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Struggle for land: A comparative study between India and Brazil
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Abstract

The present research paper analyzes and compares the process of land reforms in Brazil and in India subsequently in the light of the land peasant movement which started in Brazil in the year 1984 and that of the Bhoodan-Gramdan movement that took place around the period of 1950's in India. This paper will discuss about the origins, objectives, achievements and other aspects of both movements, in order to see where these two movements merge or stand separate. The comparison between two different alternatives to implement land reforms will portray on one hand, a model in which the Gandhian principles of non-violence and peaceful resistance was applied for a new perspective of socio-economic development in India through a system of collective and cooperative pursuits and on the other hand, a social movement based upon Marxist ideas which provided both scope and new alternatives to the current economic structure. In a nutshell, the present study debates the differences and importance of land reform in both Brazil and India.

Key Words: *Land Reforms, Bhoodan Movement, MST Movement, India & Brazil.*

Introduction: Through a comparative study, this paper aims to delineate different alternatives to the issue of mal-distribution of land, presenting a discussion on the differences and importance of land reforms in Brazil and India. Under different contexts and proportionalities, India and Brazil have faced similar social issues and challenges. The two emerging powers are at the head of important groups as BRICS and IBSA, reflecting the rethinking of the global order. Beyond the leadership of both countries at international level, the internal issues have caused several social, political and economic challenges which are equally significant.

Given that, the process of land reform is considered central at the development of countries such as Brazil and India, in which one notice high levels of social inequalities due to the historical system of distribution and concentration of the land in the hands of few people. Thus, the more important issue is to highlight the reasons of the struggle in both these countries i.e., India and Brazil and to see how it strongly impacted their population.

Through this study one can also signify both the positive and negative aspects of such land reform movements.

The comparison made in this study is shown through the two specific movements waged in each of these countries related to land distribution and reforms namely, the Bhoodan movement in India and Landless Peasants Movements in Brazil. The Bhoodan movement in India was born in the context of which the Land reforms were a major issue in post-independent India. The Bhoodan movement built on Gandhian principles of non-violence and cooperative spirit to move the people into action where the government was slow to act. On the other hand, the Landless Peasants Movements in Brazil, headed by the MST movement is termed as one of the largest and most-influential social movements in Latin America. Thousands of Brazilian families live in its land-occupation settlements in an effort to redistribute land to rural workers for small-scale farming, in order to pursue their land. Beyond that, both cases moves forward to illustrate the possibility of a new paradigm, a new perspective apart from the current order of each reality.

Bhoodan Movement in India: The period of post-independent India was marked by new challenges, priorities and responsibilities. The country was not completely prepared to face and manage all the social, political and economic issues of the emerging scenario. The era of British rule was very impactful for the economy and the consequent organization of country, especially in the villages of the rural India. Besides the economic turmoil, India was under the political tension of the partition that separated India, Pakistan and Bangladesh after a period of time.

The separation created a context of arbitrary distribution of population and land, as India concentrated the amount of people and lost important producing areas for its economy. The flow of people was enormous, and the mass transfer was felt both sides but predominately in India as the higher number of people were going to the Indian side. Under such conjuncture, the problems of the economy were multiplied as much as the social and political situation got grimmer in the country.

Amidst all this turmoil, the spiritual leader and father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, passed away and left an environment even more unstable. However, the nation had to deal with a huge challenge to decide the future of its people and what actions and policies should be implemented for achieving the same. With the economy at the cross-roads, some alternatives were offered at the table. Among them, one option was the development with leftist orientation, willing more to social aspects through a centered and powerful state to hold the issues of the new born country. At the other pole, the rightist approach was focused on modernization, high level of independence, individualism and liberty as its backbone. India decided to try an alternative between these two poles, through a more systematic, cooperative and democratic planning which would consider the social structure, traditions and economic development. (Misra, 1972, p.13)

The Indian villages were facing a depressing decline of resources and life conditions. The people suffering more under this situation were from rural areas, the peasantry.

However, there was a promising expectation over the new system of land organization described in the First Five Year Plan in 1951. The plan was a big shoot to address the issue of land management.

In order to bring about real change to the economy, it was necessary to end the landlordism system in India. To collect revenue from the land, this system was grounded on lease or grant of land or entire villages to “loyal” persons. It was proposed first under the Mughals in feudal form and later the British with a zest for more power and advantages continued the system through the semi-feudal states. The zamindars were the “loyal” person and responsible to maintain the structure of landlordism and power associated with it. The abolition of zamindari system was made extremely necessary in such a context.

With the new Congress government, the Zamindari Abolition Acts were approved. However, the challenge was that this measure should be followed by changes in the whole complex structure of the land management, in order to see real change. But what was witnessed next was a continuation of the old system. Although the abolishment of the feudal system, a new group emerged as “Rentiers”, a rent receiving class, which indirectly replaced the intermediaries Zamindars, creating a new form of feudalism as the old economic and social order remained the same and the problems of self-sufficiency and food production remained unchanged. (Misra, 1972, p.23)

Given the incapacity of the government to implement a peaceful land distribution programme, a new emerging alternative was necessary in order to bring an institutional change in the structure of agrarian economy. In this present context of dissatisfaction, a mass movement was waged in favor of distribution of land to the landless grew and awaken a new alternative for this issue. This new alternative was based upon the Gandhian principles of peace and non-violence.

This alternative appeared with Vinoba Bhave who was considered the spiritual heir of Mahatma Gandhi. Thus, a new perspective for socio- economic and moral change based on the idea of “constructive programme” flourished in India with the start of the Bhoodan movement in the year 1951. (Chandra, 2008, p.43) The movement represented a challenge to reconstruct and reorder the country, with the aim of equitable distribution of land as well as to facilitate the political, social and economic values in a country through the practice of non-violence.

This movement started with Vinoba’s visit to Telangana (Andhara). (Chandra, 2008, p-44) The region was under extreme poverty and lack of conditions intensified by the landlord’s exploitation over the peasantry due to mal-distribution of land and wealth. In an attempt to address this issue, the communists stimulated the people of the region to revolt against the situation, but they used force and violence as their main method of removing the land owners and redistribution of the land. However, for Vinoba Bhave there was a different approach to solve the current problem which he consolidated during his tour at Pochampalli village in 1951. During his visit there, he was approached by the Harijans or untouchables requesting actions from the government. Their genuine need of the hour was satisfied by

Vinoba Bhave's attempt to bring the first free donation of land. He said that "of what use is government help until we can help ourselves?" and he asked whether there were any landlord who could offer a piece of land to the landless. Promptly, a man called Ram Chandra Reddy said that he could donate a part of his land. Therefore, the first official donation of 100 acres was signed and Vinoba got the solution to meet the issue of mal-distribution of land. (Khandewale & Nanekar, 1973, p.34)

Inevitably the faith on the construction of a new method through the practice of non-violence grew after this event, and the path for the new economic revolution was paved with the birth of Bhoodan Movement in the year 1951. Bhoodan means land gift. 'Bhoo' in Sanskrit is Land and 'Dan' is gift. Through this concept based on Gandhian lines, in which the idea was not only to bring land to landless people but also to ignite interest of people in the Gandhian philosophy as educated people were overlooking those ideas at that point of time. Vinoba covered over 80,000 kilometers on foot, from village to village until 1969. In order to organize the different stages of the movement, he divided the first phase of Bhoodan (1951-57) into four distinct phases. 'The first phase called as 'Palliative' which consisted in the removal of local grievances, the second phase called as 'Calling Attention' intended to create a wider understanding of the movement and calling attention of the entire nation, the third phase called as 'fortification of Faith' complementarily intended to build confidence among the workers about the possibility of the giant mission and the fourth phase was called as 'Extensive land Gift known as the stage of concentrated experiments.' (Khandewale & Nanekar, 1973, p.-45)

In order to keep the transfer of land as legal, the lands should follow some arrangements developed by state governments that recognized the land gift as a form of redistribution. A declaration had to be submitted by any person desiring to transfer the land to the Revenue officer. It was examined and when found legal and without any problem relating to title and other aspects the gift was registered under the Indian Registration Act of 1908. The distribution of gifted land to landless families was done by the Mandal or Tehsil Committees.

The landless also included small holders owning up to 2 acres of irrigated and 5 acres of unirrigated land. Those who received land were known as Bhoodan-lessees. The movement achieved high number of donation. From the first donation of 100 acres, it reached the impressive numbers. Raja Bahadur Giriwar Prasad Singh, C.B.E., Raja of Ranka (Princely State in Garhwa then in Bihar) 1911/1969 donated highest acre of land to the villagers in Palamu area (Bhave, 1994, p.30)

By March 1967, it had 42,64,096 acres of land. Beyond that, the movement reached the level of donation of villages, known as Gramdan, which means that the whole structure and economy of one village could be transformed where there will be no separation between those owning the land and those who are only exploited and landless. Under the Gramdan three stages were established. At the first phase, village would agree to donate all its land. Secondly, after the documents are officially received, the village would be declared as a

Gramdan village. At the final stage, the village would be registered as a Gramdani village in government records. Vinoba made the 'state' the field of his experiments in Bhoodan which was a new methodology devised by him. The movement though independent of government had the support of Congress. JP Narayan withdrew from active politics to join Bhoodan movement in 1953.

Brazil's Landless Workers Movement: The situation of land distribution in Brazil is characterized by concentration, large lands and family-owned properties. The country's heritage of colonialism has left just 3 percent of the population holding nearly two-thirds of the nation's arable land. According to the Brazilian government, 30 percent of Brazilian farmers own just 20 acres of land or less. In contrast, the country's largest farms, those of 2,000 acres or more, comprise only 1.6 percent of all farms but sit on 53.2 percent of the usable land. Another 4.8 million rural families- approximately 25 million people in a country with a total population of 167 million - have no land at all and survive as temporary laborers. (Caldart, 2001, p.32)

The pioneer initiative to address the issue of land reform was the creation of a federal agency, INCRA (Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária/the National Agency for Land Reform and Settlement) in 1969. Under the scope of INCRA, the government allocated funds to buy land and to redistribute it among poor families, however the procedures are very bureaucratic, lengthy and costly. The scenario of land reform and rural conflict in Brazil have changed significantly since the creation and growth of landless peasants and rural workers interest groups, most notably the MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra/the Landless Peasants' Movement), which was founded in 1984 at Cascavel in the southern Brazilian state of Paraná. (Reis, 2012, p.21)

The movement is influenced by Marxian and liberation theology and thus emphasizes equality, the transformation of capitalist society, sustainable agriculture, cooperativism, and protection of the environment. Before the creation of the MST, organizations designed to promote and defend the interests of landless peasants and rural workers were too fragile to be able to influence governmental land reform policies. At the same time, the powerful landowners, in contrast, could afford to spend time and money on efforts to avoid expropriation, or to pursue claims for generous compensation from the Government, in the event of land reforms actually being enacted. The MST acts like a Robin Hood, seizing what they consider to be "unproductive" land and redistributing it to the landless poor. They rely on the Brazilian constitution, which states that all land must be productive. Absentee landlords can be compelled to forfeit idle land. Since its beginnings more than 20 years ago, the MST has pushed the government to redistribute more than 20 million acres to nearly 400,000 families. Landowners are understandably furious and wanted the state to guarantee their rights, and if they don't then they will do it themselves.

MST, Brazil's Landless Worker's Movement emerged from struggles for land that workers of rural area were rising in southern Brazil at the end of the 1970's in the middle of the intense political environment marked by the process of opening towards the end of the

military regime. The Brazilian economic structure was not able to lessen the existing issues as the high land concentration, the expulsion of the poor from rural areas and the process of modernization of agriculture continued, while an enormous flow to the cities and the policies of colonization entered a crisis period. Under such conjuncture, different struggles slowly took place in Brazil which were responsible for the origin of the land reform movements. From these developments, the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, or the Movement of Rural Landless Workers emerged and structured with the Encruzilhada Natalino encampment in Ronda Alta, Rio Grande do Sul and the Landless Farmer Movement of Western Paraná. (Mastro) (Barros, 2011, p.26)

In addition to that, some other movements prior to the foundation of MST are considered important at national and regional level. From 1950 to 1964, the Peasant Leagues (Ligas Camponesas) and MASTER (Movimento dos Agricultores Sem Terra or the Landless Farmers' Movement); and at the end of the 19th Century, Canudos and Contestado. The Mexican Revolution during the early 20th Century and the Cuban Revolution of 1959, both of which supported the idea of "land for those who work it." Thus, such struggles inspired the MST to continue fighting for more equitable land ownership. (Reis, 2012, p.32)

The MST battles these inequalities through a unique fusion of direct action and self-reliance. First, it seizes unused land, then it uses that land to provide real, workable alternatives to the corporate jobs. The MST is best known in Brazil and internationally for its enterprising land occupations, the first of which took place in Rio Grande do Sul in October 1985. The strategy was fairly straightforward, identify idle farmland and then, armed only with farm tools, occupy the land, cultivate it until legal ownership is granted. An average land occupation involved about 300 families. Although the 1988 post-dictatorship Brazilian Constitution explicitly states that land must be used for the benefit of all societies and contains mechanisms for land distribution, it can take years to obtain title for the settlement of occupied land. About 70,000 families are currently involved in MST land occupations waiting for their land titles. (Fernandes, 2008, p.43)

Besides the struggle for land, the movement also stated that they should fight to guarantee other rights along with the land, as access to credit, housing, technical assistance, schools, healthcare and other needs that a landless family must have met. In order to attend these needs, the MST's work doesn't end with the acquisition of land titles. The movement characterized by its decentralization and high coordination, also provides its members with basic social services not provided by the Brazilian government. The MST's 1,600 government-recognized settlements spread across 23 Brazilian states, offers medical clinics for members and even training centers for health care workers. The movement's educational programs are especially notable, with public schools, adult literacy classes, college and scholarships. (Mark, 2011, p.23)

The model of occupations and settlements with the complete system of education, healthcare, and, not just the core agricultural production can be ranked within "practical models of autonomy". Such models, like the self organization of the Zapatistas in Mexico,

offer an alternative to the common patterns of socio-economic relationships and production. Even if the MST settlements of thousands of people do not change general inequalities, it provides a different option other than living in favelas of the big cities.

Conclusion and Analysis: Land reforms have always been a keen aspect for social and economic change in the world, especially in less developed and developing countries. This study provided a discussion in the light of two movements that was created primarily for land distribution, but as it was seen these movements achieved an ample scope of action, beyond the redistribution. It is important now to analyze what are the positive and negative impacts of the Bhoodan movement in India and the MST movement in Brazil, in order to understand how it has changed the social structure, the economy and the relationship between people and land.

Bhoodan movement was started by Vinobha Bhave on the lines of Gandhian ideas of trusteeship where he urged the mighty landlord of villages to donate at least one-sixth part of their lands to the landless farmers. With the growth of the movement and donations, it achieved the level of "Gramdan" with the idea of collectively owning the 'gram' or village by considering that land belonged to God. The positive outcomes of the Bhoodan movement was that it was more a social movement than a legislature measure done by government, and hence, it was more focused on the people's need with a more personal and human approach. Also, it has indirectly brought class and caste collaborations by urging the landowners to start giving a portion of land to landless people from different backgrounds. Thereby, this movement popularized the idea among villagers in different parts of nation that Bhoodan is a 'Dan' in the sense that land is gift of nature and belonged to all people, enhancing the dissemination of new ideas in an under-developed economy. This movement to some extent also tried to counter the question of poverty by regularizing the system of equitable distribution of land.

Complementarily, it stimulated political and other activity by the participation of peasant masses. Moreover, the redistribution of land and abolition of private ownership was practiced which led to evolution of agricultural and increase in the level the production as more people were receiving land, thus more diversity of business and produces. However, there are several critics of the movement, as it faced problems of acceptance, procedures and implementation.

Land reforms had been reoccurring issue among social reformists as well as political masses. Before Independence, the social as well as political classes had very blurred line and often the objective of both groups was same. Land reform was driven by social agenda and primary led by socialist class in the initial days. However, it was hijacked by political class often in disguise of social reform. This crucial issue got an ugly twist and become a cause of long social tension between two artificial classes created in the society. Often the victims of this tension were innocent people from both artificially created classes of the society (landowner and landless).

In comparison to this, Brazil had better consolidation of land as only few owned large chunks of cultivable land, but it had failed to protect the rights of labourers which resulted in extreme poverty. These landowners had been exploiting the native and African labourers since time of colonization (or land grab era) and system had failed to change the situation.

Despite the potential the Bhoodhan Movement achieved, this movement somehow gradually lost its fervor after few years. Also, redistribution of land process was very slow and in some cases, the landlords took back their land. For those landless people whom the land was provided and guaranteed, in some cases the land which was received was of poor quality, not cultivatable or there was a lack of support in providing seeds, fertilizers and irrigation facilities, important for the new land owners to create cooperatives and get some outcome from the land received. Looking at the Brazilian movement for redistribution of land, the method of occupying used by MST became an important form of pressure over the government in order to obtain responses on the situation of the landless people in different regions of Brazil. Through its huge popular support and its decentralized and spread structure over the country, the power of influencing and mobilizing the movement was growing and the government and media tried to push it down as the movement was against the economic interest of the elites and the landlords of Brazil.

Beyond the main struggle for land, the Brazilian movement, as mentioned, had an unprecedented set of action and mission developed to support the rural worker, landless people and the most unprivileged sections of the society. Such actions and objectives included cultural fields, in which the movement stated that the public space should be more democratized, giving popular and free access to theater, exhibitions, performances as well as the incentive to celebrate more about Brazilian culture and tradition. The MST also had an important voice on the issues of democratization of the media, public health, education, economic development and political system. In all these issues, the movement had a progressive approach in which it held the engagement with the improvement of the life conditions of the population. The lines that gave the basis for the movement were strong and challenged the economic and political system that we live today, thereby, it provided new alternatives that battled the commodification of the basic rights of people.

At the political level, one of the most important achievements of the movement has been the capacity to maintain the Land reform on the national agenda and the ability to keep mobilizing and encouraging the society to participate and struggle. Complementarily, the results at the social level are significantly changing, the infant death at the settlement and occupation were strongly decreased and during all the year that the movement has been working, various people have emerged from a marginalized life, and now have more opportunities and dignity.

Indeed, the MST's actions, especially the occupations, the most used instrument of struggle for land in Brazil has changed significantly the situation of agrarian issue since its foundation given the number of people who have received land and support on other issue areas. In other words, the movement emphasized on the democratization of the land and the

implementation of the policies that could reorganize the agriculture production towards the needs of the population, as it represented a huge challenge for the elimination of inequalities in Brazil.

Both the Bhoodan and MST movements were a huge step towards the achievement of a land reform. On one side, it was use a unique and original method based on Gandhian philosophies and on the other side the classical Marxist and leftist strategy. Both were born in big nations, with various challenges in which the complexity of taking action and heading a change is extremely intense. As many attempts of real change, the movements had flaws, as they were not able to bring about the complete change in the structure of land ownership in these countries. However, it is important to highlight that in the recent history of India and Brazil, Bhoodan movement and MST were a pioneer initiative and a challenging movement that had a crucial role in changing the social and economic conditions of a significant part of the peasantry and rural population.

Thus, one can put things in a social integration perspective wherein India needs good amount of consolidated resources whereas Brazil should focus more on profit sharing. Finally, the community which owes the natural resources will use it collectively for the benefit of all the communities. They will also by and large learn to use it more sustainably as it has been proven that collective consciousness gives more sustainable system.

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