jail Bharo Andolan' and kept in the district Jails for two to four months. The impact of continuous efforts and historical work of Karmaveer Dadasaheb Gaikwad, Government of Maharashtra started 'Karmaveer Dadasaheb Gaikwad Swabhiman and Sabalikaran Yojana' from February 24, 2004. In this scheme there is a provision of 2 acres of arid and 2 acres of irrigated land distribution to each landless Dalits, Nav-Bouddha family. But, in true sense this scheme was not properly implemented (83.91 per cent land not yet distributed to the needy) by the government of Maharashtra (Pardesi, P., 2002). Lack of access to ownership of land and livelihood, day-to-day socio-economic subjugation, and exclusion in all spheres of life within village

caste structure forced Dalits to search new alternatives for their survival and sustainable livelihood. The Dalits have begun exploring new avenues of livelihood besides the traditional practices (NCAS, 2005: 12)

From 1964, the landless Dalits of Marathwada region started resisting the unjust distribution of land. With growing awareness of rights among Dalits, they began to aspire for more sustainable and permanent livelihood mechanism. As the pressure for survival was increasing, they had not a choice but to cultivate the available surplus land in the villages. This was termed as "encroachment" as they had no legal right to possess these lands. The land, which they started accessing (encroaching) were mostly grazing (Gairan) land, as these were the largest non-private lands in Marathwada (Paryay, 2004: 6).

Before these possessions the actual possessions was started during 1952-53 by getting the inspiration of Jabran Jot (forcible cultivation) movement of the 1960s in which the Tribals of Chandrapur. Also the social, political influence of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on Dalits was another force behind the upsurge for land right struggle (NCAS, 2005; 12).

In the year 1951, Bhoodan movement based on 'Sarvodaya' principles was initiated by Vinoba Bhave throughout India. Bhoodan movement in identifying, accessing and distributing surplus land to the needy landless is worth nothing. Under Bhoodan movement in Maharashtra state distributed only 0.69 per cent of 88,462 acres. Dalits had received only 56.83 per cent of land (Mohanty B. B., 2001: 3864).

In the mid-seventies the radical Dalit Panther Movement in the state has inspired the youth leadership and the various issues were raised by the youth including the issue of land and its sustainability. Dalit Panther Movement supported the land issue because of this Marathwada became a new and vibrant centre for Dalit activism on the issue of land rights.

As an impact of Dalit Panther Movement the youth started progress. After 1960s especially with the Constitutional Provisions of reservation in the jobs and in education, most of the Dalit youth in the region seemed to have begun improving their socio-economic status. But, after the land possession the dominant caste people started committing atrocities on Dalits. And the demand for renaming the Marathwada University as Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar University created a tensed situation in the region. In 1990, to control over the situation the Dalit

youths of Marathwada united and formed Manavi Hakka Abhiyan (Campaign for Human Rights - CHR) in Udgir, district Latur on December 10, 1990 (Manavi Hakka Abhiyan, 2010: 11).

### CONTEMPORARY LAND STRUGGLE

The activist group of Marathwada realised that working together will advocate the right of landless. In 2000, Jameen Adhikar Andolan-JAA (Land Right Movement) formed on November 25, 2001. The mission statement of JAA is, 'to access and manage productive resources like land, water, knowledge, skills, and finance for sustaining marginalised livelihoods.'

The JAA advocating a uniform land reform policy to ensure land entitlement to all the landless and increased government investment in development of natural resources to enhance the livelihood options of the poor-marginalised. Involvement In the region from eight districts and sixty talukas about 15000 families from 3000 village's extending their continuous support to the land right movement. In October 27, 2007, at Aurangabad conference and in April 12, 2008 at Latur, more than 30 thousand Gairan holders participated in the conference. The individual participation is increasing day-by-day. In four district of Vidarbha region, where more than 3000 families from the 450 villages extending their support for the struggle. State's interventions to access land

According to Government of Maharashtra Report 1991, between April 1, 1978 to April 14, 1990, about 1,08,915.54 hectares of waste land and 84,230 hectares grazing land was occupied, out of which 32,359 hectares land was waste land and which was under revenue department, constitute 32 per cent waste and 68 per cent Gairan land. In seven districts of Marathwada, 28,902 hectares (99.9 per cent) of land occupied out of which 28,874 was the Gairan land. By 1991, the state government had regularised occupied Gairan land of the 23,938 households, of whom 19,582 were Dalits. Those who had possessed Gairan before April 14, 1990 were considered for legal entitlement. The disillusionment that set in after the 1991 Government Resolution, which failed to meet the demands, gave rise to a land struggle in Marathwada, in the contemporary post- 1990s (NCAS, 2005:12).

### STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Apart from their inherited land, Dalits could gain access to

land through two other means: i) Purchase of land from the owner of land by paying the agreed upon or market rate of the land, and ii) Pleading the government to allot a piece of land out of the unused, barren, abandoned land which is under the direct possession of the government. These two options and other initiatives of the government, civil society organizations in the past have not yet mitigated the problem of landlessness Dalits. The Dalits were left with no option but to resort to some other means through which they could acquire land to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter and employment as well as to enhance their socio-economic status. Initially, this research paper emphasized on Dalits Land Right Movement (DLRM) popular in the eight districts of rural Marathwada region of Maharashtra dedicated to acquire village land, which is a part of Common Property Resources (CPR) of the village for meeting the common needs of the villagers, and helping landless Dalits to access and cultivate such land to sustain them. Though experiences of DLRM seem unique in terms of helping landless Dalits to gain access to land, and also get legal entitlement. Through a long struggle of collective action, such effort comes to exist. There is hardly any attempt so far to document these historical experiences of such efforts. There are number of studies on land right movements in India. Though a few studies have been carried out in the Marathwada region on the Dalits struggle for land, there has been no study from social sciences perspectives so far to understand the impact of such struggle in general and of the DLRM in particular on the economic and social status of Dalits.

If this intervention is properly documented, the struggle for land from other regions of our nation may replicate the same in their areas. Therefore, there is a need to study whole process and its socio-economic aspects in terms of sustainable development and dignified life of the landless and Dalits. The experiences of DLRM will help researcher to find answers of questions. It is in this context the following research questions assume immense importance. What was the vision that inspired the landless Dalits to participate in the land right movement? What were the strategies they adopted in their struggle and the lessons they learnt in this process? What will be the social fall-out of such attempt by Dalits at the village (local) level? What will be impact of Dalits becoming land owner or having access to land on their economic condition and social status? What are the

experiences of the individuals, communities, mass movement, and grass root organizations? The perspectives of campaigns, and civil societies which are directly and indirectly engaged since its beginning in the process of accessing, acquiring such CPR land through systematic and scientific research.

## METHODOLOGY

The articles based on research, the research study therefore having following objectives: To understand the source of inspiration and historical background of the Dalits Land Right Movement; to study the impact of DLRM on social status; and to study the impact of DLRM on economic status of Dalits after possession of grazing land.

The rural Marathwada region of Maharashtra was selected for the research witnessed a very high incidence of encroachment (possession) of grazing land. It is in this region about 2,31,000 hectares of grazing land was found and in each village on an average 230 hectares of grazing land was found. The population covered for the study was represented by the Dalits from the Marathwada region, who had taken part in the Dalits Land Right Movement (DLRM) in the region and as a result gained access to cultivating grazing land through encroachment and have been engaged in continuous cultivation of such encroached land at least two years prior to the commencement of the study. A Multi-stage stratified random sampling method was adopted to select the 200 samples from the universe. The primary data were collected between May-June, 2008, from the Beed and Jalna districts, these two districts have relatively more number of grazing landholders, the problem of land encroachment is very prominent here, and the DLRM is very active here. The 200 households were selected using lottery method. The interview conducted in Beed and Wadwani talukas of Beed district and in Jalna districts it was conducted in Ambad and Ghansawangi talukas. The primary data was collected from 34 villages. All households were interviewed belongs to Mahar and Mang community, in that men (162) and women (38) Dalit households actively share their experiences during the interview. The Software Package for Social Sciences-SPSS was used for tabulation of collected data and information.

## SCOPE

The study is exploring untold information about ongoing

Dalits Land Right Movement. In every month there are various new activities took place in the movement. This study is having wide scope as it explore the perception and approach of the beneficiaries towards the ongoing movement. It will open new avenues to the beginners and new researchers. The experiences, experiments of the people while occupying the grazing land will also help in the field of research to know the various dimensions of the land issues as well as the dynamics within the advocacy and lobbying for the entitlement for the land.

### **SUCCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY**

The success and failure of the DLRM is to be measured in terms of number of acres of land that the movement has been able to occupy and give access to needy landless Dalits for cultivation and also the number of families that could receive legal entitlement for the Gairan land that they have been under their possession for years. Entitlement and access to Gairan land today is an issue of survival for almost two lakh Dalit landless families. The government assured that entitlements to the Gairan being used for cultivation but the issue remained unaddressed due to lack of political will. Since last 45 years, approximately 1,00,000 hectares of Gairan has been accessed by the landless in Marathwada. The Gairan has thus become a controversial issue and has created a threatening environment for already powerless Dalits (NCAS, 2005:14).

In the year 2006, there are 5013 applications for land legalization (entitlement of land) and submitted to the Ministry of Revenue, Government of Maharashtra. And till June 30, 2010 from eight districts of Marathwada and washim district of Vidarbha, 35,181 grazing landholder's applications of sixty talukas and 1609 villagers were submitted to the Revenue Minister of the State. At presently 70,340.22 hectares of land so far occupied by these people. The grazing landholders are continuously cultivating the possessed land without fear of the dominant caste fellow. Their dependency is reduced and they are also doing the small business to make both ends meet.

### **IMPACT ON ECONOMIC CONDITION**

After access the Gairan land about 77.5 per cent family stopped migration, and 85 per cent families paying capacity is increased annually up to Rs. 20,000. The per cent of families preferring individual farming for economic benefit was 90.5 and about 46 per cent households able to take loan

from their relatives, and friends. About 84.5 per cent families feel economic independency. The most of the households thought that they are able to choose their profession after getting the economic support, saving after cultivation of Gairan. **IMPACT ON SOCIAL STATUS** About 92 per cent households have feeling of change in their social status, and 89.5 per cent families have stopped performing traditional, filthy practices. The 47.5 per cent households perceived that their living standard and way to thinking has improved. Now, Gairanholders not only called by their fellow villagers in their family marriage ceremonies, festivals but also sharing the resources. The Dalits in the villages now feel proud after getting continuous produce from the acquired land. **CONCLUDE**

After the adoption of New Economic Policy in our country in nineties, then land become emerge out as a very complex, and conflict issue. Since its beginning from the existence of human civilisation there are always conflict usually takes place at the time of resource (water, land etc.) distribution. The dependencies on water impetus human beings to settle down near the rivers to get access the water. Greek and Indus civilizations settled down besides the bank of the rivers. At the very firstly water was having great value, the smaller groups always tried to control over the usage of water. After the development of tools, and agriculture the land and its size have got great importance. In the modern era of civilization, under the influences of World Economic Forum, Multinationals starts targeting the poor and developing countries as a market of their produce. Further for the economic gain they start investment in the land. Merging of fringe villages is the sign of new modern infrastructural development and extension of the urban colonies. These developments create a huge pressure on rural areas where land is now considered as a commodity. The perception of land as a way of life is now changing in rural areas; now it becomes a medium of economic stability. Recently, grabbing of land is the new trend us more visible and commonly seen everywhere, and day-by-day it rapidly growing everywhere. The rural village life and villages are not secured due to the challenges of Special Economic Zones, and Special Consumer Zones, construction of big dam, and various project etc., On one side the challenges such as SEZ are taking thousands acres of land of big and middle farmers of our country, and on the other side the small, marginal farmers and agricultural workers are badly affecting. In present scenario, land is having great value, as

results common people are losing their land and those, having more paying capacity getting as much as lands they want. The dominant, economically and politically strong people forcefully grabbing the land of weaker section. But, contradict to these experiences, an experiment of Marathwada is a unique example which create a great hope among the landless, those who don't have any option to purchase the land for their livelihood and sustenance. If the model of Marathwada is taken as Method of Social Action for Social Change, then it is easy to the strugglers on land issues, to replicate the same model in their respective land struggles. The model of social action of Marathwada creates an alternative to get the sources with the proper advocacy, and also by creating a pressure group with the fellow beneficiaries. The strategies adopted in the Marathwada, involves a systematic process of democratization of needs and ways to fulfil it. The successful model of Marathwada for empowerment and development was a symbolic representation of involvement of human efforts of long journey and sharing of intellectual property such as knowledge, skill, ideology, faith, and techniques. The distribution of resources to the needy is a great concern of humanistic approach and since long back social sciences stream try to give more space to land, livelihood and sustainable issue. This article is an attempt to bring to notice one of the model of social action intervention in accessing the natural resources, simultaneously promoting and protecting the life of the needy.

### Reference

- Ambedkar B.R. 2001 (reprint). *Mahar Aani Tyanche Watan* (in Marathi), Nagpur: Neha Prakashan.
- Banerjee Arindam 2009. 'Peasant Classes Under Neoliberalism: A Class Analysis of 'Two States'', (Economic and Political Weekly Mumbai), Vol. 15: Apr 11-17, pp. 49-57.
- Bhalla G S, Singh Gurmail 2009. 'Economic Liberalisation and Indian Agriculture: A Statewise Analysis', (Economic and Political Weekly Mumbai), Vol. 52: Dec 26-Jan 01, pp. 34-55.
- Bhave Vinoba. 1963. *Bhoodan*, Calcutta: (April), pp. 13-15.
- Bhuskute 2002. 'Overview of land reforms in Maharashtra', in Shah Ghanshyam and Shah D.C., (eds.): *Land reforms in India: performance and challenges in Gujarat and Maharashtra* (Vol. 8), New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 39-94.
- Government of Maharashtra 2002. *Human Development Report Maharashtra 2002*, Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra.
- Government of India. 1998. *National SC/ST Commission Report, 1996-98*.
- Mohanty B.B. 2001. 'Land distribution among SCs and ST', (Economic and Political Weekly, Mumbai), Vol. 36 (40): Oct 6-12, pp. 3857-3868.
- Mohanty B.B. 2009. 'Regional Disparity in Agricultural Development of Maharashtra', (Economic and Political Weekly Mumbai), Vol. 6: Feb 07-13, pp. 63-69.
- National Commission for SCs and STs 1998. *National Commission for SCs and STs Report*, New Delhi: Government of India.
- NCAS 2005. *Advocacy update on land rights, issue:18* (October-December, 2005) Pune: National Centre for Advocacy Studies, 12-14.
- NCDHR 2000. *Dalits in the world of globalisation*, Hyderabad: National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights.
- Omvedt Gail 1982, 'Class, caste and land in India, an introductory essay', in Omvedt Gail (eds.): *Land, caste and politics in Indian states: Teaching politics*, Delhi: Department of Political Science, pp. 9-50.
- Paryay 2005. *Deprivation, Disempowerment and Struggle: A study of the status of Dalits and their landless sections in Marathwada and their movement for land rights*, Aurangabad: Paryay.
- Ramaiah A. 2009. *Dalit Livelihood Options Under Pressure due to Globalisation: A Myth* (unpublished paper)
- Ray Ishita Aditya, Ray Sarbapriya 2011 'B.R. Ambedkar and his philosophy of Land Reform: An evaluation', (Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences), Vol. 2, pp.1-19.
- Sengupta Arjun 2010. 'Human Rights and Extreme Poverty', (Economic and Political Weekly Mumbai), Vol. 17: Apr 24-30, pp. 85-93.
- Thorat Sukhdev K. 2007. *Dalit Nirantar Vishamata Aani Daridrya* (in Marathi). Pune: Sugava Prakashan.