Exploring Vulnerability of SC-ST Tenant Farmers in Telangana in the Context of Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima Schemes

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List of Acronyms

NREGA: National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005
MoRD: Ministry of Rural Development
ST : Schedule Tribes
SC : Schedule Caste
MSP : Minimum Support Price
INR : Indian Rupee

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Abstract

India is currently the 5th largest global economy. Agricultural production contributes 20% to its GDP with 55% of the total Indian workforce working in this sector. Yet, 70.4% of the total agricultural households are either landless or hold a meagre amount of cultivable land, leading to a higher volume of cultivation under tenancy. With 20% of Indian farmers living below the poverty line, indebtedness is one of the core problems among farmers across India. In Financial Year 2016-17, the southern state of Telangana had the highest rate of agricultural indebtedness which was most acute among the farmers from the historically marginalised Dalit and Adivasi communities in the region. To address indebtedness, the Government of Telangana came up with two simultaneous sister initiatives, The Rythu Bandhu Scheme and Rythu Bima in 2018. Surprisingly, the most vulnerable section of the farmers, the landless tenant farmers, have been explicitly excluded from both the schemes. Therefore, this research seeks to understand how the exclusion by the state from both the schemes has affected the Dalit and Adivasi tenant farmers in terms of their indebtedness from the intertwining factors of class and caste. To this end, an ethnographic route of qualitative research, using tools of sample survey, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation of 35 Dalit and Adivasi landless tenant farmers in totality, have been taken. The key findings of this research have been the reaffirmation of the caste and class hierarchical discrimination by the state actors-affiliates through its socio-political mechanism and strategical formation of policy which only do welfare of the solvent and wealthy elite class of the society. The schemes have not in any way provided relief to the SC-ST landless tenant farmers from their indebtedness. Rather, as the schemes created an additional income source for absentee upper and dominant caste landlords, the side effects of the schemes have been disastrous. Increase in monetary value of the agricultural lands making it unaffordable, higher rent of the leased lands and accelerated cost of agricultural input components have forced the landless SC-ST farmers more into indebtedness. So, instead of the facade of 'welfare schemes for the farmers' by the state, this dissertation came up with the recommendation based on the research participants suggestions of immediate initiation of the land redistribution which has long been pending by the current ruling Telangana government since it came to power in 2014.

Also, for including the actual indebted farmers, state mechanism of identifying the tenant farmers, empowering the local governmental offices is a timely requirement. Finally, putting a cap on the total number of land holdings per family as a single unit as an eligibility criterion for reception of Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima should be proposed.

Relevance to Development Studies

My research investigates the mechanism of marginalization of the Dalit - Adivasi tenant farmers in Telangana through the so-called farmers' welfare schemes by the state, its actors, and affiliates. As these welfare policies have been made without consulting with and assessing the practical components at the grassroots level with the marginalised stakeholders of the farming communities. While the concerned policies in the research, might resonate with the larger policy approach taken across the globe, these have been missing on the local perspective of the policy implementation components by going in a top-down approach. In the recent years development studies have been putting tremendous efforts to bring new nuances to take the bottom-up approach with consideration of the perspective of the maximum number of beneficiaries. In this regard, through this research, I have endeavoured to contribute to the scholarship of critical approach in making people centric welfare policies.

Keywords

Rythu Bandhu, Rythu Bima, Dalit-Adivasi, tenant farmers, caste system, indebtedness, marginalization & structured violence, State

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

India stands as the 5th largest global economy with an estimated Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of USD 3.53 Trillion in September 2022 (Armstrong, 2022; International Monetary Fund, 2022). Agricultural production has contributed to almost 20% of the total GDP in the financial year (FY) 2020-21. The number of individuals engaged in the agricultural workers and its allied sector is around 55% of the total Indian labour force (Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers' Welfare, 2022).

While these aggregate figures suggest a booming economy, especially in the agriculture sector, this apparent prosperity has not transcended to all sections of people engaged in agricultural work. 20% of Indian farmers live below the poverty line (Mehta, 2019). This data is further supported by the fact that production in the agricultural and relevant sector or the Gross Value Added (GVA)[1] has been largely inconsistent. In the financial year 2017-18, the GVA was 6.6% which reduced to 2.1% in the immediate year of 2018-19. But in FY 2019-20, it increased to 5.5% which again went down to 3.3% in both the consecutive years of FY 2020-21 and 2021-22 (Reserve Bank of India, 2022). Again, as presented in The National Economic Survey 2021-22 by the Government of India, the performance of the agriculture and allied sectors have been inconsistent with a fluctuating growth rate of 6.6%, 2.6%. 4.3%, 3.6% and 3.9% in the FY 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22 respectively (Department of Economic Affairs, 2022). Further, 70.4% of the total agricultural households[2] own less than a hectare of cultivable land making these farmers more vulnerable to climatic changes, quality of monsoons and indebtedness for their survival (Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers' Welfare, 2022).

[1] Gross value added (GVA) is an economic productivity metric that measures the value of goods produced in an industry or sector. GVA calculates the contribution of a certain sector to GDP of an economy (Kenton 2022; Seshadri 2020).

[2] "A household is considered to be an agricultural household when at least one member of the household is operating a holding (farming household) or when the household head, reference person or main income earner is economically active in agriculture." (OECD, 2001)

To add to farmers' woes, agricultural production has been severely hampered through factors like scarcity of water, insufficient irrigation facilities, reduced fertility of soil from unplanned cultivation, unequal technological access, and scanty government initiatives to procure crops at competitive prices (Deshpande, 2017). In assessing the financial situation of agricultural households, the National Statistical Office of the Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation, Government of India, conducted a survey titled "All India debt and investment survey" in 2019. Published in 2021, this report indicated that 50.2% of the total agricultural households in rural parts of India have an average debt of INR 74,121 (National Statistical Office, 2021).

Indebtedness constitutes one of the main problems afflicting agricultural communities. The central government and several state governments have taken different measures to address indebtedness. For instance, the central government had initiated Kisan Credit Card Scheme (1998), Prime Minister's Rehabilitation Package (2006), the Agricultural Debt Waiver & Debt Relief Scheme (2008), Soil Health Card (2015), Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (2016) at national level across India. However, despite such schemes, welfare delivery to agricultural communities remained highly limited (Guha and Das, 2022).

My study is concerned with two such state-level schemes in Telangana, aimed at addressing the indebtedness of farmers in the state.

To briefly set the context for indebtedness in Telangana, as per the data published by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) in 2016-17, Telangana had the highest rate of farmers' indebtedness. 79% of the agricultural households had outstanding loans. The rate further accelerated in 2019 reaching to 91.7% (second highest in India) with an average debt of INR 1,52,113 per indebted agricultural household (National Statistical Office, 2021). This indebtedness was found to be more acute amongst the most marginalised sections of the society, especially among farmers from Dalit[3] and Adivasi[4]

[3] Dalits and Scheduled Castes (SC) have been used interchangeably in this paper.

[4] Adivasi and Scheduled Tribe (ST) have been used interchangeably in this paper. Adivasis refer to the indigenous communities who are situated at the bottom most social hierarchy along with those other populations who are considered as low caste (Lerche, 1999; Omvedt, 1981; Nielsen, Sareen and Oskarsson, 2020).

communities in the region. Both these communities either own small amounts of land or do not own land and are into tenancy agreements.

The Government of Telangana in 2018 came up with two simultaneous sister initiatives, seemingly to address the cause of indebtedness, The Rythu Bandhu[5] Scheme (Agriculture Investment Support Scheme) and the Rythu Bima[6] Scheme (Rythu Bandhu Group Life Insurance Scheme).

The scholarship so far on the two schemes talked about the advantages and disadvantages of the welfare schemes. The readings showed how these are empowering people while the state has excluded some people from these policies. However, these readings do not present any comprehensive qualitative read on the effects of such policies on the lives of Dalits and Adivasis, who are the most needy of these policies. These readings also do not point to how these exclusions from the schemes have affected the social relations of the Dalits and Adivasis.

Since the initiation of the schemes, there has been a few literatures mostly highlighting the general advantages of the schemes' contribution to financial development of the intended beneficiaries, that is the owners of the agricultural lands or the landlords. While many of these studies limitedly referred to the exclusion of the landless tenant farmers, the findings escaped the effect of the schemes on Dalit-Adivasi farmers, let alone the effect of the exclusion in the social interactions of the Dalits and Adivasi tenant cultivators.

This research tries to study three things; 1) The historical-social-economic-political reasons of the state to come up with the schemes 2) To understand the indebtedness and its implications among the Adivasis and Dalits 3) The role of government schemes in affecting their indebtedness.

[5] The English translation of the Telugu term Rythu Bandhu is 'Friend of Farmer' (Vaageeshan and Chitrapu, 2021).

[6] The English translation of the Telugu term Rythu Bima is 'Farmers' insurance' (Reddy 2020).

1.2 Research Questions

As such my dissertation possesses the **central question**: How has the intertwining factors of class and caste affected the formulation and implementation of Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes in Telangana, India? Further, how have these schemes affected the Dalit and Adivasi tenant farmers regarding their indebtedness and exclusion?

The central questions can further be divided into 5 sub-questions:

1. How do we understand the State and State policies through the lens of Caste and Class?

2. How do we unpack the Rythu Bandhu and Rythu bima scheme?

3. Why do these schemes exclude tenant farmers?

4. What has been the effect of these schemes on Dalit and Adivasi tenant farmers?

5. How have these farmers responded to their exclusion from these schemes?

1.3 Context

1.3.1 Land relations in India

In India, caste location continues to remain a defining factor in determining one's socio-economic conditions. Several studies have pointed at the many subtle forms of caste expressions that extend into class realities of people (Bhowmik, 1992; Vaid, 2012; Teltumbde, 2016; Teltumbde 2020). To give a brief outline, Indian communities are hierarchically categorised based on caste, which is assigned through birth (read family lineage). As per the caste division, there are four categories - Brahmans at the highest, followed by Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and then by Shudras. Shudras are relegated to spaces for labour works and are considered lowest among the hierarchy. But beyond these hierarchies, there exists a fifth caste, the Ati Shudras, who are considered as "untouchables" (Dalits) and are treated as impure (Srinivas, 2003; Deshpande, 2013). Adivasis, too, fall beyond the caste hierarchy, as they had historically remained outside the social relations with caste communities. However, since the colonial advent in India, the Adivasi communities have

been adversely integrated within this structure, placing them at the bottom of the hierarchical order.

This caste system has been the defining feature in determining one's profession and in turn one's financial positioning. The social relations under caste order kept intact the rigid boundaries of caste (and in turn class). For instance, the upper castes traditionally played the roles of governance, priesthood, or traders, while the Shudras and Dalits were forced to limit themselves to menial jobs. This resulted in 'lower castes' being strictly limited in marginalized financial positions. The control of land in India follows from this established hierarchy of relations. Upper castes held large swathes of land, while lower castes (especially Dalits) had no control over land; they were only to perform menial works for upper castes (Srinivas, 2003; Deshpande, 2013; Gatade, 2015). Land became a major instrument in the hands of the upper caste to not only deny any social-economic upward mobility for the lower castes, but also to keep them subservient to the needs and works of upper castes.

When colonialism set its roots in India, the British instituted a system whereby they established landlordism (with upper castes as landlords) to derive maximum profits. Thus, In one of the most common practices, these upper caste landlords engaged Dalit and Adivasi labourers to cultivate their agricultural lands under various forms of tenancy (Lerche, 1999; Omvedt, 1981; Thorat and Louis, 2003; Trivedi, 2022). The British rulers institutionalised the caste structure through feudal practices. The feudal relations, of upper castes owning lands and having lower castes as tenants and workers, continue their presence even after Indian independence (Omvedt, 1981; Thorat and Louis, 2003; Thorat et al., 2010; Nielsen, Sareen and Oskarsson, 2020).

In the context of Telangana, prior to the Indian independence in 1947, Telangana was part of the monarch state of Hyderabad, which was ruled by the Nizam under the British colony. With 90% of Telangana's population being from the marginalized sections of Dalits, Adivasi and Other Backward Classes (Rao, 2014), the region of Telangana, too, displayed caste hierarchies and dynamics that regulated the social-economic positioning of lower castes. The feudal landlords from the dominant castes of Reddy and Velama were close allies

with the Nizam administrator as revenue-collecting landlords (Gudavarthy, 2014; Benbabaali, 2016). They forcefully grabbed the lands of lower castes and and Adivasi peasants by registering the latter's lands under their own names (Sundarayya and Chattopadhyaya, 1972; Dhanagare, 1974; Thirumali, 1992; Agarwal and Levien, 2020; Bhukya, 2013).

When India gained independence in 1947, Hyderabad became part of the state of Andhra Pradesh (AP) in 1956. As Benbabaali (2016) explains, because of its geographically arid location and earlier history of caste-class selective development during the Nizam reign, Telangana was lagging in educational and socio-economic advancement. On the contrary, with fertile agricultural coastal lands and canal irrigation initiated by the British rulers, AP was in an advantaged position. When the dominant peasant upper caste AP politicians took over the administrative leadership of Telangana, they started leveraging on the latter region's resources for AP's politico-economic advantages. They undertook discriminatory practices of appointing officials from AP in Telangana's administration, ignoring the local Telanganites. Also, educated and wealthy, mostly from dominant Kamma caste people started migrating to Telangana from AP. These led to unequal regional development, dominance over natural resources and cultural encroachment by AP over Telangana. Ram (2007) observes, specially, the irrigation policy by the AP leaders was highly discriminatory. AP initiated 9 irrigation projects through which Telangana was supposed to get 1,000 thousand million cubic feet (tmc) water from Krishna and Godavari rivers towards Telangana's irrigation facility. But it received only 227 tmc. Again, AP leaders widely focused on major canal-based irrigation schemes leading to a decline of under tank irrigation in AP and Telangana. But with most of the canals being irrigated in AP region only, the core irrigation support system of Telangana through under tanks broke down. The AP leaders did not even allocate river water to compensate for the arid Telangana's loss of irrigation sources. Additionally, no complementary plan was taken to accommodate the increased expenses of the farmers for groundwater while AP enjoyed irrigation sources from canals, rivers and bore wells. Therefore, as the agricultural surpluses were being eaten away by the cost of digging wells, the farmers of Telangana fell into a major agrarian economic crisis (Ram, 2007). This led to an agrarian crisis in Telangana. Dalit and Adivasi communities involved in agricultural

labor (including small and marginal tenancy cultivation) were forced into intergenerational debt (Seri and Tandur, 2021; Amitha, Karthikiyan and Devi, 2021).

It is important to note that the oppression of the people of Telangana did not go unchallenged. On several occasions, people of Telangana mobilized against the oppressive structures (Ram, 2007; Saha, 2014; Srinivasulu, 2018). For instance, Telangana peasant movement, Naxalite uprising and the 2000s' separate Telangana movement which challenged the class and caste oppression including access to land rights and ownership (Vaditya, 2018; 2021). Osmania University being at the centre of the agitation in the Telangana statehood movement, most of the students who mobilized the student were from Dalit and Adivasi communities, giving the movement a struggle against caste domination in all the sectors across Telangana (Benbabaali, 2016). Though these struggles provided momentary relief, the leadership of the struggles ultimately became centralized to the dominant castes of Velamas and Reddis whose intention of achieving Telangana statehood was freedom from outside political intervention (Benbabaali, 2016). Hence, later, when land ownership accessibility was reformed for the rural peasants, the lands mostly went to the middle castes of Velamas and Reddys. The Dalits and the Adivasis remained deprived of access to land ownership (Seri and Tandir, 2021; Amitha, Karthikiyan and Devi, 2021). This is to say that the structural issues of indebtedness and inequality for Dalits and Adivasis remained intact.

1.3.2 Background and Context of the Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima Schemes

The formation of Telangana was essentially and importantly built on the discourse of self-governance and self-determination of the region. One of the major elements of this discourse was to provide access to land rights for the landless and indebted tenant farmers (Vadtiya, 2020). In 2018, the Telangana Government came out with two welfare schemes for the farmers - The Agriculture Investment Support Scheme (Rythu Bandhu) and the Farmers Group Life Insurance Scheme (Rythu Bima). At the time of its implementation, the government popularly projected these schemes as a response to the existing issues of indebtedness among farmers.

According to the Rythu Bandhu scheme, the state government was to distribute a cash amount of INR 10,000 (122 USD) per acre of land for each crop season of Kharif and Rabi in one financial year. The benefit would be directly transferred (DBT) to the farmers' bank account on the condition of the recipients holding land ownership record (Vaageeshan and

Chitrapu, 2021; Shankar, 2020). There was no limit placed on the maximum amount of land a farmer could hold. In this way, there was no cap on the total amount of cash that could be disbursed to each farmer based on their land holdings. The scheme supposedly intended to assist farmers in breaking out of their debt cycle (Amitha, Karthikeyan and Devi, 2021; Government of Telangana, 2018).

On the other hand, Rythu Bima scheme provided life insurance coverage of INR 500,000 (6075 USD) to land record owning (pattadar)[7] farmers within the age group of 18-59 years, which was to be paid to the nominee on the farmer's death for any cause whatsoever. The government implemented this scheme to provide financial relief and security to the dependents of deceased farmers (Government of Telangana, 2018).

Given the class-caste-religious composition of the state, how and why did the government come up with the schemes and what implications did the schemes have on the marginalized section of the society? With this question set in the aforementioned context, I have designed my dissertation in the following parts: My first chapter states the problem, the background of the issue and the research questions to be investigated in the research. The second chapter investigates the existing literature on topics directly or closely related to the problem concerned in this research. The third chapter unpacks the framework of the concepts and theory required to understand this study. My fourth chapter briefs about the method and methodology utilized in this dissertation and lays down my ethical and positional boundaries based on the limitations experienced. The findings from the collected data are shown and analyzed in the fifth chapter. The research ends in the sixth chapter with conclusions and recommendations as takeaways from this research.

As per the research outline, after discussing the introduction, problem statement, research questions and context in this chapter, I am going to do a literature review in the next chapter on how the state has engaged in formulating welfare policies and how it affected the marginalized section of the society, especially in relevance to the schemes of Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima.

[7] Pattadar refers to a land which includes a person whose name is recorded in the government land database (Reddy, 2022).

Chapter 2 Literature Review

As described in the introduction, the union and the state governments have from time to time brought up various schemes to address agrarian distress and work towards farmers' welfare. However, these schemes are yet to provide any concrete output in improving the social-economic conditions of farmers. In this chapter, I would review literature on the agrarian distress in India, such as to situate the two schemes- Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima – within the larger context of State's policy formulation towards addressing agrarian distress (for the most marginalized).

Prasad (2015) explained the trajectory of caste, class, and ethnicity in shaping the existing agrarian relations in AP and Telangana between 1956 - 2014, which also mirrors the similar phenomenon across the country. Despite the increase in the number of marginal and small farmers between 1956-2014, the average amount of land held by the farmers remained low between 1 to 3.5 acres on average. On the contrary, large farmers from the upper caste and Other Backward Classes owned an approximate land of 38 acres. With this discrepancy in the number of lands owned by the rich peasants and the Dalits and Adivasis farmers, caste had played as a rift between the two evident 'classes' of the society. In AP and Telangana, the dominant peasant upper caste farmers retained this class difference through their effort to join hands with the state power to thwart the demand mobilization for tenancy identity cards, an alternative to patta along with increased wage demand. Again, the price of agricultural lands multiplied by several times as the dominant caste formed a network of 'middlemen, moneylenders, and contractors' (Prasad, 2015, p. 82), intervening with land purchase from different castes landowners and reselling it at a hiked price. This mechanism had enabled the upper and dominant caste peasants to accumulate non-agricultural income and invested them in several sectors including contracts for building state facilities of roads, highways, ports, real estate, and economic zones around the country, creating a new wealthy class. Along the way, as this class had also been retaining on their agricultural properties, a ripple effect of a soaring number of absentee landlords, surged demand for land tenancy with escalating rate of land rents had been set off. In the long run, this newly emerged caste-class relationship had left the landless farmers and the tenants in an extremely fragile situation, barely surviving within a socially controlled economy under agrarian capitalism.

Deshpande and Shah (2007) identified three indicators for the agrarian distress in India. First, increasing density of small and marginal farmers is reciprocal to the decreasing land holdings; second, consistent high concentration of marginal farmers and agricultural laborers with little financial capacity; third, imbalanced lease and sale land market that largely goes against farming community interests. Their study found that the state's dealing with the agrarian distress on a case-to-case basis led to negative side effects. For example, with application of rice-wheat technology to address food insecurity, cultivation of coarse cereals (and their cultivators) was neglected. Again, in absence of ample rainwater, irrigation through surface-groundwater sources was widely campaigned which affected the access to adequate water for everyday usage. The 'welfare' policies, though provided immediate relief, came with intense negative externalities.

Suri's (2006) findings indicated a similar nature of agrarian distress, where the government policies played a major role in causing or creating distress situations. In terms of policies for agricultural welfare, Suri (2006) observed that the state formulated and implemented policies in a top-down manner. In doing this, the state had historically favored dominant castes and communities, which came at the cost of further marginalizing Dalits and Adivasis.

This brings to question, what roles have the policies of Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima scheme played towards marginalized communities? Do they, like the other government schemes, carry negative externalities or have they been able to positively affect the lives of the marginalized sections of the society i.e., the Dalit and Adivasi farmers. Lavanya's (2022) work found that both the schemes have improved the economic situation of the farmers in Telangana. Though her work took farmers as a homogenous category, without looking into the heterogeneity of their mix – constituting Dalits and Adivasis that occupy the most marginalized position within the farming sections.

In a similar tone, Amitha, Karthikeyan, and Devi (2021) studied the output of one of the schemes (i.e., Rythu Bandhu) from the lens of input purchasing power, reduction of rural indebtedness and the farmers' willingness to continue their agriculture-based livelihood. They assessed the impact on farmers by comparing the pre and post indicators of the

Rythu Bandhu scheme. The study found that the financial capacity of the recipient farmers had increased in terms of input purchasing power, productivity, and farm income. The beneficiary farmers were more likely to continue agricultural cultivation while paying off the debts.

Against such positive readings of the schemes, Gulati and Juneja (2021) gave a critical assessment of the same. They underscored the inadequacy of the scheme, as these schemes were limited in reaching out to farmers, excluding tenant farmers (who needed it the most). They highlighted the distortion in policy outcome, as it failed to meet its intended objectives. On the other hand, while acknowledging the default exclusion of tenant farmers, Seri (2021) found that the policy implementation brought out the voices of excluded voices of tenant farmers, who demanded cash support from their landowners through the Rythu Bandhu scheme. Lavanya (2022) recorded similar findings, where she found tenant farmers demanding (the government) the extension of these schemes to cover themselves as well.

In surveying the literature on agrarian distress and the two welfare schemes implemented by the Telangana government, it is important to note the exclusive categories of class and caste in such readings or policy-making-processes. Much of the scholarship and the decision-making-bodies view class as a distinct category (and disregarding caste), such that their entire focus is towards viewing the economic upliftment/empowerment, while sidelining the social aspect of relations. Deshpande and Shah (2007) made similar observations, noting that Adivasis and Dalit communities are viewed as outliers for any welfare initiative taken by the State. The social policies have mostly been different from economic policies.

In a similar recording, Mangubhai (2014) studied the exclusion of Dalits and Adivasis from accessing government entitlements (as part of welfare schemes) intended to aid the poor sections of society. She specifically pointed out the ongoing exclusionary practices against Dalit women. In her study, Mangubhai (2014) studied the scope of lower caste people purchasing land in India. While it was difficult for them to purchase the land, the possibility further worsened when lower caste women attempted purchasing land. The upper caste landlords ensured their exclusion through increased land prices, which was beyond the affordability of any working-class Dalit and Adivasi individuals. The study also

highlighted the failure of state actors in respect to protecting and fulfilling Dalit and Adivasi women's rights by reproducing socio-economic exclusion.

Building up on the works of Deshpande and Shah (2007) and Mangubhai (2014), I intend to study the two schemes – Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima – from the integrated lens of caste and class. The scholarship so far on the two schemes talked about the advantages and disadvantages of the welfare schemes. The readings showed how these are empowering people while the state has excluded some people from these policies. However, these readings do not present any comprehensive qualitative read on the effects of such policies on the lives of Dalits and Adivasis, who are the neediest of these policies. These readings also do not point to how these exclusions from the schemes have affected the social relations of the Dalits and Adivasis. My research investigates the unheard voices of Dalits and Adivasis (in regard to the two policies) and understands the policy-impacts on them.

Chapter 3 Conceptual Unpacking & Theoretical Framework

In the previous chapter, I have provided a summary of the existing literature on agrarian distress and the policies meant to address it; in doing this, I situate Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes, and highlight the problematique in readings on the same. In this section I delve into the core concepts that I use in my thesis, such as to unpack their meanings. Following from this unpacking, I present my theoretical framework that I use to understand and examine the findings of my fieldwork regarding my research questions.

3.1 Conceptual Unpacking

I use four key concepts in my thesis that are central to my understanding of the workings of welfare schemes in Telangana and their implications – caste system, indebtedness, marginalization & structured violence, and State. Caste system retains primary position among these concepts, as it underlines each aspect of state, society, and relations. As noted by Nielsen (2018) and Teltumbde (2020), State is an intersection of caste, class, and religious positioning. I now describe these core concepts, with caste as a central underlining feature of them.

3.1.1 Caste

As mentioned earlier, caste is the oldest surviving social institution in India, where communities are divided into social hierarchical order where topmost position is taken over by Brahmins, followed by Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra (Thapa et al., 2021). Towards the very bottom of this structure are Dalits, who had been for centuries considered untouchables (Olcott, 1944; Dhanda & Manoharan, 2022). Lately, as Adivasis are gradually being integrated within the state institutions and structures, they are adversely being integrated into the caste fold, occupying the lowest rungs of the social-economic pyramid.

Especially, the Dalits were relegated to a 'subhuman level as untouchables, unapproachable, ghettoized and even unseeable' (Teltumbde, 2020, Preface) Even their shadows were considered to pollute the surroundings. They were denied any and all access to any common

public goods and services; for instance, they were refused education, denied drinking water from common wells and were even denied entry into spaces habited or frequented by upper castes (Ambedkar, 2022). Such caste-based atrocities, though seemingly historical, have frequently been recorded in the present times; for instance, a common recording from Indian newspapers would reveal the many occasions when upper caste children have refused to eat meals cooked by lower caste individuals, or that a lower caste individual is murdered for having acted against the reputation of upper castes. As Dalits were denied access to education until recently (as recent as early mid twentieth century), in addition to their lack of access to land or any other form of capital, they lacked any means (social or economic capital) for upward mobility. This lack has come to define their present realities, where they continue to be on the margins of society.

Adivasis, on the other hand, historically had an isolated existence. They had limited interactions with caste societies, until British colonization of Adivasi-populated spaces. While they remained excluded from educational institutions, the dominant communities branded them with negative connotations as naïve and primitive. With the extent of colonial authority, which brought Adivasis into a singular sovereign structure, the Adivasis were forcefully and adversely integrated within the hierarchical social structure. As their dependence and integration increased with the state institutions, their marginalization and exclusion also exceeded. This resulted in them having limited to no resources for socio-economic upward mobility. Though Adivasis were not inherently part of caste divisions, the caste structures imposed their structures on the Adivasi communities; imposing on them the structural and physical violence that was earlier experienced by Dalit communities.

In contemporary times, caste structure and discrimination has taken a subtle form, where caste exists and does not exist at the same time. The privileged people cannot see or choose to ignore caste. However, for Dalits and Adivasis, they still reel under the pressures of the caste system, failing to build their much needed social-economic capital for upward mobility.

When it comes to land and land ownership, Dalits have historically been denied access to land. They have often been relegated to positions of agricultural labourers, without having control over the means of production. On the other hand, Adivasis, who largely do have

access to land, are increasingly being divorced or alienated from their lands through nefarious corrupt means. Overall, caste remains a primal factor in understanding land ownership and access to land resources.

3.1.2 Indebtedness

Following the understanding of caste, indebtedness is to be understood through the lens of the caste system enabling situations of deprivation leading to perpetual conditions of debt. Within rural communities, indebtedness is a persistent problem among small and landless tenant farmers. Over the years, with declining agricultural ventures, increased dependence on input purchase and the failure of the union and state policies in framing an inclusive and sensitized risk mitigation scheme, the problem of indebtedness has only increased manifold (Path, 2008).

In simple terms, I understand indebtedness as the continuous financial inability of a loan recipient to pay back the loan at any point of the time within a specified deadline or beyond. But in the context of Dalit and Adivasi tenant farmers, I interpret indebtedness as an enforced condition because of unfavorable professional and cultural rigidity inflicted upon them because of their caste and ethnic location.

The Dalits and Adivasis have been stuck at the crossroads of indebtedness. They are victims of historical systematic discrimination. The upper and dominant caste communities have restricted Adivasis and Dalits from accessing any rights and tools of economic mobility, including ownership of land. They were restricted from accessing education and also from adequate income generating professions, leaving them with a lack of social and financial capital. Therefore, to meet their expenses of basic living necessities with limited sources of income, they were forced to take loans. On the other hand, the banking structure and rules denies them access to formal loans without providing collateral; hence, (given their lack of capital) automatically disqualifying them from formal loan structures. So, they procure loans from different informal resources with high interest rates (Thorat et. al., 2020).

It is through such reading that indebtedness can be seen as one of the several consequences of caste and caste-class relations.

3.1.3 Marginalization & Structured Violence

Marginalization is one of the several outcomes of the caste-ethnicity-class based hierarchical processes. In broader terms, social exclusion and marginalization are intertwined. The two concepts are often used interchangeably, however, marginalization is a result of social exclusion process, which occurs through estrangement, denial, unfairness, injustice, and underdevelopment (Rao, 2019). Hall et al. (1994, p. 25) defined marginalization as a socio-political process 'of peripheralization of individuals and groups from a dominant, central major group.' A community can be positioned in marginality for their identity, order in social hierarchy, resource availability and political representation (Rao, 2019). Marginalization is often used synonymously to suggest exploitation and suppression (Guru, 2000).

In India, Dalits and Adivasis, owing to their historicity and power relations with the dominant 'mainstream' society, are automatically positioned into marginality, commonly suppressed, and discriminated against for their very existence. Several scholars have recorded instances of social exclusion and marginalization of Adivasis and Dalits in academia and beyond. For instance, Guru (2000) observed the mutual bracketing of Dalit teachers and Dalit students in academic institutions, by assigning them together in supervision roles and thus isolating them from larger academia. In other instances, symbols of Adivasi and Dalit empowerment like statues of Dr. Ambedkar and that of Birsa Munda, (in case of Dr. Ambedkar, despite him being considered as the father of Indian Constitution) have been desecrated time and again.

Dalits and Adivasis are often marginalized in accessing jobs that have been established as general, decent, or respectable in the 'mainstream' society and hence forced into jobs deemed as dirty or impure (connected to the notion of the Dalits being polluted individuals by birth). In the rural areas, they are engaged as agricultural labourers, tenant farmers and other menial jobs, as they have been economically marginalized for ages, diminishing their financial ability to access land ownership.

But how are jobs being denied to Adivasis and Dalits? This leads us to understanding public and private institutions as dominated by the overarching institution of caste. Much of eminent positions in public and private enterprises and services are manned by individuals from upper/middle castes. The exclusion of Dalits and Adivasis from these spacious are

justified on the rationale that they are not meritorious enough to occupy these positions, and if at all any person (from Dalit and Adivasi background) manages to rise to the position, they are branded as a non-meritorious who climbed up the ladder only through affirmative policies. These deeply ingrained ideas of merit work against the selection of individuals in esteemed jobs, where the employer (mostly from upper castes) already deems the person unworthy of the job. This goes into reproducing the entire circle of exclusion and marginalization. On the one hand, a Dalit or Adivasi is excluded from job spaces because of their identity, and on the other hand, their lack of presence in jobs is seen as a confirmation to their (Dalits and Adivasis) non-meritorious identity.

Rao (2019) observed that, while the social exclusion of Dalits is based on untouchability or impureness coming from Hindu religious caste discrimination, the basis of marginalization of Adivasis are multiple - 'geographical segregation, home language, culture and tradition, dependence on forest for their livelihood, inaccessibility to education and health facilities' (Rao, 2019, p. 9). The marginalization of Adivasis is a ripple effect of the exclusion of their core feature of geographical positionality. Despite constituting only 8.6 percent of the total Indian population (census 2011), they represent almost 55 percent of the total population who have been dispossessed of their own land (Das, 2012). Such forced migrations cost the Adivasis their access to a basic sustenance system of land, forests, and waterbodies (Padel, 2019). With displacement, the Adivasis, who were erstwhile mostly dependent on nature and forest resources in secluded geographic areas, were suddenly exposed to the dominance of state-cum-caste institutions.

The non-Hindu Adivasi identity has further marginalized these communities, clubbing them together with the Dalits as 'others. The differing tradition, culture, religion, and practices of Adivasis, different from the dominant 'mainstream' caste societies, have gradually led to their ongoing epistemic erasure. Their cultures, religions and practices are being infringed and destroyed – all in the pretense of development (Padel, 2019). The contemporary developmental model (especially in Adivasi populated areas) ignores the constitutional safeguarding provisions (instituted for safeguarding the interests of Adivasis) and rather bludgeons its version of high-rise building and factory set-up as developmental standards (Xaxa, 2005).

All these deliberate and systemic oppression and hindrances to the rights of Dalits and Adivasis aligns with the concept of Structural Violence (Galtung, 1969; Lee, 2019). Structural violence is an institutionalized form of violence that inflicts harm on individuals from certain communities by preventing them from accessing their rights and denying them the opportunities. In subtle strides, this violence becomes an underlining feature of all public and private spaces, thereby further promoting unequal power differences and unjust dominant structures. Structural violence is deeply ingrained within the everyday social structures, where people take for granted the existing inequalities as a natural order, without reflecting upon the consequences of such violence on the lives of the marginalized (Galtung, 1969; Lee, 2019). With the socio-cultural compulsion to make the Dalits-Adivasis miss opportunities in their life, structured violence is an important essence of this research.

3.1.4 State

Having talked about caste, caste structures and caste-based exclusion and marginalization, it is only important to situate State within the workings of caste. However, to summarily say that State is an intersection of caste and class is an oversimplification of the idea. It requires further unpacking. It is important to raise the question that if the State is indeed dominated by caste structures, why does it come about certain policies to address the caste oppression? Or why does the State formulate certain legislations for the welfare of the communities?

Several studies have attempted at understanding the State in India and beyond. Bardhan (1984) interpreted State from a Marxist lens. He described the transition in Marxist understanding of State from being perceived as a direct managing committee for the elite to an indirect representative of the dominant elite class in a capitalist society. Essentially, the State works to safeguard the interests of the elite dominants ultimately. The state acts subtly through 'goal formulation, agenda setting and policy execution' (Bardhan, 1984, p. 33) to retain the class dominion over the subjugated groups.

But this understanding hides beneath the many layers and complexities of State and State-society relations. While the State works in the interest of the dominant, it is not a monolith to act in tandem across space and time on issues of caste and class. Nilsen (2019) gives a nuanced understanding of State, imagining its workings through the coming together of

structural constraints and conjugated opportunities. He acknowledges the intersection of State by caste, class and religion, but also concedes that social movements (for the marginalized) have created opportunities to bring change. However, he reads this as a space provided by the State to protest and mobilize for certain demands, who maintains this façade of democracy of allowing people to engage and act on their demands. But these opportunities only serve within the boundaries as provided by the State. When protests or movements seek to challenge the structures, they are met forcefully by the structural constraints in place (Nilsen 2019).

For example, different State policies that are supposedly meant for the welfare of citizens (which come into force through popular protests and movements) are limited in delivering outcomes to the entire group of intended beneficiaries; the benefits are mostly reaped by dominant groups. For instance, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (NREGA) was legislated over the demand to combat rural poverty and unemployment through guaranteed wages. While the demand was met through visible framing of the scheme. However, in its practical implementation, it failed to provide substantial assistance to the worst sufferers of joblessness in rural areas (Breitkreuz et. al., 2017).

So, how do we use this understanding of State to explore the legislations of Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima (which were popularly implemented to address the menace of indebtedness)? Were these yet another mis-directed and poorly designed policies, only to project the State as a champion of social welfare? While on paper, the State structured the policy for addressing indebtedness. But in terms of ground implementation, they captured only the solvent landowners; especially when the most indebted population had been the rural landless tenant farmers. It is this duality of conjugated opportunities and structural constraints that marks its visibility in the scheme, where, on the one hand, the State formulates policies to uplift the poor from indebtedness. But on the other hand, excludes the neediest population from the list of beneficiaries.

It is in this understanding of State, that it is essential to spell out that State can never be considered as an entity that would work for the welfare of the people. Constraints would always top over opportunities. However, the boundaries of constraints and opportunities are constantly being challenged, tested and pushed through social mobilizations and

movements. The State has become an ensemble of managing these boundaries in favor of the dominant.

However, I would not hold on to a predetermined or a very rigid understanding of the state. Rather, I would explore the concept of state through the findings of the fieldworks.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

I use conjugated oppression as my theoretical framework to understand the many workings of oppression – that of caste, class, religion, gender – that Dalits and Adivasis have come to face regarding Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes.

3.2.1 Conjugated Oppression

Oppression is not confined to one element of deprivation or violence, but instead consists of several elements like caste and class. For the purpose of my research, an intertwined theoretical understanding of how people are oppressed through different causal factors is required. Hence, the theory of Conjugated Oppression gives insight into the overlapping yet different forms of oppression.

For thousands of years, the socio-cultural life of India had been structured and regulated by the discriminatory caste system in place that rigorously embedded its aspects in each and every element of the Indian society. Irrespective of religion or ethnicity, the essence of treating individuals of certain groups as inferior follows from the 'spilled over effect' of the Hindu casteism into other minorities like different religions and Adivasis (Thorat and Lee, 2005; Thorat, 2010). It is maintaining this order that the hierarchical caste system has been enforcing encapsulation of lower castes, Dalits and Adivasis within specified civil, cultural, and economic spaces. Specifically, they have been systematically forced into having limited access to occupation, forced to limit themselves to activities like agricultural laborer or daily wage laborer.

Shah and Lerche (2021) observed that the capitalist processes had further cemented the social-economic divisions among the society, further reaffirming the identities of caste and class, such as to ensure that Dalits and Adivasis were at the bottom of the ladder.

Despite India's economic growth, its outcome had trickled down disproportionately based on social divisions of caste, regardless of their contributions. In the process of capitalist development, the pre-existing identity-based marginalization is integrated into 'new mechanisms of exploitation, oppression, and subjugation' (Shah & Lerche, 2018, p. 2). Thus, several layers of coercive tools of caste, tribe, gender, class etc. get intertwined in a multiple pack, the process of which has been conceptualized as Conjugated Oppression by Shah and Lerche (2018).

Reading through Shah and Lerche (2018), I understand Conjugated Oppression as a process which has forced Dalits and Adivasis into denials and restrictions from accessing necessary services and economic capacity. For example: Landless tenant farmers (who are mostly from Dalit and Adivasi communities) have not been mentioned in the Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes (thereby, excluding them), whereas these schemes specify the land document owning farmers as the recipients of monetary entitlements.

The subjugations have been stemming from the oppressive socio-cultural discourse of purity-pollution through which the dominant classes have economically marginalized the Dalits and Adivasis. The oppressions have been so pervasive that despite not being part of the Hindu caste community, the Adivasis have been treated as 'Untouchables' just by the proximity of interaction between them and the Dalits, along with the public narrative of the Adivasis being wild and subhuman because of their inclination to nature.

The continuation of caste segregation and derogatory behaviour against Adiavsis since the pre-colonial period, through the colonial past, and prevailing in the present times is self-evident of the multiple exclusions (from welfare schemes) and oppressions of Dalits and Adivasis. The Indian constitution, and the laws of the land in India, provides that every citizen be considered equally. However, for Dalits and Adivasis, who had remained on the margins of society, at the bottom of socio-economic hierarchy, they are yet to see equality from the

state or caste communities. Their exploitations have only taken subtle forms, while retaining their oppressive character.

In the context of Telangana, Benbabaali (2018; 2022) found that dominant castes (like Kamma and Reddy) from Andhra Pradesh came to Telangana (erstwhile Hyderabad) and took over lands from Dalits (Malas and Madigas) and Adivasis systematically by using the legal state institutions under the development agenda. They further legalized their ownership through patta (official land-owning document) and enslaved Dalits and Adivasis through bonded labor. In addition, the private and public enterprises, following the capitalist trend, displaced Adivasi and Dalit communities of their holdings. These layers of oppressive capitalist stances against the Dalits-Adivasis have accumulated over the years as an inseparable cluster of identity-class. This nexus of caste-gender-class identities have stranded Dalit and Adivasi men and women on the unfavorable side of local power relations, which control their labor, pinning them to intergenerational poverty and vulnerability. Seen through the lens of conjugated oppression, poverty then is the outcome of systematic ability of certain groups (in this case, the upper castes) to assert their inherited dominance into the everyday socio-economic relations at the cost of groups (in this case, Dalits and Adivasis) who are at the bottom-most tier of the unequal power structure.

Again, in the process of experiencing the accumulation of oppressive social relations, Lerche and Shah (2021) observed that gender is a crucial layer in the many forms of oppression. Dalit and Adivasi women bear a greater burden of *social reproduction* (Lerche and Shah, 2021, p. 13). Along with the unpaid 24/7 'duties' in their households, these women contribute to the overall income of the family through agricultural labor or any other forms of work. But they are paid lesser than their Dalit and Adivasi male co-workers. They are also the survivors of sexual exploitation by their dominant caste employers. Dalit and Adivasi women are more exposed to conjugated oppression within the Dalit-Adivasi communities.

Chapter 4 Method and Methodology

In my research, I have sought to understand the ways in which the Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes have affected the Dalit and Adivasi tenant farmers in terms of their indebtedness and exclusion, from a caste perspective. To this end, I have taken an ethnographic route. My research falls within the domain of qualitative research, and uses tools such as sample survey, semi-structured interviews and participant observation.

My fieldwork was situated within three villages – Dilawarpur, KJR colony and Pedda Thanda[8] – of Damarcharla Mandal (administrative block), Nalgonda district[9], Telangana. Several factors influenced my choice of field site. First, based on the historicity of the location. The district of Nalgonda[10] bore immense socio-political importance in the history of Telangana. It was one of the three districts that was at the forefront of peasant movement in the state (Dhanagare, 1974). Despite the success of this movement, which uprooted the feudal landlords and led to land redistribution, the Dalits and Adivasis were denied their share of benefits. Instead, the benefits went to mostly the middle class and dominant peasant caste farmers (Sundarayya and Chattopadhyaya, 1972; Thirumali, 1992). This curious mix of success and failure of the movement makes it an interesting case study to explore the workings of similar-sighted schemes, whereby the neediest are again excluded.

My second reason for choosing this site is based on the accessibility of the space, in cultural and linguistic terms. My familiarity with the region (as my home district) and my knowledge of the local language provides me with access to the social networks within the village, especially amidst local communities.

For the purpose of my research, I first carried out purposive sampling to identify my key respondents (who carried intersectional identities of class, caste, gender, age). I conducted a sample survey with 35 tenant farmers (landless) from Dalit and Adivasi households of the

[8] Pedda Thanda and KJR colony are (ST) Lambadi hamlets. Thanda's are where the Lambadi tribal (ST) community resides.
[9] As per the Nalgonda district administration office, 75 percent of the district population depends directly and indirectly on agriculture.
[10] Historically Nalgonda district was the epicentre of Telangana peasant movements (Sundarayya, 1973).

aforementioned three villages in Nalgonda district. The sample survey asked questions about their basic demographic features (including their caste, age, gender, religion etc.), along with their conditions of tenancy, solvency, indebtedness, and household income and expenditure.

From this survey, 13 respondents were selected who represented different profiles from a conjugated perspective, that of coming from different class, age and gender locations. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with these 13 participants, to explore their understanding and experiences of their marginalization, especially in regard to Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes. The 13 respondents came from Madiga (Dalit), Mala (Dalit), Yerukala (Adivasi), and Lambadi (Adivasi) communities.

The interviews were conducted in two local languages - Telugu and Lambadi[11]. As I come from the same region, I am well versed in both the languages (Lambadi is my mother tongue and Telugu is my second language)[12]. The in-depth interviews touched upon several topics including the respondents and their ancestors' primary livelihood before tenancy; migration status and reason; details of their tenancy; their state of indebtedness including loan sources; amount of their crop production output; their relationship with their land-lords in the context of caste; their knowledge on Rythu Bandhu; effect of the scheme and government's informal request to support the tenant farmers on their indebtedness and tenant-landlord relationship; their alternative suggestion to the scheme; their knowledge on Rythu Bima; effect of exclusion from Rythu Bima on their indebtedness; the tenant farmers' experience in getting the state government-promised three acres of lands[13]. The idea was to gain a comprehensive understanding of these issues, including exclusion, oppression and the advantages and disadvantages of the schemes in question. Besides in-depth interviews, I engaged in participant observation, when I spent limited time with these communities and tried to read through their body language and expressions on caste issues and their experiences of exclusion.

[11] Lambadi language is a tribal language of Lambada tribals of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and other states in India.

[12] Telugu is one of the Indian official languages widely spoken in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

[13] Telangana Rastra Samithi party in power in 2014 state election manifesto promised to give 3 acres of lands for landless Dalit-Adivasi families.

4.1 My Positionality as a Researcher

I come from an Adivasi community, the same as some of my research participants i.e., from Lambada tribe. Being an Adivasi, I have come to gain much understanding of the exploitation and oppression of Adivasis and Dalits in Telangana and beyond. When speaking to my research participants, I could relate to several of their recollections of caste-based exploitative experiences. In many such instances I could position myself as an insider. However, I was cautious enough to ensure that my familiarity or past experiences did not cloud my perceptions when interacting with people on field, and that I carefully listened and recorded their versions without any value additions from my bias. But in being cautious, I also took cognizance of Harding's (2009) standpoint theory and Haraway's (2020) situated knowledge, to embrace my positionality as an Adivasi researcher that gave me a rather 'strong objectivity' in conducting my research. I found my positioning as a better vantage to comprehensively understand and observe the experiences of people vis-à-vis the two schemes in question (from a caste perspective).

But my mere background as an Adivasi did not automatically translate to me being an 'insider' researcher for the communities. I personally encountered questions from people asking, "Why are you interested in doing this research on our problem? Are you getting money? Or will we get money from the government if we participate?" A few of my respondents casted their doubts that I might take out a loan using their stories or problems. They were also skeptical of me being a local from the same region, feeling that I might be taking advantage of their vulnerabilities and making money from it. This added to my understanding of the duality of my position, that of being an insider as well as an outsider at the same time.

Further, my positioning as an Adivasi studying in a foreign institute in the global North further added to distancing me (or creating boundaries) from my participants. While few participants were supportive and appreciative of my research, few others could not relate to me as my own. This further conformed to my understanding of insider and outsider as a spectrum, where one's position keeps shifting based on who they interact with (Parikh, 2020).

4.2 Ethical Choices

Coming from an Adivasi community myself, I have closely witnessed the debt struggle of my parents who were tenant farmers in rural Telangana. With this positionality and awareness of its sensitivity, I attempted to go beyond the established power relations of researcher and interviewer, such as to not further reproduce hierarchies. I was careful not to assert any power relations which came at the disadvantage of people. I was also cautious about not raising the expectations of my participants in terms of any professional-political values and any form of monetary rewards. I clearly communicated my research topic, research objectives and the scope of my study to my research participants and took their consent for research participation. In conducting all my data, I have decided to anonymize all my respondents to ensure that they do not have to face any problems arising from this research. I have made my best efforts to conduct this research in a professional and scientific manner.

(This research has been conducted only after approval from the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS). All participants had been oriented with the rationale of the research as a MA dissertation and informed consent had been ensured for all voluntary participants. The confidentiality of the data shared would be safeguarded as per the research institution's guidelines and would be utilized only for academic knowledge development purposes.)

4.3 Limitations

In terms of limitations, the time assigned for fieldwork was constraining, as it gave limited time for collecting data. Especially for participant observation, the time was severely limited to intimately connect with the communities. With the participants being landless SC-ST tenant farmers with no access to basic education let alone any technology like a smartphone, laptop or internet, the interviews had to be conducted in-person in Telangana, India. There were no options of conducting a telephonic interview or video conferencing; in this regard, my monetary limitations in traveling further limited my fieldwork. Besides, the participants too were busy as it was the monsoon harvesting season, which further limited my conversations during fieldwork.

Chapter 5 Findings and Analysis

This dissertation looks into the existing socio-economic plight of the Dalit and Adivasi tenant farmers in Telangana in regard to Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes. The state government has explicitly excluded the landless[14] tenant farmers from these schemes. In this context, it is important to ask as to how have Dalit and Adivasi tenant farmers experienced indebtedness and exclusion, and how have the two exclusionary schemes further influenced their experiences? This section details about the experiences of Dalit and Adivasi tenant farmers, as found in my fieldwork, during my one month visit to the three villages in Nalgonda district.

A sample survey conducted among 35 tenant farmers from SC-ST communities in 3 villages of Nalgonda district depicts a demographic picture of tenancy, solvency and indebtedness spread across my participants (Dalits and Adivasis)..

Among the 35 tenant farmers, 16 respondents were from the Adivasi Lambadi[15] community; comprising eight participants each from the villages of Pedda Thanda and KJR Colony. The rest 19 participants were from two Dalit communities of Madiga (14) and Mala[16] (3) and one Adivasi community of Yerukala[17] (2), all from Dilawarpur village. Amongst these, only 6 households owned a minimal amount of land, ranging between 0.5-2 acres, which barely provided enough means for their sustenance. For the rest 29 participants, life was difficult to even make ends meet. To support their livelihood, these 29 villagers took up (and have continued) tenant cultivation. . But, with such bare minimal economic support, where they hardly earned an approximate Rs. 8000 monthly (EUR 100), they were forced to take loans from any available sources. It is important to note that of the 35 survey participants, 33 had applied for formal loans, but the banks had rejected most of their applications. This

[14] Tenant farmer, Farmer, and Respondents are interchangeably used.

[15] Lambadi or Lambada have been interchangeably used.

[16] Mala, Madiga associates Scheduled Caste (SC) communities and is mostly found in South Indian states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka.

[17] Yerukala tribal community primarily found in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Tamil Nadu, they majorly engage with basket making, mat weaving, rope making and rearing livestock.

forced them to take loan from informal sources. 27 tenant farmers had taken loans from informal sources.

One of my respondents, an Adivasi Lambada female farmer, Mangli (name changed) recounted her dehumanizing experience, when she sought a bank loan. She said, 'I had just lost my husband. After his death while my neighbors helped me for months, I had no money at all to start working in our field again. And I had already been loaned from my relatives, neighbors, money lenders and even landlords for his treatment. So, I thought of trying at least to get a small loan from the bank with self-help group support. But when I went, the officer questioned me in a demeaning way, 'How would the bank give you a loan? Do you have any assets? House or land? As a Dalit widow, how would you earn enough to repay the loan even if they consider from sympathy. You lower caste people cannot be trusted.' After that I never went to the bank again' (Personal interview, July 2022).

It was a common practice among villagers to take loans from informal sources - from wealthy, dominant caste landlords, private money lenders, relatives, friends, and neighbours - at a higher interest rate compared to the usual bank rate for loans meant for farmers. One of my Dalit respondents, Kesavulu (name changed) remarked, 'Alongside the mounting debt, even if we attempt to pay off any little amount we had managed, as there are no written documents, given that we cannot read or write, the money lenders often declare a high amount that we 'owe' to them as they desire. We can understand everything, but how can we prove that? We have taken for granted that we would die leaving this burden on our children. The thought breaks my heart! But what else could we do? We are helpless' (Personal Interview, July 2022).

In this marginalized financial positionality of Adivasi-Dalit tenant farmers, what does it mean for them to be excluded by the state from Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes, looking at it from an intertwined lens of class and caste?

But before we dig deeper into the exclusions of from the two schemes, it is important to first have a generalized opinion about the caste-class location (and how this translates into the everyday realities of people) of my research participants. For this purpose, drew from the list of 35 participants with whom I conducted my sample survey, and chose 13 participants

for in-depth interview. These participants were selected such as to represent diverse voices; hence, I selected people from different class, gender, religion, age, tribe, and geography – all of them were tenant farmers. Of the 13, six were from the Adivasi lambada communities (from Peddathanda and KJR colony), one was from the Adivasi Yerukala community (from Dilawarpur village), four from Dalit Madiga community and two from Dalit Mala community.

Caste-Class location

For both Adivasis and Dalits in the region, their subalternity vis-à-vis the dominant castes had a historical origin (or trajectory). All my research participants (who themselves were tenant farmer) recalled that their ancestors were engaged in daily agricultural wage works. Their wages came in different forms, for instance, in the form of food grains. They were always at the margins of economic sustainability, and never had the means to uplift themselves or to buy a a piece of land. My research participants found themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty, where they could not rise beyond their marginalized position.

One of the obvious manifestations of Dalit-Adivasis failing to break free from the cycle of poverty was their inaccessibility to educational institutes. Except for two, all my participants found school system lacking in the region, where they had classes only up till fifth standard. These participants, besides the two (who were in their 20s and 30s), had no formal education. Not that these participants did not want to, but that they could not. Owing to the shortage of labor in one's agricultural fields, they were rather taken to work by their parents. Several of my respondents commonly held the opinion that the dominant caste teachers and fellow students in the nearby public schools maintained a hostile attitude towards their children which greatly discouraged them (Field Notes, July 2022).

Dalit and Adivasi students also faced other problems. One of my respondents, Mattayya (name changed) remarked that 'Even though I was keen to learn, and my parents sent me to school, the corporal punishment in schools by some teachers made me lose my interest. So, I dropped out eventually' (Personal Interview, July 2022). The other farmer with formal education, Yadayya (name changed) from Dalit community in Dilawarpur shared that 'I had difficulty in understanding the complex math, and chemistry subjects in school, though I did

well with Telugu, and social studies. Also, since I studied in a government-run school, students were not paid much attention. Unlike other privately administered schools, our teachers used to come late and go early. Sometimes they did not come at all. Obviously, I failed.' (Personal Interview, July 2022). This brings to fore the lack of social capital or conducive environment that would help Dalit Adivasi students from taking up education.

Following the historical trajectory of poverty, and the lack of educational skills/tools, the Dalits and Adivasis in the region found themselves entrapped in marginalized situation with no recourse. Their only option was to further embed themselves within the cycles of poverty or exploitation, in order to sustain themselves. This led them to taking up tenancy farming as their main cultivation in the contemporary times. My 13 research participants have been cultivating between 5-7 acres of rented lands for 5-15 years of time. Many have switched over from one landlord to the other, depending on their rent rates.

One of the major problems that tenant farmers faced was crop failures. This resulted from unusual rainfall, droughts, pest and insect attacks, and inability to purchase fertilizers and pesticides. One of the Dalit farmers from Dilawarpur, Kesavulu (name changed) narrated that 'Only in the last crop season in 2021, after putting in all the physical time, effort, investing all loaned money in cultivating crops, just one night of an untimely thunderstorm washed away all of those hard-working 6 months of our life' (Personal Interview, July 2022).

These conditions of financial uncertainty and the need to feed one's and their family's stomach, led to several of my participants undertaking temporary migration for 2-3 months, between May to July. They migrated to urban areas of Hyderabad or Nizamabad, where they worked either as construction workers (in Hyderabad) or agricultural workers (in Nizamabad). These conditions further pushed Dalit and Adivasi tenant farmers into deprivation and indebtedness. My participants commonly noted that 'At this point, all the tenant farmers in the village have been compensating the gap in the growing monthly expenses by loaning from the landlords and loan sharks' (Field Notes, July 2022).

These experiences are not to say that non-Adivasis and Dalits always have better class positioning or that they never face deprivation; instead, these experiences highlight the systemic nature of deprivation that certain communities are pushed into and how their lack of social, economic, and cultural capital provides them with no recourse to move out of their situations of poverty. With this understanding, it is now only relevant to dig deeper into the experiences of Adivasi Dalit tenant farmers in regard to Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes.

In this context of indebtedness of tenant farmers, looking through a caste and class lens, how do we understand the effects of Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes for the Dalit and Adivasi landless tenant farmers?

To assess their experience, it was first important to know if they were aware of the two schemes. When conducting interviews, I found all my participants to be familiar with the two policies. They were also aware of their exclusions from the policy. . One of the Adivasi farmers from Peddathanda, Mangtha (name changed) said that 'We do not get the benefits because we don't have land registration. Though we had land which we lost under the government's Mission Kakatiya[18] project. Farmers with land registration get it.' (Personal Interview, July 2022). Few other farmers remarked that 'we heard that KCR is giving money to the landlords and farmers who have land records' (Field Notes, July 2022).

Similar findings were to be seen regarding the awareness on Rythu Bima scheme. Most farmers knew about the scheme. One of the Adivasi farmers from Peddathanda, Dasru (name changed) 'I know farmers get 5 lakhs when they die if they are below the age of 60. We don't get it because for this scheme land records possession are mandatory and Kaulu Rythulu[19] are not eligible. Even if I had less than 1 acre of land, I could have been eligible' (Personal Interview, July 2022).

[18] Mission Kakatiya is a project of rejuvenating 47,000 tanks in Telangana by 2020 by the state government of Telangana (Kumar et. al., 2016).

[19] Kaulu Rythulu (Telugu) translates to Tenant Farmers in English.

For both these schemes, the participants had a clear understanding that they were not the targeted recipients.

While landless tenant farmers (mostly comprising Dalits and Adivasis) were officially 'excluded' on paper from the two schemes, the government of Telangana (and its representative, the current Chief Minister of Telangana - KCR) informally 'requested' landlords (comprising dominant caste members) to share their benefits with the tenant farmers. One of my female Adivasi participants from KJR colony, Kavita (name changed) reacted, saying that 'I heard it from our neighbor who has a television that KCR said something like that. That made me laugh! Our landlords don't even consider us as fellow human beings and equal like them, and they would give their freely earned money just like that? Nothing would happen if the govt. doesn't order to do so formally on paper'(Personal Interview, July 2022). Another Dalit Madiga farmer, Sadidulu (name changed) from Dilawarpur said that 'The way he said it did not help us. Any Chief Minister coming to power is only pumping money to rich influential people. But the poor always remain poor in the end. Dalits didn't get any money from any government so far, even after Telangana formation.' (Personal Interview, July 2022).

My participants were aware of their negligible possibilities of being supported (or being pushed through their indebtedness) by a scheme like Rythu Bandhu. Hence, they took alternative routes of earning basic income, though NREGA and private means (as discussed earlier). The resignation in the voice of Dalit and Adivasi farmers in talking about the two schemes was clearly visible. An Adivasi farmer from the Yerukala community in Dilwarpur, Ramulu (name changed) shared that 'As there is no possibility of getting any support from Rythu Bandhu to reduce the debts we have, many of us on our days of less land work, go to find NREGA works for some extra money' (Personal Interview, July 2022). Another Adivasi Lambadi respondent from KJR colony, Mothiya (name changed) said that 'As I am not eligible for Rythu Bima, I feel very restless thinking of all the debts my wife and children would have to be in! I can see the money lenders threatening them for money in my head always. So, I try to go to work under NREGA as many days as possible. Whatever money I get from that, I am saving for my family when I am not there' (Personal Interview, July 2022).

So, based on these experiences, can we develop an understanding of State and the schemes that it has implemented?

While the theoretical frame, as developed in Chapter 3, provides a broader understanding of the ways we can interpret State i.e., as an entity intersected by caste, class and religion, where the State actors play managerial roles in maintaining the dominance of upper caste/class, the field experiences add insights to this perspective. It helps contextualize the understanding of conjugated opportunities and structural constraints in regard to Dalit and Adivasi experiences in the three villages of my fieldwork.

To this end, it is important to go beyond the seemingly simplistic understanding of the State as being dominated by upper castes and their policies as a means to serve the upper castes/upper class. In the case of Telangana, the welfare policies of Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima were discursively directed at addressing the indebtedness (which should have ideally landless tenant farmers) of farmers. However, a closer look, especially from a landless Dalit-Adivasi perspective, revealed that these policies only served the already rich and powerful; benefitting people who already had the means to sustain themselves. But in this case, why did the State have to play discourses around indebtedness? Why did the State have to worry about the poor, or create a façade of caring for the poor?

This brings forth the managerial role of the State in maintaining relations with different sections of society, in a way that the hegemony of dominant (from caste-class) continues. On the one hand, State responds to the pressures from below to address the conditions of deprivation. These pressures create conjugated opportunities that gives way to welfare policies such as Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima. In doing this, the State is ensuring that the 'moral economy' (as conceptualized by Scott (1976)) of landless peasants (from Dalit and Adivasi communities) is not disrupted. This façade plays an important role in stabilizing the social relations between rich and poor, which otherwise could lead to State losing legitimacy among people.

This is not to say that the landless peasants cannot see through the façade of State, as was the case with people whom I interviewed in the three villages. They could see the State delivering benefits only to the rich. It is in this understanding and observation, that we can see

the structural constraints in place. The State is limited in its functioning of what it can do for the subaltern, being bound by structures of the dominant. The welfare schemes, then, help maintain a difficult equilibrium between conjugated opportunities and structural constraints. Here, for the people on receiving end of power relations, the possibilities of opportunities keep intact their struggle against the constraints, thereby reproducing the equilibrium relations. It is therefore not the policies of Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima that determine the perception of State, instead, it is the further possibilities that people see in State (through other policies like NREGA) which carry forward the legitimacy of the institution.

But if landless tenants (mostly from Dalit and Adivasi communities) were excluded from the two schemes – Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima – how did they get affected by the policy except for their exclusion? Could it be yet another policy that excluded the poor?

The exclusion of landless tenant farmers from the Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes was explicit. For both these schemes, it was important for the person making claim to possess the land documents. While the tenant farmers did not possess land documents, the landlords could still benefit from the scheme (despite being not invested in the land and having tenant farmers working instead) and not pass the benefits to tenants. But this entire mechanism of landlords reaping benefits and tenants being sidelined/marginalized resulted in conflicting opinions developing on both sides of the spectrum.

On the part of landless tenants, at least in a few cases, it gave rise to the perception that landlords should pass over the benefits. An Adivasi farmer from the Peddathanda village, Bujji (name changed) said, 'I heard that government is giving the landlords money for their land. But I don't understand what they do with the money. If it is for the land, they should give it to us, right? We are purchasing fertilizers for cultivating his land. Then why am I taking out a loan to do so? Or why am I paying him such high rent?' (Personal interview, July 2022).

While on the part of landlords, they increasingly used coercive measures and threat tactics to keep the aspirations and demands of landless tenants in check. The same was reflected in my conversations with Dalit and Adivasi landless tenant farmers. One of the Adivasi tenants from Peddathanda, Veera (name changed) remarked that 'Initially, I was thinking of asking the landlord to help us in cultivation from the money he got from the Rythu Bandhu scheme.

I was a bit scared, so I talked to other tenant farmers in the village as well. But before we could approach, my friend, who is also an Adivasi tenant farmer in another village, shared that his landlord increased his rent and said that he would terminate the tenancy after this season's crop after my friend asked about the Rythu Bandhu scheme money' (Personal Interview, July 2022). The respondents often feared that if they asked the landlords, they would terminate their tenancy or impose a higher rent on tenants.

But this is not to suggest that relations were pleasant erstwhile, before the implementation of this scheme. The Dalit and Adivasi tenant farmers faced various forms of discrimination and oppression at the hands of their landlords. It was a common practice for landlords in the region to ask their tenants for personal household manual work in exchange for less than market price. Tenant farmers did not talk back to their landlords as they feared that the landlord would give the land to some other tenant farmer who would rather remain silent and obedient. A female Dalit farmer from Dilwarpur, Mamatha (name changed) recalled that 'One upper caste landlord told me that I would never be able to pay his rent on time. So, I should either work as vetti[20] or contract laborer for his family or go to town and do the works of 'what Dalits do' like scavenging' (Personal Interview, July 2022). Another Dalit tenant farmer from Dilwarpur, Praveen (name changed) remarked that 'It has only been 5-6 years since I started working as a tenant cultivator. But I had to take tenancy under 3 landlords within this time. Though both my wife and I would work together on the land, the landlord's family would call my wife for their household work like cleaning, cooking, washing utensils for no wage and giving some other things for daily house needs. During the harvest season, when we both needed to work in the field, my wife refused to work one day. They got very angry and insulted saying that Dalits are always ungrateful. One landlord's family would make me work till very late in the evening. When I asked to leave early and to pay my wage, they suddenly increased the land rent. So, we had to leave that tenancy' (Personal Interview, July 2022).

With the implementation of Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima scheme, the tenants feared of facing backlash from landlords and hence never approached the landlords for asking for any share of money from the schemes. Several of my research participants shared that they were unable to receive any support (from the schemes) in reducing their indebtedness from the

[20] Vetti is a bonded labour in Telangana (Balagopal, 1983; Dhanagare, 1974).

schemes, but instead bore the brunt of schemes' consequences (in regard to their power, social and economic relations). Few Adivasi farmers noted that they had been obligated to take additional loans, as the shop owners had increased input costs for agriculture in an un-regulated manner, over the claims that the government is giving money to farmers for each crop season through Rythu Bandhu.

A Dalit farmer from the region, Saidulu (name changed) expressed his frustration, 'We have heard about the schemes from the people, but we don't have land, so we don't get it. How cruel is it for the landless farmers like us? When we are alive, we won't get it and when we will die, my family won't get it either. So, for mental peace, we try not to think much about this' (Personal Interview, July 2022).

Conjugated Oppression

Having learnt about the many experiences of Dalits and Adivasi landless tenant farmers on social and economic exclusion, how do we then theorize these experiences? Or understand them as a pattern, beyond the individual observation and experiences? It is here that the importance of conjugated oppression as a theoretical framework comes forth.

To briefly summarize, Dalit and Adivasi landless farmers in the region have faced social exclusion and oppression, economic exclusion, discrimination, and indebtedness, among others. But from personal observations and gathering from the existing literature on social conditions in India, it can be inferred that these experiences are common to people from lower classes, despite their caste locations. But, in reading through the frame of conjugated oppression, it reveals the systemic layers of oppression for a Dalit and Adivasi, that gets further intersected by class, gender and geographical identities. A common thread follows through their entire length of exclusions, where one leads to the other, and these experiences are centred around the identities of their caste location.

For instance, the historical trajectories of social interactions of Dalits and Adivasis with the structures of power have already put them into a socially marginalized position. Based on their exclusions, they are deprived of any means to access resources or instruments that might

push them out of poverty or deprivation. As seen through the experiences of farmers from the three villages, who were denied educational and banking services (among others). This denial further translates into inhuman experiences of discrimination and exploitation against the said identities, where they are constantly subjugated to reproduce the relations of power and hierarchy vis-à-vis the dominant communities. These oppressions further take an exploitative turn when intersecting identities of class, gender and age cut across the already existing hindrances. In the case of farmers in three villages in Nalgonda district, female Dalit and Adivasi farmers faced further suffering and marginalization. Here, Shah and Lerche's (2021) observation on the differently layered oppression of the Dalit and Adivasi women resonates with my findings. The female tenant farmers are even more left out of the state – policy – beneficiary network which mirrors the concept of the structural violence of deliberate deprivation (Galtung 1969).

In the case of Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes, the exclusions faced by Dalit and Adivasi tenant farmers, on the one hand, further perpetuate their lack of economic means to address their conditions of poverty and indebtedness. But on the other hand, and most importantly, they further reaffirm the social identity of Dalits and Adivasis, forcing them into their constrained economic positions. As one of the Adivasi farmers from KJR colony, Balu (name changed) remarked that

'It is our fate to be born in debt, live through indebtedness and die indebted. So, what is there to talk about?' (Personal Interview, July 2022). All 13 participants from my fieldwork shared that they have a debt of at least 1 Lakh to 5 Lakh INR (1200-6500 EUR).

These conjugated oppressions for the farmers in Telangana have come to shape their everyday realities of social and economic relations. But have these farmers never thought about challenging these structures and institutions?

How have the SC-ST tenant farmers responded to their exclusion in general, and not specific to Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes?

The landless tenant farmers from my fieldwork in attempting to go beyond their marginalized positioning, further found themselves entrenched in the cycles of indebtedness and poverty. For instance, several participants shared that for decades they could not access or/and afford

educational facilities and remained uneducated. So, they wanted their children to get better education for their future. These farmers tried sending their children to private educational institutions in the town areas with boarding facilities, by taking loans to meet these expenses. Even in receiving healthcare services in state-run facilities, these Dalit-Adivasi farmers felt neglected. This forced them to go to private hospitals where they paid thousands of rupees for minor problems, let alone any major treatment like surgery which would have costed lakhs of rupees. To meet these expenses (or to say, to escape their exclusions) they took loans, which kept adding to their debts on top of the loans regularly taken to compensate crop failures and paying land rent as the landlords usually would not reduce the pre-agreed rent even during crop failures.

But the exclusions did not automatically translate to ideological subservience of Dalits and Adivasi landless tenant farmers. Their agency was expressed in their opinions, where they suggested that all kinds of welfare schemes should include the tenant farmers, particularly vulnerable groups like Mala, Madiga, Lambadi, Yerukala, Gondu, Koya[21] and other SC-ST communities. The Dalit tenant farmers said that within their community, they have been discussing to form a collective or group like Kaulu Rythu Sangham (tenant farmers collective), where both Dalit and Adivasi tenant farmers can mobilize to claim their share of Rythu Bandhu benefits from the landlords.

While the state has responded to the criticisms of excluding landless tenant farmers from the schemes, saying that the procedure of identifying such farmers is too complex to carry out on a massive scale. On this note, few of my respondents suggested that the state can coordinate with the panchayat (grassroots village level) officials as they have detailed information on tenant farmers with debts and who require monetary assistance.

To summarize my findings and analysis, I have first delved into the caste-class locations of my research participants who come from landless Dalit and Adivasi tenant farming communities, trying to understand their everyday experiences of marginalization and exclusion. Following that, I tried situating these experiences within the context of their exclusion from the Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes. In delving into these experiences, I used them to

[21] Gond and Koya Adivasi communities live in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh etc.

frame an understanding of State and State policies. I used the lens of conjugated oppression to understand the wider implications of caste and identity for the landless tenant farmers. Lastly, I read through the agency of people to locate their responses to the wider structures and to the State policies.

Chapter 6 Conclusion & Recommendations

In this research, I have explored how the state marginalised and denied the welfare entitlements of Dalit and Adivasi tenant farmers. Thus, the state reaffirmed the caste and class based institutional discrimination. I have studied the issue from the formulation and implementation lens of two government farmers welfare schemes meant for welfare of the indebted farmers in Telangana. Moreover, my study has looked into the effects of such policies on the lives of the marginalized landless tenant farmers.

In the first chapter, I have stated the problem of indebtedness and exclusion of the Adivasi Dalit tenant farmers. I framed my research questions to understand the intertwining role of caste and class in formulating the policy of Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes, such as to expound the role of State in this process of framing policies that lead to the marginalization of Dalit and Adivasi farmers. I further sought to examine and understand the implication of this policy exclusion (from the Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima) on the Dalit and Adivasi farmers.

In the second chapter, I sought to situate my query within the larger context of agrarian situation, government's response and lack of policies that have a dual approach of adressing caste and class issues. It reads through some of the welfare policies introduced and implemented by the governments. In reading this, I have located the research gaps in finding the effects of exclusion of Dalits and Adivasi tenant farmers from the said schemes.

In the third chapter, I have discussed the conceptual and theoretical unpacking of caste, indebtedness, marginalization and structural violence, state, and conjugated oppression. In this part, I elaborate on my understanding of the concepts, especially from a caste-centric lens. Later, I put forth conjugated oppression as my theoretical framework to understand the implications of the Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes, and also examine the lived experiences of marginality of the landless tenant farmers from Dalit and Adivasi backgrounds.

In the fourth chapter, I have detailed my methods to seek answers to my main research questions. I expanded my use of ethnography as my methodology, and detailed my use of

survey, interviews and participant observation. I also expand my positionality as a researcher and the limitations I faced in the process, and the ethical choices I made.

In the fifth chapter I explored the findings of the data collected and analyzed them in the light of the context, reviewed literature, conceptual and theoretical unpacking.

Through my research, I have showed that the policy makers ignore the intertwined aspects of caste and class that come together to subjugate Dalit and Adivasi tenant farmers.. Their systematic bias in the policy favors the rich, leaving the ragged marginalized Adivasi-Dalit groups out of the greater developmental scenario (Choragudi, Pellissery & Jayaram, 2022). And even if certain policies do include the excluded communities, the implementation of policy is often uncertain. The primary question that my research raises is: when it is the landless SC-ST tenant farmers, whose major income sources are their rented lands, who struggle their whole life to pay back their loans, who precariously live on the whims of their landlords – who then should be the recipients of farmers' welfare schemes like Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima by the government?

Therefore, in the context of my findings in this research, I would like to present the following recommendations to the policy-makers and policies, so that the benefits reach to the people who need it the most.

Besides the obvious recommendation that policies like Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima should include landless tenant farmers and not have land documents as the primary basis of identifying beneficiaries, it is also important for the policy makers to approach solutions from the intertwined lens of caste and class.

Further, the governments must focus on land redistribution initiatives to reduce the disparities within the peasant caste and classes. For instance, the Telangana government can ensure distribution of 3 acres of land to the landless SC-ST households that the current ruling party Telangana Rastra Samithi (TRS)[22] promised during its election campaign in 2014.

[22] Telangana Rastra Samithi is the party in power in Telangana state.

The ruling party TRS has been circulating a narrative that identifying the true indebted landless farmers is a complex and a mammoth task with the risk of scheme money getting wrongly appropriated. As per the recommendation provided by the research participants, the state government can empower the local level panchayat bodies[23] to identify the landless tenant farmers in the villages and disseminate the scheme benefits.

Further, in case of identifying the beneficiaries of the Rythu Bandhu benefits, the family should be considered as a unit. Agriculture and allied works are mostly done by several members of the family. Therefore, instead of individual landowners, a family should be considered as one single unit, and a cap must be put on the number of acres of land a family can hold. This would restructure the benefits' schemes and put a check on the unlimited amount of resources held by the dominant caste communities.

Similarly, in the case of Rythu Bima,[24] currently, anyone who is not directly involved in agricultural production, but owns a land by default gets registered in the Telangana government's farmers group insurance scheme. Hence, the clauses of the Rythu Bima must be changed to only including individuals who are actively involved in agricultural production with or without land holdings like farmers, tenant farmers, agricultural labourers and other dependents on agricultural allied activities. Also, the age requirements for the Rythu Bima benefit receiving eligibility should be expanded beyond the current ceiling of 59 years of age.

The Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima schemes have been set in a way that allow only certain sections of the farming society to enjoy the comfort of life while the wider farmers' groups continue to get marginalized. Therefore, unless the government wants to continue its political gimmick of development, it must ensure that each of its family units owns certain acres of land. The government should exact excess lands from individuals (owing lands over the specified cap) and redistribute it to the families who are landless or own a meager amount of land. Building the capacity of local governmental authorities like panchayat would facilitate

[23] "Panchayat" means an institution of self-government constituted under article 243B, for the rural areas.

[24] Farmers Group Life Insurance Scheme (Rythu Bima) provides social security to family members in case of losing a farmer's life for any reason. The age group of 18 to 59 years are eligible, and the government pays the entire premium to the Life Insurance Corporation of India; the land record is key to get benefits.

this process. Lastly, the government should coordinate the regulation of the price of fertilizers, pesticides, which are currently determined by corporate companies.

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