

Caste Hierarchy and Class Hierarchy: A Comparative Study of Tamil Nadu and Bihar*

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Introduction

The Social and economic structures vary in various regions of India. Traditionally, in the South the severities of caste have been felt more acutely than in the west or the north. The caste divisions in Tamil Nadu, Kerala or Andhra are more broad based and not as hierarchical as in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, etc. Consequently, the gap in social, economic and political positions between the high castes and the low castes has been more severe in the South. In the South there was not only untouchability, but also inapproachability and unseeability. In Eastern India particularly in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, etc untouchability has been quite severe; it also has been severe in other state like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, etc. However, in northern states like Punjab and Haryana and in north-eastern plains like the state of Assam, the characteristics of Purity and Pollution have been weak. In the pre-independence period there was apparent convergence between caste and class hierarchy but in the post-independence period there has been shift in this relationship, concomitant to structural changes. The two factors which have contributed to such a change are land reforms and social movements based on land issues. There has been some variations across different regions in the country in the relationship between caste hierarchy and class hierarchy.

Objectives

The objective of the present paper is to examine the variations in caste and class hierarchy in a comparative perspective between Tamil Nadu and Bihar. In this context the hypothesis is that the factors inducing the structural changes (caste and class hierarchy) in the post-independence period can be attributed to land reforms and social movements.

Role of Land Reforms in initiating structural changes in Tamil Nadu (Tanjavur as a case in point)

In 1950, at least half the cultivated land in Tanjavur lay in large estates. Many of these estates comprised one or more villages spread to several hundred and thousand of acres. One third of the area under large estates was owned by temples or monasteries; two thirds, by wealthy families of middle to upper Hindu castes. The other half of Tanjavur's land was owned in small lots by village temples and by small landowning families who lived in kinship communities in the villages. Each of these families usually owned less than 10 acres; and most of them owned less than 5 acres. Thus, more than one-sixth of the district's total cultivable area was owned by temples and monasteries, chiefly in large estates, while about one-third consisted of relatively large private estates up to 6,000 acres, and more which altogether comprised about 11.2 per cent of all private land holdings.

Agriculture was the main source of livelihood for 70 percent of the people in 1950. Those who belonged to families who lived mainly from their own land as noncultivating landlords or as rich or middle peasant cultivators formed 43.4 percent; 22.2 per cent were poor peasants who leased in most of the land they tilled, either on a share cropping tenure (varam) or on a fixed rent tenure (kuthakai).

In 1950 Tanjavur had the highest concentration of land ownership in Tamil Nadu. It also had the highest percentage of noncultivating landlords at the upper end of the scale and of poor tenants and agricultural labourers at the lower end. The high ranking landlord castes were mainly Brahmins, Vellalars, Naidus and Kallars. The dominant agricultural class also came from middle class rank of Muslims, Padayachhai, Vanniars, Moopanars, Nayakars. The tenants came from the backward castes and the scheduled castes. At the rope-bottom were the agricultural labourers whose also swell because of the large scale eviction of tenants by 80s most of the Brahmin dominated villages along the banks of the main stream of Kaveri were dominated by the families of the middle ranking castes i.e. so called backward classes. Many of the service and artisan caste who were under the authority of the dominant landlord castes now work independently. These independent entrepreneurs belong to middle or lower ranking non-Brahmin castes, such as, Padayachhis, Vanniars, Kallars, Nadars, etc. The growth in the number of agricultural labourers could be attributed to eviction tenants and to the ongoing process of pauperization and proletarianisation.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, India's planning experts acknowledged a need for land reforms in India which would produce economically viable holding, obviate the growing agrarian tension, raise productivity and expand the market for industrial commodities. This need was especially recognized in the case of Tanjavur which because of its high fertility was selected as an early experimental site for the 'green revolution package' in 1960-1. A push had been given to land reform in the post-independence period when communist organizers led the rural poor in an effort to take over the land and in general to make urgent demands for social justice.

Land Ceilings

What of the results of this long series of Land reforms? To put it mildly they had some impact in inducing structural changes and consequent changes in the caste and class hierarchy which would be described later. Tenancy legislation fared even better than that relating to land ceilings and it also had desirable impact in initiating changes in the agrarian class structure particularly at the lower level and middle peasant level.

The Impact of Land Reforms on agrarian social structure in Tanjavur

Although they failed in their egalitarian objectives, the land reform acts unquestionably changed the agrarian structure. They had the following effects:

Apart from temple and monastic lands, the largest estates were partly sold or broken up into smaller ones, even though the remaining holdings might comprise several hundred or in a few cases, several thousand acres. Land ownership was no longer considered safe as the sole investment by Tanjavur's landlords. Although only a small proportion of the land was distributed to the landless, the various governments of Tamil Nadu did make efforts to grant house sites of about 0.02 to 0.03 acres to landless labourers, or at least to give them security of tenure on their sites. By 1976, the great majority of labourers controlled their house sites, often with a tiny garden. This gave them somewhat greater security in their economic and political struggles against the landowners, for they were no longer subject to legal eviction. It also however, gave them a small stake in the present economy. The financial decline of many temples since the

early the 1950s paralleled a general loss of land, wealth and power by Brahmins and other religious institutions.

By the last 1970's there was a general loss of land and power of the Brahmins and rise to power of the larger middle ranking non-Brahmin castes. The landless were left to fend for themselves. The land owners had decline to about 31% of the agricultural work force by 1971 and about 25% in 1981. The land reforms did result in the decline of power of the landlords and the rise of intermediate caste in the caste hierarchy (Gough, 1989).

Table-1

Changes in Class Composition over 15 Years in Kumbapettai – 1952 and 1976

Class	1952		1976	
	% of Total Agric	% of Total Non- Agric	% of Total Agric	% of Total Non-Agric
1.Petty Bourgeoisie	18.9	13.5	6.4	41.2
2. Indep-endent Entre-preneurs	3.8	35.2	5.1	22.0
3. Semi-Proletarians & Proletarians (a) Tenants, etc.,	16.8	27.0	10.1	11.8
(b) Labourers with some leased land.	10.8	-	12.8	-
c. Laboures with some own land	-	-	3.7	-
(d) Landless Labourers	49.7	16.2	61.9	10.3
4.Mendicants Unemployed, etc.	-	8.1	-	11.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Gough, Kathleen; "Rural change in Southeast India: 1950s to 1980s", OUP, Delhi, 1989, p. 260-1, Table 13.1 and 13.2

Table-2
Percentages of Cultivable Land Owned by Major Caste Groups in Greater Kumbapettai

	Internal			External		
	1897	1952	1976	1897	1952	1976
Temples	2.6	2.6	2.6	-	0.3	0.3
Brahmans	61.1	32.2	9.0	2.7	24.5	21.0
Vellalars	7.3	7.3	5.5	-	13.4	17.0
Non-Brahmans	1.9	2.6	4.5	-	12.5	23.0
Muslims	-	-	-	3.6	4.4	13.0
Christians (Former Harijans)	-	-	-	-	-	0.5
Harijans	-	0.2	3.4	-	-	0.2
Total	72.9	44.9	25.0	27.1	55.1	75.0

Source: Kathleen Gough, op. cit, 1989, p-272, Table 14.1

Table-3
Percentage Ownership of Land in Greater Kumbapettai by Class and Occupational Group, 1952 and 1976

	1952		1976	
	Internal	External	Internal	External
Temples	2.6	0.3	2.6	0.3
Landlords and rich Farmers	34.0	36.0	8.2	39.5
Professionals and white collar workers	2.5	13.8	3.2	17.2
Marchants Peasants	0.4	5.0	-	17.3
Cultivators	5.4	-	11.0	0.7
Total	44.9	55.1	25.0	75.0

Source: Gough, Kathleen, op cit, p-274, Table 142.

The land reforms had much greater structural change in Kerala. It is interesting to note, that backwards castes like Ezhavas and Pandarams Benefitted maximum land from the reform measures. This is evident from the studies conducted in Kerala.

Table-4
Caste and Land Ownership Pattern in a Kerala village

Caste/Community	Number of land owning households	Total land in (acres)	Percentage
A. High Castes	25	75	13.64
B. Backward Castes	101	422	76.73
C. Scheduled Castes	5	12	2.18
D. Other Communities	14	41	7.45
Total	145	550	100.00

It would be also interesting to understand the dynamics of agrarian changes in Tamilnadu based on the study of Athreya, et. al. (1990) on Production Relation and Agrarian Change in the context of Trichi districts in Tamilnadu. The objective of this study were the following:

1. To make a systematic comparison of different agrarian ecotypes (tank-irrigation, canal-irrigation, well-irrigation and dry farming).
2. To study the variety of relations of production
3. To explore the pattern and tempo of agrarian change
4. To investigate how relations of production impinge on the other levels of social formation.

Trichi districts and the pancahayts unions of Kulithalei and Manaparei were selected for the study reflecting the two different variety of ecotypes; Kulithalei represented wet ecotype and Manaparei represent dry ecotype. Three villages were selected from each ecotype to understand the variations in agrarian relations.

It would be appropriate to highlight some of the significant findings of this study which would collaborate the hypothesis of the present paper:

1. It is remarkable that the effects of the reforms are so clearly visible in our area; the de-concentration of land ownership in the wet area must be attributed to the land reform legislation. The land owners have sold their land to evade the law, and in the process the de-concentration that the law ostensibly aimed

at was achieved but in a round about way. There are many indication of old landlords selling out and new dominant land owners entering the agrarian scene in other parts of India as well.

2. An important cultural factor seems to be active namely, the caste system which differs between the two ecotypes. The dry area has very 'aristocratic' castes like the *Brahmins* who shun manual labour and consider it below their dignity even to touch the plough. While the old landlords in the wet area were mainly Brahmins, the dominant castes in the dry area were typical peasant caste whose ethos regarded labour on the land as a virtue. These castes kept their women away from work in the fields.

Changes in Agrarian Social Structure in Bihar due to Land Reforms during Post-Independence Period

Pradip Kumar Bose in his article "Mobility and Conflict: Social Roots of Caste Violence in Bihar" analysis the reasons for the upward mobility of Backward Castes in Bihar during the post-independence period.

Table-5
Major Caste Groups in Bihar

	Caste	Per cent of Total Population
Upper Castes	Brahmin	4.7
	Bhumihar	2.9
	Rajput	4.2
	Kayastha	1.2
	Sub Total	13.0
Upper Backwards	Bania	0.6
	Yadav	11.0
	Kurmi	3.6
	Koeri	4.1
	Sub Total	19.3
Lower Backwards	Barni	1.0
	Dhanuk	1.8
	Hajjam	1.4
	Kahar	1.7
	Kandu	1.6
	Kumhar	1.3

	Lohar	1.3
	Mullah	1.5
	Tatwa	1.6
	Teli	2.8
	Other	16.0
	Sub Total	32.0
Scheduled Castes		14.4
Scheduled Tribes		9.1
Muslims		12.5
	Grand Total	100.0

Most of the members of the backward castes like the Yadavs, Kurmis, Koeris were tenants just preceding the independence of the country. The Ahir (Goala) movement for uplift had arisen in Bihar during the 1920's. The claims of the backward castes to the upper caste status, their refusal to render any unpaid labour and sell their products at privileged rates to landlords and moneylenders, their demands for occupancy *rise over their land, stoppage of menial services and payment of abwabs, etc. led to violent reactions on the part of landlords and money lenders mostly belonging to upper castes and resulted in caste rights.*

The rising economic power of the backward castes gradually reflected in the political arena as well. With the adoption of adult franchise, backward castes became politically important because of their numerical superiority. Caste breakdown of the general seats in the Bihar Legislative Assembly over the 1962-77 period depicts the familiar story of upper caste domination in the early years, when well over half of the MLAs from non-reserved seats belonged to the four 'twice-born' castes. The pattern maintained itself through the 1967 and 1969 elections, and even down to the period of Emergency, when fully 54.8 per cent of the MLAs from general seats were Forwards (i.e. upper castes) as against their 16.5 percent of the non-Scheduled population. The 1977 election meant a noticeable decline in the Forwards' representation to 48.6 percent. As the Forwards declined in strength, the Backwards grew and the Yadavs by 1977 became the second largest group in the assembly next only to the Rajputs.

While the backward castes struggles against the upper castes were mostly confined to the electoral arena, legislative assembly, etc., for the enforcement of certain policies beneficial to them, at the village level a more violent repression was perpetrated

by them to suppress the discontent and grievances of the agricultural labourers of which nearly half belong to the scheduled castes. In many of the cases of major caste violence that occurred in the 1970's and 1980's in Bihar, the Yadavs and Kurmis were the perpetrators of violence against the Harijans. For instance, in Bishrampur several landless agricultural labourers were burnt alive by the Kurmis in 1978. Some of the Kurmi landlords possessed more than 100 bighas of land, maintained tractors and own impressive houses. Similarly in Belchi, where eight Harijans were burnt alive by the Kurmis in May 1977, the Kurmis were the rich landlords who perpetrated the massacre on the scheduled caste landless labourers. Kurmis have prospered through the cultivation of potato and onions and serial crops like wheat and paddy. They have accumulated enough wealth apart from engaging in farming; there are also government contractors and owners of transport services and cold storages among the Kurmis.

The violence against the Harijans was visible in those places where the Harijans as agricultural labourers were getting organized and becoming politically conscious under the leadership of CPI (ML).

Table-6
CASTE VIOLENCE IN BIHAR

Sl. No.	Place	Aggressor		Victim		Issues
		Caste	Economic Status	Caste	Economic Status	
1	Bajitpur	Bhumihar	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourers and sharecroppers	Wage, sharecroppers' right over land
2	Belchi	Kurmi	Landlord	All caste	Poor peasants, agricultural Labourers and sharecroppers	Social oppression
3	Beniapatti	Kurmi	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourers and sharecroppers	Wage
4	Bishrampur	Kurmi	Landlord	Harijan	Poor peasant and one big landlord	Wage, sharecroppers' right wage
5	Chandadano	Brahmin	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourer	Wage
6	Dharampuri	Yadav	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourers and sharecroppers	Wage, sharecroppers' right.
7	Dohija	Kurmi	All caste	Bhumihar	Poor peasant and one big landlord	Retaliation
8	Gopalpur	Bhumihar	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourer	Wage
9	Jarpa	Kurmi	Landlord	Yadav	Poor peasants and sharecroppers	Land dispute
10	Kalia	Brahmin	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourer	Wage
11	Khijuria	Bhumihar	Landlord	Harijan	Sharecroppers	sharecroppers'

						right.
12	Parasbigha	Yadav	Landlord	Yadav	Sharecroppers	sharecroppers' right.
13	Pathada	Harijan	Landlord	Harijan	Agcicultural labourer	Wage
14	Pipra	Harijan	Landlord	Harijan	Agcicultural labourer	Wage
15	Pupri	Harijan	Landlord	Harijan	Agcicultural labourer	Wage and possession over land

Land Ownership Pattern in Bihar: current scenario

Of the landed segments, while 60 per cent were marginal landholders, with marginal and small landholders constituting 78 per cent of the total, only 1.3 per cent of the households owned large landholding. Going by the NSS estimates, marginal holding have increased from 71 percent of total holding in 1970s to almost 90 percent in 2003. Similarly, area accounted for by the marginal holding has increased from around 18 percent to 42 percent over the same period. Marginal and small holding together were 96.50 percent of total number of holdings, accounting for 67.36 percent of the owned area.

Table-7
Percent Distribution of Households and Area Owned over five major class in Bihar

Year	% of land Holdings					
	Marginal (0<*<1ha)	Small (1<*<=2)	Semi- medium (2<*<=4)	Medium (4<*<=10)	Large (*>10)	All
Bihar						
2003	89.40	7.10	2.70	0.70	0.10	100
1992	80.56	11.10	6.00	2.14	0.20	100
1982	76.55	12.42	7.79	2.82	0.31	100
1971-72	71.71	15.11	9.15	3.66	0.37	100
All India						
2003	79.60	10.80	6.00	3.00	0.60	100
1992	71.88	13.42	9.28	4.54	0.88	100
1982	66.64	14.70	10.78	6.45	1.42	100*
1971-72	62.62	15.49	11.94	7.83	2.12	100

Year	% of area owned					
	Marginal (0<*<1ha)	Small (1<*<=2)	Semi Medium (2<*<=4)	Medium (4<*<=10)	Large (*>10)	All
Bihar						
2003	42.07	25.29	18.53	9.56	4.63	100
1992	28.58	23.84	24.45	18.68	4.44	100
1982	23.96	22.91	27.02	20.22	5.90	100
1971-72	18.20	23.43	28.07	23.63	6.67	100
All India						
2003	23.05	20.38	21.98	23.08	11.55	100
1992	16.93	18.59	24.58	26.07	13.83	100
1982	12.03	16.49	23.58	29.83	18.07	100
1971-72	9.76	14.68	21.98	30.73	22.91	100

Landownership and Poverty

Land ownership is also closely associated with poverty. The poor typically own less land than the non-poor in Bihar. In fact, *75% of the rural poor were 'landless' or 'near-landless' in 1999-2000. This has expanded by 8% since 1993-94.* Here one also must observe that while incidence of poverty has declined for all land owning classes, but the *incidence of poverty has increased for the landless from 51% to 56% during the nineties*, also the share of poor of this group has increased from 55% in the early nineties to 61% by the 1999-2000. Thus the condition of landless and near landless has unambiguously worsened in the nineties to say the least.

Table-8
Rural poverty Incidence and Shares by land Ownership

Land owned (ha)	50 th Round			55 th Round		
	% of rural population	Poverty Incidence%	% share of the poor	% of rural population	Poverty incidence	% share Of the poor
No land	9	51	12	10	56	14
0<*<=0.4ha	43	51	55	53	46	61
0.4<*<=1ha	24	34	20	20	29	15
1<*<=2 ha	15	28	10	10	30	7

2<*<=.4ha	7	18	3	4	16	2
>.4ha	3	6	0	2	18	1
Overall	100	40	100	100	40	100

Source: NSS 50th, 55th Rounds

Land Ownership by Social Groups

If one takes a look at the rural landownership by social groups, then going by the NSSO data, *landlessness has increased in the SC/ST in the decade of nineties(NSSO 50th and 55th round)*. While the overall landless has increased too from 8.9% to 10.1% in the same period, but the SC/ST groups stand out as clear losers in this period 1993-94 to 1999-2000. Also, while 17% of SC/ST households had land ownership of greater than marginal size (greater than 1 hectare) by 1999-2000 it had fallen to around 9%. There is also a clear concentration of all the social groups in the marginal land-holding class, and fall is also witnessed in the percentage of households holding lands of higher than the marginal sizes.

While 72 percent of the 'other' category households would be classified in the marginal landholding category, which would essentially mean poor peasants, the corresponding number for the OBC households and SC households is found to be 77 per cent and 73 per cent respectively. A very significant pattern emerges here, even in this broad categorization of social groups, is that a **substantive majority similar class positioning of poor peasantry** (even here the lot of SC households can be seen to be much worse). The **differences between these groups begin to show significantly as one moves up the landholding category, especially for the SC households**. While only 3 per cent of the 'other' category households is found to be In the large landholding category of more than 4 hectares, the corresponding percentage for OBC households in only 0.7 per cent, with no SC household to be found in this class of rich peasantry.

Table-9
Land Possessed (hectares) by Social Groups in Bihar

Social Group	0.0	0.00.4	0.41-1.00	1.01-2.00	2.01-4.00	4.01+
Others	6.0%	49.2%	23.0%	12.6%	60.1%	3.1%
OBC	8.8%	58.0%	19.5%	9.5%	3.5%	0.7%
SC	23.8%	67.1%	6.4%	2.1%	0.6%	0.0%

Source: 55th round NSS (1999-2000), report no.469

Table-10
Rural Land ownership by Classes

Land owned (ha)	50 th Round(1993-94)			55 th Round (1999-2000)		
	Majority	SC/ST	Overall	Majority	SC/ST	Overall
No land	6.8	14.0	8.9	6.8	18.6	10.1
0<*<=0.4	38.1	53.3	42.8	51.6	57.6	53.3
0.4<*<=1	27.4	15.7	23.9	23.3	13.5	20.5
1<*<=2	16.9	9.6	14.7	11.3	6.7	10
2<*<=4	7.6	5.3	6.9	5.1	2.5	4.4
>.4ha	3.2	2.1	2.8	2.2	1	1.9

Table-11
Average size of owned land in 1999-2000 and 1981-82 and % fall in average land holding across Caste and Class

	Average Size of owned Land (Acres)		% fall in average Area
	1999-2000	1981-1982	
Caste			
Brahmin+Kayastha	3.45	6.25	44.86
Bhumihar+Rajput	2.78	5.43	48.85
Kurmi	3.45	4.26	19.48
Koeri	1.11	1.41	21.69
Yadav	1.17	1.60	26.71
Other backward 11	1.25	3.20	61.03
Backward 1	0.75	1.31	42.73
Scheduled Castes	0.31	0.63	50.38
Muslims	1.14	2.19	44.86
Class			
Agricultural labour	0.45	1.08	58.02
Poor middle peasants	0.83	0.73	-13.66
Middle peasants	1.02	1.48	31.56
Big peasants	2.99	4.78	37.42
Landlords	2.93	6.13	52.31
Non-agriculturalists	0.31	1.40	77.86
Total	1.80	3.42	47.52

Source: A.N. Sharma-Agarian relations and socio-economic change in Bihar, EPW march 5,2005

Thus while on the one hand, we see a **trend towards proletarianisation in rural Bihar**, we also find a **weakening of the grip of traditional elites, non-agriculturalist on the agrarian economy.**

Table-12
Percentage of households and average size of selling and buying of land, 1999-2000

	% of Households Selling land	Average land Sold(acres)	% of Households Purchasing land	Average land Purchased(acres)
Caste				
Brahmin+Kayastha	26.51	1.22	7.83	1.34
Bhumihar+Rajput	30.68	0.93	9.09	0.85
Kurmi	17.86	0.24	17.86	0.76
Koeri	10.00	0.40	3.33	0.62
Yadav	9.62	0.33	13.46	0.95
Other backward 11	9.72	0.73	11.11	0.62
Backward 1	5.16	0.53	10.97	0.64
Scheduled Castes	1.99	0.20	4.48	0.52
Muslims	13.33	0.92	9.09	1.09
Class				
Agricultural labour	3.50	0.69	4.04	0.23
Poor middle peasants	15.38	0.38	15.38	0.41
Middle peasants	17.54	0.27	17.54	0.98
Big peasants	24.52	1.00	13.55	1.13
Landlords	29.73	1.03	12.84	1.17
Non-agriculturalists	5.22	0.72	5.97	0.29
Total	13.02	0.90	8.64	0.85

Source: A.N. Sharma-Agrarian relations and socio-economic change in Bihar, EPW march 5, 2005

A substantial percentage of uppercaste households are found to be selling land and with few buying, with the average size of land sold being less than the size of land bought. This is only a pointer towards the internal differentiation among the upper caste segments, with the weaker sections among them losing out. *In fact, in this period upper castes have been the biggest losers of land, and the gainers have been the backward castes, specially kurmi and yadav. The Yadav households seem to be most bullish in the land market with only 9.62% household selling land of average size 0.33 acres, but 13.46% of households buying land of average size 0.95 acres.*

For scheduled castes too, the percentage of households buying land (4.48%) is more than households selling land (1.99%). For all caste groups, size of land bought is more than the size of land sold, except for the OBC II group, where though the percentage of households purchasing land (11.11%) is more than the percentage of households (9.72%) selling land, but the average size of land sold is 0.73 acres while the average size of land brought is 0.62 acres. This could well be a case of **erstwhile cultivators moving out of cultivation in distress, and the ascendant groups/class across all the caste groups inverting in land**. This could well be marker of a new dynamics taking shape in the agrarian Bihar with the weaker segment across different caste groups moving out, leaving the contest for agrarian control between the ascending/powerful segments of different castes.

Contemporary Caste and Class Hierarchy in Bihar

A trend analysis of ownership holding in Bihar from 1971-72 to 2003 indicates the following (based on NSS Report 491: Household Ownership Holdings in India, 2003)

1. Marginal holdings have increased from 71 percent of total holdings in the 1970's to almost 90% in 2003. Similarly, area accounted for by the marginal holdings has increased from around 18% to 42% over the same period.
2. Marginal and small holdings together were 96.50% of total number of holdings accounting for 67.36% of total owned area.
3. While the percentage of large holding has been a form in the 90's from 0.92% in 1992 to 0.01% in 2003, the area under such holding has increased from 4.44% to 4.63% over the period.
4. It is the middle peasantry in the semi-medium and medium category which is clearly losing out land in the period.
5. The relationship between land ownership and poverty shows that 75% of the rural poor were landless or near landless in 1999-2000. This incidence of poverty has increased for the landless from 51% to 56% during the 1990s (source: NSS 50th and 55th rounds).
6. The relationship of land ownership by caste groups indicates the following scenario:

- a. The incidence of landlessness has increased among SCs/STs from 14.6% to 18.6% between 1993-94 to 1999-2000 (NSSO 50th and 55th round). Even the land holdings of the remaining category is concentrated in marginal landholding class.
 - b. While 72% of the 'other' (upper caste) category households are in the marginal land holding category, the corresponding status of OBC and SC households is 77% and 73% respectively.
 - c. Only 3% of the 'other' category households is found to be in the large land holding category of more than 4 hectares; the corresponding percentage for OBC households is only 0.7%, with no SC households to be found in this class of rich peasantry.
7. An empirical study conducted by Sharma (2008) also sharply focuses on relative positions of different caste groups on land holdings as indicated below:
- a. A substantial percentage of upper caste households are found to be selling land and are the biggest losers of land between 1981-82 and 1999-2000.
 - b. The gainer have been the backward caste, especially Kurmi and Yadav. The yadav households are the most bullish on the land market.
 - c. Erstwhile cultivators are moving out of cultivation in distress and the ascendet groups/class across the dominant backward caste groups investing in land
8. The changing agrarian scenario has also implications for Rural Unrest in Bihar
- a. While overwhelming majority of landless are agriculture labourers, their proportion went up from 70.3% in 1993-94 to 77% in 1999-2000.
 - b. It was among the backward and scheduled caste population that the agrarian movement as well as the naxalite movement found fertile ground.
 - c. The increased in the incidence of clashes between the naxalites and the land owners indicate the preponderance of dominant backward castes particularly Yadav's and Kurmis on the one hand and landless agricultural labourers on the other.

Conclusion

The comparison between changes in the agrarian structure and caste class hierarchy in Tamil Nadu and Bihar leads us to the following inference. Due to the impact of Land Reform and Agrarian Movement led by the communists, the hold of the landlords by 1980s dwindled as the dominant caste and it was replaced by the erstwhile intermediate castes. The process of pauperization, proletarianization and eviction of tenants also swelled the percentage of agricultural labourers. Bihar which was entrenched with feudalism at the dawn of independence, with the dominance of the four upper castes namely Brahmin, Rajput, Bhoonihars and Kayasthas were overtaken and replaced by the strong emergence of the dominant backward castes consisting of the Yadav's, Kurmis and Koeris. However, the scheduled castes and agricultural labourers in particular continued to be the victims of dominant backward castes.

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