

## Tribal Land Alienation and Poverty in Tamil Nadu

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**ABSTRACT** Poverty is defined as material deprivation, isolation, dependence, land alienation, and insecurity. Access to land is of fundamental importance in rural India. The incidence of poverty is highly correlated with lack of access to land, although the direction of causality in this relationship is not clear. Economically the tribes are the weakest section in the social hierarchy, so their poverty level too is high among these sections. Land is the only tangible asset which the members of the scheduled tribes possess. Their income exclusively depends upon the size of land holdings. Hence, any loss of land not only reduces their income but also increases their poverty level. In this context, the present paper tries to identify the relationship between land alienation and the level of poverty and found that there has been severity of poverty in all the villages where the magnitude of land alienation is high.

### INTRODUCTION

Resources like land, water, and forests constitute the cornerstone of tribal culture. Even after more than five decades of our independence, there is no clear cut government policy related to these vital components of tribal culture (Kumar 2002). The problem of land alienation is more alarming today than ever before (Dalvi and Bokil 2000). During the British rule, land alienation was not a serious problem. Its extent was so small that tribes had not been affected much, by way of either loss of land or loss of livelihood. In fact, the forests were plenty, and not completely occupied either by the tribes or by the non-tribes. After independence also, the same situation continued, but, gradual influx of non-tribals in the tribal areas forced the tribes to leave their lands. Today, the growth of population and the government policies on forest and environment have reduced the land resources completely. So, the demand for the land has been on the increase, forcing the tribes to be aliens to their own lands, thereby causing loss of their livelihood, culture and identity (Baskardoss 1989).

India is the second largest tribal populated country, next only to South Africa. The tribal communities comprise about 8.06 per cent (2001 Census) of the total population in the country. Tamil Nadu is one of the states having a significant percentage of tribal population. According to 2001 Census, the total tribal population of Tamil Nadu is about 651321, which constitutes 1.04 per cent of the total. There are about 40 tribes living in the state, in which six tribes are considered primitive. All the six primitive tribes viz., Irular, Kattunaikan, Kota, Kurumba, Paniya,

and Toda are living in Nilgiris district. But their proportion is very small in the total tribal population of the state. Malayali or Malayalee is the major tribe found in Salem, Vilupuram, Namakal, Dharmapuri, Tiruvannamalai and Cuddalore districts of the state.

In the above said districts, the non-tribal farmers, moneylenders, and traders trouble the tribes in various ways with the ultimate intention of driving them out of their lands (Karuppayyan 2001). Studies by Roy Burman (1989), Sinha (1990), Saravanan (2001) revealed that the women tribes are facing atrocities, besides exploitation by businessmen and forest officials. A study conducted by Mearns (1999) reveals that there exists high correlation between incidence of poverty and lack of access to land. Amita Sha and Sha (2004) were of the opinion that the economic development and anti poverty strategies implemented in India, especially among the tribes had an overall effect of limited shrinking of land base among the tribes. According to Ramdas (2009), the processes of land alienation, due to the entry of non-tribals, commoditization of land, introduction of cash crops etc., increased the poverty level in the state of Nizam in Andhra Pradesh.

### METHODOLOGY

The primary data required for the study were collected from the tribes of eight selected villages in the districts of Nilgiris and Salem (four each) in the state of Tamil Nadu. Multi-stage random sampling technique has been employed for the study.

In the first stage, the districts were identified

on the basis of concentration of primitive and scheduled tribal population. In conforming to the factor concentration, the primitive tribes of the district of Nilgiris (28373 (4.26%) as per 2001 Census) and the scheduled tribes of Salem district (103921 (15.59%) as per 2001 Census) have been chosen for the study.

In the next stage, the villages were identified on the basis of their distance to the nearest town/taluk headquarters. Based on the distance, viz., Proximity Location (PL) (less than 5 kms), Close Location (CL) (10-15 kms), Distant Location (DL) (15-20 kms), and Remote Location (RL) (above 20 kms) four villages from each district were selected. All these villages have been screened from the District Census Handbooks of 1981 and 1991. Having selected the villages, all the land alienated tribal households from these villages have been contacted for the survey.

In the final stage, a complete enumeration was made of all the households affected by alienation. (Earlier, the households had been identified through a pilot survey). The surveyed population varies from village to village. Of the 120 households surveyed in Nilgiris, 55 were from PL village, while 40 were from CL village. There were 7 and 18 households from DL and RL villages respectively. In Salem, 155 households were surveyed, 22 from PL, 36 from CL, 42 from DL and 55 from the RL villages. The pre-tested interview-schedule was administered on all the 275 listed households. The specific information collected on land alienation was corresponding to the agricultural year 2001-2002 by recall method.

#### **TRIBAL POVERTY AND LAND ALIENATION**

Poverty has traditionally been defined as lack of income. However, in recent years, poverty has been recognized as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, which in addition to lack of income and opportunity also manifests itself in terms of vulnerability and powerlessness. Poverty is also defined as material deprivation, isolation, dependence, land alienation, and insecurity. Access to land is of fundamental importance in rural India. The incidence of poverty is highly correlated with lack of access to land, although the direction of causality in this relationship is not clear. Economically the tribes are the weakest section in the social hierarchy, so their poverty level too is

high among these sections. Land is the only tangible asset which the members of the scheduled tribes possess. Their income exclusively depends upon the size of land holdings. Hence, any loss of land not only reduces their income but also increases their poverty level. Tribes have lost their lands in two ways. The first one is compulsorily or forcibly, due to heavy indebtedness and the second one is voluntarily, to occupy better positions elsewhere. However, the forms of land alienation also determine the level of poverty. The case of temporary alienation (smooth path viz., lease out and mortgage) does not affect their income to a greater extent, while the forms of permanent alienation (hard path viz., sale and acquisition by government) put the magnitude of poverty at higher level (Fig. 1).

In the present analysis (Table 1), poverty has been calculated using income method. To work out the poverty line, the present study has used the Planning Commission, Government of India's revised statistics of Rs. 11000 per household during Ninth Plan as per 1992-93 prices. This figure has been suitably inflated using Whole Sale Price Index numbers and worked out to Rs. 20742 at 2001-2002 prices. Further, the figure is rounded off to the nearest number that is, Rs. 20700, to fix the poverty cut off, which also used the Planning Commission Report 2002 (Karuppaiyan 2002). The level of poverty has been classified into seven categories viz., Destitute (Below Rs. 7000), Very Poor (Rs.7000 – Rs 14000), Marginally Poor (Rs.14000 – Rs 20700), Marginally Non-poor (Rs.20700 – Rs 30000), Better-off (Rs.30000 – Rs 50000), Well-to-do (Rs.50000 – Rs 100000), and Rich (above Rs.100000), based on the level of annual income.

It could be observed from Table 1 that 23 per cent of the total surveyed households (275) belonged to the category of Below Poverty Line (BPL) and another 15 per cent of the households were in the borderline BPL. Out of this 23 per cent BPL category, 12 per cent were marginally poor. These tribes needed a small lift for their betterment. It is interesting to note that most of (77%) the land alienated cases in total have come under the Above Poverty Line (APL) category. In the APL category, 50 per cent of the tribes were better off and well to do, due to the time gap between the occurrence of land alienation and present income.

A similar picture can be seen in the district wise analysis as well. The proportion of the

Land Alienation



Acuteness of Land Alienation (in %)

District \ Village	PL	CL	DL	RL	ALL
Nilgiris	46	5	29	0	24
Salem	100	86	100	100	96



Endowment Loss



Entitlement Loss



Indebtedness (in %)

District \ Village	PL	CL	DL	RL	ALL
Nilgiris	24	38	29	0	24
Salem	77	93	64	65	74



Poverty Level (in %)

District \ Village	PL	CL	DL	RL	ALL
Nilgiris	4	3	0	6	3
Salem	32	28	15	51	38

Fig. 1. Land alienation and poverty – A link

**Table 1: Poverty level of the surveyed households**

S. No.	Poverty level	Nilgiris district - villages				All n = 120	Salem district - villages				All n = 155	Overall N = 275
		Distance from block headquarters (kms.)					Distance from block headquarters (kms.)					
		PL (Below 5) n = 55	CL (10 – 15) n = 40	DL (15 – 20) n = 7	RL (Above 20) n = 18		PL (Below 5) n = 22	CL (10 – 15) n = 36	DL (15 – 20) n = 42	RL (Above 20) n = 55		
1	Destitute (Below Rs. 7000)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(2.78)	1(2.38)	2(3.64)	4(2.58)	4(1.45)	
2	Very poor (Rs. 7000 - Rs. 14000)	1(1.82)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(0.83)	4(18.18)	4(11.11)	4(9.52)	13(23.64)	25(16.13)	
3	Marginally poor (Rs. 14000 - Rs. 20700)	1(2.00)	1(3.00)	0(0.00)	1(5.56)	3(2.50)	3(13.64)	5(13.89)	9(21.43)	13(23.64)	30(19.35)	
4	Marginally non-poor (Rs. 20700 - Rs. 30000)	5(9.00)	2(5.00)	0(0.00)	1(6.00)	8(7.00)	4(18.00)	13(36.00)	9(21.00)	8(15.00)	34(22)	
5	Better off (Rs. 30000 - Rs. 50000)	12(21.82)	9(22.50)	3(42.86)	3(16.67)	27(22.50)	9(40.91)	8(22.22)	8(19.05)	11(20.00)	36(23.23)	
6	Well-to-do (Rs. 50000 - Rs. 100000)	22(40.00)	17(42.50)	4(57.14)	8(44.44)	51(42.50)	2(9.09)	5(13.89)	9(21.43)	7(12.73)	23(14.84)	
7	Rich (Above Rs. 100000)	14(25.00)	11(28.00)	0(0.00)	5(27.78)	30(25.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	2(4.76)	1(1.82)	3(1.94)	
	Average household income	78493	84680	49929	75867	78495	31136	30819	42095	30195	33698	
	Total	55(100)	40(100)	7(100)	18(100)	120(100)	22(100)	36(100)	42(100)	55(100)	155(100)	

Source: Computed

Note: Figures in the parentheses are percentages to the total

**Table 2: Poverty and extent of land alienation**

Extent	Poverty level	Nilgiris district - villages				All n = 120	Salem district - villages				All n = 155	Overall N = 275
		Distance from block headquarters (kms.)					Distance from block headquarters (kms.)					
		PL (Below 5) n = 55	CL (10 – 15) n = 40	DL (15 – 20) N = 7	RL (Above 20) n = 18		PL (Below 5) n = 22	CL (10 – 15) n = 36	DL (15 – 20) n = 42	RL (Above 20) n = 55		
Below 1 acre	Poor	2 (3.85) (3.64)	1 (4.35) (2.50)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	1 (10.00) (5.56)	4 (4.35) (3.33)	2 (20.00) (9.09)	7 (28.00) (19.44)	2 (18.18) (4.76)	4 (66.67) (7.27)	15 (28.85) (9.68)	19 (13.19) (6.91)
	Non-poor	50 (96.15) (90.91)	22 (95.65) (55.00)	7 (100) (100)	9 (90.00) (50.00)	88 (95.65) (73.33)	8 (80.00) (36.36)	18 (72.00) (50.00)	9 (81.82) (21.43)	2 (33.33) (3.64)	37 (71.15) (23.87)	125 (86.81) (45.45)
	Total	52 (100) (94.55)	23 (100) (57.50)	7 (100) (100)	10 (100) (55.56)	92 (100) (76.67)	10 (100) (45.45)	25 (100) (69.44)	11 (100) (26.19)	6 (100) (10.91)	52 (100) (33.55)	144 (100) (52.36)
1.1 -2 acre	Poor	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	2 (25.00) (9.09)	2 (40.00) (5.56)	1 (16.67) (2.38)	13 (54.17) (23.64)	18 (41.86) (11.61)	18 (29.03) (6.55)
	Non-poor	3 (100) (5.45)	12 (100) (30.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	4 (100) (22.22)	19 (100) (15.83)	6 (75.00) (27.27)	3 (60.00) (8.33)	5 (83.33) (11.90)	11 (45.83) (20.00)	25 (58.14) (16.13)	44 (70.97) (16.00)
	Total	3 (100) (5.45)	12 (100) (30.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	4 (100) (22.22)	19 (100) (15.83)	8 (100) (36.36)	5 (100) (13.89)	6 (100) (14.29)	24 (100) (43.64)	43 (100) (27.74)	62 (100) (22.55)
2.1 - 3 acre	Poor	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	2 (66.67) (9.09)	0 0.00 (0.00)	3 (33.33) (7.14)	7 (46.67) (12.73)	12 (41.38) (7.74)	12 (35.29) (4.36)
	Non-poor	0 (0.00) (0.00)	1 (100.00) (2.50)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	4 (100) (22.22)	5 (100) (4.17)	1 (33.33) (4.55)	2 (100.00) (5.56)	6 (66.67) (14.29)	8 (53.33) (14.55)	17 (58.62) (10.97)	22 (64.71) (8.00)
	Total	0 (0.00) (0.00)	1 (100) (2.50)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	4 (100) (22.22)	5 (100) (4.17)	3 (100) (13.64)	2 (100) (5.56)	9 (100) (21.43)	15 (100) (27.27)	29 (100) (18.71)	34 (100) (12.36)
3.1 - 4 acre	Poor	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 0.00 (0.00)	4 (40.00) (9.52)	1 (25.00) (1.82)	5 (33.33) (3.23)	5 (29.41) (1.82)
	Non-poor	0 (0.00) (0.00)	2 (100) (5.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	2 (100) (1.67)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	1 (100) (2.78)	6 (60.00) (14.29)	3 (75.00) (5.45)	10 (66.67) (6.45)	12 (70.59) (4.36)
	Total	0 (0.00) (0.00)	2 (100) (5.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	2 (100) (1.67)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	1 (100) (2.78)	10 (100) (23.81)	4 (100) (7.27)	15 (100) (9.68)	17 (100) (6.18)
4 acre and Above	Poor	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	1 (100.00) (4.55)	1 (33.33) (2.78)	4 (66.67) (9.52)	3 (50.00) (5.45)	9 (56.25) (5.81)	9 (50.00) (3.27)
	Non-poor	0 (0.00) (0.00)	2 (100) (5.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	2 (100) (1.67)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	2 (66.67) (5.56)	2 (33.33) (4.76)	3 (50.00) (5.45)	7 (43.75) (4.52)	9 (50.00) (3.27)
	Total	0 (0.00) (0.00)	2 (100) (5.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	0 (0.00) (0.00)	2 (100) (1.67)	1 (100) (4.55)	3 (100) (8.33)	6 (100) (14.29)	6 (100) (10.91)	16 (100) (10.32)	18 (100) (6.55)
Grand Total		55 (100)	40(100)	7(100)	18(100)	120(100)	22(100)	36(100)	42(100)	55(100)	155(100)	275(100)

Source: Computed

Note: Figures in the parentheses are percentages to the total, Note: Figures in bold letters are percentage to the grand total

**Table 3: Forms of alienation of the surveyed households**

S. No.	Form	Nilgiris district - villages					Salem district - villages					
		Distance from block headquarters (kms.)					Distance from block headquarters (kms.)					
		PL (Below 5) n = 55	CL (10-15) n = 40	DL (15-20) n = 7	RL (Above 20) n = 18	All n = 120	PL (Below 5) n = 22	CL (10-15) n = 36	DL (15-20) n = 42	RL (Above 20) n = 55	All n = 155	Over All n = 275
1	Sale	25 (45.45)	2 (5.00)	2 (28.57)	0 (0.00)	29 (24.17)	22 (100.00)	31 (86.11)	42 (100.00)	55 (100.00)	150 (96.17)	179 (65.09)
2	Mortgage	4 (7.27)	31 (77.50)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	35 (29.17)	0 (0.00)	4 (11.11)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	4 (2.58)	39 (14.18)
3	Lease	25 (45.45)	7 (17.50)	5 (71.43)	18 (100.00)	55 (45.83)	0 (0.00)	1 (2.78)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.65)	56 (20.36)
4	Acquisition	1 (1.82)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.83)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.36)
Total		55 (100)	40 (100)	7 (100)	18 (100)	120 (100)	22 (100)	36 (100)	42 (100)	55 (100)	133 (100)	275 (100)

households in BPL category was lower than that of the proportion in the APL category. But the proportion of the BPL households was 12 times higher in Salem (38%) when compared to Nilgiris (3%). It is observed from the survey that in the Nilgiris district, the value of the land was higher than that of Salem district. On account of increased tourism, the land in the Nilgiris district has attained commercial value, which could be the one of the reasons for increased land value of tribal settlements apart from its yield and fertility. So the tribes in Nilgiris district preferred to lease out their lands rather than to sell it. The fall of tea prices in the second half of 1990s forced them to dispose of their lands, and around 75 per cent of the tribes (see Table 3) have alienated their lands in the form of lease out and mortgage.

In Salem District, 38 per cent of the tribes have come under the BPL category. The major reasons for this higher percentage of BPL category is that poor land value (most of the land is dry) and also most of the land transfers have taken place in the form of sale (96% see Table 3). So these tribes could not restore their land without government's intervention or steps like the tribal movements organized by them. Thus, the permanent loss of land forces most of the Salem tribes to fall into the poverty trap.

In the Nilgiris, when the land was offered either for lease or mortgage, it could obtain a reasonable return to the tribes. This could be one of the reasons for low incidence of poverty among the same tribes, whereas in Salem district, the

tribes were forced to sell out their land due to the poor value and poor fertility of the land.

Regarding the average income of the family, the average household income of all the villages in Salem district has not reached even the lowest average income of Nilgiris district. Though the average income is high in the DL village of Salem (Rs. 42095), the level of poverty in this village is higher (33%) than that of PL and CL villages. But in the case of Nilgiris, there are 6 per cent households in the entire district categorized BPL group. More than 60 per cent households in PL, CL and RL villages, and all the tribes in the DL village have come under the categories of better off and well to do. In the DL village, the reason is no household in DL village lost his/her land entirely (see Table 4), and hence there is no sizeable fall in income as a result of which there is very low per cent of tribes below poverty line. At the same time, the average household income is the lowest in this village (Rs. 49929).

## DISCUSSION

This section highlights the facts of change in the size of landholdings before and after alienation, its process and impact. Of the households surveyed, more than a half of them hold marginal farms. It is observed that the survey could not record any case of large farmers in both the districts after land alienation. In this process, the assets of the tribes have drained off and they have slid down to lower categories viz., medium,

**Table 4: Village wise size of landholdings before and after land alienation in Nilgiris District**

S. No.	Farm size	Nilgiris district - villages									
		Distance from block head quarters (kms.)									
		PL (Below 5) n = 55		CL (10-15) n = 40		DL (15-20) n = 7		RL (Above 20) n = 18		Nilgiris n = 120	
		Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
1	Land less	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	6 (10.91)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (5.56)	0 (0.00)	7 (5.83)
2	Marginal	46 (83.64)	46 (83.64)	47 (85.45)	14 (35.00)	27 (67.50)	3 (42.86)	4 (22.22)	11 (61.11)	66 (55.00)	88 (73.33)
3	Small	9 (16.36)	9 (16.36)	2 (3.64)	20 (50.00)	11 (27.50)	4 (57.14)	12 (66.67)	6 (33.33)	46 (38.33)	23 (19.17)
4	Medium	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	3 (7.50)	2 (5.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (11.11)	0 (0.00)	5 (4.17)	2 (1.67)
5	Large	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	3 (7.50)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	3 (2.50)	0 (0.00)
	Total	55 (100)	55 (100)	55 (100)	40 (100)	40 (100)	7 (100)	18 (100)	18 (100)	120 (100)	120 (100)

small, marginal and landless. It is worth mentioning that the earlier studies going into the problem of land alienation have not attempted to focus on the conditions of the tribes after land alienation. As the studies were made at different points of time, there was no in-depth examination in this regard. Hence, the present study ventures into assessing the present situation. The major alienated lands are dry in nature. However, it cannot be construed that these lands are less productive and are less in value. Because the plantation crops like tea and coffee grow in the hilly regions do not warrant any continuous irrigation. These crops give higher yield than those crops grown in the wet lands. But after 1995, the tribes of Nilgiris have faced the problems of deceleration in the prices of tea and the tribes of Salem belonging to two villages, viz., PL and CL were facing the problem of continuous decline in coffee prices and hence a large alienation happened during this period in both the districts.

In Nilgiris, most of the alienated cases have taken place in the form of lease due to a temporary fall in the prices of tea. The non-tribes are the major agents in the study region of Nilgiris. However, in the case of Salem, the land alienation has taken place among the tribes. This is attributed to the fact that there has only been a partial implementation of the act 'village green', which did not permit the tribe, Malayali, to transfer their lands to any non-tribe. Besides, the tribes have also taken a collective decision of not allowing the non-tribes to enter into any deal with

the non-tribes. The agents, tribe and non-tribe have been discussed in all the studies except a few. Karuppaiyan (2002) in his article has stated that in Nilgiris some of the tribes have alienated their lands to others among their own tribes, but the present survey finds that there has been no such transfer reported except in some hamlets. In some cases, the government is responsible for land alienation, where the governments involve themselves in the developmental activities.

Most of the alienated cases have been registered in the form of sale in Salem district, whereas in Nilgiris, the form of lease is predominant<sup>1</sup>. Among the causes for land alienation, the repayment of old debts is predominant<sup>2</sup>. Besides, inability on the part of the tribe to manage the lands has come up as another reason. Some of the households possessed the lands in the areas located far away; hence they could not get additional labourers and other inputs. So they could not manage the lands and, consequently, they leased out a part of their lands. These issues have not been reported by the authors who have studied earlier the problem of land alienation. In all, the incidence of total per household alienation is high in the DL village of Salem (2.94 acres), whereas it is low in the comparable village of Nilgiris district (0.64 acres)<sup>3</sup>. In the process of land alienation, a few households (8%) have lost their entire lands and joined in the landless category. However, insignificant proportions of households have disposed of their lands voluntarily and joined in the service sector, which may

give a regular monthly income. The researcher has observed that there is no restoration of lands in the two districts. It reveals that the existing Standing Order released by the State Government earlier could not arrest and control the land alienation, which takes place between the tribes and non-tribes.

**Poverty and Extent of Land Alienation**

The relationship between poverty and extent of land alienation is analysed in Table 2. In general, the level of poverty and extent of land alienation are positively correlated. At the same time, the extent of poverty depends upon the size of land holdings of the tribes before land alienation. The real loss of land varied significantly among the various categories of farmers, and the magnitude of loss is very high in the categories of

marginal and small land holders. The tribes' core economic activities are related to the land based assets, and any loss in it pushed them into the poverty spectrum. It is construed that there is a direct link between land alienation and poverty. The severity of poverty is related to the type of land which they possess. In the process of land alienation, the income of the households has come down to the level of marginally poor and non-poor. The poor is one whose annual income is below Rs. 20700, and others above this cut off will come under the category of non-poor.

In the analyses of intra-district, the proportion of the households in the poor and non-poor categories has varied among the villages. In Nilgiris, in respect of each category of land alienation, the registration of non-poor is higher than that of poor in all the villages of Nilgiris. A slight variation is seen in Salem district. In this dis-

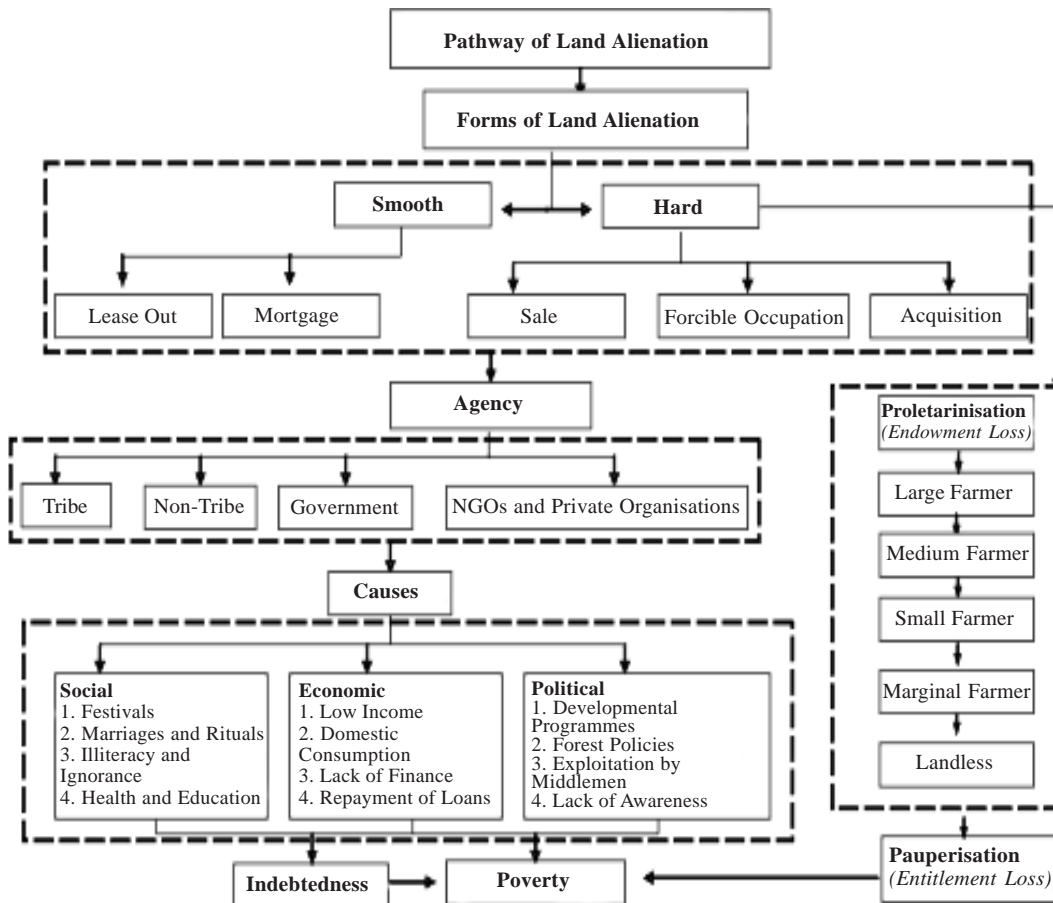


Fig. 2. Pathway of land alienation

tract, the proportion of poor that is, BPL category is high in the RL village (24%) under 1.1 to 2 acre extent. Given this backdrop, it could be said that there is a close association between the land alienation and the magnitude of poverty. In the case of absolute poverty analysis, around 77 per cent of households are in the category of APL.

### Poverty and Land Alienation

It is seen from the Figure 2 that the level of poverty is high in all the villages of Salem district due to high indebtedness. But, in the case of Nilgiris, the proportion of poverty is low because of its low indebtedness. In Salem district, the acuteness of land alienation is hundred per cent in the villages of PL, DL, and RL, and it is 86 per cent in the CL village. But this lowest registration of Salem district is higher than that of all the villages of Nilgiris.

In Nilgiris district, the proportion of acuteness of land alienation is high in the PL village (46%), and it is nil in RL villages. It reveals that the distance makes the difference in Nilgiris, but there is no difference in the case of Salem district. The level of poverty is high in Salem district when compared to Nilgiris. In Salem district, the level of poverty is highest (51%) in the RL village, where the acuteness of land alienation is 100 per cent. It is also pointed out that the level of poverty is lowest (15%) in DL village of Salem district with hundred per cent acuteness of land alienation. But in Nilgiris district, none of the villages has reached the lower poverty level of Salem district, because of its poor acuteness and low indebtedness. In this district, the level of poverty is high in the RL village (6%) and lowest in the DL village, where there is no registration of BPL households. Thus, it could be said that there is a positive relationship between the level of poverty and acuteness of land alienation.

Hence, the tribal land alienation not only reduces their income and size of land holding, but also forces them to fall into the poverty spectrum. Most of the tribes have alienated their lands, due to their temporary income and consumption gaps. So, the government has to take necessary steps to prevent the land alienation or at least prevent their permanent alienation. Hence, the from indebtedness, ignorance and prices of their plantation crops' viz., tea and coffee may help them to get sufficient income which in turn help them to safe guard their lands.

Thus, the level of poverty is higher in Salem than in Nilgiris due to various reasons. The major reasons for the poor registration of BPL in Nilgiris is that most of the tribes have alienated their lands in the form of lease out and mortgage and the value and yield from their remaining land is high. Besides, some of the households have alienated their lands to move over to better occupations after land alienation. On the other hand, the major reasons for higher poverty in Salem are the permanent alienation (sale), which has occurred, and poor value barren lands. However, a more precise picture can obtain, if a comparison is drawn between the poverty and the extent of land alienation.

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### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Ragava Rao and Baskara Doss have observed the sale as the predominant mode of alienation in the state of Tamil Nadu during 1989. However, in the northern region (J.L.Batre SP Sinha) the mortgage is the major mode, which they treat as equivalent to sale.
- <sup>2</sup> The repayment of old debt is realised by many authors. For instance, Thakur and Deventra Thakur (1994) pointed out that the tribes borrow from the money lender at an exorbitant rate of interest, which grow beyond their credit worthiness within short term, then the tribes are ultimately forced to lease out or mortgage or sell their lands.
- <sup>3</sup> Per household alienation was registered at different levels in different regions. They are 1.38 acres in Tamil Nadu (Ragava Rao and Baskara Doss), 1.58 acres in Bihar (SP Sinha), 2.3 acres in Bihar (SL Batra) and 5.28 acres in Orissa (CPSW & WIDA).

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