



Involvement of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe People in Agriculture: Challenges, Opportunities, and Revolutionary Pathways

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Introduction

Agriculture has been the backbone of India's rural economy, with Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) playing an integral role in its development. Despite their significant contributions, SC and ST communities have faced systemic barriers, particularly limited access to land, resources, and opportunities. These challenges not only hinder their socioeconomic advancement but also perpetuate cycles of poverty, food insecurity, and social marginalization. This article delves into the involvement of SC and ST people in agriculture, explores the impact of their limited land ownership, and discusses revolutionary approaches to transform their agricultural futures through inclusive and sustainable practices.

Historical Context: Agriculture and Marginalization

Agriculture in India has long been a dominant occupation for SCs and STs. While many SC communities have worked as agricultural laborers or in menial tasks, the STs often relied on forest based subsistence farming. Over time, however, a deep disparity in land ownership and agricultural opportunities has emerged. Both SC and ST communities have remained marginalized in the agrarian landscape, not just in terms of ownership but also in access to modern tools, technologies, and agricultural policies that would enable them to thrive.

The inequities in land distribution date back to colonial policies and the caste based social structure, which sidelined these communities from owning or controlling land. Despite post independence land reform efforts, the progress has been slow, and SC and ST people still constitute a significant proportion of landless and smallholder farmers.

Challenges from Limited Land Ownership

The absence of land ownership for SC and ST farmers has created several longstanding barriers to economic stability and social progress:

1. Economic Insecurity and Poverty

Without land ownership, SC and ST farmers remain tied to the precarious nature of seasonal labor and tenancy farming. In many cases, they are forced to work for landlords from higher castes, earning meager wages, which leaves them economically insecure. They



have limited ability to invest in agricultural improvements or diversify income sources, making them vulnerable to price fluctuations, poor harvests, and lack of savings.

2. Exclusion from Institutional Support

Landownership is often a prerequisite for accessing institutional credit, government subsidies, and crop insurance schemes. SC and ST farmers, especially those without land titles, face difficulties in obtaining financial support, which prevents them from adopting modern farming practices, purchasing necessary inputs, or addressing issues like crop diseases and droughts. This exclusion perpetuates the cycle of poverty, as these farmers are left with outdated tools and techniques.

3. Food Insecurity and Dependence on Markets

A lack of land means these communities often do not have the means to grow their own food. As a result, they depend on the market for food, making them vulnerable to price volatility and economic shocks. Without the security of land and the ability to cultivate diverse crops, SC and ST farmers often face food insecurity, particularly in times of droughts or poor harvests.

4. Social Marginalization and Discrimination

Land is not just an economic asset—it is also a source of social status and power. The absence of land ownership has contributed to the further marginalization of SC and ST communities, reinforcing caste based discrimination. In rural areas, those who own land wield more influence in local governance, agricultural policy decisions, and community dynamics. SC and ST people are often excluded from decision-making processes that impact their livelihoods and are left without a voice in local agricultural and environmental governance.

5. Vulnerability to Climate Change

Many SC and ST farmers rely on rainfed agriculture, making them particularly vulnerable to changing weather patterns and climate related disasters. Without secure land tenure and the resources to invest in water management systems or climate resilient crops, these communities are at greater risk from floods, droughts, and soil degradation.

Revolutionary Pathways: Empowering SC and ST Farmers

Given the pressing challenges faced by SC and ST communities in agriculture, there is a need for revolutionary solutions that go beyond incremental changes. Here are transformative ideas to empower these marginalized groups:

1. Comprehensive Land Reform and Redistribution

One of the most revolutionary steps toward empowering SC and ST communities in agriculture is to address land ownership disparities through comprehensive land reform. The government should prioritize the redistribution of land to landless SC and ST households, ensuring that tribal and marginalized communities receive titles to land they have historically relied upon but have not legally owned. This process can be accelerated through digitization



of land records and better enforcement of existing laws, such as the Forest Rights Act, 2006, which has recognized tribal land rights but has not been fully implemented in many areas.

2. Land Pooling and Cooperative Farming Models

In regions where individual land ownership is not feasible due to fragmentation, land pooling and cooperative farming models can revolutionize agricultural practices. SC and ST farmers can pool their land, resources, and labor to form cooperative societies, enabling them to access larger markets, share equipment, and reduce risks. This can help them transition from subsistence farming to more profitable and sustainable agricultural practices.

3. Inclusive Financial Systems: Microfinance and Digital Platforms

The expansion of inclusive financial systems is key to empowering SC and ST farmers. Microfinance institutions, community based savings groups, and digital lending platforms can provide low interest loans to farmers without the need for land titles as collateral. Such systems should be tailored to the needs of smallholders and landless farmers, offering affordable credit for inputs, technology, and market access. Additionally, government subsidies should be directly transferred to SC and ST farmers to ensure they benefit from crop insurance, fertilizers, and irrigation systems.

4. Agro ecological Farming Practices and Sustainability

In contrast to industrial agricultural methods, which often alienate small farmers, agro ecology emphasizes sustainable farming techniques that align with the cultural practices of SC and ST communities. Training programs should focus on promoting organic farming, water conservation techniques, and agro forestry. By adopting agro ecological practices, SC and ST farmers can enhance biodiversity, improve soil health, and reduce vulnerability to climate change, all while securing higher yields and better market access.

5. Technology and Knowledge Transfer

Bridging the digital divide and providing SC and ST farmers with access to agricultural technologies can be a game changer. Governments and NGOs can facilitate training in the use of mobile applications that provide real-time information on weather forecasts, pest management, and market trends. These platforms can also help connect farmers directly with consumers, bypassing middlemen and increasing profits. Additionally, integrating traditional knowledge with modern farming techniques can foster innovation while preserving cultural practices.

6. Social and Political Empowerment

Empowering SC and ST communities requires not only economic reforms but also social and political inclusion. Programs should focus on increasing the participation of these communities in local agricultural decision-making processes, strengthening their representation in local governance, and ensuring that policies reflect their needs. This will help reduce social exclusion and enhance their ability to advocate for policies that benefit their livelihoods.



Conclusion: Building an Equitable and Sustainable Agricultural Future

The involvement of SC and ST communities in agriculture is both a matter of economic necessity and social justice. By providing access to land, resources, and modern technologies, India can transform its agricultural sector into a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable system. However, these changes require bold, revolutionary action that addresses the root causes of inequality. Land reform, inclusive financial systems, sustainable farming practices, and the integration of digital technologies can empower SC and ST farmers, increase their socioeconomic standing, and ensure food sovereignty for these communities. Through a commitment to these transformative changes, India can build an agricultural future that reflects the true potential of all its citizens, particularly those who have historically been left behind.

