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Empowering Inclusive Growth: Addressing Socio-Economic Inequalities and Caste Dynamics for Sustainable Development in Indian Agriculture

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Abstract

Over the past 60 years, India's agricultural policies have undergone significant changes, particularly following the Green Revolution in the 1960s. This revolution fostered self-reliance in food grain production but also led to significant changes in the country's social agrarian system.³ New technology, sensitive to fertilizers and water, was more advantageous to institutional landowners, increasing socio-economic gaps. The Green Revolution also enhanced power balance for multinational corporations in agrochemicals and agricultural machinery. The agricultural industry is the leading economic sector in India, employing 58 per cent of the farming population and accommodating 55 per cent of the population. However, historical caste inequality still defines the agrarian systems, restricting the ability of the underprivileged in terms of land ownership, credit, and institutional support, particularly the Dalits. The increase in agricultural grain production has exacerbated agrarian distress. Nearly 40 per cent of farmers express a desire to leave agriculture due to low profitability, financial risks, and a lack of social status. The gains of agricultural growth have stay on with the dominant caste landowners. This paper will investigate the information needs of farmers in different castes and propose ways to address the gaps. This paper will explore the agrarian structure and working landholdings from the perspective of caste and hash out the significance of historical injustices in this context.

¹ “A social agrarian system is one in which land ownership and agricultural connections are fundamental to the economics, social hierarchy, and cultural standards of the community”.

Keywords: Agriculture, Caste, Land Ownership, Agrarian Inequality, Dalits, Doubling Farmers' Income

1. Introduction

Agriculture has continued to be arguably the prop leg of Indian economy. Agriculture is still the Indian economy backbone as approximately half of the population and about 58 percent of the rural workforce relies on it. Indian agriculture has experienced massive changes over the years due to policy changes, change in technologies and modernization. Nevertheless, other problems, including declining farm revenues, environmental deterioration, unequal resource distribution, and the need to revise the approach to sustainable agriculture remain an issue in the context of Indian agriculture, thus necessitating a new emphasis on sustainable agriculture methods (Prasad, 2007; Singh, 2021; GoI, 2024). Since the time of Independence, the Indian government has undertaken so many initiatives in order to enhance the productivity of agriculture. One of these breakthroughs was the Green Revolution of the mid-1960s. Massive growth of food grain production occurred as 51 million tons of food grains in 1950-51 evolved to more than 314 million tonnes in 2022 (Pathal et al, 2022). The benefits of the Green Revolution were however not equally shared. The big farmers particularly those of the higher castes were gaining a lot out of it thus maintaining the status quo in the society, small and peripheral farmers (who form 86.08 per cent of the total landholders) struggled to access credit, technology and markets. Post-Independence agricultural growth, while increasing food grain production, has reproduced regional and social inequalities (Pathak, 2022). The unfair allocation of information, technology, and institutional support also aggravates their economic situation and turned farming into an uncompensated activity (Dhanagare, 1988 & Guha, 2016). The Indian agricultural situation is rather heterogeneous with heterogeneous agro-ecology, patterns of cropping, as well as traditional and modern farming techniques.

The sector's contribution to the economy extends beyond food production, influencing rural employment, cultural heritage, and economic stability. Despite the success, the following are the continual challenges that Indian agriculture is addressing resilience in the climate change context with an eye on uneven farm incomes. Also, it resulted in massive degradation of the environment such as depletion of the soil, water-logging and groundwater depletion. In addition, the escalating prices of the inputs, excessive use of chemical fertilizer, water-intensive agricultural production, and soil degradation has increased the threat regarding its sustainability as this is also a threat to the industry in the long term. To deal with these challenges, one has to

consider a change in paradigm as sustainable and inclusive agricultural development (Guha, 2016; Prasad, 2006). Moreover, the Indian agrarian sector is very closely interconnected with the rural caste system, in which historical divisions of power regulate the ownership of land, opportunities to obtain resources, and relations of production. The inequalities harmonized in the agricultural system still impair small and marginalized farmers, especially Dalits and Adivasis, to enjoy the results of the policies. Recent agricultural statistics reiterate that structural inequalities and uneven access to resources continue to shape agrarian outcomes across social groups (Government of India 2023). However, caste remains a fundamental principle of social organization, influencing economic and political networks). Unlike other social inequalities, the Indian caste system is rigid and deeply entrenched. In rural areas, it continues to shape production structures, reinforcing disparities in resource distribution and agrarian opportunities (GoI, 2023; Srinivasrao et al., 2021).

2. Research Problem

Government of India set an ambitious goal of Doubling Farmers' Income (DFI), aiming to transform agriculture into a more profitable and resilient sector. Doubling farmers income is long term development goal, it is expected that doubling the famers income will require minimum six years and maximum 13 years. In case of small and marginal farmers, it is major challenge. The inadequacy of Minimum Support Prices in addressing income volatility has further intensified agrarian distress among small and marginal farmers (Kaur & Singh, 2018). Annual income per cultivator increased from 12,365 rupees to ₹1,20,193 from 1993–94 to 2015–16. However, at real prices, the increase has been from ₹21,110 to ₹44,027 during this period. This shows that the real income of farmers has increased twice for 22 years (GoI. 2015; Singh, 2018). This plan is aimed at different strategies including improvement of productivity, reduction of input prices, crop diversification, improvement in value chains, and access to markets. The Swaminathan Committee Report (2006) proposed that the Minimum Support Price (MSP) must be increased fivefold with the weighted average cost of production (Chintapalli & Tang, 2022), a requirement that is still present in the agrarian industry. However, the implementation of such measures has been inconsistent, and farmers continue to face global competition, fluctuating prices, and climate-related uncertainties (Harris, 2006; Kaur & Singh, 2018).

To overcome these challenges appropriate and comprehensive policy measures are needed with emphasis in the areas of access to credit, land reform, agricultural extension services and rural

infrastructure. Though the DFI⁴ initiative is a major policy vision, only comprehensive and equal realisation will ensure that no farmer, whether large landowner or belonging to the lower caste will be left out of agrarian growth and modernization. The Economic Survey underscores that achieving the goal of Doubling Farmers' Income requires structural reforms beyond productivity enhancement (Ministry of Finance, Government of India 2024). In examining the political reflections of agriculture post-Independence, the paper demonstrates the need to have inclusive policy intervention. It demands specific initiatives to deal with the discrimination of castes in the access to the resources and inclusion of disadvantaged groups especially Dalit farmers to get a fair share. The elimination of the above-mentioned social obstacles is essential to the success of agrarian transformations as well as to the attainment of the mission of sustainable and inclusive development of India in the agrarian sector.

2.1.1 Methodology

This study was carried out in vidarbha region (Parbhani district) of Maharashtra and investigates the role of caste on entry to agricultural resources. Applying multi-stage sampling, qualitative and quantitative results that emerged through the use of a semi-structured interview and survey process point out systemic obstacles encountered by Dalit farmers. The solution to these disparities seeks special interventions, one of them being land reforms, better rural infrastructure, and fair access to markets. The need to bridge the caste-based gaps and achieve the sustainable development in agrarian sector requires inclusive policies. The paper delves into the nature of information gaps between caste and also recommends what can be done to address this disparity of information within the farmer community. The paper investigates the system of destruction and internal dynamics of landholdings according to caste categories as an instrument of historical injustices that causes the unequal distribution in the present day.

3. Size of Land Holdings

The agrarian distress in India was officially recognised with the help of 2003 National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) survey. According to the survey, 40 percent of Indian farmers were not happy with agriculture as a profession because it was not profitable enough and those who got into agriculture did not feel that this profession would give them the social status in life and

⁴ “The Indian government set a target to double farmers' income by 2022, with a focus on improving their overall well-being and income security. This initiative aims to achieve a sustainable increase in farmers' income through various strategies like enhancing productivity, diversifying income sources, reducing post-harvest losses, and improving market access”.

they were ready to leave the sector in case an alternative option would have arisen (Harris, 2006). However, the continued engagement in farming was primarily driven by the absence of viable non-agricultural employment options. Further, disparities in farmers' attitudes toward agriculture exist along caste lines. Higher caste farmers exhibit greater disenchantment with farming compared to Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) farmers. Within SC and ST communities, the inclination to remain in agriculture is positively correlated with landholding size, whereas among other caste groups, dissatisfaction with farming increases with landholding size (Kaur & Singh, 2018).

The further agrarian distress in the past two decades has also contributed to income insecurity among the farmers and agricultural growth rate has stagnated. The agricultural growth rate decreased in 2021- 22 compared to 3.3 percent in 2020- 21. According to the structural transformation theory, which is proposed by Arthur Lewis (1954) and Simon Kuznets, the labor force undergoes a transition, and it is natural as an economical process that occurs between agriculture and manufacturing and services. Though the average agricultural workers percentage in India has declined to 54.6 in 2011, down by 58.2 in 2001 (Swaminathan, 2006) the total number of agricultural workers has increased in India since 234 million agricultural workers in 2001 to 263 million in 2011 (Singh et al; 2019). In addition, the disaggregation of landholdings has also made agrarian distress worse. The sown area has decreased and is almost 139.9 million hectares as compared to 143 million hectares in 1990-91. The average landholding size of operation has also reduced drastically to 1.15 ha in 2010-11 as compared to 1.33 ha in 2000-01. The total marginal and small operational landholdings have increased by 17 million and 2 million respectively at this time (Jha & Kumar, 2025). In 2010-11, 67 percent of total operational holdings and 22 percent of the area operated was composed of marginal operational landholdings (less than 1 ha) (Census of India, 2011). It means that even though there has been a relative decrease in the agricultural labor force, the increasing population has led to the overall rise of the number of people relying on agriculture, which contributes to agrarian distress and population pressure on farming land, which presents a problem with regard to agricultural investment, mechanization, and the sustainability of agricultural incomes (GoI, 2020).

Table – 1: All India Report on Agriculture Census 2015-16 (in '000)

Census Year	Marginal		Small		Semi-Medium		Medium		Large		All Classes	
1970-71	35682		13432		10681		7932		2766		70493	
1976-77	44523	3.8	14728	1.5	11666	1.5	8212	0.6	2440	-2.1	81569	2.5
1980-81	50122	3	16072	2.2	12455	1.6	8068	-0.4	2166	-2.9	88883	2.2
1985-86	56147	2.3	17922	2.2	13252	1.2	7916	-0.4	1918	-2.4	97155	1.8
1990-91	63389	2.5	20092	2.3	13923	1	7580	-0.9	1654	-2.9	106637	1.9
1995-96	71179	2.3	21643	1.5	14261	0.5	7092	-1.3	1404	-3.2	115580	1.6
2000-01	75408	1.2	22695	1	14021	-0.3	6577	-1.5	1230	-2.6	119931	0.7
2005-06	83694	2.1	23930	1.1	14127	0.2	6375	-0.6	1096	-2.3	129222	1.5
2010-11	92826	2.1	24779	0.7	13896	-0.3	5875	-1.6	973	-2.4	138348	1.4
2015-16	100251	1.6	25809	0.8	13993	0.1	5561	-1.1	838	-2.9	146454	1.1

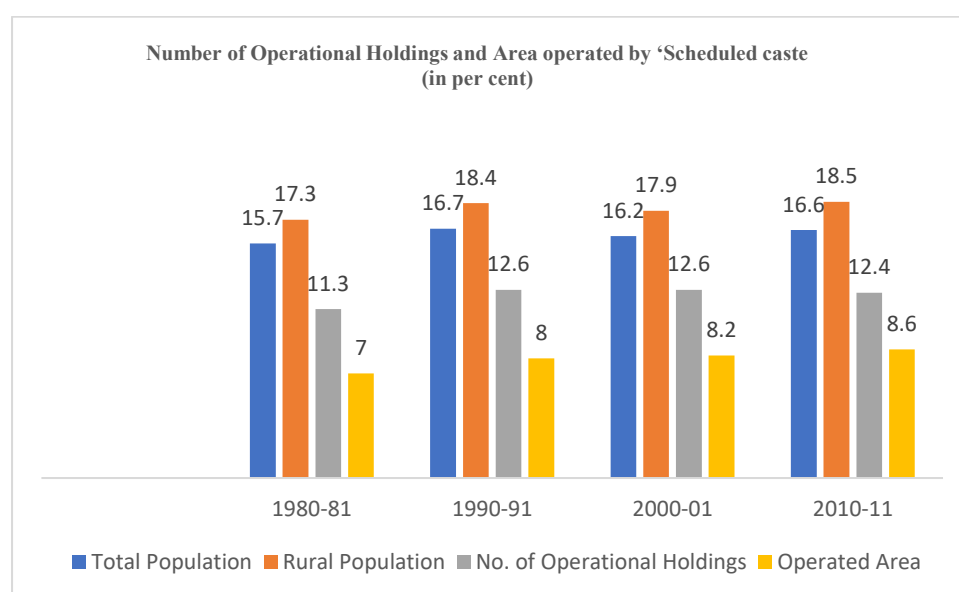
(Source: *Agriculture Census of India*, 2015-16)

The distribution of land among various types of landholders is an important aspect that should be analysed in order to comprehend the Indian agrarian set up. As we see in Table 1, the number of operational holdings (OH) has more than doubled over ten Agricultural Census (AC) periods, increasing from 704.9 lakh in 1970-71 to 1464.54 lakh in 2015-16 (GoI,2020). Marginal holdings increased 2.8 times from 356.8 lakh to 1002.51 lakh, while small holdings rose 1.9 times from 134.3 lakh to 258.09 lakh. In contrast, medium and large holdings declined from 79.3 lakh to 55.61 lakh and 27.7 lakh to 8.38 lakh, respectively, over the same period. Due to land fragmentation, the average operational land size dropped from 1.19 hectares in 1975-76 to 0.8 hectares in 2005-06. The average landholding size decreased by half from 2.28 ha in 1970-71 to 1.16 ha in 2010-11. Marginal holdings (less than 1 ha) constituted 67 per cent of all holdings in 2010-11, with their operated area share rising from 9 per cent in 1970-71 to 22 per cent in 2010-11 (GoI, 2019). Land fragmentation and declining average operational holding sizes have been a persistent feature of Indian agriculture since the 1970s and Marginal holdings account for nearly two-thirds of total operational holdings, reflecting increasing pressure on land and declining farm viability (GoI 2006 &2019).

Access to land has historically shaped social relations in India, with marginalized communities facing systemic exclusion. Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) remain disadvantaged in landholding, with SCs being largely landless and STs occupying less fertile

land. According to the Agricultural Census (2005-06), 87 percent of the SC and ST farm owners are small and marginal farmers and 64 percent are agricultural workers. Dalits are more likely to be landless (56.5 per cent), than Adivasis (35.5 per cent), and non-Dalit/Adivasi households (37.8 per cent) (NSS, 2003). SCs own 9.5 per cent of the total land, but the OBCs and upper castes own a disproportionately large share of land. They have an average of 0.52 hectares of land, half of the size of the average of the Other households (1.05 hectares). Out of 100 households in the SC, only 6 percent are having over 2 hectares of land, as compared to 10 percent SCs in 12 percent of OBCs and 16 percent of upper castes (Das, 2021 & GoI, 2014).

Figure:1 - Number of Operational Holdings and Area operated by ‘Scheduled caste’

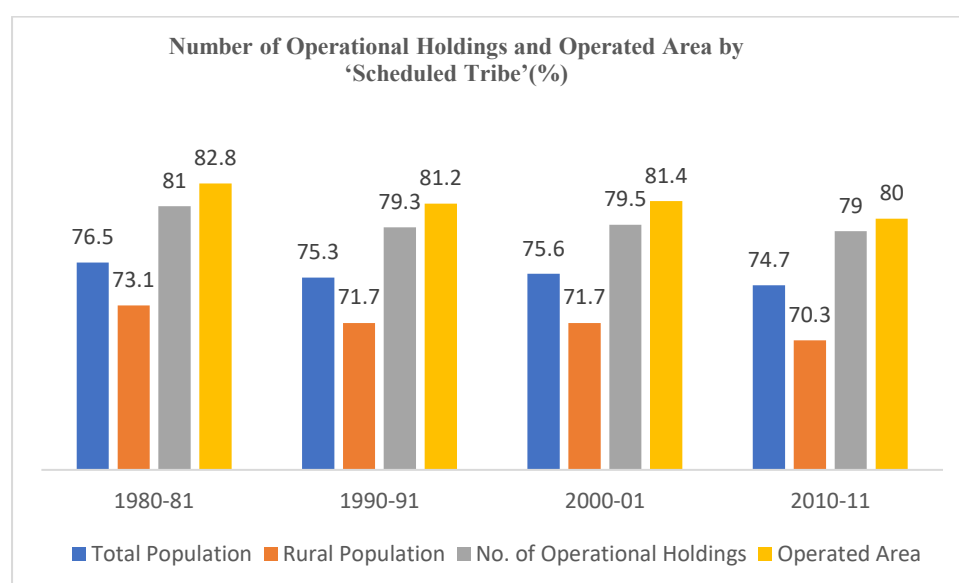


(Source: All India Report on Agriculture Census 2015-16)

Fig. 1 presents changes in the population share, operational holdings, and operated area of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in India between 1980–81 and 2010–11. The proportion of SCs in the total population increased from 15.7 per cent to 16.6 per cent, while their share of the rural population rose from 17.3 per cent to 18.5 per cent, indicating a sustained demographic presence in agrarian regions. Despite this, the share of operational holdings owned by SCs increased only marginally, from 11.3 per cent to 12.4 per cent. More critically, the operated area under SC holdings remained disproportionately low, rising from 7.0 per cent to 8.6 per cent over three decades. The figure underscores the persistence of structural inequalities in land access, where demographic growth has not translated into commensurate gains in control over productive resources. This pattern reflects the enduring influence of caste-based exclusion within India’s agrarian structure.

Agrarian organization in India is marked by the inequality of caste with SCs being denied land owning rights. The Dalit farmers have less fertile and smaller land and thus are more exposed. The land reforms that were made after the independence have not been able to give the marginalized groups the needed land. National Commission of Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (Census of India,2011). It is observed that, Scheduled Castes continue to own disproportionately smaller and less fertile landholdings compared to OBCs and upper castes (Government of India 2014). According to the Census of India, 2011, the small farmers experience a number of problems including inadequate access to market, credit, and extension facilities. The Dalit and tribal farmers have low rates of payment of their crops due to the low quality of the land that they have. The inequality issue can be resolved through carrying out agrarian reforms to give people equivalent access to land and farm equipment (GoI, 2014 & Bolazzi & Ballarino, 2019).

Figure:2 - Number of Operational Holdings and Operated Area by ‘Scheduled Tribe’

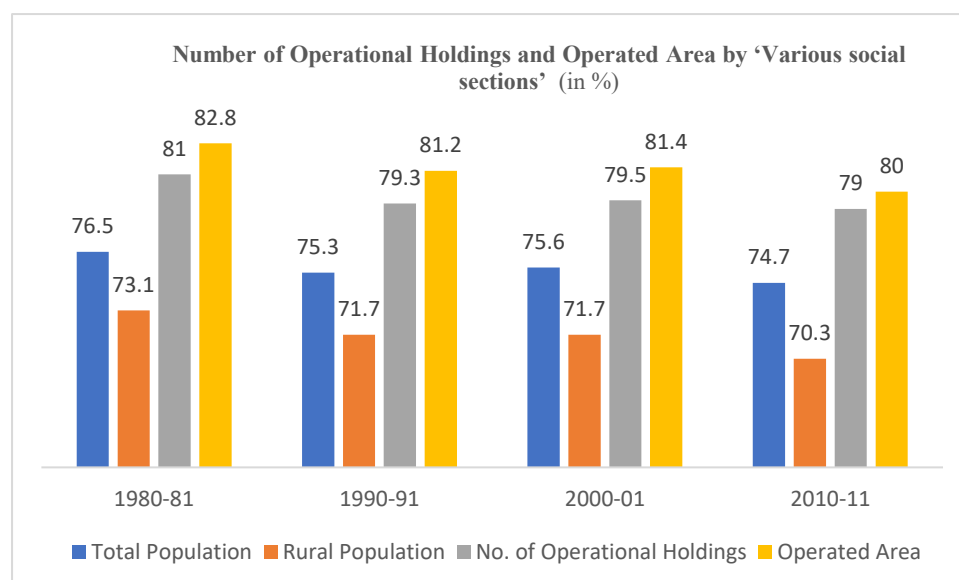


(Source: All India Report on Agriculture Census 201 5-16)

Fig. 2 illustrates trends in the population share, operational holdings, and operated area of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India from 1980–81 to 2010–11. The share of STs in the total population shows a marginal decline from 76.5 per cent in 1980–81 to 74.7 per cent in 2010–11, while their rural population share also decreases from 73.1 per cent to 70.3 per cent during the same period. In contrast to this demographic trend, the proportion of operational holdings operated by STs remains relatively high, though it declines slightly from 81.0 per cent to 79.0 per cent. Similarly, the operated area under ST holdings continues to be substantial, decreasing

modestly from 82.8 per cent to 80.0 per cent over the period. The figure highlights the distinct agrarian position of Scheduled Tribes, where land operation remains comparatively robust despite a gradual reduction in population shares, reflecting the continued significance of land-based livelihoods within tribal regions.

Figure:3 - Number of Operational Holdings and Operated Area by ‘Various social sections’



(Source: All India Report on Agriculture Census 2015-16).

Fig. 3 depicts trends in population share, operational holdings, and operated area across various social sections in India from 1980–81 to 2010–11. The total population share declined from 76.5 per cent in 1980–81 to 74.7 per cent in 2010–11, while the rural population share decreased from 73.1 per cent to 70.3 per cent during the same period. In contrast, the proportion of operational holdings remained relatively high, though it declined modestly from 81.0 per cent to 79.0 per cent. Similarly, the operated area decreased from 82.8 per cent in 1980–81 to 80.0 per cent in 2010–11. The persistence of a higher share of operated area relative to population indicates continued dependence on land-based livelihoods among these social sections. At the same time, the gradual decline across all indicators reflects structural changes in the agrarian economy, including demographic shifts and increasing pressure on land resources. In comparative terms, these trends differ from the persistent land constraints experienced by Scheduled Castes and from the relatively higher levels of land operation observed among Scheduled Tribes.

4. Results - Data Analysis

Indian agrarian economy cannot be separated with the caste system that continues to play a role in land ownership, access to the resource and agricultural practices. In this paper, the correlation between caste and agrarian structure in Parbhani district, Maharashtra is going to be explored using empirical evidence which was gathered in the three villages of Asola, Nandgaon Bk, and Malsonna in three villages comprising of approximately 120 households. The paper will pay attention to the inequalities in land ownership, land information needs, and accessibility of extension services to the various castes.

4.1 Landholding Patterns and Caste Disparities

The success of agriculture depends on land accessibility as one of the most critical aspects. As Table 4 and 5 indicate, many respondents (59 per cent.) are marginal and small farmers (with less than 2 hectares of land). Only, 5 per cent of respondents own large farms (above 10 hectares), highlighting the dominance of small-scale farming in the region.

Table 4 - Caste-based analysis of respondents

Social Group	Total respondents (in per cent)
Other castes (OC)	43 (35)
Back word caste (BC)	23 (18)
Scheduled caste (SC)	32 (26)
Nomadic Tribes (NT)	22 (20)
Total	120

(Source: Field work)

4.1.1 The distribution of landholdings among respondents

The size of land holding holds plays a decisive role in accessing resources, agricultural information, credit, and the commercialization and mechanization of agriculture. In this study, majority of the respondents fall under the categories of marginal and small farmers. Approximately 61 per cent of them own less than five acres of land. Only about 5 per cent of the respondents are the large farmers' who own more than ten acres of agricultural land. (refer table 5). The Caste-wise distribution of land ownership among respondents, as presented in Table 6, suggests that nearly 67 per cent respondents from OC category who can claim ownership of more than five acres of land. In contrast, a significant proportion of SC and NT

farmers, 84 per cent and 72 per cent respectively own less than five acres of agricultural land. Among the 31 SC respondents, 17 individuals (55 per cent) are marginal farmers. Overall, the statistics show that 59 percent of the entire landholding is marginal and small, which underlines the point that there is a clear tendency towards limited access to land among most of the farmers.

Table 5: Landholding Pattern among Respondents

Classification of Respondents by Landholding Size	Number of respondents (in per cent)
Marginal (below one 1 ha.)	43 (36)
Small (1to 2.0 ha.)	28 (23)
Semi-Medium (2 to 4 ha.)	26 (22)
Medium (4 to 10 ha.)	17 (14)
Large (above 10 ha.)	6 (5)
Total	120 (100)

(Source: Field work)

Table 6 shows the unequal distribution of land between the caste groups, as it is identified that, 67 percent of the farmers under the category of Other Castes own over five acres of land. On the other hand, only a small percentage (84 and 72 respectively) of the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Nomadic Tribe (NT) farmers own fewer than five acres of land.

Table 6: Caste-wise Distribution of Landholdings

Caste	Total respondents (in per cent)					
	Marginal	Small	Semi Medium	Mediu m	Large	Total
OC	8 (21)	5 (12)	13 (31)	10 (24)	5 (12)	42 (100)
BC	8 (32)	6 (27)	5 (23)	4 (18)	0 (0)	22 (100)
SC	16 (55)	9 (29)	4 (13)	1 (3)	0 (0)	31 (100)
NT	11(40)	8 (32)	4 (16)	2 (8)	1 (4)	25 (100)

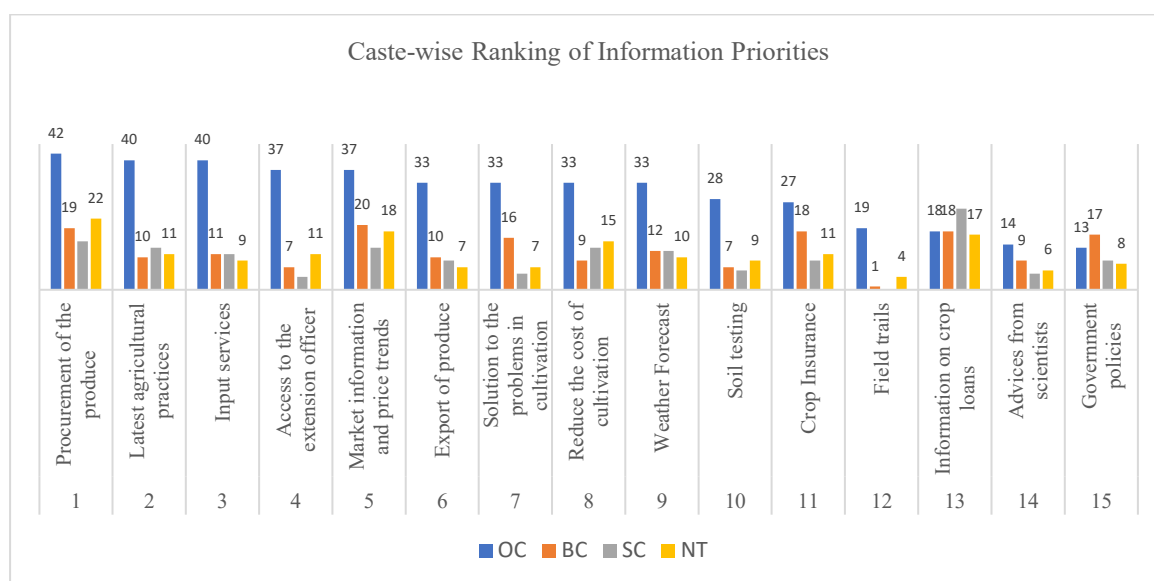
(Source: Field work)

According to the data, the most common castes Kunbi, Patil, Dhanger and Vanjari (OC) possess the larger resources of land and this fact provides them with the economic and social superiority in the village. The landless or marginally endowed farmers in the SC and NT farmers are at a disadvantage and they can not afford to use modern farming techniques to gain higher incomes.

4.1.1.1 Agricultural Information Needs: A Caste-based Perspective

Agricultural information is valuable in enhancing the productivity of the farm but as Table 7 indicates, the kind of information required varies significantly among the caste. Although much of the information associated with the market and agricultural practices are of concern to the OC farmers, SC and NT farmers are more interested in crop loans, insurances, and reduction of the cost of cultivation.

Figure :7 - Caste-wise Ranking of Information Priorities



(Source: Field work)

As illustrated by Figure 7, OC farmers enjoy more information about the market trends and extension officers because they are well incorporated in the current agrarian system. Nevertheless, SC and NT farmers are found to be more reliant on government policies, crop insurance, and information related to loans which makes them susceptible to finance. Bearing in mind the fact that the information needs of farmers in the contemporary scenario of commercial agriculture are continually changing to suit the demands of the changing times -

the information was gathered to gauge their perception and priorities regarding agricultural information. Table 7 indicates the ranking of the information requirements according to the perceptions of the respondents and there is a significant difference across the castes. The OC caste farmers attach value to the marketing of their products, learning of the newest agricultural methods, input services, agriculture extension officers consultation, and market conditions and price changes. Conversely, BC farmers (Kunbi Vanjari, Patil, and Kammi) attach significance to selling their products, obtaining information regarding market prices and level, familiarity about crop insurance and crop loans, and government subsidies. The SC farmers attach significance to marketing as well as information regarding crop loans, and knowledge regarding agricultural activities that may reduce the cost of cultivation and market trends. Marketing, crop loans, market and price trend, and cost-reducing agricultural practices are also significant to the NT farmers.

Figure 7 highlights the distinct information needs among farmers, largely shaped by caste. Caste functions as a critical social institution influencing agricultural dynamics, particularly in determining access to social capital. BC, SC, and NT farmers exhibit heightened concerns regarding crop loans, insurance, and cost-reducing practices issues that are not a priority for OC farmers. OC farmers as initial beneficiaries of the Green Revolution already aware about loans and insurance, and BC, SC, and NT farmers who adopted commercial farming more recently and have no considerable social capital, see these problems as a major risk. Information constraints disproportionately affect marginal farmers, reinforcing existing socio-economic inequalities within agrarian systems. A large proportion of Dalit and small farmers remain trapped in informal and insecure livelihoods within the agrarian economy (Aker 2011& NCEUS 2008).

The paper also highlights geographical inequities and access to agriculture information among the respondents. OCs are farmers living in the heart of villages, hence they can access agricultural knowledge very conveniently and frequently meet in Panchayat offices to exchange information with regard to field problems. In the process, the farmer in NT and SC occupations, which mostly resided at the fringes of the village, lack information on time and tend not to make frequent trips to the offices of Panchayats. OC farmers are keen in knowing about fertilizers and pesticides whereas NT and SC farmers are concerned with the availability of seeds and the price of produce. The study shows that land, resources and economic opportunities have long been unequal even before caste came to influence the access to

information in agriculture. Structural imbalances still exist even after land reforms and implementing policies. These inequalities need to be dealt with to establish an inclusive agricultural economy and make sure that the marginalized farmers can enjoy proper participation in the agrarian field.

Besides numerical differences caste exclusion in information presence is also visible in the villages. OC and BC farmers living within the neighborhood around the village center regularly visit Panchayat offices and discuss farming problems. In the interim period, the SC's⁵ and NT's⁶ farmers, who live in the peripheries, can access these interactions to a limited extent, and this exposes them to less farming information. Researchers (NCEUS, 2008; Chakravorty, Chandrasekhar, & Naraparaju, 2019) stress that information and the structure of the villages play a major role in the inequality of resources. Such socio and spatial segregation is transferred into knowledge system differentiations. OC farmers constantly exchange information on the use of fertilizers, using of pesticides and technological development whereas, SC and NT farmers are still busy with the simple wistful life of seeds and market price of crops. This inadequacy of exposure contributes even further to an economic divide between caste groups.

5. Discussion

The social structure of the caste system in India has left permanent marks on the way resources are distributed, and Dalits are mainly affected by means of the institutional discrimination. Not only has such systematic exclusion contributed to economic disparities, but it has also strengthened social hierarchies, with the result that the Dalit farmers would be hard out of the poverty loop. Historically in the agrarian system caste plays an important role in gaining the benefits of resources such as credit and extension services and technology. In spite of the land reform efforts since Independence, excluded groups such as Dalits and Adivasis are mostly lockout of land redistribution in a significant measure. Although successive governments at the

⁵ "Scheduled Castes (SCs) are specific groups within India, officially designated in the Constitution, that have historically faced social, educational, and economic disadvantages due to practices like untouchability. These groups are eligible for special provisions and protections aimed at promoting their overall well-being and development".

⁶ "In India, nomadic tribes are communities that traditionally move from place to place rather than settling in one location permanently. They are often characterized by their mobile lifestyles, which are intertwined with their livelihoods, such as herding, hunting, gathering, or providing specialized services. Historically, they played an integral role in the socio-economic fabric of Indian society".

national level have initiated programmes such as the Green Revolution in a bid to make agriculture modern, minimize inequalities and poverty levels, the upper and dominant castes have had the privilege of seeing the fruit of such initiatives. Although post-Independence has focused on agricultural sector, caste remains a determining factor on beneficiaries of state policies, technologies and opportunities in the economy. Caste remains a foundational principle of social organization in rural India, deeply influencing land ownership, labour relations, and access to power and persistent agrarian distress has manifested in social suffering, including farmer suicides and livelihood insecurity (Jodhka 2012& Vasavi 2012). The case study of rural Maharashtra has shown that there are critical differences in agricultural information needs of the farmers in relation to caste which means that they vary according to geographical, social and economic status of farmers in the villages. These differences can be explained by their caste-related access to social capital. Overall, the study highlighted that, agrarian policies in India selectively internalize global development narratives while reproducing existing caste and class asymmetries (White 2003) and agricultural information needs are not uniform but vary significantly by caste and landholding, with caste influencing the farmers' access to critical resources and information. It is critical to highlight that the increasing fragmentation of operational holdings, emphasizes the challenge of ensuring equitable development within the agrarian sector. The small and marginal farmers must be given importance in the process of development and poverty reduction because they account for about 86 per cent of this sector.

Circling back to the political manifestos announcing their agenda of doubling farmers' income and to become a developed country by 2047, this paper underscores the importance of formulating inclusive policies and special strategy to address the challenges faced by Dalits, and small and marginal farmers. On the whole, the research is informative to policymakers, researchers and agricultural economists who aim at comprehending and resolving agricultural growth and social injustice constraints within the agrarian sector in India. The recommendation of transformative changes will fill the socio-economic gaps in rural India and will add into the overall discussion of inclusive growth.

6. Conclusion

When developing the agrarian policy in the 21st century, the idea of promoting the farmer incomes and livelihood sustainability should be balanced. Any new policy of doubling farmers income and so on, cannot overlook structural inequality based on, caste, land and economic to a good part of the population; even today a billion can eat the food that our agriculture is

producing on paper but can only afford to enter the world of economic prosperity, as it is, due to multiple levels of disadvantage structure. Poverty and exclusion are also likely to procreate unless all stakeholders actively strive to reform the land ownership and access, and provide equitable access to resources by the most marginalised among us. Consequentially, and to counteract the stagnation in agriculture, the effective policy solutions should not only satisfy the agricultural development but also the social justice which ensure that all the farmers, and particularly the marginal farmer is in accord with the speed of development and the expanding economy of the country. The Indian agriculture should have a more inclusive strategy to deal with the structural barriers in terms of caste and the land inequality to make the historically disadvantaged groups not lag behind. The agrarian reform in India will also need to eliminate the caste hierarchies which are deeply rooted and still influence the rural economy in the country.

Ethical Declaration

Formal ethical approval was not required for this study, as it involved non-invasive social science research methods. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and no personal identifiers were collected. The study did not involve any intervention, experimentation, or sensitive personal data.

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