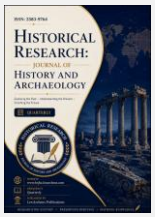
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Land Reforms and the Transformation of Power Relations in India: Agrarian Transformation and Social Justice

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ABSTRACT

Land has historically been a major source of economic security, social status, and political power in India, making its ownership and distribution central to social transformation. Following independence, land reforms sought to abolish intermediaries, regulate tenancy, redistribute land, strengthen ownership rights, and expand access to productive resources. This paper examines the evolution and implementation of land reforms, their impact on land ownership and socio-economic relations, and their role in transforming established power structures and advancing social justice. The findings reveal that land reforms weakened certain traditional concentrations of power and created opportunities for marginalized communities, but their transformative potential remained uneven because of incomplete implementation, administrative weaknesses, legal loopholes, unequal enforcement, and persistent inequalities in land ownership and access. The study concludes that land reforms contributed significantly to agrarian changes and the transformation of power relations in India, although their broader goals of social justice remain only partially realized.

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INTRODUCTION

Issues of land ownership and the history of India are closely connected. The control of land has been the factor that has shaped economic growth, social status, political power and access to productive resources for more than a millennium. In an agrarian society land serves as a productive asset and an asset of livelihood as well as a source of social and political power (Joshi 1975). While India gained independence in 1947, the agrarian structure was highly skewed with huge disparities in land ownership, exploitative tenancy, absentee landlords and poverty (Byres, 1996). Agricultural tenants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers occupied large areas and had only limited security of tenure and rights to the land they farmed. The Indian state took to a major land reform programme in the early years of nation building, being aware that no political independence could be achieved without agrarian justice. The First Five-Year Plan (1951–1956) put a high priority on reviving agrarian relations in order to boost agricultural productivity and social equity (Mishra, 2012). The initial stage dealt with the elimination of the intermediary system like Zamindari, Jagirdari and Inamdari, which allowed landlords to collect revenue from cultivators without any involvement in agricultural activities. By the mid-1950s most of the States had enacted legislation to eliminate these intermediate tenures and to place millions of cultivators more directly in touch with the State (Government of Uttar Pradesh, 1950).

Land reform then took on four main aspects: the elimination of intermediaries, tenancy reform, landholding ceilings, and amalgamation of fragmented land holdings. The Government of India has considered these measures as key tools for achieving social justice and mitigating land ownership disparities (Ministry of Rural Development, 2024). The official records show that around 73.67 lakh acres were declared surplus under the land ceiling laws, out of which the government acquired 64.97 lakh acres of land, and 57.46 lakh acres were distributed among 54.03 lakh poor people. Almost half of these beneficiaries (49.9%) were in Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, underlining the redistributive intent of land reform policies (Ministry of Rural Development, 2024). The reorganisation of the land did not have only an impact on agriculture but also upset ingrained caste, class and landlord-based hierarchies (Sinha, 2022). Improved access to land led to better economic autonomy, and to a more powerful bargaining position and greater role for disadvantaged groups in local institutions. Land reforms in some states, like Kerala and West Bengal, had a major effect on changing power relationships, as they empowered tenants and small cultivators (Besley & Burgess, 2000). Transfer of ownership rights led to the formation of new social groups that had increased economic bargaining power and political influence. The impact of the reforms, however, was unevenly distributed among states due to the level of political will, administrative capacity and socio-economic conditions.

However, the goals of land reform have largely not been realised. The agricultural system remains highly inequitable and fragmented in India. According to Agricultural Census, small and marginal farmers are dominating the farming community with about 85% of the total operational holdings having less than two hectares area. Subdivision and fragmentation have also caused the average size of operational holdings to decrease over the years (MSPI, 2012). These patterns illustrate prevailing trends in the importance of land distribution and ownership in determining economic opportunities and social relations. The Committee on State Agrarian Relations and the Unfinished Task of Land Reforms in 2008, established by the Government of India, found that the rest of the land reforms in India were not completed, hidden tenancy, poor land records, legal issues, and weak institutional mechanisms were the primary constraints on the effectiveness of the land reforms (National Land Records Modernization Programme, 2008).

To meet these ongoing challenges, more recent policy initiatives have increasingly linked the goals of land reform to the modern management of land. The concept of Digital land-record modernization is aimed to enhance transparency, verification of ownership, administrative efficiency and accessibility of land-related services while the National Generic Document Registration System (NGDRS) and Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN or Bhu-Aadhaar) are aimed at enhancing transparency and verification of ownership. The government reports have shown significant achievements in digitization and modernization of land records in India in recent times (Press Information Bureau, 2024; Ministry of Rural Development, 2016). But unequal ownership structures, missing or restricted tenancy rights, ambiguous title and old power structures cannot simply be

overcome by technological modernization. In this context, the present study will analyse the connections between land reforms and the changes in the power dynamics in India. It chronicles the history of land reform policies, examines their implications for land ownership and access to productive resources, examines their implications for social and political relations, and explores the institutional and socio-economic barriers to the implementation of land reform policies today. An appreciation of these aspects is vital for evaluating the impact of land reforms on agrarian change, social justice and inclusive development in the current context of India.

Objectives

The main objectives of this paper are to examine the evolution and implementation of land reform policies in India, analyse their impact on land ownership and access to productive resources, assess their influence on traditional power structures and socio-economic relations, and identify the challenges limiting their effectiveness in promoting equity and social justice for marginalized communities. The study addresses the limited attention given to the long-term relationship between land reforms and changing power relations by examining their contribution to agrarian change, social transformation, and the restructuring of established patterns of economic and political dominance in India.

Statement of the Problem

Land reforms in India emerged in response to the historical concentration of land ownership created and reinforced during the colonial period through systems such as Zamindari, Jagirdari, and other intermediary tenures. These arrangements produced unequal agrarian relations in which a limited section of landlords exercised substantial economic, social, and political control over land and productive resources (Jenkins, 2013). Following independence, land reforms were introduced to redistribute land, protect tenants, regulate ownership, and democratize access to productive resources (Deininger, 2003). Although considerable research has examined the legal provisions, implementation mechanisms, agricultural outcomes, and redistribution achievements of these reforms, their broader role in transforming power relations remains comparatively underexplored. Existing studies frequently focus on economic indicators such as productivity and landholding patterns or examine specific state-level experiences (Besley & Burgess, 2000; Govindarajulu, 2019), leaving limited understanding of how land reforms reshaped authority, social influence, political participation, and class relations. The central research problem therefore lies in the absence of a comprehensive assessment connecting land reforms with the transformation of established power structures. Addressing this gap, the present study analyses how land reforms influenced ownership patterns, social hierarchies, local governance, political and economic influence, and the empowerment of marginalized communities in India (Sadasivam, 2019; Rao, 2014).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach using interpretative and document analysis to examine the relationship between land reforms and the transformation of power relations in India. The research systematically analyses government and committee reports, legislation, archival records, census and agricultural census publications, policy documents, scholarly books, memoirs, and academic literature. Key sources include P. S. Appu's Land Reforms in India (1996), Daniel Thorner's The Agrarian Prospect in India(1956), and B. H. Baden-Powell's The Land Systems of British India(1892),alongside relevant memoirs and official policy documents.The collected materials are critically examined to trace the evolution of land reforms, assess changes in land ownership and access to productive resources, analyse the transformation of established power structures and socio-economic relations, and identify continuing challenges to agrarian change and social justice in India.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Evolution and Implementation of Land Reforms in India

The colonial era land-revenue systems (1757–1947) further consolidated the zamindari and landlord classes, and institutionalized unequal land relations, such as the Permanent Settlement of

Bengal (in 1793), the Ryotwari System of Madras (in 1792) and the Mahalwari System of North India (in 1822) (Sethi, 2006). The emphasis placed on revenue generation by the colonial state led to high levels of tenancy, landlessness and landlordism. By the time of independence in 1947, the tenancy or agricultural labour population was estimated to be about 90% dependent and land was held by a small percentage of landlords. These circumstances led to the setting-up of the foundation for post-Independent land reforms. India adopted four underlying principles of reforms after 1947: elimination of intermediaries, tenancy reforms and security of tenure, landholding ceilings and redistribution of surplus land, and consolidation of small holdings. However, Entry 18 of the State List put land under State legislative authority and there was a lot of variation between states in implementing this.

The most successful part of the reform programme was the elimination of the intermediaries, which was achieved through legislation in states from 1948 to 1954. Important laws were introduced in Madras early (1948–50), followed by laws in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Assam (1951), and in West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi (by 1954). It was followed by the U.P. Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, 1950 which was implemented in 1952 and abolished all intermediaries and land ownership rights were transferred to cultivators (Government of Uttar Pradesh, 1950). In 1992, about 11 million tenants were granted land ownership rights to 14.4 million acres, which was just about 4% of India's total number of acres operated by tenants (Jenkins, 2013). The extent of ceiling limits also differed from one State to another, from a mere 4.05 hectares in Andhra Pradesh for irrigated land up to 54 acres in Rajasthan for dry land. In West Bengal the ceiling was introduced at the rate of about 5 hectares for irrigated and 7 hectares for dry land. In 1952, Jammu and Kashmir was the first state to introduce comprehensive laws regarding the ceiling of land.

Redistribution of surplus land was not as effective as abolition of the intermediaries. The states declared about 8-10 million acres as surplus, but only about 14.4 million acres were actually redistributed, according to estimates cited, or about 4% of the land operated by farmers. The most notable cases of successful redistribution were in Kerala and West Bengal, where over 1.5 million acres and 1.2 million acres, respectively, were redistributed. Achievement of relatively significant results was also obtained in Andhra Pradesh. By contrast, most States left significant disparities among the amount of surplus land, the amount of land taken into possession, and the amount of land actually distributed. These failures helped to sustain the situation of landlessness, agrarian inequality and social tensions in many regions of India.Political commitment, administrative capacity and opposition from the landed elites all played a significant role in the process of implementation. Tenancy and redistribution measures have been more effectively implemented in Kerala, especially during the tenure of the Communist Party, and in West Bengal, especially during the Left Front, than in many other states (Vaidyanathan, 2016). Political opposition of land-owning organizations, government apathy, corruption, outdated land books, legal loopholes, benami transfer of land and exemptions for plantation owners, orchards and religious institutions hampered the implementation of reforms. The Central Government was mainly responsible for implementation, but lacked uniform application and funding. Revenue departments also often did not have the capacity to locate surplus land, and only 15-20% of the declared surplus land was actually physically distributed in some parts. Slow judiciary action also provided a respite for landlords to oppose land acquisition for decades. Lack of adequate information on land ownership, land holdings and land tenure further hampered effective implementation, and local power structures sometimes prevented the landless cultivators from asserting their legal rights. Other marginalised groups including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Siddi communities, were subjected to further hindrances due to discrimination and unequal access to administration (Fanvekar, 2017).

As the Revenue Minister and later Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Chaudhary Charan Singh was closely involved in the process of amalgamating zamindari system and land reforms in the state through his advocacy of the concept of peasant proprietorship and the principle of “land to the tiller” which eventually came into force in 1952 (Government of Uttar Pradesh, 1950). The bill reduced the power of big landlords, and gave the ownership rights to millions of tenants and cultivators. Charan Singh had also raised a debate on the over concentration of land ownership and it was important from the point of view of agricultural development and social justice to have a small peasant proprietorship. Works like Abolition of Zamindari (1947) and India's Poverty and Its Solution (1964) helped give birth

to, and make more prominent, middle peasant groups like the Jats, Yadavs, Kurmis, Gujjars and Lodhs as economic and political entities. These groups began to become more involved in the functioning of local government and cooperative organizations, as well as in electoral politics, by the 1960s and 1970s, thereby challenging the traditional power of the upper-caste zamindars, and showed a way in which land reforms could help to change established power relationships. (Joshi, 1975).

Indian land reform was quite successful at eliminating the intermediary link, but was unsuccessful in land ceiling and in regulating land ownership, as well as in redistributing surplus land. Constitutional decentralisation, political opposition, the power of landed elites, inadequate administrative ability, corruption, erroneous land records, legal loopholes, and judicial delays led to significant disparities between the states. The state-level results were most prominent in Kerala, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, with comparatively important progress being achieved in the latter, but where larger parts of the country were concerned, implementation remained limited. Land reforms continue to be an unfinished policy agenda as about 45% of households were still landless, or landowners had less than one hectare. However, the continued inequalities in access to productive resources, in land ownership, in caste status, and in economic and political power suggest that land reform and social justice are in need of renewed political commitment, a robust institutional framework, effective enforcement of law, reliable land registers, and more protection for marginalised groups (Deininger & Binswanger.). 2003).

Impact of Land Reforms on Land Ownership and Resource Access

Land reforms in India produced partial changes in ownership but did not eliminateconcentration of land. Although intermediary abolition transferred rights to approximately 2 crore tenants, only 14.4 million acres, or about 4% of the operated land, had been redistributed by 1992 (Jenkins, 2013; Ministry of Rural Development, 2024). The top 10% of households still own approximately 44% of land, while top 5% control 32% and top 1% approximately 18%, land indicating persistent inequality (Kumar, 2026). Regional successes include West Bengal's Operation Barga (1977–1987), which registered 14 lakh sharecroppers, Kerala's redistribution of over 1.5 million acres, and Andhra Pradesh's redistribution of overone million acres, particularly benefiting the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Ghatak & Besley, 2000; Sadasivam, 2019). However, many beneficiaries, especially tenants and sharecroppers, failed to obtain physical possession of allocated land (Hans & Sajimon, 2025).

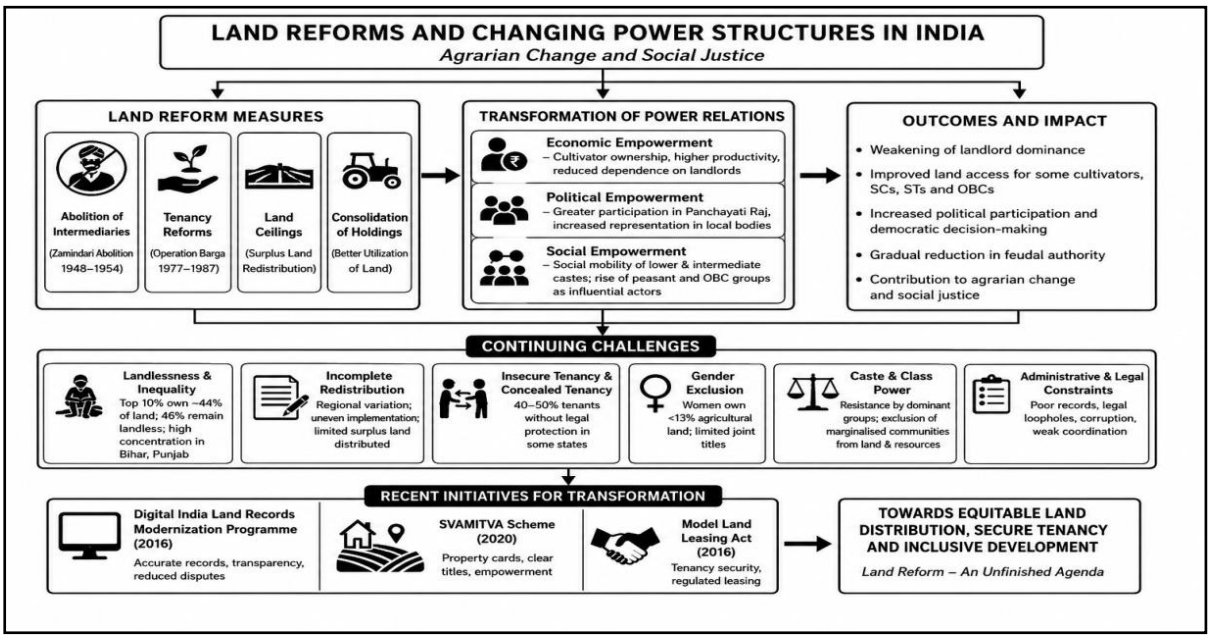
Formal ownership improved access to institutional credit, government schemes, crop insurance, subsidies, irrigation, and agricultural inputs, while tenure security encouraged investment and political participation (Deininger, 2003; Hricke & Luce, 2018). Nevertheless, caste, regional, and gender inequalities remain significant. Landlessness is highest in Punjab (73%), Bihar (59%), and Madhya Pradesh (51%), as compared to Rajasthan (34%) and Uttar Pradesh (39%) (Sadasivam, 2019). The largest landholder controls approximately 12.4% of village land on an average, while in 3.8% of villages a single owner controls over half of the agricultural land (Satarkar, 2025). Women own less than 13% of agricultural land despite contributing 60–70% of agricultural labour (Sinha, 2022). With approximately 45% of households remaining landless or marginal farmers, land reform remains an unfinished agenda requiring stronger enforcement, inclusive ownership policies, judicial efficiency, and reliable digital land records to advance agrarian changes and social justice (Ministry of Rural Development, 2024; Amrullah & Wening, 2026).

Land Reforms and Changing Power Structures

Land reforms significantly transformed traditional landlord–tenant relations by abolishing intermediary systems and transferring ownership rights to cultivators. The Zamindari Abolition Acts (1948–1954) ended the rent-collection rights of overthree million zamindars, jagirdars, and other intermediaries across 20 states and transferred ownership rights to approximately 20 million tenants (Joshi, 1975). In West Bengal, Operation Barga (1977–1987) registered 14 lakh sharecroppers, guaranteeing a 50% crop share and greater protection against eviction, thereby weakening traditional landlord dependence (Ghatak & Besley, 2000). However, concealed tenancy continued in states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab, where fake leases and benami transfers enabled landlords to evade

regulations, leaving an estimated 40–50% of tenants without formal legal protection by 2000 (Yadav, 2023).

Figure 1: Efficacy of Land Reforms in Transforming Power Structures in India



Source: Compiled by the Author from various published sources.

Figure 1 illustrates the transformation of power relations in India through land reforms. Abolition of intermediaries, Tenancy reforms, Land ceilings and consolidation of holdings reduced the traditional influence of zamindars and absentee landlords and encouraged cultivator ownership of land. Such changes brought about economic empowerment of cultivators, greater political empowerment through Panchayati Raj systems and enhanced mobility of the lower and intermediate castes, resulting in the rise of new social and political forces – land owning peasant and OBC. However, the figure also indicates ongoing problems, such as insecure tenure, incomplete redistribution and landlessness. The above-mentioned shortcomings have led to various recent efforts, like the Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme (DILRMP) which indicates that land reform continues to be an unfinished agenda for continued efforts to create equitable land distribution, secure land tenancy and inclusive development.There was only partial reduction of social and economic inequalities, and wide disparities between States. The state of Kerala and West Bengal had the greatest amount of wealth and power redistribution with Kerala giving about 1.5 million acres to landless labourers most of whom were from the scheduled tribes and the scheduled castes while West Bengal gave about 1.2 million acres to landless labourers most of whom were also from the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes. In West Bengal, where registered tenants were beneficiaries of Operation Barga, agricultural productivity is estimated to increase by around 28% and measurable poverty to drop between 1980 and 1990, as tenants invested in irrigation and modern agricultural inputs. But the statistics for the country show that there has been no significant change in the distribution of land ownership after 75 years of reform, with the richest 10% of households owning around 44% of the total land and 46% of households being completely landless (Rao, 2014). Bihar and Punjab have still seen high land concentration in certain areas - over 50% of land in village is held under cultivation by one or more landlords (Debnath et al; 2026).

Land ownership transformation also impacted political participation and decision making with empowerment of new land-owning cultivators in Panchayati Raj institutions. This enhanced the economic independence, political participation, and eligibility for local government positions for former tenants and sharecroppers who became owner farmers in Kerala after 1957 and West Bengal after 1977 reforms of the Left Front. This undermined the earlier political monopoly of the landlords over the village councils. In Kerala, a small group of land-owning peasants from intermediate castes (Nairs, Ezhavas) and marginalized groups had secured about 35% of the seats in the Gram Panchayats by 1995,

as compared to less than 5% prior to the land reforms (Byres, 1996). However, in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, where reforms were not effective, it is believed that landlords still exercised enormous influence over the village councils, holding around 60–70% of the power in the 1990s and 2000s, with the power to make decisions on irrigation, maintenance of roads and distribution of welfare.The land reforms also helped in empowering the marginalised people as they were targeted for redistribution, but not on equitable basis based on the number of people. Around 60% of the expected beneficiaries of Operation Barga in West Bengal were SCs and 25% were STs, thus empowering communities in the region, which were traditionally dependent upon debt bondage and forced labour. The land reforms between 1957 and 1967 in Kerala brought some land to about 8 lakh landless labourers of which around 45% were from the Scheduled Caste group, breaking the monopoly of dominant land owning groups, thereby providing greater access to education and political representation. Also, under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, land ownership and used rights was granted to about 1.5 million members of the Scheduled Tribes, to compensate for their historical dispossession. However, the situation of the landless population for both the SC and ST communities is skewed, with STs showing 55–65% landlessness rates in areas with high density of STs compared to 35–40% in areas with low density of STs, indicating that caste-based inequality of access to productive resources still exists (Shiva, 2020).

The gender aspect of land reform brings another big field of exclusion. Women's role in agriculture is about 60-70% of the total agricultural labour, but the legislation of land reform ignored independent ownership of women. Joint titles were still not prevalent and women had less than 13% of the agricultural land across the country and they found it difficult to access institutional credit, subsidies and government programmes that rely on formal land ownership. The Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana, which was first started in 2011, as well as the Model Land Leasing Act from 2016, have tried to work towards aspects of women's economic participation and tenure rights, but they have not been adequately implemented, with only around 8% of the beneficiaries reportedly having been issued joint titles by 2020 (National Land Records Modernization Programme, 2008). The situation was more favorable for women whose access to land was about 18% in Kerala by the year 2000 and women enjoyed higher household decision-making and engagement with local governance. The political economy of land reform implementation indicates that, more often than not, the actual results of the reform process were determined by caste and class power rather than by legislation. These dominant land-owning groups such as Bhumihars in Bihar, Jats in Punjab and Vidars in Maharashtra opposed reforms by legal action, by hiding the transfers, and by physically assaulting the claimants in some instances. Political mobilization was more effective in some states to counter this opposition, particularly those with good left movements. An eight village study in Maharashtra between 1950s to 2000s revealed that the condition of landlessness worsened in six villages, particularly among Dalits and Adivasis. The sale of land was largely limited to the same caste groups as in the past and marginalised groups were not involved until during times of distress. The ongoing loopholes are being closed by new initiatives such as the 2016 Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme, the SVAMITVA Scheme (2020) and the Model Land Leasing Act (2016). But inequalities from the past are entrenched. Colonial institutional arrangements had a long-term impact, as observed in the areas that remained under the Permanent Settlement where about 15–20% more land is concentrated than in the areas where the Ryotwari system was implemented (Indian Institute for Human Settlements, 2017). The evidence shows that the land reforms of 75 years have resulted in a reduction in the power of the traditional landlords and increased land ownership and political participation by some cultivator and marginalized groups, but have not eliminated the entrenched inequalities. In this context, agrarian changes and social justice will continue to be dependent on the continued enforcement of agrarian reforms, women's inclusion in land rights and effective digital land administration, protection of tenants and marginalized communities, and agrarian reforms that are based on equitable ownership practices (Anjanah & Subhashini, 2024).

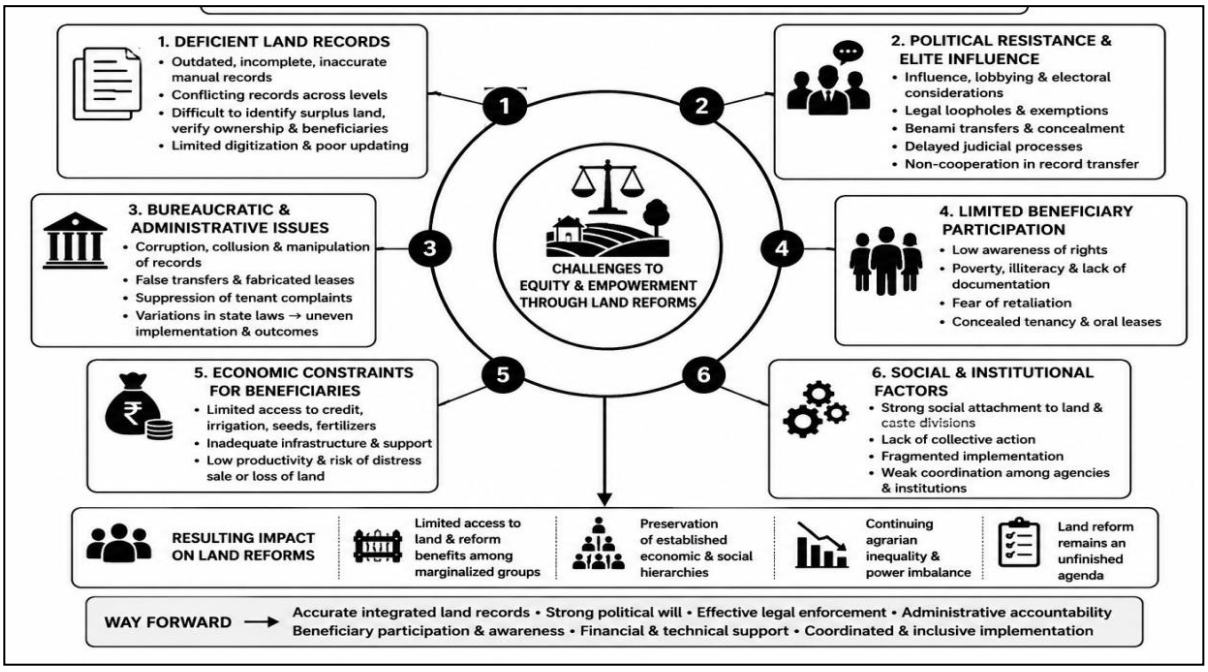
Challenges to Equity and Empowerment through Land Reforms

Implementation of land reforms in India has been beset with serious problems of equitability and empowerment. The accuracy and completeness of land records, many of them based on manual methods and systems, have led to discrepancies in the information on ownership, cultivation and

tenancy. Disagreements between different administrative levels hamper the identification of surplus land, the establishment of ownership and identification of the real beneficiaries. Sparsely digitalized integration and poor record keeping have also hindered good implementation. Political opposition and landowning elites have also limited the implementation of reforms. Ceiling laws, tenancy protection, and redistribution have been resisted by powerful landowners who have wielded political influence, lobbied, and considered election politics. There are certain loopholes in the law such as plantation, orchard and religious institutions which have allowed the hidden transfer of surplus land through benami transactions. The non-cooperation of former intermediaries in providing records and the delay in the judicial proceedings in land acquisition and redistribution have added to the administrative hassles and delays (Byres, 1996; Sethi, 2006).

Bureaucratic corruption, administrative apathy and collusion between revenue officers, politicians and landowners have hampered the progress of reform by means of false transfers, fake lease records, silencing of tenants, and falsification of records. State laws regarding land ceilings, exemptions, and tenancy protection have been different, leading to varying application and legal avoidance of the restrictions from state to state (Joshi, 1975). The legal rights of the tenants, landless labourers and the marginal cultivators could not be claimed due to various reasons like limited beneficiary participation, poverty, illiteracy, lack of documentation, fear of retaliation and hidden tenancy. Furthermore, credit availability, irrigation, seeds, fertilizers, infrastructure, and other support are lacking, limiting the productive sustainability of redistribution. Social attachment to land, caste divisions, the lack of collective action, non-uniform implementation, lack of inter-agency coordination, and discrepancies among land records, tenancy data and redistribution programmes have also hindered progress. Thus, while some changes in agrarian power dynamics have occurred to some extent, inclusive and precise land data, increased political involvement, robust law enforcement, accountability of administration, involvement of the beneficiaries, financial assistance and coordinated implementation of land reforms are necessary for furthering agrarian change and social justice in India (Deininger, 2003; Yadav, 2023).

Figure 2: Challenges Hindering Equity and Empowerment through Land Reforms in India



Source: Compiled by the Author from various published sources.

Figure 2 illustrates the major challenges that continue to hinder equity, empowerment, and the transformation of power relations through land reforms in India. It highlights administrative problems such as incomplete land records, political resistance from land-owning elites, legal loopholes, and bureaucratic corruption, which have weakened implementation. Structural barriers, including variations in state laws, limited beneficiary participation, financial constraints, social attachment to land,

concealed tenancy, and weak institutional coordination, have further restricted effective redistribution and tenure security. Together, these interconnected challenges have limited access to land and reform benefits among marginalized communities, preserved established economic and social hierarchies, and contributed to continuing agrarian inequality. Thus, despite decades of policy intervention, land reform remains an unfinished agenda requiring stronger implementation, institutional coordination, legal enforcement, and inclusive governance.

Policy Measures to Strengthen Land Reforms

Complete Digital Land Records: Strengthen DILRMP (2016) to achieve comprehensive coverage through GPS-based mapping, real-time updates, integrated databases, and secure digital ownership verification, reducing discrepancies in land records.

Common Land-Ceiling Framework: Develop a coordinated national framework with consistent ceiling standards, exemptions, compensation rules, and enforcement mechanisms to reduce legal loopholes and uneven implementation among states.

Stronger Tenant Protection: Encourage wider adoption of the Model Land Leasing Act, formal registration of tenancy agreements, improved tenure security, and effective safeguards against illegal eviction.

Political and Administrative Accountability: Establish independent monitoring mechanisms, public hearings, transparent reporting, and performance-based evaluation of land reform implementation by state and district authorities.

Beneficiary Empowerment: Conduct legal-literacy and awareness programmes for tenants, landless cultivators, and marginalized communities, including assistance with documentation and access to legal remedies.

Post-Redistribution Support: Establish a dedicated national fund to provide institutional credit, irrigation, crop insurance, agricultural inputs, and technical support to beneficiaries, ensuring that redistributed land remains productive and contributes to long-term economic empowerment and social justice.

CONCLUSION

The history of land reforms in India reflects the effort to transform an agrarian order shaped by colonial land policies, concentrated ownership, and entrenched social and economic inequalities. After independence in 1947, land reforms became a central instrument of nation-building, focusing on the abolition of intermediary tenures, protection of tenants, redistribution of surplus land, and expansion of equitable access to productive resources. The findings demonstrate that reform outcomes varied significantly across states due to differences in political leadership, administrative capacity, social structures, and agrarian conditions. Kerala and West Bengal achieved comparatively greater success in tenancy reforms and weakening landlord dominance, while Jammu and Kashmir significantly altered ownership patterns through early and extensive redistribution. In contrast, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and parts of Andhra Pradesh recorded more limited outcomes because of political resistance, bureaucratic weaknesses, legal loopholes, and the continuing influence of landed elites. In Uttar Pradesh, despite the abolition of Zamindari through the Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, 1950, inequalities in land ownership and power relations persisted, revealing the gap between legislative objectives and implementation. The study further demonstrates that the significance of land reforms extends beyond land redistribution: weakened traditional landlord authority, transformed landlord–tenant relations, expanded participation of marginalized communities in political and social institutions, and contributed to the development of democratic governance. However, fragmented holdings, concealed tenancy, unequal access to productive resources, inaccurate land records, and administrative limitations continue to restrict agrarian transformation. Land reforms in India therefore, represent neither complete success nor failure but an ongoing process of social change whose legacy continues to shape ownership patterns, power

relations, social justice, and debates on equity across states including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Kerala, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Jammu and Kashmir.

Ethical Considerations

This study does not involve human participants, personal data, interviews, surveys, or clinical investigations; therefore, ethical approval was not required. The research is based on publicly available archival records, government documents, books, academic journals, and historical publications, with all sources appropriately acknowledged. Artificial Intelligence (AI), including ChatGPT, was used solely for grammar correction, language refinement, sentence restructuring, and improving clarity and readability. AI was not used to determine the research questions, historical interpretations, analytical arguments, findings, or conclusions. The authors remain responsible for the accuracy, originality, and scholarly integrity of the research.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research.

Data Availability

All data and materials used in this study are derived from publicly available archival records, government publications, land reform reports, census documents, memoirs, academic books, scholarly journals, and institutional reports. Relevant sources are cited in the manuscript and are accessible through libraries, archives, government repositories, and academic databases.

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