

## **Constraints for the growth of Dalit Farmers' in Telangana: A South Indian State**

**Dr Prasanth Kumar Munnangi**

Project Associate, C-GARD, NIRD&PR,  
Hyderabad-500030, Telangana State, India.

### **ABSTRACT**

*Many of the legislative acts and land reforms to the Dalits (Schedules Castes) in the state and at the center are unable to reduce social inequalities in the rural as well as in urban societies in India. Dalits shares not more than five percentages in the total cultivable land in our country. Dalits are treated as workforce to their farm fields by the forward castes in India, without their significant workforce Indian agriculture conditions are unimaginable. Land reforms in our country helped Dalits enter into farm fields as owners' instead of daily wage laborer as great hope to break their socio-economic barriers in the society. The present study carried out in one of the village in Warangal district of Telangana State in South India by using constructivist methodology by adopting in-depth interviews, actors and actions of Dalit farmers in their farming life. Present paper explains how Dalit farmers are facing different issues and problems in various forms at the cultivation process. Not only increase of input cost in the present day agriculture but also facing constraints from the forward castes in the village.*

**Keywords:** Dalit farmers, Landholding, Cultivation, Agricultural institutions, Constraints.

### **Introduction:**

Land is the primary source of income at the country side, around 85% of the rural India directly or indirectly, depends on land and its produce. Landlessness is the one of biggest downside characteristic of Dalit communities in India. Landlessness is an initial step to the existence of Dalits as a distinct social group among the different communities at country side. Land forms the primary basis for the domination and exploitation of Dalits in the non-economic spheres as well. Present day's caste system as a result of social oppression and class exploitation to the Dalit communities within the society. After the sixty nine years of Indian independence, the dalits' are depending on farming and its allied sectors as a wage labourers or tenant farmers or farmers. The Indian government felt that it was necessary to protect the interest of the tillers to land and bring equity in agriculture, and abolish intermediary and tenure. Even the five year plans gave top priority to land reforms which included abolition of intermediaries, tenancy reforms, imposition of ceilings on landholdings, distribution of surplus land, allotment of government land, consolidation of holdings and protection of lands of Scheduled castes (Dalits) and Tribes (Nancharaiah, 2000). Several government policies and programs for dalits made few steps forward in their day to day life. But those policies and programs has not helped them to achieve sustainable growth, especially in farming sector. Land reforms in the period of 80's gave Dalits' to acquire land as their own and chance to cultivate of their own. "In the case of Andhra Pradesh several land legislations to augment the production and to reduce the inequalities in the distribution of land. But even today, the land is concentrated in the hands of some of the

social upper strata, and nearly 89% of Dalits, there who are denied social and economic equality since long time are retain as landless and agricultural labourers” (Rao, 2012). Farming in India from historically started with traditionally, but the untouchables are seen as workforce, but they don’t have rights on their lands in the era of land acquisition by the present governments. In Addition to these land reforms and legislations, with the aim of providing minimum source of income and promoting social and economic well-being of the poor landless people, the government distributed the surplus land made available from land ceiling. It may not be possible for all rural poor to be accommodated but there is scope for utilizing the wasteland for providing access to the poor and also eliminating the biases against the poor in land relations. The desire to possess land is strong among the poor as ownership of land denotes one’s social status (Rao E, 2012).The Study intends to understand, what are the constraints for the growth of Dalit farmers in their cultivation process? What are the different forms of constraints they are facing in and around of their farming communities in the study village.

### **Methodology adopted for the Study**

The paper is based on the findings of the study conducted in a village named Nainala in South Indian state of Telangana. Study village is located in Warangal district of Telangana, which falls under the semi-arid tropical climate. The village has a long history of agriculture as its major occupation. It is located about five kilometers from the lowest revenue headquarters indicating the greater amount of exchange of communication with the outside world. For decades, farmers in the village have been cultivating multiple crops in semi dry and dry land. Major crops grown in the village are paddy, maize, cotton, turmeric. Crops are cultivated in both seasons, namely Kharif and Rabi. Using the constructivist method, data was collected from 50 Dalit farmers on their socio-economic and their landholdings in the village. Out of 50 Dalit farmers’ the researcher has collected in-depth interviews from 20 Dalit farmers. Field work was carried out in the village for a year from 2012 to 2013 covering both the crop seasons. The study includes Research techniques like focus group discussions, observations, and key informants would be employed in the study. Researcher has its own constrained towards Dalit farmers’ and their growth in cultivation process in the village.

### **Land holding pattern at the Study village**

Land holding pattern in the village reflects the traditional socio-economic and political hierarchy. Based on the land ownership the households in the village may be divided into two types i.e., landholding and landless. According to the Nainala village official records of 2012, the total geographical area under Nainala village is 1,554 acres, out of which the cultivable land is 1,143 acres (80 percent) The cultivable land comprises of 725 acres of dry land (which depends on rainfall for cultivation) and 418 acres of irrigated land, and the remaining 411 acres (20 percent) of land comprises of houses, tank and barren land. Village tank (covers 50 acres of land) and tube wells (numbering about 350) are the major sources of irrigation.

**Table No. 1: Caste-wise distribution of land**

Sl.No	Caste	No. of households	No. of acres	No. of landless households	% of land
1.	Yadava	127	389	38	34.01
2.	Madiga	98	210	27	18.36
3.	Gowda	82	135	10	11.80
4.	Mudhiraj	55	34	3	2.97
5.	Vaddera	53	25		2.18
6.	Chakali	33	83	2	7.25
7.	MunnruKapu	25	55	3	4.80
8.	Mala	19	59	10	5.16
9.	Reddy	16	92		8.04
10.	Dudekula	15	39	2	3.41
11.	Mangali	10	10	4	0.87

12.	Komati	3		3	
13.	Vadrangi	3	1	2	0.08
14.	Kummari	2		2	
15.	Yanadhi	2	1	1	0.08
16.	Brahmin	1		1	
17.	Kamsali	1	10		0.87
18.	Mera	1		1	
Total		546	1143	109	100

**Source:** Study Village Panchayat records. 2012.

Table 1 shows that 437 (80percent) households own land and 109 are landless. Majority of the land is in the possession of *yadava*, *gowda*, *madiga*, *munurukapu* and *reddy* castes. The numerically dominant caste (*yadava* caste with 127 households) holds 389 acres of land constituting about 34percent of the total land in the village. *Gowda* caste has 82 households who own 135 acres of land (12 percentage of the total land). *Madiga* and *mala* are the Dalit Communities (*Scheduled Castes*) which hold 269 acres of land out of 1,143 acres of total land constituting to about 24 percent of the total cultivable land. It is rare situation found in the Indian states, by having of 24% of the land holding to the Dalit communities. *Reddy* caste households are 16 who hold 92 acres of land with a share of 8 percent of the total cultivable land. *Vaddera* caste holds 25 acres of cultivable land. *Dudekula* caste holds 39 acres (about 3 percent) of land in the village. *Vadrangi*, *Kamsali* and *Yanadhi* castes hold less than one percentage of the total land holdings of the village.

### Cultivable Land to the Dalits' in the study village

The Study village has a history of land reforms. Land reform refers to the redistribution of land to the landless. Land reforms in the village took place because of the agitation of Communists. The village has a historical association with the Communists. At the time of Razakar aggression in 1948, villagers helped and protected Communist leaders. This solidarity has encouraged the Communists to support the cause of land redistribution in the village. In 1960s the *gowda*, *yadava* and *madiga* castes have led the movement of occupying barren land in the village. With the help of politicians they have started cultivating the lands. After several agitations and representations to the district administration, in 1980s the district collector of Warangal, *Kaki MadhavaRao* sanctioned 500 acres of forest land to the 100 landless families in the village and provided *land patta* (authorisation deed) of the land. In 2005, the government of Andhra Pradesh transferred the legal rights to the villagers. In the study village, Dalits population is very high, they holds 24% of the village households and in the case of population is also high in the village. Their participation in the village agriculture is remarkable, they holds 25.76% of the landholdings in the village and out of 278 farmers in the village 78 farmers comes from the scheduled castes communities.

Table No 2: Dalit farmers in the village agriculture

Caste	Marginal	Small	Medium	Larger	No. of Farmers	No. Of Acres of Landholdings	No. of Tenant
Madiga	42	22	01	01	66	210	08
Mala	05	06	01	00	12	059	02
<b>Total</b>	47	28	02	01	78	269	10

Source: Study Village Panchayat records. 2012.

Table 2, clearly shows that, there are 78 Dalit farmers in the village out of it there are 47 marginal farmers (farmers those who are having less than 2.5 acres of cultivable land), 28 farmers' are small farmers (farmers those who are having above 2.5 acres to five acres of cultivable land) and there are two medium farmers in the village. One large farmer hails from the Dalit communities in the study village, where he is having of more than 16 acres of land.

These 78 Dalit farmers are cultivating 269 acres of cultivatable land with multiple crops in their fields. These are the Dalit farmers cultivating 24% of the village land.

### **Constraint's for the Dalits' growth in cultivation**

Even though Dalits farmers having 24% of the cultivable landholdings in the study village, these are facing several constraints in the cultivation process from sowing to harvest of their products, because of their social identities in the society. Dalit farmers are narrating their stories to the researcher by stories about how they discriminated from the other caste peoples in or around to them. Not accepting them as a farmer is one of the harassment from other farmers by saying that you people has no idea of how to cultivate and how grab the chances. Attacking Dalit farmers' fields with their livestock's are another form of harassing from the forward caste farmers in the village. In case of irrigation supply to their fields from one field to another field of him is another obstacle's for them in the cultivation process. Neighboring farmers probably other caste farmers creates different obstacles in the case of flow of irrigation supply where irrigation flows from their lands.

As agriculture attained commercial overtones in the village since a decade credit requirements of farmers have increased manifold. Regional rural banks and other nationalized banks also have been focusing on lending loans to farmers. The extent of loan disbursal by the nationalized banks has increased in the post-liberalized scenario. It may be said that penetration of banks in rural areas, particularly farmers (only owners of land) have increased significantly over the years. The trend may be ascribed to the wider changes in the agriculture sector in the country. It was observed in the study that few Dalit farmers in the village have taken loan from banks. State Bank of India (SBI) provides short term, medium and long term loans to farmers. However, farmers observe that loans to the farmers are not given at the appropriate time and have to make several visits to the banks. A marginal farmer aged 48 years, belonging to *madiga* caste suggests that,

*'banks take lot of time to sanction loans to farmers and we have to approach again and again. Farmers who pay some percentage of commission to the bank's staff get loans immediately. We take loans by pledging 'bhoomipatta' (Pass Book issued by the revenue department that contains the details of land holdings of the farmer). Loans start from Rs. 5,000/- to Rs.10, 000/- per acre and it varies from farmer to farmer. Farmers who use influence through their networks based on caste or land holding get more loan than others who don't have such influence'.*

Majority of the Dalit farmers in the village, approach informal credit sources in and around the village. Fellow farmers, money lenders, relatives are the informal sources of credit to the Dalit farmers in the village. The interest rate is Rs.3/- per hundred per month. It was reported that two years back it was Rs.4/- or 5/- rupees, but due to state intervention which imposed restrictions on the interest charged by the informal sources the rate of interest has come down. The informal credit sources flourish mainly because banks don't lend in time.

The invention of green revolution paradigm is 'progressive farmer'. One of the ideological bases of green revolution was reaching out to the progressive farmer of the village so that new technological knowledge would trickle down to other farmers of the village and of neighboring villages. Thus, progressive farmers are those who are large landholders, belonging to the upper castes and dominant castes in the village, risk taking, open to fresh ideas, first to adopt new technologies, who have shown significant performance in terms of higher crop yields in his farm when compared to other farmers in the village. Farmers belonging to lower castes (*yadava, gowda, madiga* and *mala* castes), with small holdings, in their middle or old age approach the progressive farmers. Interestingly, Dalit farmers, who are loyal and obey the rules and regulations at the social gatherings and support in their political parties will help the Dalit farmers in their cultivation process. Otherwise, they will create obstacles in their cultivation process. A small farmer (aged 63 years) from *madiga* caste with 32 years of experience in cultivation said that,

*'For several years Dora (referring to the progressive farmer who belongs to Reddy caste) has been buying agricultural inputs for me. I believe him and request him to buy seeds, fertilizers and pesticides for my cultivation needs. I approach him when he goes for buying the inputs from the mandal headquarters, and he, generally, obliges. For his help's I have to support and praise at village social gatherings otherwise I have face several problems from him'.*

Another respondent, 60 years of age, marginal farmer from *mala* caste said that,

*'for more than 15 years I worked in Dora's farm as an attached labour. Even now I work for him whenever there is work in his fields. Because of this acquaintance he helps me in buying fertilizers, pesticides and seeds. Even if I don't have sufficient money, he brings them for me. Many farmers in the village told me that they were cheated by the input dealers when they bought seeds or fertilizers on their own. But Dora never cheated me till today. Whatever he brings for himself, he also brings for me. For that we have to obey his orders in village, otherwise I've to suffer a lot in my life'.*

It was observed in the study that the Dalit farmers, particularly the marginal and small, do not have a very good opinion about the information provided by the input dealers. At least five marginal farmers and two medium farmers suggested that they were either misinformed amounting cheating or disillusioned by the shopkeepers (*input dealers*). Sarvaiah, 48 years of age, medium farmer belonging to the *madiga* caste, narrated his experience of buying seed from the input dealer at the Nellikudur (mandal headquarters),

*"while buying the paddy seeds, the input dealer said that the brand of seeds is of good quality as it was a new seed variety which gives high yield and has higher resistance to certain pests. He even gave me hundred percent guarantees for the seed, saying that it would fetch good yield. On his advice, I bought that brand of seeds and sowed. But the seeds never germinated even after taking care of the nursery well. When I went and asked him about the non-germination of the seeds and demanded compensation the input dealer blamed me saying that I didn't know how to cultivate and the problem lies with my field. He even said that there is no complaint against that brand of seeds though it was sold to many farmers. What I understood from his words was that he was blaming me and my field, rather than owning up the responsibility. In what way could I check with other farmers about the quality of that brand?"*

The transactions with the input dealer and the farmers are based on trust. Most of the respondents observed that they go to a particular input dealer who is trustworthy when compared to others. Trustworthiness and allowing credit purchase are the two factors influencing farmers in choosing a particular input dealer. In some cases, farmers resign to their fate when the particular inputs like seeds or pesticides fail to perform. It was clearly evident in the field that the input dealers are in unison in reacting to the issues of failure of seed or pesticides. They all blame the farmer for his/her lack of knowledge in the usage of the input. They throw the blame on the farmers' inability to understand what they (the input dealers) have said at the time of sale of the input about its usage. It was observed that farmers do take this blame thinking that it is their lack of knowledge that caused the failure of input. Even in the cases where farmers are aware of the spurious nature of seed or pesticide and dubious act of the input dealer they seldom claim compensation from the input dealer. As mentioned, a large majority of the farmers who take advices from the input dealers are marginal and small. Because of the lack of social capital and political power they don't act against the dubious practices of the input dealers. However, it was observed in the field that, when an input fails to perform the farmers belonging to upper castes and medium category claim compensation from the input dealers.

Marketing the agricultural produce is an affair that involves farmers' interface with the forces that are entrenched. These forces operate market in such a way that the Dalit farmer is always at a loss. If it was the traditional *shahukar* (*village trader*) who used to buy the agricultural

produce within the village in the earlier days, now emerged the class of market agents and their middlemen. Farmers can sell their produce either in the village or at the market yards located in the nearby towns. This is an institutional mechanism where fair price and fair weighing is promised. However, there are non-institutional mechanisms which buy the produce at farmers' fields operating on trust.

## **Conclusion**

Even though Dalit farmers having a share of 24% cultivable landholding in the village. They are facing several constraints in the growth of cultivation process. Due to increase of input costs in the cultivation and also traditional caste dominance prevails in the in and around the village reflecting on them in their cultivation process. Which lead to give up their farming profession and search for another profession for their sustainability in their day to day life. For the centuries onwards, Dalits are treated as a workforce at the fields and they used for manual labourers. With the welfare programs of the state and central government's gave a chance to enter into cultivation as a working labour to land owner. Due to constraints in the cultivation in the form of higher input costs and obstacles from other castes farmers i.e., forward castes farmers, and not treating them as a normal farmer lead them to move out of agriculture and search for another alternatives in their life. Failure of agricultural institutions like credit, agricultural extensions services, input dealer, poor educational qualification and marketing lead them to heavy loss in the agriculture which results severe problems among the Dalit farmers in the society. Another obstacle from other caste farmers in the same village in the form of trying to attack their fields with their livestock's to destroy Dalit farmer's crops, and not providing irrigation supply or opposing irrigation channel to their fields from their fields leading them to face another unbearable loss in agriculture. State agencies have to look after about the needs of Dalits farmers to overcome these constraints in their cultivation to gain profits for the betterments of Dalit communities to reach equal along with other castes in the society.

## **References:**

Nancharaiah. G. "Agrarian Reforms and Agrarian Change: 50 years of Independence" in K.R.Gupta (Edts) Issues in Indian Economy, Vol. III, Atlantic publishers and Distributions, New Delhi, 2000, Pp:63-92.

Rao. E. "Land Reforms and Dalits in Andhra Pradesh: A South Indian State". *International Journal of Sustainable Development*.Vol: 3. 2012, Pp: 59-70.