

Land Reforms in Post Independent India: Notes for UPSC

Since its independence in 1947, India has carried out many land reforms with the dual objective of economically uplifting its landless poor and in bringing regulations in the agriculture industry.

Land Reforms in Post Independent India are an important topic in the Indian history section of the UPSC Exams

History of Land Reforms in Post-Independent India

Since its independence in 1947, there have been central government and state government mediated land reforms in several states with dual objectives of optimum use of land and ensuring the well-being of the peasantry. The most notable and successful example of land reforms are in the states of West Bengal and Kerala. Other than these state-sponsored attempts of reforming land ownership and control, there were grassroots level activism for land reforms by individuals, the most famous among them being the Bhoodan movement of modern-day Maharashtra.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) came to power in West Bengal in 1977, riding on the promise of enacting land reforms. Keeping their word, the new government initiated gradual land reforms, such as Operation Barga. The result was a more equitable distribution of land among the landless farmers, and enumeration of landless farmers. This has ensured an almost lifelong loyalty from the farmers and the communists were in power till the 2011 assembly election.

In Kerala, the only other large state where the CPI(M) came to power, the state carried out some of the most extensive land, tenancy and agrarian labour wage reforms in the country as well as that of the non-socialist late-industrialising world.

In a nutshell, land reforms have been successful only in pockets of the country, as people have often found loopholes in the laws that set limits on the maximum area of land that is allowed to be held by anyone.

Objectives of the Land Reforms in Post-Independent India

Redistribution of land has been the state policy of India since independence. Independent India's biggest success story regarding land policy is perhaps the abolition of the Zamindari system.

The land-reform policy of India had two specific objectives:

1. To remove such impediments to increase in agricultural production as arise from the agrarian structure inherited from the past.
2. To eliminate all elements of exploitation and social injustice within the agrarian system, to provide security for the tiller of the soil and assure equality of status and opportunity to all sections of the rural population.”

Actions taken during the Land Reforms in Post-independent India

In order to attain carry out the reforms, the following actions were undertaken by the Indian government:

Abolition of intermediaries: One of the many aims of the land reforms was in eliminating middlemen entities such as the Zamindars and Jagirdars in order to bring the cultivator into direct relationship with the government.

Regulating Tenancy: The congress Agrarian Reforms Committee very strongly felt that there was a direct relation between the welfare of the Indian peasantry and the progress of agriculture in India. To a large extent that relation relied on to what extent the peasantry felt secure about the source of its livelihood and whether the tenure system provided incentives and opportunity for local development.

A ceiling on landholdings: In all other states, the level of ceiling was fixed to take account of different classes of land. For example, the ceiling ranged all the way from 27-134 acres in Andhra, 20-80 acres in Orissa, 19-132 acres in Gujarat, 18-126 acres in Maharashtra. In others, it was fixed in terms of standard acres, a standard acre being equal to a certain number of ordinary acres laid down in the Act passed in each state.

Thus the ceiling was fixed at 30 standard acres in the Punjab, Rajasthan, Delhi and Madras; 25 standard acres in Madhya Pradesh and 27 standard acres in Mysore. In U.P., ceiling was imposed on 40 acres of 'fair-quality' land.

Consolidation of landholdings: The consolidation of fragmented holdings was regarded as 'part and parcel' of the agricultural production programme. Legislation for compulsory consolidation of holdings was enacted in Bombay in 1947, in the Punjab in 1948, in Pepsu and Saurashtra in 1951 and in U.P. in 1953. Similar provisions were made in other provinces except Kerala and Madras. By 1964-65, a total area of 55 million acres was consolidated.

Encouragement of cooperative joint farming: Cooperative farming did not receive any attention before the planning period although the congress Agrarian Reforms Committee had recommended cooperative farming for holdings below the 'basic' holding. The Progress was rather meagre. Up to 1965-66, a total of 7294 cooperative farming societies having a membership of 1.88 lakhs had been formed and these covered an area of 3.93 lakh hectares.

However, many of these societies were defunct and some existed only on paper for the sake of obtaining state grants though their land was cultivated in the old way. It also did not help that some of the old owners had left for new nations born following the partition of India, making the redistribution of land a difficult affair.

Abolition of bonded/forced labour: Another significant development since 1947 was the virtual disappearance of forced labour. At the turn of the century, the vast majority of agricultural labourers were men who were held in bondage due to debt or other forms of forced servitude.

However, since independence the force of hired labourers in Indian agriculture, by and large, was made up of free men. This was a change of great significance which was likely to have far-reaching repercussions in the future.