

Populist Land Policy and Decoding Marginalisation: Study of Land Rights Movement of Dalits in Punjab and Change in Identity and Representation

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Since the question of annihilation of caste remained unsolved, identity politics of Dalits emerged as key factor in the reaction to this. It was very hard among the leaders who raised the voice of Dalits as these are socially, economically and politically backward groups. Even in Dalit political groups we can see the dominance of particular sub castes. The backwardness of Dalits helped governance to make so called 'populist' policies where Dalits were denied agricultural land rights and therefore they remained landless laborers.

Punjab is a state where more than 31% of its population is Dalit and the data on landowning says that they own less than 2% land. Despite these large numbers Dalits, politics is not emerging as expected. The recent agitation of pights over Panchayati Zameen is landmark where every Dalit sub caste and gender is coming forward to claim their constitutional rights. It has been mentioned in the 'Punjab Village Common Land Act, 1961' of state that $\frac{1}{3}$ part of the Panchayat land would be sanctioned to the Scheduled Caste population of the village through auctioning. This process never materialised into reality, till as late as 2008. A massive peasant movement, the outcome of small agitations, of Dalits for demanding ownership of land started in the Malwa region. From 2009 to 2016, transparent and fair distribution of land was observed in more than 65 villages with a parallel game of violence, arrests of Dalits and electoral changes. Dalit farmers have started working in those land as landowners. The hierarchy and division of labour and labourers has been broken to certain extent by the movement. Above this, Dalits are doing collective farming and hence they are equally dividing the products within the community. There has been tremendous change in the social, economic and political life of Dalits of rural Punjab, who acquired land thereafter.

This study will focus on the qualitative and quantitative analysis of changes in the political life of Dalits of Balad Kalan village of Sangrur district in Punjab. How the representation of Dalits emerged in Gram Sabha, Panchayat Raj Institutions, Local committee elections and as Punjab has $\frac{1}{3}$ part of its population as Dalits, how the state politics was affected by this movement. It

will also explore the role of various institutions as families, gender, PRIs, Police, Administration, State and other stakeholders in making the populist policy where Dalits are denied their rights and dominant caste groups are acquiring the rights of other villagers. Another objective of the study would be to come up with the demands and suggestions of these Dalits which can help agricultural policy frameworks that ensures social justice.