

## **Gender inequities in operational holdings: the case of Tamil Nadu, India**

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**Abstract:** *Asymmetrical distribution of land is an appalling feature of Indian agricultural system which is largely due to inherent socio-economic disparities. Land holdings and property rights governed by law of inheritance discriminates women and thereby curtails their economic independence. Research reveals that landlessness is more in Tamil Nadu than country as a whole and in this set-up; the paper makes an attempt to study gender differences in the distribution of land holdings by major size groups in the state in comparison with all India level. The study has utilized the Agriculture Census (2010-11) report to understand the anomalies in gender wise operational holdings for all social groups and SC/STs exclusively. The results for operational holdings and area operated carried out between different size groups show that there exist poor gender equality. However, the state is comparatively more equitable than the nation. The study also examines distribution of average size per holding by major size groups and gender. Effective implementation of the already existing policies on property entitlement and creating awareness among the stakeholders will go a long way in bridging the gender gap in land holdings.*

**Keywords:** land, operational, holdings, gender, social groups

### **Introduction**

Land holdings provides a safety net in the form of economic independence FAO, (2003) but agricultural structure particularly ownership is hampered with asymmetrical distribution. Inequality in land holdings is not a new phenomenon for India Ray, (2014) which is largely due to inherent socio-economic disparities Thorat and Newman, (2007). In Indian agricultural system, land holdings and property rights were governed by law of inheritance which discriminates women and thereby curtails their economic independence. Gender equality in land holdings can not only reduce women's but her whole family's poverty and increase in livelihood options and thereby enhance women empowerment Agarwal, (1994). Ninth Plan (1997-2002) envisaged efforts to give land titles to women even then all the efforts and measures of the constitution to remain non – discriminatory has not met with desired results. Even National Agricultural Policy (2000) which aimed to streamline gender concerns in agriculture could not bring out significant change Planning Commission, (2007).

Work force participation is one of the important parameters to measure gender inequalities along with health, education and political empowerment (Gender Inequality Index, 2016). According to 2011 Census, distribution of female workers in India comprises 32.9 per cent cultivators, 38.9 per cent agricultural labourers, 6.5 per cent workers in household industries

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## Gender inequities in operational holdings: the case of Tamil Nadu, India

and 21.7 per cent other marginal workers. Significantly, the percentage of female cultivators, agricultural labourers and workers in household industries is more than their male counterparts except in the case of marginal workers. Similar trend can be witnessed in Tamil Nadu. In fact, percentage of female agricultural labourers (41.61 per cent) in the state is higher than all India figures. This can be attributed to the poor land holding pattern of the female population in the state. At this backdrop, the paper makes an attempt to study gender differences in the distribution of operational holdings by major size groups in the state in comparison with all India level. The study has utilized the Agriculture Census (2010-11) report to understand the anomalies in gender wise operational holdings for all social groups and SC/STs exclusively.

### **Distribution of Operational Holdings**

According to Agriculture Census 2011, land which is used wholly or partly for agricultural production without regard to the title, legal form, size or location is referred as operational holdings. At the national level, the total number of operational holdings has increased from 129.22 million in 2005 – 06 to 138.35 million in 2010 – 11, indicating an increase of 7.06 per cent but in the case of Tamil Nadu, there was a fall of about 0.91 per cent. In line with the Agricultural Census report, operational holdings are analyzed for different size categories which includes Marginal, Small, Semi-medium, Medium and Large. In Tables 1 and 2, gender wise (Male / Female) break-up of number of operational holdings by its size for each social category (SC / STs / All Social Groups) is presented for India and Tamil Nadu respectively. At all India level, it can be observed that distribution of operational holdings among female population for ‘all social groups’ is only 12.78 per cent whereas for SCs and STs it is 12.27 per cent and 11.32 per cent respectively. Thus it can be inferred that gender bias is slightly higher among STs than other social groups for ‘All Size Classes’. It has also to be noticed that gender gap in terms of share of land holdings between male and female population is higher in ‘large’ holdings than other size groups for all social categories.

**Table 1: Distribution of Number of Operational Holdings By Major Size Groups & Gender: India (Number in `000)**

Size of Land Holding	SC			STs			All Social Groups		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Marginal	11556	1691	13247	5698	772	6470	80032	12656	92826
Small	2187	277	2464	2552	325	2877	21736	3010	24779
Semi-medium	905	100	1005	1601	186	1787	12418	1451	13896
Medium	303	27	330	693	67	760	5355	499	5875
Large	49	3	52	102	8	111	887	66	973
All Size Classes	15000	2099	17099	10646	1359	12005	120427	17683	138348

**Source:** *Compiled from Agricultural Census 2010-11*

**Note:** Total may not tally due to rounding off & institutional holdings are added under ‘total’.

In the case of Tamil Nadu, the overall pattern is somewhat better off than the nation (Table – 2). Distribution of operational holdings among female population for ‘all social groups’ is 19.10 per cent whereas for SCs and STs it is 19.35 per cent and 17.56 per cent respectively. It is interesting to note that the discrimination level among female SCs is marginally lesser than

females of 'all social groups'. It is also seen that unlike all India figures, there is no major variation in gender differences among different land holding sizes. It is therefore clear that gender inequities for all social categories of the state are lesser than all India level. However, both Tamil Nadu and India is nowhere near gender neutrality which remains only in paper.

**Table 2: Distribution of No. Of Operational Holdings by Major Size Groups & gender: Tamil Nadu (Number in `000)**

Size of Land Holding	SC			STs			All Social Groups		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Marginal	599	147	746	39	9	48	4996	1259	6267
Small	79	17	96	15	3	18	982	197	1181
Semi-medium	22	4	26	6	1	7	427	73	502
Medium	4	1	4	1	Neg.	2	130	19	151
Large	Neg.	Neg.	Neg.	Neg.	Neg.	Neg.	14	2	17
All Size Classes	705	169	873	61	13	74	6548	1551	8118

**Source:** Compiled from Agricultural Census 2010-11

**Note:** 1.Total may not tally due to rounding off & institutional holdings are added under 'total'

2. Neg. = Negligible (< 500 units/hectare)

### Distribution of area operated

A similar kind of analysis has been carried out for area of operational holdings for both India and Tamil Nadu Table 3 and 4. According to Agriculture Census 2011, operated area includes both cultivated and uncultivated area, provided part of it is put to agricultural production during the reference period. Also, the operated area has increased to 159.59 million hectare in 2010 – 11 from 158.32 million hectare in 2005 – 06, showing a marginal increase of 0.80 per cent whereas in Tamil Nadu, it dropped by around 5 per cent. For the nation as a whole, percentage of area operated ('all size classes') by female population of 'all social groups' is only 10.34 per cent which is lesser than their percentage of operational holdings (12.78 per cent). Even for female SCs (10.42 per cent) and STs (10.02 per cent), same trend prevails. However, gender gap among female SCs is slightly better than females of 'all social groups' which is not so in the case of operational holdings at the national level. Further analysis shows that when the size of land holdings of operated area increases percentage share of female population goes on declining for all three social groups. It is also found that gender discrimination against female STs under 'Large' holdings size is lesser than other two social categories (SCs and 'all social groups').

In the state of Tamil Nadu, percentage of area operated ('all size classes') by female population of 'all social groups' (16.27 per cent) is less than female SCs (18.29 per cent) as witnessed in operational holdings Table 2. It is reflected in major size groups as well. Among the social categories, gender disparities are higher among female STs. Apart from that, gender differences are lower than all India data on area operated. This further validates the claim that gender bias is less in Tamil Nadu in comparison with all India figures.

**Table 3: Distribution of Area Operated By Major Size Groups & Gender: India**  
(Area in `000 ha.)

Size of Land Holding	SC			STs			All Social Groups		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Marginal	4285	582	4867	2786	358	3144	31315	4549	35908
Small	3074	382	3455	3662	457	4119	30979	4218	35244
Semi-medium	2417	260	2678	4335	496	4831	33767	3864	37705
Medium	1732	153	1885	3984	380	4363	30863	2834	33828
Large	782	54	836	1628	135	1763	14617	1045	16907
All Size Classes	12291	1430	13721	16395	1826	18221	141540	16510	159592

**Source:** Compiled from Agricultural Census 2010-11

**Note:** Total may not tally due to rounding off & institutional holdings are added under 'total'

**Table 4: Distribution of Area Operated by Major Size Groups & Gender: Tamil Nadu**  
(Area in `000 ha.)

Size of Land Holding	SC			STs			All Social Groups		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Marginal	212	53	264	18	4	22	1838	450	2292
Small	108	23	131	21	4	24	1368	272	1644
Semi-medium	58	11	69	16	2	18	1152	197	1356
Medium	20	3	23	8	1	9	730	107	848
Large	3	Neg.	4	1	Neg.	1	213	29	350
All Size Classes	402	90	492	63	11	75	5300	1056	6488

**Source:** Compiled from Agricultural Census 2010-11

**Note:** 1.Total may not tally due to rounding off & institutional holdings are added under 'total'

2. Neg. = Negligible (< 500 units/hectare)

### Distribution of Average Size per Holding

Any significant change in agrarian structure will have some kind of impact on the size distribution of land holdings (NSS 59<sup>th</sup> Round). Considering the changes that have happened in the last few decades particularly after the advent of state intervention in land distribution, it becomes all the more important to study percentage distribution of average size per holding (Selvaraj and Arun, 2017). However, the average size per holding has been steadily declining in the country in successive census (Agriculture Census, 2011). The following section deals with the gender wise distribution of average size per holding in India and Tamil Nadu for SC/STs and 'all social groups' by different size of land holdings (Table – 5 and 6). Average size per holdings of STs outweighs other two social categories under consideration. It is interesting to note that average size per holding of female STs is better than the males of SCs and 'all social groups' but not more than male STs. This clearly highlights the presence of gender disparity irrespective of their socio-economic status. It is also seen that in marginal sized land holdings, average size per holding of female STs has an edge over the male SCs and also against the males of 'all social groups'. In all kind of land holding sizes, average size per holding pattern is superior among

female STs than other category females. Moreover, for all social categories and importantly for both the genders average size per holding increases with the increase in land holding sizes.

**Table 5: Distribution of average size per holding by major size groups & gender: India  
(Area in `000 ha.)**

Size of Land Holding	SC			STs			All Social Groups		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Marginal	0.37	0.34	0.37	0.49	0.46	0.49	0.39	0.36	0.39
Small	1.41	1.38	1.40	1.43	1.41	1.43	1.43	1.40	1.42
Semi-medium	2.67	2.60	2.66	2.71	2.67	2.70	2.72	2.66	2.71
Medium	5.71	5.62	5.70	5.75	5.66	5.74	5.76	5.68	5.76
Large	16.01	15.72	15.99	15.96	15.88	15.95	16.48	15.83	17.38
All Size Classes	0.82	0.68	0.80	1.54	1.34	1.52	1.18	0.93	1.15

**Source:** Compiled from Agricultural Census 2010-11

*Note:* Total includes institutional holdings also

Table 6 shows gender wise distribution of average size per holdings for three categories: Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and ‘all social groups’ in Tamil Nadu. And, it can be seen that the state more or less follows all India trend. In the sense that the state also depicts the favourable position enjoyed by the STs and in particular female STs; better average size per holdings than male SCs and ‘all social groups’ males. As far as ‘marginal’ land holding size is concerned female STs are on par with their counterparts and this is the one of the rarest occasion where gender equality can be seen in the entire study. Other instances where female average land holding size is higher than their community males is under ‘medium’ land holding size of SCs and then under ‘large’ land holding size of ‘all social groups’.

**Table 6: Distribution Of Average Size Per Holding By Major Size Groups & Gender:  
Tamil Nadu (Area in `000 ha.)**

Size of Land Holding	SC			STs			All Social Groups		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Marginal	0.35	0.36	0.35	0.45	0.45	0.45	0.37	0.36	0.37
Small	1.37	1.36	1.37	1.40	1.37	1.39	1.39	1.38	1.39
Semi-medium	2.62	2.59	2.62	2.66	2.60	2.65	2.70	2.68	2.70
Medium	5.44	5.49	5.45	5.44	5.33	5.43	5.63	5.59	5.63
Large	14.76	11.82	14.42	14.03	15.28	14.19	15.47	15.52	20.13
All Size Classes	0.57	0.53	0.56	1.03	0.87	1.00	0.81	0.68	0.80

**Source:** Compiled from Agricultural Census 2010-11

*Note:* Total includes institutional holdings also

## Conclusion

The study reveals about the presence of gender inequities in both India and Tamil Nadu in all the three parameters under consideration which includes distribution of number and area of

## Gender inequities in operational holdings: the case of Tamil Nadu, India

operational holdings and average size per holdings. However, discrimination against females in the state is not as bad as all India level. Also, the state presents that the rate of gender bias against female SCs is lesser than the females of 'all social groups' in terms of both number and area of operational holdings. This is not the case at national level where female SC/STs 'number of operational holdings' are below than 'all social groups' females. Another important outcome of the study is that average size per holdings of female STs is higher than male SCs and 'all social groups' males but not than male STs. By and large, women have to go a long way to claim their legal rights on land ownership. The major reason for the poor land holding pattern among women is probably due to poor implementation of the already existing policies on property entitlement and this warrants a pressing need for correcting implementation anomalies. In addition to that creating awareness among the stakeholders will go a long way in bridging the gender gap in land holdings.

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