

Description of the Module

Items	Description of the Module
Subject Name	Sociology
Paper Name	Agrarian Relations and Social Structure in India
Module Name/Title	Agrarian structure on the eve of the British Rule I
Objectives	Based on the work of economic historians, this module offers you an overview of the agrarian structure on the eve of the British Rule. It demonstrates that some of the contemporary phenomena like rural indebtedness, economic differentiation among the peasantry and the expropriation of agrarian surplus by the ruling class were important dimensions of agrarian structure in pre-British India.
Key words	Revenue assessment, expropriation, peasantry, Mughal, Agricultural production

Module Structure

Agrarian Structure on the Eve of the British Rule I	Introduction, Revenue System in Mughal India, Agrarian Surplus and the Ruling Class, Conclusion
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Role	Name	Affiliation
Principal Investigator	Prof Sujata Patel	Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad
Paper Coordinator	Manish Thakur	IIM Calcutta
Content Writer	Manish Thakur	IIM Calcutta
Content Reviewer	Professor BhaskarChakrabarti	IIM Calcutta
Language Editor	Professor BhaskarChakrabarti	IIM Calcutta

Introduction

The nature of Indian economy before the British conquest has been a matter of intense debate among the historians. The latter has been interested in knowing if the economy had such elements that would have led to subsequent development of capitalism in India. Alternatively, the question has been if capitalism had to enter the economy in India, it had necessarily to depend on the colonial intervention. Based on such historiographical literature, we present in this module an overview of agrarian structure on the eve of the British Rule. This module heavily reproduces the work of Irfan Habib, the eminent historian of Mughal India. The assumption here is that an understanding of the agrarian structure in Mughal India implies an understanding of the agrarian structure on the eve of the British Rule. Though, it is true that at the time of the arrival of the British, the Mughal Empire was in a state of decline, and the inevitable disarray and collapse. It is also true that regional rulers and potentates had taken over increasingly large swathes of territory and snatched them away from the control of the Mughals. Yet, Mughals' impact on the agrarian structure has been long-lasting, and even today, there are technical terms in vogue in the field of land revenue administration that had their origins during the Mughal rule.

Revenue System in Mughal India

Habib (1969) begins his discussion of Indian agriculture during the seventeenth century by noting a great abundance of land. According to him, the extent of cultivation then was about half of what it was about the beginning of the 20th century, in the middle Gangetic basin and Central India, and from two-thirds to one-fifth in other regions. Generally, cultivation would be done on more fertile lands in 1600. Also, owing to larger wastes and pastures more cattle could be kept indicating not only a larger output of pastoral products per capita, but also a greater use of cattle-power in agriculture. It is probable that each household farm should have approximated more closely to the optimum size; and, speculates that a greater amount of double-cropping could have been undertaken by the peasants. Habib does not see much difference in terms of agricultural technology available in 1600 and that in 1900 except the large-scale canal irrigation network laid out by the British in the Indus basin and the upper Gangetic region, the impact of the railways facilitating the raising of crops for which particular lands or localities were most suited; and substantial expansion of new crops namely, maize and the plantation crops, tea, and coffee in the nineteenth century.

The point being made by Habib is that per capita agricultural productivity in Mughal India was not in any way backward when compared with other contemporary societies, including those of Western Europe. The "low yields" of traditional Indian agriculture is a myth. He writes (1969) 'there is little doubt, then, that the absence of capitalistic development in India cannot be attributed very simply to a low level of agricultural production. Given the minimum size of the agricultural surplus, it is really the mode of its appropriation, and ultimate distribution, which can (but may not) contain the seeds of capitalism. The agricultural surplus may be appropriated and shared in various ways that are reducible, theoretically speaking, to two basic forms: (A), a demand from outside imposed on the producer (e.g., rent) and (B), a gain accruing as a result of the appropriator's undertaking or organizing the productive process himself (e.g., peasant's savings; profits of the capitalist-farmer).'

In Mughal India, *qua* Habib, the dominant form of surplus-appropriation was of the type A listed above. Its two distinct elements were peasant agriculture (as the mode of production) and the land revenue (representing the bulk of surplus appropriated). He adds, but for rare possible exceptions, Indian peasant farming was organized on individualistic lines. Each peasant had his own separate holding. Owing to land abundance, land in most areas had little or no price, but seed and cattle were important forms of peasant property. In other words, individual ownership and the attendant stratification were present within the peasantry. At the same time, the Indian village presented the appearance of a closed, custom-based social and economic unit. The close settlement of peasant households and the needs for peasant migrants to move in a body, for better protection, furnished the basis for a collective organization of peasants within the framework of clan and caste and the Indian Village Community.

With this community were associated hereditary artisans and village servants, who provided the peasants with goods and services needed by them. They were paid by the peasants, as a body (for the community had a financial pool), and as individuals, according to customary rates, usually in kind, or through allotments of land. Habib asserts, 'to a certain degree an Indian village was a stable economic unit, essentially self-sufficient in respect to its own consumption needs. This is not to belie the individualistic organization of production and the economic

stratification that must have existed among the peasantry or various forms of customary economic transactions.

Irfan Habib argues that the zamindar's share of the "rent" in Mughal India was of a subordinate order. It amounted, nominally, to 10 percent of the land revenue in Northern India and 25 percent in Gujarat. In other words, it was the land revenue that represented the bulk of the rent, 'Mal, that is land revenue, was not, formally speaking rent from the land, but a tax on the crop. It was basically a share of the crop; and it was generally collected through an actual division of the harvest (Batai). There were variations though in actual practice rendering the process more complex and, administratively, less strenuous. The revenue, for example, was imposed in kind, but the demand was fixed by means of surveys of the cropland, and the application of an estimated crop rate upon the area so determined, so as to give the estimate of the total crop (Kankut). The revenue being a given share of the produce, the total revenue demand could now be stated in kind, but might subsequently be commuted into cash at market (or arbitrary) prices. In the most developed farm, and in some provinces the most prevalent, a standard cash rate was levied per unit of area, varying according to the crop (Zabt). Here too, for purposes of drawing up the schedules, the revenue had to be assumed as a fixed portion of the crop. By and large, it seems that the share of the produce taken as revenue ranged from one-third to half in most parts of Northern India and the Deccan; but was less in certain arid areas, and substantially more in certain fertile tracts.

The revenue demand was, theoretically, assessed separately on each individual peasant, according to his holding and the crops. Terms such as "demand" and "revenue demand," are frequently used in British-Indian land-revenue administration. This term represents the Persian term *jamer*, and means the amount at which the revenue was assessed or fixed. In fact, the whole village body was usually made into a single assessed, and collectively called upon to pay the revenue levied. Habib also notes that despite the fact that revenue demand was basically a share of the produce, land revenue was realized most often in cash, not only under zabt, but also under other systems through commutation of the demand into demand in cash. Often when fixed on a village it appeared as an amount of money, quite arbitrarily determined. Cash nexus appears as an established institution in the Delhi region as early as the beginning of the fourteenth century. In Mughal India, collection of revenue in cash was far more prevalent than collection in kind save

local exceptions, and during periods in certain regions where there might have been a shift from the one mode of revenue assessment to the other. Even when the revenue was collected in kind, the authorities often did so not for purposes of consumption directly, or for storage, but for sale.

Agrarian Surplus and the Ruling Class

These characteristics of land revenue were historically interwoven with the emergence of a ruling class among whose members it was distributed. The revenue was collected from the peasant directly in the name of the king, either by his own officials for the royal treasury, or by his assignees for themselves. The areas from which the revenue went to the treasury were known as Khalisa. The Khalisa consisted of areas scattered throughout the Empire, and its total size varied. In 1647, for instance, the estimated revenue of the Khalisa amounted to about 13.6 percent of the total. The remaining portion consisted of jagirs, or territories whose revenues were assigned by the king to his mansabdars (officers or nobles) in lieu of their personal pay, and allowances for the maintenance of their military contingents. Such assignment holders were known as jagirdars. But some mansabdars also drew their pay (wholly or in part) in cash from the royal treasury. For all practical purposes these mansabdars, especially those holding higher ranks, might be considered as forming the ruling class of the Mughal Empire. This class was largely urbanized and contained a considerable foreign element. It was largely without local roots, and was prevented from forming such roots by a system of transfers of posts as well as jagirs. On an average, the period for which an area was held in jagir by any assignee was less than three years. Neither the rank in service, nor the jagir (except in the case of certain chiefs) was hereditary.

According to Habib, this ruling class was completely subordinate to a centralized royal despotism. With the help of this ruling class only, the realization of the massive claim on the entire rural surplus of the country that the land revenue represented was realized. Owing to the system of transfers, the noble's household and contingents could not naturally be established permanently on a jagir so as directly to live off the land. In general, the larger the jagir, the greater the distance of the headquarters of the jagirdar's establishment from the villages; and this was apart from the fact that, being highly urbanized, the Mughal nobles in any case disdained rural life. It is, therefore, no wonder that jagirdars preferred to collect revenue in cash, or to commute collections in kind

immediately into cash. Since the royal treasury too had to pay out salaries (to the mansabdars and others) in cash, the tendency in the Khalisa too must have been overwhelmingly toward collections in cash.

In Habib's description of the agrarian system in Mughal India, we find the centrality of the ruling class. Habib relates the major aspects of the land revenue system to the power, organization, and composition of the ruling class. This understanding reveals the historical tendency toward a steadily intensified pressure upon the peasants and other revenue payers. The source of this tendency was the system of transferring jagirs. This meant that individual revenue assignees could have no interest in the long-term maintenance or growth in the revenue-paying capacity of any particular area. In a way, the excessive pressure for greater revenue was ultimately self-defeating, since for immediate gain it sacrificed future possibilities. In fact, the Mughal system did not contain any effective mechanism whereby restraints could have been put on the ruling class.

Habib underlines two main consequences of the collection of land revenue that was prevalent in pre-British India. First, the rural economy was subjected to an enormous drain of wealth that would go into the maintenance and consumption of the ruling class. There was a general flow of wealth away from the rural sector. Of course, part of the land revenue undoubtedly stuck to the hands of certain rural elements, through shortfalls in collection, remissions, concessions, and commissions to certain local magnates (chaudhuris, ganungos) and the village headmen (muqaddams), salaries and perquisites of local revenue staff, etc. Some of the jagirdars sub-assigned their jagirs to their soldiers who lived in the villages. Besides, there was a whole class of revenue grantees (comprising the intelligentsia and the idlers), the imperial revenue grants (madad-i maash) alone accounting for 4 to 6 percent of the total estimated revenue. Even then, after making allowances for all these leakages, Habib asserts, that the total net amount of produce annually lost by the country-side, without any return, must have amounted to a very large portion of the total—at least a fourth of it, if not a third or a half.

Secondly, the mechanism by which the bulk of the rural surplus was removed created the conditions for the establishment of the rural market. When the land revenue was collected in cash, the revenue payer was compelled to sell his produce in order to get money to pay for it, but when

it was collected in kind, then too, as we have noted, the revenue authorities preferred to sell it. In either case, most of the surplus was put on the market, and, therefore, a very large portion of agricultural production would not be directly 'for use' but would be commodity production, properly speaking. The market mechanism once established must have reacted on the mode of agricultural production. The consequence of the creation of the agricultural market was that it not only introduced money relations into a system of 'natural economy', but also engendered a shift to high-grade crops and cash crops (e.g., from coarser grains to wheat; and to cotton, sugarcane, indigo, poppy, tobacco, etc.).

Irfan Habib avers that the two-fold impact of the Mughal revenue systems led to a considerable subversion of the 'pure' peasant economy, and an alteration in the nature of exploitation. In effect, the land revenue represented an enormous drain on the countryside. Moreover, the built-in tendency in the Mughal system was toward an increase in pressure upon the revenue payers. Habib is emphatic that unlike the lord's 'rents', the land-revenue rate was firmly based on the conception of its being a set proportion of the produce, and was accordingly variable when stated in cash. As a result, though agricultural prices appear to have risen during the seventeenth century, the revenue demand did not fall in real terms. Also, among the peasantry, the land revenue, being in essence a regressive tax, fell more heavily upon the poorer than upon the richer strata. When it represented a set proportion of the produce, it is obvious that the peasant who produced less would have a smaller amount left to him than the one who produced more. It is also possible to argue that when each individual peasant was assessed separately, the village community was naturally bypassed, and the individual was alone made to face all the risks as a revenue payer. This too should have led to economic differentiation. In practice, however, the village was the usual unit of assessment, and that the village community had a distinct role to play in the payment of revenue by means of a financial pool into which all the peasants paid, and out of which the revenue demand, the other fiscal burdens, and the expenses of the village establishment were met.

Conclusion

The picture that emerges from Irfan Habib's exemplary work on the agrarian system in Mughal India is thus complex. It reveals the degree of monetization and the degree of flexibility of the village community as an economic organization. It is also possible that the stronger (and richer) peasants would dominate the community and distribute the revenue demand at will among their brethren to the great detriment of the poorer peasantry. Individual assessment was indeed often seen by the officials as a device to prevent such unjust distribution. Sometimes, the whole village itself could be so heavily assessed that the peasant population was threatened with slaughter and enslavement in case the revenue demand was not met. In Habib's reading, in its initial impact the tendency generated by land revenue was toward increasing stratification and pauperization of the poorer strata. In the long run though, it pressed upon the whole peasantry as a class. Monetization could also directly or indirectly lead to pauperization. Prices could fluctuate to the great detriment of peasants as commodity producers. Moreover, most of the cash crops involved larger investments in cattle (owing to the necessity of more frequent ploughing and watering) and in installations (such as the sugarcane press and boilers, indigo vats, etc.), and heavier risks, in respect of harvest and prices. It was unlikely that poorer peasants could compete with the richer ones in the raising of such crops.

Rural indebtedness is another aspect of the agrarian structure that was prevalent in pre-British India. Very often, the peasants would go for debts in order to pay the land revenue or to obtain his 'subsistence food' and cattle. Once the rural market had developed to a certain degree, moneylending could have extended rapidly. Habib speculates that it is, indeed, likely that peasant indebtedness in Mughal India was more widespread than has hitherto been supposed. The ultimate effect of usury, particularly since the interest rates were extremely high must have burdened the peasantry to a large extent. The beneficiaries of usury were not only zamindars (especially chaudhuris) and headmen (who thus added to their customary exactions), not only professional usurers, who thereby augmented their usurious capital, but also merchants (who often gave advances to the peasants to establish claims on their produce) and, quite generally, merchant-moneylenders.

As Habib perceptively notes, while the land revenue and monetization added, or at any rate, increased another means of exploitation of the peasantry in the shape of usury, they also created the conditions for increased pressure upon the peasantry from the zamindar class. The pressure came, first, through an alteration in the substance of the zamindar's economic right, and secondly, through an expansion of the area under that right. The zamindar's fiscal claims appeared as claims on the land revenue collected (as a share thereof, whether as malikana or nankar, or both), and the zamindar was transformed into an intermediary (e.g., taalluqdar) responsible for the collection of the revenue and its payment to the authorities. As a result, the zamindars found themselves obliged, when the revenue demand increased, either to lose their share or to recompense them at the expense of the peasantry. Owing to monetization, the zamindari right became a fully salable commodity, at least from the sixteenth century onward. This meant that persons who obtained their wealth initially out of the distribution of land revenue purchased zamindaris. Such people included the nobles and officials, and cavalry troopers and revenue grantees. Urban merchants did not yet seem to have found in zamindari purchase a suitable avenue for investment of their superfluous capital. However, rural usurers sometimes converted their capital into zamindari right. Such a market in land rights not only contributed to the increasing heterogeneity of the zamindar class but also placed larger capital at the disposal of that class as a whole.

Moreover, the increasing economic differentiation and social stratification within the peasantry could lead to the emergence of a dominant section (muqaddams, headmen, etc.) whose claims might in time grow into zamindari rights. There was also the presence of a very large class of landless laborers who worked in return for the provision of their barest needs of subsistence. Importantly, as Habib writes, 'the existence of this large class in conditions of land abundance did not derive initially or in the main from any failure of peasant cultivation but from a social structure maintained by custom and force'. The landless belonged to the menial castes, compelled to serve the interests alike of peasants and of superior cultivators, and forming therefore a vast rural semi-proletariat, maintained entirely through non-economic compulsions.

Description of the Module

Items	Description of the Module
Subject Name	Sociology
Paper Name	Agrarian Relations and Social Structure in India
Module Name/Title	Agrarian Structure on the Eve of the British Rule II
Objectives	Based on the work of economic historians like Burton Stein, H. Fukazawa and IrfanHabib, this module offers you an overview of the agrarian structure on the eve of the British Rule. It demonstrates that some of the contemporary phenomena like rural indebtedness, economic differentiation among the peasantry and the expropriation of agrarian surplus by the ruling class were important dimensions of agrarian structure in pre-British India.
Key words	Economic Differentiation, Peasants, Land Revenue, Village, Labour

Module Structure

Agrarian Structure on the Eve of the British Rule II	Introduction, Aspects of Agricultural Production in North India, Agricultural Production and Relations in South India, The Medieval Deccan and Maharashtra, Conclusion.
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Role	Name	Affiliation
Principal Investigator	Prof Sujata Patel	Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad
Paper Coordinator	Manish Thakur	IIM Calcutta
Content Writer	Manish Thakur	IIM Calcutta
Content Reviewer	Professor Bhaskar Chakrabarti	IIM Calcutta
Language Editor	Professor Bhaskar Chakrabarti	IIM Calcutta

Introduction

As mentioned in Module 2.1 A, the nature of Indian economy before the British conquest has been a matter of intense debate among the historians. The latter has been interested in knowing if the economy had such elements that would have led to subsequent development of capitalism in India. Alternatively, the question has been if capitalism had to enter the economy in India, it had necessarily to depend on the colonial intervention. Based on such historiographical literature, we present in this module an overview of agrarian structure on the eve of the British Rule. This module heavily reproduces the work of H. Fukazawa in its presentation of the agrarian structure of Maharashtra and the Deccan. It does the same for South India in relation to the work of Burton Stein. And, of course, Irfan Habib, the eminent historian of Mughal India, is present in each and every sentence concerning Mughal India. The assumption here is that an understanding of the agrarian structure in Mughal India, South India and Maharashtra and the Deccan implies an approximate understanding of the Indian agrarian structure on the eve of the British Rule.

Aspects of Agricultural Production in North India

Economic historians generally agree that Indian agriculture was characterised by the large number of food and non-food crops. In terms of sheer range of crops produced, the Indian peasants were distinguished from their counterparts in other parts of the world. The peasants elsewhere were confined to a very few crops. For instance, the *Ain-i Akbari* gives revenue rates for sixteen crops of the *rabi* (spring) harvest cultivated in all the revenue circles of the Agra province with three others not cultivated in some; and twenty-five crops of the *kharif* (autumn) cultivated in all, or all but one, circles. In each locality as many as forty-one crops were being cultivated within the year. A similar multiplicity of assessed crops appears in the *Ain-i Akbar* rates for other provinces. Not only did the Indian peasant grow a multiplicity of crops, but he was also prepared to accept new crops. The seventeenth century saw the introduction and expansion of two major crops, tobacco and maize. Both were immigrants from the New World. The rapid extension of tobacco was spectacular: its cultivation had begun on the western coast soon after 1600; but by 1650, it was being cultivated in almost all parts of the Mughal empire (Habib 1982).

Historians like Irfan Habib underline the mobility of the peasantry as an interesting feature of agriculture during Mughal times. Habib quotes Babur who says, “In Hindustan hamlets and villages — even towns — are depopulated and set up in a moment! If a people of a large town, who have lived there for years, flee from it, they do it in such a way that not a sign or trace of them remains in a day or a day and a half. On the other hand, if they fix their eyes on a place in which to settle, they need not dig watercourses or construct dams, because all their crops are rain-grown.... A group collects together, they make a tank or dig a well; they need not build houses or set up walls — *khas* grass abounds, trees (are) innumerable, and straight way there is a village or town.”

Abundance of land was another characteristic of the prevailing system of agricultural production. The large areas of virgin land were available in most regions during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The desertion of old lands and settlements of new appear to be common practices undertaken by peasants organized in communities. In some cases, perhaps, individual peasants, too, shifted their cultivation. Habib mentions a category of peasants designated *pdikdsht* or *pdbikdsht*, who cultivated lands in villages other than their own. This may not have been the common practice though. Also, there was little change in the average productivity of the land during the three centuries — 17th through 19th. According to Habib, it is possible that productivity per head (as distinct from per acre) was higher in 1595 than around 1870 or 1900. Given greater availability of land, with means of cultivation remaining the same, the average peasant holding of 1595 was more likely to approach the optimum size than that of 1900.

Also, as discussed in the earlier module, the Indian peasantry was economically highly stratified, and considerable differences existed in the size of holdings, produce obtained and resources of the peasants within the same villages. On the one hand, there were the big peasants, or headmen (*muquddams*), who organize *khwudkdsht* (cultivation under their own management). They employ labourers as their servants and put them to the tasks of agriculture; and making them plough, sow, reap and draw water out of the well, they pay them their fixed wages, whether in cash or grain, while appropriating to them the gross produce of cultivation. At the opposite end, were the small peasants engaged in cultivation but depended wholly upon borrowing for their subsistence and for seed and cattle. If the absolute size of the agricultural product, or even the per capita product, in Mughal India was impressive, it does not necessarily follow that agricultural production was carried on at a smooth or even pace. On the contrary, there were two factors, one

natural and the other human, which created serious interruptions or violent setbacks for agricultural life.

The first factor was climatic, essentially, the untimeliness, scarcity or superfluity of rain. The dependence of Indian agriculture on the monsoons is proverbial. In the absence of adequate means for transporting grain in bulk, the mortality in each major famine, which was often accompanied by pestilence, was frightful. During the 1630-2 famine in Gujarat, 3 million people are said to have died. In the years 1702—3 and 1703—4, 2 million people are said to have died of starvation in the Deccan. These figures in themselves are guesses only, but are still important as showing the immensity of the mortality as it appeared to contemporaries. The Gujarat famine of 1630-2, caused a lasting dislocation to the economy of the region. The villages were utterly depopulated; and when they began to 'fill but slowly' late in 1634, the peasants who had survived abandoned cotton cultivation for food. The marks of the famine were visible in 1638 and even by 1647 agriculture in Gujarat had not fully recovered, since the revenues of the province had not yet reached the level attained before the famine.

The second factor to consider is the impact of the system of agrarian exploitation. It has been argued that since the land revenue covered practically the entire surplus produce raised by the peasant, and that since, representing a fixed share of the produce or a fixed cash-rate on the crop per unit of area, it was a retrogressive tax, it fell excessively heavily on the smaller peasantry. In addition, the system of *jdgir* transfers encouraged an unchecked spoliation of the peasantry by the potentates. This resulted in the large-scale abandonment of land by peasants. With famines as recurring setbacks to agricultural production and Mughal agrarian exploitation as a factor of constant pressure upon the peasantry, it would perhaps be reasonable to rule out any spectacular increase in the extent of cultivation during the Mughal period. There were areas that were reclaimed from waste or forest as in the Terai or eastern Bengal; but such reclamation did not exclude the simultaneous process of depopulation in other areas.

Agricultural Production and Relations in South India

Some of the most important features of agricultural production in South India were: (i) the tropical climate allowing agricultural operations throughout the year; (2) more even distribution of rains than in northern India (combination of south-western and south-eastern monsoons), which to an extent made it really possible to vary dates of sowing and harvesting of some crops; (3) large

quantity of unoccupied lands, absence of land-starvation, and, on the contrary, a shortage of labour; (4) the great expenditure of labour for bringing into cultivation the new lands. The construction of an irrigation system usually was beyond the labour resources of a single household and hence undertaken by avillage or a group of villages. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the representatives of central power and the local officials are more often seen as the organizers of the construction of reservoirs, canals, sluices etc. than before. Irrigation was considered a work of religious merit, with the result that during all the known history of southern India we find inscriptions, detailing the construction of tanks, dams, etc. Yet, In most parts of southern India in the beginning of the nineteenth century only 3 to 7 per cent of cultivated territory was irrigated. Only in Tanjore, where the conditions for irrigation were especially good, was this ratio nearer to 50 per cent. Irrigation management in the medieval period was often uneconomical. Tanks and canals were neglected and abandoned, perhaps as often as they were constructed. The main crop on the wet lands was paddy, the most important food -grain of southern India. Each householder, even the marginal peasant, had to use additional labour. This additional labour was sometimes provided in the form of peasant cooperation but also in the form of labourers from depressed untouchable castes. There was the considerable group of landless labourers who was forced by their social and economic dependence to work in the others' households. The historian Dharma Kumar has estimated that at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the Madras Presidency agrestic labourers, mainly from the untouchable castes, numbered up to 10-15 Per c e n t of the population and 17-2 5 per cent of the agricultural population. They were comparatively less numerous in Rayalasima, Baramahal and Mysore, but in eastern Tamilnadu and in Kerala the untouchables' labour had relatively more importance.

The small-peasant household based on personal labour of the householder was but one type of production unit in agriculture. Widespread to some extent were also two other types, i.e. the large peasant house hold with the householder taking some part in the work but mainly dependent on the regular inflow of additional labour; and the type in which the householder directed the work of labourers dependent on him and attached to the land. The Indian social system reversed the influence of economic factors. The deficiency of labour force was to an extent connected with the fact that an appreciable part of the population from high castes considered physical labour as degrading and some agricultural operations as forbidden and constantly sought to avoid personal participation in the production processes.

The main food-grain was rice, but the millets (*cholam, ragi, varagu*, etc.) occupied a comparable area. Rice was at the same time the most important commodity. The poorer strata of the population sold the rice they produced (except the part taken in kind as a tax) in order to buy *Ragi* and *cholam* for their own consumption. Other commodities were pepper, produced mainly on the Malabar Coast, chilli, oil-producing crops (sesame, flax, groundnut), cotton. In the inscriptions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and earlier, village bazaars and fairs are mentioned where the retail trade in rice, betel-leaves, pulses, *ragi*, oil, pepper, milk, jaggery and artisans' goods took place. But the connections of the rural population with the market did not yet create a commodity-production system. The agriculture continued to be essentially natural, as the reproduction of its labour implements was going on inside the village community on the basis of natural exchange between the artisans (the blacksmith, the carpenter, etc.) and the cultivator. Thus, the system of agriculture developed and traditionally consolidated in southern India was extensive in principle, oriented to labour-saving and not to land-saving. It assured a definite and rather high level of agricultural productivity, but the further increase on the basis of the same system was impossible. With the growth of population and cultivation of the worse lands this system was sure to suffer a sharp decline in its productivity as happened later on. The system of traditional services by artisans who produced the agricultural implements, as well as widespread use of dependent labourers not interested in the results of their labour, were the greatest obstacles preventing an intensification of the methods of production.

The Medieval Deccan and Maharashtra

The village of the Medieval western Deccan was called *gdnva* (from Sanskrit *grama*), *mauje* (from Arabic *mauza*), or Persian *deh*. These terms were used interchangeably, but formally *mauje* was prefixed to the proper name of the village. A bigger village containing a market-place (*bdjdr*, Persian *bddr*) was called *kasbe* (from Arabic *qasba*). The villages as a rule took the collective form of habitation. There, the 'village-site' was called *pdndhari* (literally 'white') and usually surrounded by earthen walls. Outside the village site there were agricultural lands called *kali* (literally 'black'). It is said that people originally inhabited the white soil unfit for cultivation and turned the black soil widely found in the Deccan into their agricultural fields. Beyond them there was village common or grassland called *kuranorgdyerdn* (literally 'waste land for cows'). The grassland meant for common use of villagers was termed 'people's grassland' (*lokdcdkuran*) and that for fodder used

by government was called 'government' sgrassland' (*sarkdrckkuran*). Agricultural land (*kali*) was divided into perhaps twenty to forty blocks called *thai* (from Sanskrit *sthala* = land), and each block had of tena name that was probably the surname of the original proprietor or colonizer. Each block was composed of fields variously called *set* or *set* (from Sanskrit *ksetra*= field), or *jamin*. Occasionally Sanskrit *bhumi* (land) was also used to mean the fields.

To put the matter in another way, *kali* would be divided into (1) ordinary owned land (*mirasjamin*), (2) gifted or exempted land (*indmjamin*), (3) state land variously called 'demesne of the government' (*sarkarcisert*), 'demesne fields' (*sericen set*), 'demesne' (*seri*) or 'treasuryland' (*khdlldjamin*), and (4) land of extinct families (*gatkuljamin*) or wasteland (*padjamin*). On the other hand, villages would consist of (1) hereditary village officers such as headman (*pdtilor mokadam*), accountant (*kulkarnt*), and assistant headman (*chaugula*), (2) proprietary peasants called *mirsdars* in Persian, or *thalkarior thalvdik* in indigenous terms, (3) temporary peasants or tenants called *upari* (literally 'strangers'), and (4) village servants and artisans collectively called *baluteddrs* (literally 'twelve holders of *balute*). While the headman was usually of Kunbi (peasant) caste (which was later to become assimilated into Maratha caste), the accountant was generally a Brahman because of his literacy. Village officers used to own more or less large *mirds* land and be allowed by the government to have some *inam* land as well. Moreover, they were entitled to enjoy certain rights and privileges to receive some amount of produce from peasants and village artisans. Their office and accompanying *inam* landas well as privileges were called *watan* which was not only heritable but saleable and transferable with acknowledgement of state authorities and village assembly. On the other hand, *mirasdar* peasants, mostly Kunbls by caste, were permanent residents of the village and bore the regular revenue and miscellaneous cesses for the state on their *mirasland* in which they held a fairly complete proprietary right. Though it was not a frequent practice, they could sell their own land from the late sixteenth century. Village servants and artisans called *baluteddrs* included the carpenter, blacksmith, potter, shoemaker, rope maker, barber, washer man, astrologer, temple-keeper, mosque-keeper, (being butcher as well), Mahar (an untouchable caste engaged in sweeping, watching and other menial works), and so on. Their composition was fairly uniform though their number varied according to the size of the village. They were expected to serve villagers whenever required in their respective capacities fixed by their castes, and were paid the remunerations at two harvests of the year usually in kind, but occasionally in cash, such remunerations being called *balute*. Besides these they were entitled to

certain shares of offerings dedicated to village temples, and to some other perquisites on special occasions. Moreover, many of them were given by the village a small plot of *indmland*, which was as a rule cultivated by themselves.

On the other hand, like the peasants, *baluteddrs* were divided into permanent and temporary residents of the village. The right to serve and the right to receive various remunerations of permanent *baluteddrs* was clearly recognized as their *mirds* or *watan*; hence *mirdsddrbaluteddrs* (or *watanddrbaluteddrs*). Their *mirds* was heritable and transferable. The temporary *baluteddrs* were naturally entitled to receive rewards so long as they worked in the village, but were called *upartbaluteddrs* and not recognized as *mirdsddrs*. In fact, the *baluteddrs* were not employed by individual peasant families (as under the '*jajmdnisystem*') but by the village as a territorial whole. There were broadly three methods of paying remuneration to them, probably corresponding to three different systems of payment of land revenue to the government. The first method corresponded to the *batdt* system; all the peasants brought their respective produce to a certain place in the village and gave customary shares of it to each category of *baluteddrs*. The second method was in the line of the system where each peasant paid a certain fixed amount of his produce to the state; after inspecting the state of harvest, the village headman got every peasant to pay a certain portion of his produce to each category of *baluteddrs*. And the third method was when the revenue was paid in cash, where each category of *baluteddr* would receive a certain amount of cash. At any rate, each category of *baluteddr* was considered to hold one *watan* per village, and the amount of remunerations was fixed per *watan*. When a *watan* was shared by several families of the same occupation or caste, what was divided was not the sphere of work but the remuneration for the *watan*; the lump amount whether in kind or in cash was to be divided among themselves. The assembly would decide village affairs such as dispute over lands and rights, disposal of waste lands, and so on, and attested the transfer of lands and rights in *watan* (or *mirds*). It sometimes intervened in the caste matters of villagers, though there was a separate caste-assembly for the members of each caste residing in the same region. The village was responsible to the state for arresting criminals, compensating for the value of goods stolen or tracing them as far as the next village.

Despite the fairly stable structure of the village community, considerable economic differentiations among the peasants were a reality. This could have been there owing to a variety

of reasons: the revenue system, state promotion of cultivation, system of inheritance, individual availability of capital and labour, natural as well as man-made calamities. Peasants were not only divided into *mirdsddrs* and *uparis*, but also into the comparatively well-to-do and the poor. From ten to two hundred villages formed a sub-district called *apargana* and so on, and each sub-district had one or several hereditary chiefs (*desmukbor desai*) and hereditary accountants (*despdnde*), the former being usually peasant by caste and the latter, as a rule, Brahman. At any rate the zamindari system of the north Indian type was generally absent in the Deccan. Also, hereditary officers of sub-districts were not the sole holders of land and village in *inam*. Kings and pesh was of the Marathas as well as preceding Muslim kings of the Deccan used to give waste land as *inam* to distinguished servants of the state, noted temples, monasteries and mosques, in addition to the hereditary officers of sub-districts and villages. The more important of them were given villages in *inam*. *Inam* was as a rule free from revenue, though sometimes lighter revenue called *inampatti* was levied. The holders of villages and large lands in *inam* generally exercised feudal authority on the people on the lands.

Government sometimes encouraged the construction and repair of dams and wells, and gave money to those who were willing to do so. Those peasants who actively responded to the state encouragement of the cultivation of waste land seem to have been *uparis* rather than *mirdsddrs*. A large portion of revenue was more or less assigned to the officials and aristocrats in the medieval Deccan states. In the Deccan Muslim kingdoms the high-class officials and nobles as well as the middle-class officials were as a rule temporarily assigned the revenue from a certain region, such assignments being called *muqasti*. The assignees, and especially the large ones, exercising wide administrative power over the assigned areas, were virtually in a position to collect as much as possible through their agents.

Conclusion

Much like in north India, the general structure of the village in the medieval Deccan was fairly uniform and stable. Also, the size of landholdings among the peasants fluctuated considerably because of natural and political situations. As a consequence, there was remarkable economic differentiation among the peasants. In the medieval Deccan, there seems to have been a conceptual distinction between the tax and rent corresponding to the different categories of agricultural land.

At any rate, the revenue was assessed and levied usually in cash on different crops and soils. At a more fundamental level, the southern and western parts of the country did not have the type of zamindari rights that was so characteristic of Mughal and north India.



Description of the Module

Items	Description of the Module
Subject Name	Sociology
Paper Name	Agrarian Relations and Social Structure in India
Module Name/Title	New issues in agrarian studies: contract farming, non-agricultural uses of land and land acquisition
Objectives	This module examines the structural changes across the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in the economy and its effects on the peasants. It also discusses the changes wrought within the agriculture sector through contract farming and the increasing transfer of land from agriculture to non-agriculture uses.
Key words	Agriculture, land, contract farming, land acquisition

Module Structure

New Issues in Agrarian Studies: Contract Farming, Non-agricultural Uses of Land and Land Acquisition	Introduction, The Development Agenda, Structural Compulsions, Dispossessing the Poor, Conclusion.
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Role	Name	Affiliation
Principal Investigator	Prof Sujata Patel	Dept. of Sociology, University of Hyderabad
Paper Coordinator	Manish Thakur	Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta
Content Writer	Vandana	Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta
Content Reviewer	Manish Thakur	Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta
Language Editor	Manish Thakur	Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta

Introduction

In India, the agricultural sector contributed substantially to the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at the time of independence. The village economy and the emblematic *kisan* were celebrated in the larger national culture (Jodhka, 2008, 96). But by the turn of the century, the sheen of agricultural sector appears to have been lost. India has become a service-driven economy. But this structural change in the character of the economy is not accompanied by a structural change in employment. Agriculture continues to employ 53% of the workforce (Mehrotra et al, 2014) while contributing only 14% of the total GDP (UNDP Report, 2011). This has resulted in decline in productivity of agriculture in even agriculturally rich states like Punjab. This scenario is referred to as a crisis in agriculture on many occasions. This crisis has to be understood in the context of the larger development strategy adopted by India. The political ideology, planning processes and the economic policies have determined the multiple trajectories of agrarian change in India. There have been changes within and across the major sectors in the economy. These changes which led to the marginalization of agriculture were also accompanied by a decline of farmer's movement (*Ibid*, 112). In spite of the political influence of the rural elite and limited migration from rural to urban India, agriculture was going through a downfall.

This is perhaps due to the growing differentiation of the agrarian elite and the disintegration of village as a viable socioeconomic unit. This disintegration of village as a structural unit was because of the introduction of new modes of cultivation. These new modes of cultivation required a different kind of social organization of production and the traditional ties characterising the local communities began to crumble. The growing politicization of dalits at the same time distanced them from the local community. The new forms of commercial and capitalist agriculture that the rich farmers engaged in led to the breakdown of traditional *jajamani* system. With the decline of agriculture, the transfer of land for non-agricultural usage began to be carried on at an increasing rate. It has been observed that the average size of landholdings in India has diminished in India from 2.28 ha in 1970-71 to 1.23 ha in 2005-06. The proportion of marginal holdings (area less than 1 ha) has increased and is now around 64.8 percent (Status of Indian Agriculture Report, 2011-12). These small farmers have lagged behind in the agriculture sector as the benefits of new modes of cultivation are reaped only by the big farmers. This group of population along with the rural landless people are at a loss as they do not have the skills to get employed in industries. Industrialization has received impetus

from the government ever since independence. For meeting the requirement of land for building industries, Special Economic Zones and other infrastructural projects, the transfer of agricultural land for non-agricultural usage is inevitable. The State has the power of eminent domain which enables it to acquire land for public purpose. This includes acquisition of land by private players also for the purpose of industrial or infrastructural development. The new act Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 provides for clear guidelines and requirement for land transfer to private companies. In the given socio-economic environment and legal framework, this module will examine the structural changes across the primary, secondary and tertiary sector in the economy and its effects on the peasant class. It begins with describing the development path adopted by India after Independence. Further, it discusses about the changes brought about within the agriculture sector through contract farming and its contributions to the socio economic development of peasants. To understand the changes beyond agriculture sector, the effects of the transfer of land from agriculture to non-agriculture sector are also examined. It concludes by raising questions about the general position of the peasants in the highly unequal society of our times.

The Development Agenda

The development of a capitalist economic system in a country is necessarily accompanied by a transformation of its social structure. ParthaChatterjee (2008) explains the conceptual framework given by KalyanSanyal for the development of capitalism in India and refers to the development model adopted in India after independence, as a process of “passive revolution”. This is because in spite of claiming to be inclined to socialism, planning had pursued modernization through industrialization. The political arena was dominated by the elites, and unlike what happens in a revolution, the dominant class was not overthrown. Land reforms and initiatives for agrarian development over the years have largely failed. The development process hence did not qualify as a real revolution. However, the establishment of democracy indeed provided an avenue for popular expression of varied interests. The uniqueness of the Indian capitalist process lies in the fact that the primitive accumulation of capital and welfare measures by the state as part of passive revolution was carried out simultaneously. Primitive accumulation through separation of producers from the means of production was carried on along with provisions by the government agencies to provide them with basic welfare needs of livelihood. The passive revolution of capital helped secure hegemony of the elites along with the rudimentary appeasement of the poor masses. This was required also because in India the

larger conditions under which capitalism was getting established were different from those prevalent in the West. Europe could deal with the surplus labour created by land dispossession by resettling them in colonies. The capitalist growth then was also far less capital intensive which resulted in creation of jobs for the dispossessed people. Such has not been the context in which capitalism took shape in India. Therefore, the conditions of poverty and inequality in India got exacerbated. The welfare measures of the state were like drops in the ocean. Not surprisingly, in the recent times, there have been growing incidences of farmer mobilization not only against the continued misery but also against the dispossession by state and capital. There are numerous people's movement comprising of anti-SEZ struggles, movement against displacement and rights over common property resources. It is well established that a large section of Indian workforce is trapped in agriculture for lack of alternative opportunities. They are in a low productivity sphere which leads to extremely low income and consumption expenditure. The social implication of such an economic condition is the rising unrest among the peasant classes.

With the advent of paradigms of human rights and justice, putting down peasant resistance by armed power of the state is no longer legitimate. The state therefore takes on several measures to reverse the effects of primitive accumulation of capital. These initiatives of the government to reverse the ruthless effects of capitalism, in current times, involve intervention of the market. The peasant and craft production is today integrated into the market economy. Within the agriculture sector the new mechanism adopted with the intent of bringing prosperity to farmers is Contract Farming. The entire process involves large business houses and it seemed to be a path-breaking idea to link farmers to businesses and larger markets. Similarly, building large industries is considered as another option in the market economy to create employment for a large number of people. These large industries would create avenues for development of the real estate, banking services and the retail market. In the current globalized market economy, these are the ideas available for development of people who have been living on the fringes of society. But a careful understanding of these processes would reveal a different picture altogether. The economy has turned to be pro-business rather than become a pro-market one. A market economy would have created a level playing field and regional inequalities would have diminished (Kohli, 2007). But available evidence confirms the view that development model pursued in India post 1980s was pro-business resting on the ruling alliance of political and economic elites (*Ibid.* 112). Also, the agrarian transition has been unique with limited influence of capitalism in the agriculture sector. We need to consider some of these issues: contract farming, setting up of large industries and the real estate growth in greater detail.

Structural Compulsions

The new economic environment has led to the reorganization and restructuring of the agriculture sector. The macro level policy changes in the direction of free market capitalism have impacted on agriculture. Agri-business growth which is defined as a process of industrialization of agriculture and rural production takes place through either appropriationism or substitutionism (Singh, 2008). Both these processes are contradictory to each other as the former is centred on exploitation of land and other biological resources through advanced technology to get cheaper raw materials and the later focuses on moving industry away from direct crop sources to create new products. Contract farming is a method of appropriationism through which biological resources are utilized to the optimum level to get enhanced level of output. It has been promoted by the World Bank and was introduced in India after the Structural Adjustment Program to ensure quality and timely availability of raw materials for the food processing industry. Contract farming was also left as the only way for involvement of large firms in agriculture as captive farming is not allowed in India.

Bringing the farmers and large firms together, in effect, leads to changes at three levels - production, processing and marketing (*Ibid.*).

One of the models comprising of the different stakeholders involved in contract farming is shown in Figure 1. It basically comprises of four elements: a pre-agreed price, quality, quantity or acreage (minimum/maximum) and time (Singh, 2002). It can also be seen as a method of vertical integration where the

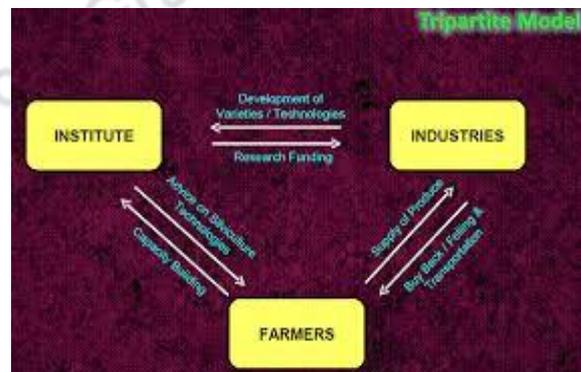


Figure 1 (Source: <http://agritech.tnau.ac.in>)

different levels of supply chain are merged. However, whether integration takes place or not depends on the nature of the contract which is mainly of three types- procurement contracts, partial contracts and total contracts. It is only in total contract that perfect vertical integration takes place as all the inputs are provided by the large firm and produce is bought at a pre agreed price.

The reasons for contract farming can be seen from both demand and supply side. The supply side forces were fuelled by growing application of agriculture technology leading to production to “specification” and preservation technology while the demand was fuelled by the rising income and the increasing number of discriminating consumers. Contract farming as a concept

can also be viewed as creating positive externalities which lead to institutional change at a wider level. The political economy viewpoint of this arrangement would however bring out that fact that contract farming leads to a diminishing role of state in the agriculture sector and an increased focus on specialization which would lead to an increasing shift to production of cash crops. In the long run, it would lead to capitalist penetration in agriculture and indirectly give the agribusiness the control on land (*Ibid*: 1624). Such an approach rejects the various economic rationales for engaging in contract farming and brings out the influence of cultural and social relations of production in the arrangement of contract farming. There have been studies to prove that contracting has helped them generate better employment and acquire new skills for farming. However, farmers find these contracts biased and enforced strictly in case of default by the farmers due to the natural calamity loss. The large firms do not explain the pricing system, over price their services and delay payments. This is explained as the “monopsonistic exploitation” (a system in the economy when one buyer is present) in contract farming by Sivramkrishna and Jyotishi (2008). This leads to power asymmetry between the producer and the buyer resulting into exploitation of the former.

Only an economic view of the process of contract farming would not help in understanding it as a social phenomenon. The culture of the village system influences the working and outcome of the contracts. It is due to cultural factors that the arrangement of contract farming becomes biased against the producers as they do not have the negotiating ability to get a fair share of the profit generated by the large firm from their produce. Also, in India there are several instances when the contracts are not written but oral in nature with loose specifications. It protects the large firms from the all kinds of unforeseen obligations but makes sure that farmers meet the contract provisions under all circumstances.

The larger social impact of contract farming is also not favourable. Though contract forming has brought an employment boom and an increase in wage rate at the local level, this would not last for long as companies plan to mechanize plantation and harvesting operations (*Ibid*: 1632). The effect on the surrounding non contract farmers can be detrimental as well. The shift to cash crops from basic food crops by large farmers due to contract farming can result in a price hike of the basic food crops. The poor farmers would not be experiencing the increase in income due to contract farming but their expenses would increase. Such favouritism towards large farmers would result in a socially undesirable “dual” agriculture development (*Ibid*: 1625). For the large farmers, there is an entire process of quality assessment and advance payment before entering into the contract. On the other hand there is no such arrangement for small farmers. The firms have this discretion especially in procurement contracts to reject the

produce based in low quality and on many occasions favour large farmers who can bear the cost of investing in better inputs. The socio economic divide existing in the rural agrarian system would further deepen due to contract farming.

Irrespective of the disadvantages that the system of contract farming can pose for the small and marginal farmers it was introduced in India in the state of Punjab in early 1990s. The Johl Committee Report in 1986 on diversification of Punjab agriculture suggested more land to be brought under cultivation of fruits and vegetables. It was suggested that the economic conditions of small and marginal farmers would not improve without a change in the crop pattern and further diversification in terms of technology used. In Punjab, the system was established by the entry of Pepsi Foods into potato and chilli processing which was later taken over by HLL. Both these are export oriented companies which also led to internationalization of the farming sector in Punjab. But most of these farmers were rich owning large tracts of land and capital to invest in better agricultural inputs as shown in Picture 1.



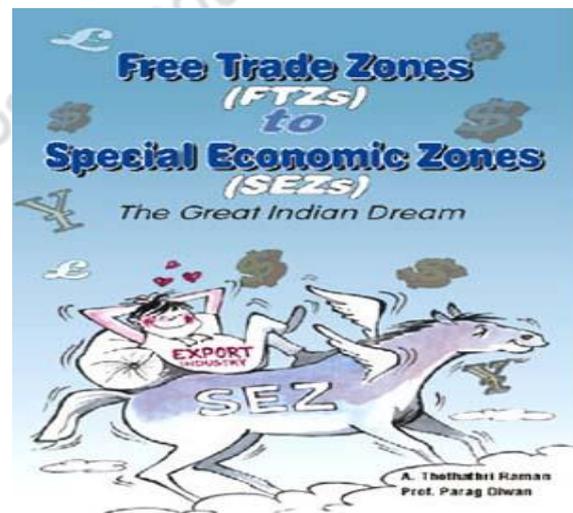
Picture 1 (Source: samilabs. com)

Also, the area cultivated for fruit and vegetable remained less than 2% till late 1990s. There could only be a shift in area within the fruit and vegetable sector. The number of farmers' suicide in 1998 and 1999 (Singh, 2002) in Punjab only validates that this arrangement has not improved the socioeconomic condition of small farmers. Further, the Punjab government launched a multi-crop, multi-year contract farming scheme in 2002, and the Punjab Agro Food Grains Corporation was established as the nodal agency for the same purpose. This agency provided farmers with High Yielding variety of seeds from reputed companies, technical supervision and buy backs of the entire produce of the farmers through tie-ups with large firms. The plan was to bring 2. 5 million acres of rice-wheat area under alternative crops in 2007, which did not happen (Kumar, 2007: 5367). Marginal farmers, that is, farmers with landholding between 0. 01 to 2. 50 acres, hardly figured in this scheme. Similar is the case in Andhra Pradesh where oil palm cultivation was encouraged through contract farming with the express objective of helping the small farmers (Dev and Rao, 2005: 2711). On the contrary, small farmers found the production of Gerkinsmore profitable as it was labour intensive and the farmers could avail of the subsidised irrigation facilities. In fact, ensuring participation of small farmers in contract farming is not automatic and requires a strong regulatory framework.

The role of NGOs or farmers' cooperatives has also been limited in Punjab. They potentially have a major role to play in terms of information dissemination, monitoring and scrutiny of contracts. In Punjab, the Agriculture Produce Market Committee Act has been amended to recognize contract farming as a system. However, the Act does not provide legal protection to growers in case of a default by the private firm. A broader institutional support system is required if the ill effects of contract farming has to be eliminated and interest of small farmers is to be protected. A regulatory framework to protect the interest of the farmers is urgently required. The state can also provide for certain concessions needed to attract large number of firms in the area of fruits and vegetables processing. Also, rules binding on the agri-business firms to compulsorily involve marginal and small farmers can be formulated and incentive for the same can be designed. State should function as the facilitator in a manner that the interest of the small and marginal farmer is met. Sivramkrishna and Jyotishi (2008: 293) suggest the formation of Association of Farmers is the solution proposed to eliminate the “monopsonistic exploitation” of contract farming. These measures would ensure that the new concept that was launched to infuse life back in the agrarian system of the rural would become inclusive in nature rather than further deepening the socioeconomic disparities in the villages.

Dispossessing the poor

In the recent years “land grab” has become a catch phrase which refers to the increasing transnational land transactions for large-scale production of food as well as for non-agricultural purposes. Here, we focus on “internal land grabbing” concerning non-agricultural purposes, including mining, industrial and infrastructural development, business parks, residential and



Source: pentagonpress.in

other real estates (BorrasJr and Franco, 2012, 48). During 2007-2011, the area of cultivable land has shrunk by 790, 000 hectares, mainly due to diversion of land towards non-agricultural purposes like construction, industries and other development activities (Sampat, 2013). A government committee on Land Reforms asserts that the growing corporate “investment” in indigenous areas is the biggest land grabs of tribal lands since Columbus (*Ibid.*). The extent of landlessness in India has increased. The proportion of “effectively landless” people or those owning less than 1 acres of land among rural households stands at 73% (Basole and Basu, 2010). The NSSO data reveals a lower figure. This discrepancy is because of the difference in

the range of land holding within which landlessness is considered. For the purpose of this module, we assume all farmers with less than 1 acre of land as landless because it has been seen that such farmers use 90% of their landholding for homestead and are in no position to generate livelihood from land (*Ibid.* 12).

The development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) has been a major factor behind the landlessness of peasants. It has led to land wars in India with farmers resisting the transfer of their land to the capitalists. According to Levien (2012), what is going on is “accumulation by dispossession”. The agrarian transformation in India is increasingly tied up with the capitalist growth. This transformation is non-labour absorbing and real-estate driven, and is therefore, responsible for further marginalization of the poor. In the recent past, there have been incidents of intense farmer protests in Nandigram, West Bengal and in several other places in Mumbai, Gurgaon and Rajasthan. These conflicts have come in the



Source: all4all.org

way of industrial projects of large companies like POSCO, Reliance and Tata.

In India, however, the acquisition of land for the development of industrial estates and townships is not a recent phenomenon. It has been going on for quite some time. Immediately after Independence, the transfer of land was seen as a sacrifice for the development of the nation. Of late, the nature of land transfers has changed. The acquisition of land is currently for the corporate sector and for the SEZs. This is indicative of anew phase of primitive accumulation (Banerjee-Guha, 2008: 58). Land is now more used for real estate development and as investment rather than for manufacturing activities which would create jobs. This has contributed to increasing the informal sector which now comprises of 95% of the labour force. In fact, the creation of jobs has been low in the economy in the last two decades. This means that the high growth experienced so far is based on increase in labour productivity. This is evident from the large scale layoff of workers in private sector manufacturing companies like Tata Steel and Tata Motors at a time when there enormous increase in production. The public sector employment also fell substantially over the last two decades which kept overall employment growth at 1%, at a time when the economy was soaring at 7-8%. The improvement in productivity however did not lead to increase in wages which basically meant a substantial increase in profits (Bhaduri, 2008). To further encourage these processes and push the labour force into deplorable work conditions, SEZs were established. It has been found out that workers in SEZs work for 5.3 percent more hours than those in non-SEZs and at hourly wages

which is 35 percent lower (Banerjee-Guha, 2008). This is possible because SEZs are declared as “public utility services” which exempts them from labour laws like Minimum Wages Act and the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act. Worker strikes are also made illegal in the SEZs. In India, SEZs have been developed under inspiration from the Chinese SEZs, but are different in the nature of its ownership. In India, unlike China, these are developed by private companies which, in a way, lead to privatization of development. The state attracts the private companies to build hyper-liberalized economic enclaves – with minimal taxes, tariffs and regulations which give a lot of operational freedom to the private sector. The SEZ Act of 2005 requires only 50 percent of the land to be used for productive purpose, and the remainder is to be used as per the wishes of the private developer. The 50% of the land meant for productive use is mostly used for housing development and associated “social infrastructure” like shopping complexes, private schools, golf courses etc. The SEZ, therefore, in the name of privatized infrastructure development, has created several avenues for real estate gains.

As per the Government of India data on the SEZ of May 2008, only 5 percent of the approved SEZs are multi-product. Information technology (IT)/information technology enabled services (ITES) SEZs comprise of 62 per cent of the total SEZ project. The employment that the IT/ITES SEZs will create is negligible. The IT sector only accounts for 0.3 percent of the country’s employment and the revenue is majorly from exports (*Ibid.*).

In effect, the SEZs turn out to be a form of predatory accumulation of wealth by private players through dispossession of the subsistence farmers from their land. Even otherwise, in India, the land holding is fragmented in nature and the small-holding peasantry is reluctant to



Source: frontline.

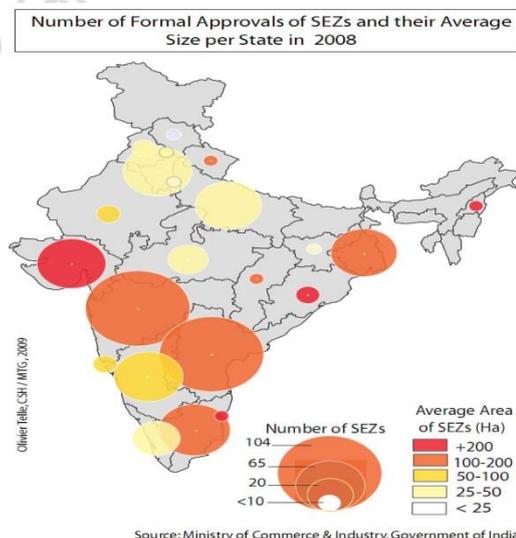
sell their land for numerous reasons. Even when farmers would like to exit agriculture they are not ready to surrender their land as it’s valued in ways which are not easily reducible to exchangeable value. It is for this reason that the private companies are reluctant to engage in direct land transactions with the farmers and prefer the state’s involvement as the facilitator for the land transfer. Large projects are, therefore, given land through the eminent domain provision of the state which allows state to acquire land for “public purpose”. SEZs have thus become a legitimate mechanism for unrestricted private capital accumulation in which the state acts as a broker.

As a consequence, the land is made artificially cheap. The land transactions are not governed by the market forces, and hence the small land owners are at a relative economic disadvantage. The value of agricultural land is also underestimated as it's based on the average listed sales prices of previous years which are lesser than the real purchase price. In the case of Mahindra World City in Rajasthan even though the ownership of land is with the state government the company has a 99 years lease and 40% of the land is developed as "Lifestyle Zone". The real estate development in Gurgaon has also negatively impacted the agrarian structure in the vicinity. Several commercial farmers, in fact, have been reduced to subsistence level farmers due to the grabbing of their land (Narain, 2009). These peri-urban residents have been pushed into other livelihood activities like working in brick kilns or nearby shops. In several cases, the effect of receiving cash in lieu of land has led to increase in idleness and alcoholism.

The impact of dispossession of farmers from their land is far-reaching in its implications. It brings distortions to the agrarian structure and transforms the lives of farmers in fundamental ways. The SEZ developer is a state appointed capitalist landlord which has made the state a key player in the entire process of dispossession. Despite the resistance on several instances at multiple levels, the states have not made any serious policy intervention on this count.

After the SEZ Act was passed in 2005, by 2006, 464 SEZs were approved which has increased to almost 600 in the recent years. The details are shown in picture 2.

The approved SEZs would require over half a million acres of land. Given the peasant agitations on the issue, the transfer of land is not going to be smooth. In states like Goa and West Bengal, the establishment of SEZs has already been put on hold in the context of the opposition to them. In Goa, seven SEZs had got final approval by 2007 which were opposed by the civil society. It was perceived as land and resource, mainly water grab, for the real estate



Picture 2 (Source: indiasezpolitics.org)

sector and the industry. The people were against the *arbitrary* and *illegal* handing over of the local resources for private profit. In Goa, however, the central issue was not merely land dispossession but also environment hazards that SEZs would bring forth. It was seen as impacting the existing livelihood relationship between man and nature. The activists demanded locally appropriate projects which would require reconstitution from below of the relationship between land and resources (Sampat, 2013).

In West Bengal, in Medinipur, people have been waiting for years for the utilization of land after it has been transferred for industrial projects. They have neither received compensation nor are able to cultivate their land. The entire process of land acquisition becomes faulty due to the absence of any arrangement for rehabilitation of the dispossessed (Guha, 2008). Sarkar (2007) raises the question of compensation to both small peasants and agricultural labours in the process of land acquisition in West Bengal. Till now the acquisition of land was carried under the colonial law, namely, the Land Acquisition Act 1894, which does not have any provision for rehabilitation. Section (3) of the Land Acquisition Act 1894 (LAA), poses lot of problems. It attempts to define "public purpose," but its loose language creates an opportunity for companies to project their ventures as an initiative to serve public purpose. The requirements for acquisitions with a private purpose under Section 40 would no longer be binding in an acquisition for a public purpose. Such an acquisition can be done by private companies as a special economic zone under Section 3f (3) for development purposes. Compensation under the LAA would be decided subjectively by the collector and the process of finalizing the value of compensation could not be questioned.

The displacement and rehabilitation issue and the overall compensation, therefore, became central issues for the new Land Acquisition Act. The Section 2 of the new act Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 clearly lays down the various reasons for which the government can acquire land. The new legal framework is thought to be a positive movement and is seen as having addressed some of the recurrent concerns. Yet, it is too early to comment on its progressive features.

Conclusion

The development strategies and policies in place have not been able to benefit the majority of population. Inequality levels have increased and India has witnessed "jobless growth". The informal sector has been expanding and the conditions of employment of workers have not shown substantial improvement. The agrarian transition in India is not a classic one and is different from what the western world experienced (Shah and White, 2011). Poor Indians with homes in rural India have complex livelihoods. They manage between tilling their small plots and wage labour in the farm or non-farm economy. The main challenge that India faces today is to create 17 million jobs per annum in a globalized economy (Mehrotra et al., 2014). The rural non-farm sector, therefore, needs to be strengthened with appropriate policy measures. The informal sector which employs the migrant population from villages comprise of mainly the Small and Medium Scale industries and other Micro Enterprises. There is also a large share

of the informal sector which is self-employed. They are the ones who are small entrepreneurs and engage in business activities for subsistence, and not accumulation of profit. They constitute what KalyanSanyal (2014) calls the “need economy”. In the absence of quality jobs being created in formal sector, the only option available for economic development of the majority is to improve the conditions prevailing in the informal sector. At present, the rural economy’s transition to capitalism remains unclear and messy. In any case, the penetration of capitalism in Indian agriculture is going to be of great theoretical and conceptual significance for the students of agrarian sociology.



Description of the Module

Items	Description of the Module
Subject Name	Sociology
Paper Name	Agrarian Relations and Social Structure in India
Module Name/Title	The relevance, decline and possible renewal of agrarian studies I
Objectives	This module introduces you to the gradual transformation of the image of village in popular perception, and to the changing fortunes of what we call agrarian/village studies. It discusses the colonial and nationalist constructions of the village as well. It helps you trace the way village/agrarian studies captured the scholarly labour of a generation of sociologists in the early decades after Independence.
Key words	Agrarian, village, caste, politics, migration

Module Structure

The Relevance, Decline and Possible Renewal of Agrarian Studies I	Introduction, Colonial and Nationalist constructions of the village, Beginning of the decline, In Brief.
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Role	Name	Affiliation
Principal Investigator	Prof Sujata Patel	Dept. of Sociology, University of Hyderabad
Paper Coordinator	Manish Thakur	Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta
Content Writer	Vandana	Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta
Content Reviewer	Manish Thakur	Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta
Language Editor	Manish Thakur	Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta

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Introduction

In popular perception, India continues to be a land of villages. The demographic fact that a larger share of the Indian population resides in villages has had certain ideological force as well. The Census 2011 data also indicates that the number of rural units or villages has increased. But it cannot be implied from this that the position of village in the economy and society has not deteriorated. The rural population is on a decline. Its share after independence was 85% which today is around 68.85% (Census, 2011). Also for the first time after independence, the Census data of 2011 confirmed that the absolute increase in population was more in urban areas than in rural ones. The share of the agriculture sector to GDP, which employs the majority of the population in rural areas, has shrunk from 55% at the time of independence to 14% in 2011 (UNDP Report, 2011). These economic changes also have social and cultural underpinnings. The popular discourse today looks at the village as symbolic of backwardness and deprivation. In this module, we will tell you the story of the gradual transformation of the image of village in popular perception. We will begin with the image of village in colonial times and during the nationalist movement. Further, while highlighting the shift in the image of the village, we will examine the different factors, responsible for changes in the perception of village in modern times. We will discuss the political and cultural implications of these changes. Given the changes in economic and social context in current times, we will underline the need to bring the “village” back into the macro-level policy discourse. In no way, do we wish to give the impression that the village form has remained the same through history. Also, we are wary of the uncritical equation of the idea of the village with either community or tradition. For the sake of simplicity, we use village/rural/agrarian interchangeably. But you will find the conceptual difference depending on the context of the usage.

Colonial and Nationalist Constructions of the Village

Since the colonial times, the idea of village has undergone enormous change. The colonial powers in India viewed villages as the basic unit of investigation as they recognized the ideological character of the village. Villages made the new land in the control of the British, intelligible and manageable. It was the caste structure of the villages that helped them understand the uniqueness of the people of India. The “caste system” and the “village

community” were the two most important category of colonial ethnography which was created to make sense of the Indian society, and distinguish it from the West (Jodhka, 2002b: 3345). The ethnographic studies during the colonial created an image of village India that has had lasting ideological and political implications. The writings of James Mill and Sir Charles Metcalfe had inspired the later writings on Indian village. Metcalfe, a British administrator had made a remark about Indian villages which was long celebrated. According to him, “village community were little republics, having everything they wanted within themselves and almost independent of foreign relations.” (Jodhka, 2002a). The idea that village community lasted even after the tumbling down of several dynasties was established and seen as a distinguishing feature of Indian village. Though not all colonial administrators shared Metcalfe’s assessment, it was the most widely accepted representation of India. The Indian village was attributed with diverse features like simplicity, stagnation, social harmony and marked by functional integration of various occupational groups. It was pointed out by Marx and Engels also that given the features of Indian village the British rule would create conditions for a social revolution in India. The ethnographic studies by colonial administrators helped in development of theories of society and history in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Citing Breman’s four components of village in colonial discourse: “political autonomy, economic autarchy, social homogeneity and tenacious immutability of the closed collectivity”, Jodhka argues that such a construction helped the colonial rulers rationalize their dominance. For them village brought out the reality of India which made it easier for them to legitimize their rule. As village was seen as an unchanging reality or “village republics” which remained untouched from the Hindus, Mughals, or the Sikhs, the rule by Britons would also make no difference. The rulers would remain outsiders and village characteristics would remain intact. The idea of village and the knowledge of colonial rulers about the village were of great importance for the native middle class elite. In modern India, the historians have pointed out the continuity between the colonial category of knowledge and nationalist thinking.

The idea of village was, as given by the nationalist leaders and the political agenda, was to recover the “real” India. In spite of the presence of urban centres like Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, it was the rural hinterland that was seen to carry the essence of Indianness. As cited in Jodhka (2002a), Beteille says that village was an important ideological category, which is not only a place to live in but a design which reflected the basic Indian values. By the 19th century village had assumed meanings like subsistence agriculture, low technology crafts, timelessness of lifestyle, immobility of people and ideological integration with land (Thakur, 2014). The fact that villages remained uninfluenced by the colonial forces contributed in the formulation of nationalist ideologies around village in the first half of the 19th century. Village,

in spite of its much criticised hierarchical structure of caste, was celebrated because of the virtue of being the repository of civilization ideals of India and hence fundamental to the idea of Indian nation.

For Mahatma Gandhi who mobilized the entire nation to achieve freedom, village was the soul of Indian nation. The nationalists leading the freedom movement made village a powerful political symbol (Dewey, 1972: 327) depicting patriotism. It was village that represented “real” India or the “pure” form of Indian life. The nationalist literature was mainly centred on two themes: the need to preserve the basic constitution of Indian villages and the detrimental effect of the colonial rule on the status of villages (Thakur, 2005). The different leaders fighting for the freedom of the nation in the most divergent manners also agreed that the modern state machinery had eroded the traditional form of local self-governance which was fundamental for our freedom. The modern market was threatening the existence of the cottage industries on which the village economy rests and hence the Swadeshi movement was initiated.

Beginning of the Decline

Soon after independence, the ideology of self-sufficient village of Gandhi, which led to mass mobilization and ultimately gained independence, was overpowered by the modernization ideals of Nehru and Ambedkar. Even though the nationalist leaders celebrated village life they did admit about the scarcity and ignorance that prevailed in villages. The very qualities of village which was romanticised earlier repelled other radical thinkers in contemporary times. They believed that even though the village preserved society from chaos, it stood for stagnation (Dewey, 1972). For the utilitarian, the progress was the objective which could be obtained only by state intervention and market forces. The bond holding the village community together was a factor holding the individual down which is important for progress. This was the target for reform. A village community, according to Ambedkar, was a threat to national integrity and also a thriving place for the caste system which needed to be reformed. Given his background of belonging to a dalit family, he represented the most oppressed and marginalized class and had a dalitist view of the village (Jodhka, 2002b:3350). He was of the opinion that creating village as a basic unit of the legal structure would be a great calamity. He argued that the idea of village was not natural to Indian civilization but perhaps being derived from the colonial or western imagination of India. He believed that the normative structure of the village was radically opposing the spirit of democracy and hence should not occupy the centre stage in the

new independent state. A more balanced view, albeit critical of the existing idea of village, was held by Nehru.

Nehru, who had become the supreme leader of the Congress by the dawn of independence, saw villages rather critically. According to him the village comprised of the peasant class who were the majority in the nation and were living in abject misery. The agrarian economy was exploited by the landlords whom he described as “physically and intellectually degenerate” and had “outlived their day” (*Ibid*:3349). Though he agreed with the traditional view of village of Gandhi, he also believed that the agrarian structure is plagued by the internal differences and contradictions between the landlord and the peasants. He was a major proponent of industrialization and modernization and believed that technology would be advantageous for the farmers. In his nation building strategy, industrialization was a priority but at the same time he also knew that the modern industries would not be able to absorb the entire “surplus labour” population and hence the cottage industry would also need to be promoted. Programs like community development and land reforms were introduced immediately after independence with a view to reform the village structure. Thus for Nehru, the village did not have with virtues of the type that called for celebration. Rather, it had problems that required intervention of the state. Similar was the overall perception towards the village as revealed through five-year plan documents of the Planning Commission. The changed attitude of the national planners of the new welfare state towards the village marked the beginning of the erosion of the sheen of the idealised village purveyed by both the colonial administrators and the nationalist ideologues.

The Planning Commission’s initiatives in the post-independence period saw a plethora of rural development program ostensibly meant to integrate the village in the larger development process. But while this initiative intended to bring development to villages, it conceptually demarcated it as a world which is distant from the developed world. The professionals and academicians in the field of rural development began to see development as the solution to the problems of village (Thakur, 2007:232). However, the new centres of development were but the cities, industries, and the dams, and the other temples of Nehruvian modern India. The policy makers of the new state comprised of elites and the majority of the leaders had no first-hand experience of a typical village life. The vision of development for the nationalist leaders like Nehru and Ranade with support from the business classes in post- independent India was modernization through industrialization. Given the process of “passive revolution” (Chatterjee, 1993) that unfolded in India, the old feudal class was not destroyed, agrarian reform was avoided and the popular masses were prevented from going through the political experience of a fundamental social transformation. The political ideological program in India comprised of

ensuring mass support from the subordinate class to get independence but at the same time the pre independent dominant class was not shaken from its position. The rule, therefore in the new state was, by the Indian dominant class with support from the masses. The development initiated after independence therefore began to see signs of its failure as it could not bring about regional convergence in development or a more equitable society.

The initiatives taken to bring a qualitative change in the lives of rural people, like land reforms and community development programs, have largely failed. Not surprisingly, most of the aspiring people want to leave the village if given an option. In our times, the village has turned out to be some sort of waiting room with the inhabitants often being at various points of real or imaginary transit to that ultimate destination – the city or town. As a consequence, the status of village in the economy and in popular imagination has considerably declined. There would no longer be a cinematic presentation of a village of the nationalist dreams. The urban life and culture have come to be increasingly glorified in art and cinema, and this imagery has penetrated the minds of not only people living in urban centres but also in the villages. Inhabitants of the villages have begun to get increasingly influenced by the urban glamour and there is no gainsaying that Indian village reality has undergone a change, not only economically but also culturally (Gupta, 2005a). The factors responsible for such changes are at the structural level. The land holding pattern of village is such that there are few employment avenues in the village and that too suboptimal in nature. The increase in reach of roads and railways has made movement to urban centres relatively easily with which there is an influx of the urban spirit in rural areas. A villager has no difficulty in accepting himself/herself inferior to those living in cities and has a persistent aspiration of being able to eliminate the cultural gap. The new generation in the village is living there but is largely detached from the agrarian economy or its normative structure. The spread of education has had a significant influence on the young minds of the villages that motivates them to dream about an urban life. The life of people working in modern cities is seen as a positive development and not perceived as process of pauperization or forcible separation from land (Chatterjee, 2008: 54). Moving to cities is rather a voluntary step taken by people who have been living in villages in the past. Since the 1970s there have been a series of social, cultural and political instances which has distorted the agrarian character and caste hierarchy of villages. The widespread participation of the lower caste people in political arena through formation of dalit parties has led to the breakdown of the caste structure which was fundamental to the concept of the village. In the underdeveloped pockets of the country, there have been several agitations against the lack of employment opportunities and deplorable living conditions existent in the rural areas (Gupta, 2005a: 573-

574). On the other hand, the development of the cities has provided immense power to the new aspiring middle class. The popular media is motivated by the interest of this middle class which has assumed great importance in the new neo-liberal political economic environment in the country.



Transformation of the Agrarian: The underlying forces

Influence of the Economic Structure: The village of modern times is qualitatively different from what it was imagined to be. Statistics point out the falling rates of growth in agriculture and the increasing migration from the countryside to towns. Even in villages the non-farm employment has increased tremendously over the years. Nearly 24% of the villagers are engaged in non-farm employment which is a substantial share of the labour population. The contribution of agriculture in GDP has also dwindled. Besides, there is general undermining of the “rural ethos” (Gupta, 2005a). No longer would a farmer from Punjab proudly proclaim that farming is the noblest of all professions. Everybody wants an urban foothold, and there is disenchantment from villages on various fronts. The agriculture sector in India remains largely dependent on monsoons even today. Even in regions where green revolution has had significant impact the dependence on the vagaries of weather has not been eliminated altogether. This has given reasons to the village people to migrate to the cities where also the quality of life is not good. The land holding in villages are small in spite of the land reforms undertaken after independence. Approximately 85 percent of the land holdings are below 5 acres and 63 percent

is below 3 acres (*Ibid.* 2005). The limited number of economic opportunities is also due to the social relations which are even today dominated by caste hierarchy. The economic status of village is a result of the overall development strategy adopted by the Indian state in post-independence period. There was conscious attempt to limit the degree of openness and integration with the world economy to become more self-reliant. The state had assumed the role of planner for development, because market in itself was not perceived to be sufficient to meet the aspirations of a nation which began to industrialize late. India had adopted the model of a development state and industrialization was agreed upon as the most appropriate strategy. The objective was very clearly put down as catching up with the industrialized world and in the process improving the standard of living of people. In this context, agriculture was seen as a sector with diminishing returns (Nayyar, 1998). Industrialization was agreed as a promising sector which would create productive employment and absorb the surplus labour from the rural sector. The economic policies were shaped based on these perceptions. Public investment was made to establish capital intensive industries and an industrial licensing system was adopted to guide the allocation of resources. Agriculture, in the entire process was relatively neglected.

The neglect of the agriculture sector led to the persistence of poverty in the rural areas. As Michael Lipton (1977) argues, the major reason for sustenance of poverty is the “urban bias”. Urban centres have been given priority in the process of allocation of scarce physical, financial and human resources. This has further increased the gap between the rich and the poor. Mass poverty remains alongside development, because developmental process does not create conditions of mass consumption. Even though this gap existing within the society is glaring, it still exists because the policy makers are insulated from the experience of poverty. Most of the politicians and bureaucrats are selected from towns and hence have limited capacity to understand the needs of the poor majority. Even when there is a pro-poor rhetoric, the policy makers are protected from any kind of political pressure that can possibly arise in a democracy (Kohli, 2012). This is possible because the policy making machinery i.e. the Planning Commission and the policy implementation machinery i.e. the administrative structure is kept outside the political arena. As is explained by Chatterjee (1993), the objective of development led to the decision of keeping the planning process away from political influence. Curiously, grand efforts towards “development” notwithstanding, mass poverty continued to exist alongside economic growth. State intervention through planning was mainly to develop industrial capitalism as it was assumed to be synonymous to development.

In spite of claiming to be inclined towards socialism, planning had pursued modernization through industrialization. The political arena was dominated by the elites and unlike a

revolution the dominant class was not overthrown. Land reforms and initiatives for agrarian development over the years had failed. The development process hence did not qualify as being driven by a real revolution. However the establishment of democracy indeed provided an avenue for expression by the masses.

The uniqueness of the Indian capitalist process lies in the fact that, the primitive accumulation of capital and welfare measures as part of passive revolution was carried out simultaneously. Primitive accumulation through separation of producers from the means of production was carried on along with provisions by the government agencies to provide them with basic needs of livelihood. This was required, as in India the larger conditions under which capitalism was getting established were different from when the same was happening in the West. Europe could deal with the surplus labour created by land dispossession by resettling them in colonies. The capitalist growth then was also far less capital intensive which resulted in creation of jobs for the dispossessed people. Under these circumstances the industrialization process driven by planning could not lead to improvement in the conditions of poverty and inequality after the initial years of planning (Nayyar, 1998).

Socio-Political Factors: In addition to the economic reasons for the decline of the position of rural India in popular imagination, there were also social factors at play. The caste structure is a distinguishing feature of the village community. The chief patrons of the village were the members of the dominant class (Srinivas, 1987) and even after independence, the traditional upper castes continued to be the ruling class (Gupta, 2005b). There has been continued tension between the agrarian classes. Bose (1991) has brought out the severity of the power asymmetry between the agrarian classes. The abundance of studies focusing on the inequality persistent in rural society has changed the supposedly tranquil picture of the village. In the past, the caste structure was responsible for romanticising the jajmani system. It provided for the locus of each of the castes an agreed place in the hierarchy of purity, accepting Brahmins at the top. But soon the unequal distribution of wealth responsible for the caste structure was understood and the ideological acquiescence fundamental to the caste structure was challenged. It has been argued by Gupta (2005a) that every caste valued itself and its rituals by the origin tales of these castes, recalling that a supposedly “lower caste” actually held a high status in the distant past. The loss of status of these castes is attributed to reversal of wars, deceit and idiosyncratic gods. It is argued that a so called lower caste never participated willingly in its own subjugation. The idea of unconditional dominance is therefore a thing of the past and caste identities have begun to become more strident and are expressed more openly today.

Even though until 1977, the upper castes continued to hold prominence in Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in Indian Union, the traditional peasant castes such as Ahirs, Kurmis, Koeri, Lodh Rajputs and Jats soon began to dominate the political landscape of northern India (Gupta, 2005b). In southern parts of India also the Vanniyars and Thevars became assertive. The power was taken over by mid 1950s from the rural elite within the Congress party. In Northern India, in 1977, for the first time the upper caste members in the parliament fell below 50%. The Congress was challenged by the coalition of peasant castes led by Charan Singh in Uttar Pradesh. In Bihar also, there was significant weakening of the hold of upper caste members in the legislative assembly post 1977. The decline of the rural elite in the traditional politics has been discussed by the Rudolphs (1987) who referred to these new ascendant peasant castes as “bullock capitalists”. They challenged the traditional hegemony of Kshatriyas such as Rajputs and Bhumiars as they controlled 51% of land but constituted 34% of the population. Not only was there the emergence of the so called landed peasant class in politics the backward classes also made their presence felt in the political arena. Uttar Pradesh saw the rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party and Bihar witnessed the rise of Rashtriya Janta Dal under Laloo Prasad Yadav. The Yadavs and Dalits began to get represented in politics and this led to the emergence of backwards class along with the peasant class.

The reason behind this political churning was that in independent India gradually the backward classes could become assertive because the propertied class in rural India could not dominate the landless peasants because of the abolition of the zamindari system. The power of the land lords as patrons had diminished as the size of their landholdings had shrunk. The result of abolition of the feudal system in India was that the pre-eminence of the traditional land lords was lost and the middle peasants or bullock capitalists ascended in the power ladder. The hitherto backward castes had begun to challenge their social superiors. The low caste chamars in Punjab began to identify themselves as adi-dharmis (Jodhka, 2002b: 1816) and established their own gurudwaras even without formally rejecting Sikhism. They stopped visiting the gurudwaras controlled by Jat Sikhs and distanced themselves from them. They worshiped Guru Ravi Das in their gurudwaras and gave up wearing turban and growing beard. The Ramghariyas or the carpenters by caste occupation in Talhan village in Jalandar district have also been drawn into the adi-dharmi fold. Though the social ascendance of Adi-dharmis is not approved by the Jats, they have ended up being spectators of their prosperity. In parts outside Jalandar also, people belonging to this community refuse to do menial work or work as agriculture labourers in the fields owned by jats. The traditional scavengers known as the mazhabi Sikhs have now begun to take up jobs in fields, but have not been able to become as assertive as the adi-dharmis. In spite of this, the dominant trend has been to look for livelihood options in the non-agrarian

sector while residing in villages. Village people have largely begun to prefer working as coolie's and rickshaw pullers in urban areas than work in farms as it provides them some level of economic certainty (Gupta, 2005a). A similar trend can be seen in states of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The scheduled castes in these areas have begun to have temples of their own defying the age old traditions of untouchability. The caste identity has therefore, resurfaced at all levels and every caste is claiming an elevated status. Citing M N Srinivas (2003), Shah (2007) argues that caste as a system which formed the basis of production structure in rural India is dead and the idea of individual castes is thriving. Hierarchy, which was essential to the system, is breaking down under the influence of new values of democracy, equality and self-respect. The village economy is no longer closed and hence the oligarchs of the traditionally dominant castes cannot subjugate the lower castes. The communities on the lower rungs of caste hierarchy can now express their sense of self-worth and are ready to come out the shackles which constricted their development. The urban centres give them space to enter into economic relations irrespective of their caste. The social and cultural heterogeneity of the city provides congenial grounds for innovation and change which helps movement against the caste hierarchy. A large number of social thinkers who began working against the hierarchical structure of the caste system were from the urban centres. It has also been pointed out the individual caste was a feature of pre-modern urban centres and gradually the economic and political forces of these urban centres influenced the rural areas also. It has been discussed also by Sheth (1999) as secularization of caste which comprises of de-ritualization and politicization of caste. These processes have taken place in urban centres and refer to the elimination of the socio-religious content of economic relationship in village. The jajmani system which regulated the economic transactions in village was replaced by contractual relationship between the employer and the employee. It can hence be said that the social relations which were sustained by the internal food production system of village based on caste had virtually disintegrated. Also, the green Revolution and the increasing role of state and outside agencies in food production had changed the social organization of the village substantially. Village was no longer a social-religious system but an economic organization which supplied food.

The politics of caste has resulted in securing the system of reservation in Indian society. With the failure of the Congress party's policies in minimizing poverty and inequality after two decades of independence, the ground was created for formation of parties representing the interests of the poor and marginalized who mainly belonged to the lower castes. The regional parties proliferated in several states which led to more competition in politics. This led to substitution of vertical power relation with horizontal power relations. The upwardly mobile

and dominant castes which were traditionally of lower status strengthened their status based on caste based politics and a new middle class emerged. This new middle class was no longer the English speaking upper castes but the backwards classes, SCs and STs who had received the benefits of reservation in employment. With the recommendations of Mandal Commission in the late 1980s, the classisation of caste occurred. This basically meant that individual members of all castes were released from the religiously sanctioned techno-economic and social organization. Also, their interests were linked to the organization relevant to urban industrial system and modern politics. This process was going on in urban as well as rural areas which led to a fundamental change in the social structure of village.

The economic processes undertaken through planning after independence led to an agrarian crisis. The focus in the initial decades of planning for economic development was clearly on industrialization and modernization. Agriculture came in focus only for a limited period of time mainly due to the food crisis in the 1960s. There was no place for agriculture in the plan framework. In the path of development the stylization suggested a sectorial and labour transformation from agriculture to industrial and service sector. In India, however, the transition led to a crisis in the agrarian structure.

The decline in the growth rates, productivity and profitability in agriculture in the last two decades has led to a crisis in the agriculture sector. The output for small and marginal farms is meagre and cannot even guarantee subsistence for the peasants (Mohanty2013). The recent increase in farmer suicides in different states confirms the widespread distress in the agriculture sector. Sainath (2011) has explored and established the structural factors underlying the crisis which leads to farmer suicides. The per capita real income of agriculture dependant population has been stagnant between 1994-95 and 2003-04 when the real income of the entire economy was increasing at the rate of 4%. The per capita food production has also declined which exposes a large section of the population to food vulnerability leading to hunger and malnutrition (Jha, 2007). The problem of landlessness had also increased because of the agrarian distress which has further overcrowded the agriculture labour market. The agriculture extension services provided by government and research in agriculture have also weakened since the early 1990s. P. Sainath, an eminent journalist, through his works has continuously pointed out that multinational seed corporations through their exorbitant price structure have created adverse conditions for the farmers. The withdrawal of the state has led to weak public provisioning in the area of agriculture. The consequence of such neglect may prove to be perilous. It has destroyed the dignity of the profession which lies at the heart of rural India.

Rural India has in the recent times witnessed several types of conflicts which have not necessarily been between the agricultural labour and the landlord as used to be the case in the

1970s or earlier. The political parties then kept the interest of rural India and farmers alive as part of their political agenda. Such large scale mobilization of people on agrarian issues is no longer seen in today. Mass organizations and political parties have lost their focus on agrarian issues because agriculture is no longer seen as a critical issue which involves masses of rural people. By the 1980s, landless agriculture labourers had become a weak voice with poor representation in the political arena. The leading farmer agitations were the ones espousing the interest of the owner cultivators and it was clearly stated that anybody who did not own land was not a farmer (Gupta, 2005a). The political agenda of the major parties have very little to do with the issues of rural India. Though the politics of caste had become a major election strategy, the parties had never committed themselves to the chemistry of village (Ibid.).

In Brief

Through this module, we wanted to tell you about the general decline of the agrarian issues in popular and scholarly discourses. We began by telling you about the heyday of village studies in the context of colonial and nationalist constructions of the village. Thereafter, a combination of factors has led to the subsequent lack of interest in agrarian studies. We have delineated some of these factors in the module. The dominant model of development itself was meant to engulf the village in the vortex of urban-industrial growth. Moreover, the assertive caste identities, fuelled by the processes of democratisation, have made village the mere container of social conflicts of various sorts. The preponderance of the caste idiom has come to overshadow the expressions of agrarian conflicts. We keep hearing of Dalits and the OBCs. But, we hardly hear of the plight of the agricultural labour and the share-croppers. We talk of agrarian issues only when there is a crisis situation like drought, floods, famines or farmers suicides. This lends credence to our assertion of the decline of agrarian studies. Sociologists have moved to the studies of other phenomena and processes than of the life and culture of the agrarian communities. In the next module, we continue this discussion and give you an overview of the divergent set of issues that students of agrarian structure need to focus on. You will find references in the same module.

Description of the Module

Items	Description of the Module
Subject Name	Sociology
Paper Name	Agrarian Relations and Social Structure in India
Module Name/Title	The relevance, decline and possible renewal of agrarian studies II
Objectives	This module helps you understand the factors that led to the general decline of scholarly interest in the agrarian question. It also makes a plea for the possible renewal of agrarian studies given the enormous changes that the agrarian sector is witnessing.
Key words	Agrarian, village, development, non-farm employment, policies

Module Structure

The Relevance, Decline and Possible Renewal of Agrarian StudiesII	Introduction, Village in the New Economy, Agrarian Crisis, Conclusion
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Role	Name	Affiliation
Principal Investigator	Prof Sujata Patel	Dept. of Sociology, University of Hyderabad
Paper Coordinator	Manish Thakur	Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta
Content Writer	Vandana	Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta
Content Reviewer	Manish Thakur	Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta
Language Editor	Manish Thakur	Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta

Introduction

Even as we keep using the term rural/agrarian interchangeably, we know for certain that these terms have particular genealogy in the context of the growth and development of sociology in India. The issues that they engage with have been part of the distinctive scholarly tradition designated as village studies. In the 1970s, under the influence of Marxism, the term agrarian acquired certain prominence along with the class analysis of the Indian countryside. It was argued that the earlier type of village studies was a misnomer in the sense that they were hardly interested in village as such. For them, the village was just a convenient site of fieldwork for issues like caste, kinship, and politics. It was to distinguish themselves from the large number of studies carried so far that the agrarian studies brought to our attention the simmering conflicts among the agrarian classes. Such studies also became the empirical anchor for the larger theoretical debate pertaining to the mode of production in Indian agriculture and/or the nature and direction of capitalist growth in agriculture. However, as this module presents, there has been a subsequent waning of scholarly interest in the agrarian question. We will talk about the factors that can be seen responsible for the general decline of agrarian studies. We discuss in detail the substantive processes of change that have had an impact on the recasting of the agrarian question. For us, even now the agrarian question is too important to be given a decent academic burial. That is why; we make a plea for the possible renewal of agrarian studies given the enormous changes that the agrarian sector is witnessing. We begin by presenting to you an updated overview of the place of the village in the new economy. Thereafter, we take you through the processes of change that shape the substantive content of the agrarian. And lastly, we urge you to keep yourself abreast of the changes in the agrarian sector lest the agrarian turns out to be the synonym for crisis alone.

Village in the New Economy

In the module 6.4 A, we drew your attention to the so-called urban bias as the implicit motif in the dominant blueprint of development that the newly independent India went for. Nehru was very clear in his agenda of modernization and used to equate modernization with urbanization, which was expected to pull India out of its rampant poverty and past backwardness, and put it on the road to progress. The development of Chandigarh was symbolic of his approach towards city as a vital element in the process of development. The construction of the Chandigarh confirmed Nehru's confidence in planned urbanization and the final work of the architect Le

Corbusier was something that was considered to be “Indian” rather than “Western” (Prakash, 2002). This inclination towards urbanization was strengthened further by the economic policies in the era after Nehru. Indira Gandhi reinforced the statist model of development through nationalization of banks and the land redistribution reforms. There was also an additional dosage of populism through the *garibi-hatao* rhetoric. This had an adverse impact on the economic growth, and the gap between state capacity and popular expectation of poverty alleviation increased. Sustained economic growth and a coherent political party and bureaucracy were prerequisites for poverty alleviation. But what ultimately happened was deinstitutionalization of the Congress party and the fragmentation of the state authority structure. Instead of channelizing public resources in agriculture, infrastructure, public sector industries, education and health the spending was mainly done to buy political support (Kohli, 2012). The overall economic climate in the country did not support investment and growth. In the backdrop of mass starvation and famine, though agriculture sector received investment, it was mainly concentrated in providing better seeds and fertilizers in the already rich agricultural states. The focus was on increasing productivity than bringing more land under cultivation through investment in irrigation. In this entire process, the state and the propertied class of farmers benefitted, and hence the goals of redistribution were not achieved in spite of public investment in agriculture during Green Revolution.

A similar alignment of the state and the elite was seen in the 1980s, but this time the elites were of the industrial sector. This led to higher economic growth in the 1980s and further failed to achieve the goals of redistribution. The focus, in the entire process of industrial growth, was on the productivity growth which is achieved at the cost of employment generation. The “growth first” policy of the 1980s got further strengthened by the economic reforms in the 1990s after which the decline in the agriculture sector began to set in. The growing inequality has had an adverse impact on the rural-urban divide too. The agricultural growth rates plummeted leading to lower incomes in the countryside. The cities continued to become rich more rapidly which only hastened urbanization. In the rural areas, agriculture had taken a backseat and the non-farm sector was growing. The rural non-farm sector till 1983 was small. There were 12 states which had Rural Non-Farm Employment (RNFE) below 20 per cent. Therefore, only 5 states had RNFE more than 20 percent. But within 20 years, the scenario had changed substantially. As per the 50th round of NSS held in 1993-94, about 32.9 per cent of the rural household were outside agriculture. The percentage had gone up to 35.2 per cent by the 57th round. States like Punjab, Kerala and Haryana had more than 50 percent of the rural household involved in non-agricultural activities. Jammu and Kashmir, West Bengal,

Himachal Pradesh and Bihar had around 40 percent of the household in non-agricultural occupations. This change in trend of employment is however, not in proportion to rural prosperity. Developed states like Maharashtra and Gujarat have RNFE less than 20 percent and they rank below Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh in terms of RNFE. In rich agriculture states of Punjab and Haryana also the RNFE has increased to around 30 percent. In Himachal Pradesh also, the increase in this sector was almost double from 12.4 percent to 25.2 percent.

Around one third of male workers, as per the data, no longer work in the primary sector in rural areas. The service sector attracts a majority of those who are engaged in RNFE. According to the study by Lanjouw and Shariff (2004), the service sector comprises of the larger share of employment than manufacturing in the RNFE category. The non-farm sector contributes 45 percent of the rural net domestic product which only throws light on the growing importance of the service sector in rural areas. This increase in non-farm sector can be understood as both a cause and effect of a number of factors. First, the scope of agriculture employment due to lower wages and smaller land holdings has gone down. The agriculture sector's contribution to the national GDP decreased as explained earlier and there was limited investment to increase the productivity of this sector. With the decline of agriculture, the transfer of land for non-agricultural usage began to be carried on at an increasing rate. It has been observed that the average size of landholdings in India has diminished from 2.28 ha in 1970-71 to 1.23 ha in 2005-06. The proportion of marginal holdings (area less than 1 ha) has increased and is now around 64.8 percent (Status of Indian Agriculture Report, 2011-12). Secondly, there has been a refocusing of the rural aspirations as well. The increase in RNFE in Punjab and Haryana can be attributed to the increase in agriculture production which creates a need for complementary non-farm activities like harvesting and others. But the increase in RNFE in other states like Assam, West Bengal and Bihar remains unexplained. It has been argued in several places that the RNFE is symbolic of "distress employment". This is because in times of stagnant agriculture growth the RNFE has increased which only indicates that the rural unemployed is in search of jobs and is in they who get absorbed in the non-farm sector. The majority of workers in the non-farm sector were those with less than 10 acres of land (Gupta, 2005a). It is clear that the poorer a farmer the greater is the pressure to look for employment outside farming. In India, however, owning 10 acres of land is not necessarily an indication of distress. In Punjab and West UP, all these farmers are active in the non-farm sector. The Adi Dharmis and Jats in Jalandar own stores, run STD booths, sell grocery and other such similar activities. In Uttar Pradesh, the scenario is different. The non-land owning castes are the ones which are more involved in non-farm activities. Thus, be it land owning or non-land owning household,

what is widespread is a general disenchantment with village life. People living in villages have the ambition to live outside it for a better life. The availability of off-farm employment drives the people outside villages and these locals are the migrant labours of the city who are ready to work for less also. This is possible because this “less” wage is also better than what is available in the agriculture sector. The availability of jobs outside the farm sector is important which is driven by factors like public utilities investment. It has been pointed out in the study by Visaria (1995) that villages which have gas, electricity and water are the ones where RNFE is also high. This means that as modernity penetrates, more and more people leave farm jobs and choose to get employed in non-agriculture operations.

India has turned out to be a service driven economy in the process of structural change in output between primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. But this structural change in output is not accompanied by a structural change in employment. For the first time, post 2004-05 in the 2004-05 to 2009-10 plan periods, did large number of people, nearly 10% of the agricultural workforce abandoned agriculture. Employment in the non-agriculture sector grew by 25 million, and from 2009-10 to 2011-12, it even increased with a simultaneous fall in the employment in agriculture. But a closer look at the sub sectors of the non-agriculture sector reveals that the increase is driven by an expansion in the labour intensive sub-sectors, mainly construction. The development of urban centres has pulled workers out from agriculture as the total employment in construction almost doubled by 2011-12. Other sectors where the fluctuations in employment has been seen are the sub-sectors within manufacturing like textiles, wearing apparels, non-metallic mineral products and wood products and other labour intensive sectors. But, the share of these sectors in the total manufacturing value added has remained constant. It can hence be implied that it is the low productivity small scale enterprises which are driving employment. Employment within the service sector has mainly been in telecom due to the increase in Tele-density and also in education, health and real estate. The increasing influence of education through public programs in the rural areas has had a strong influence on the young minds. Increasing penetration of media into the rural areas has impacted rural India at a cultural level. The old taboos against holding certain type of jobs are disappearing (Gupta, 2005a). Untouchability is not practised as widely as it used to be in earlier times. Even households which are economically prosperous seek for a future outside the village as discussed earlier. It has been seen that not many farmers are found satisfied. The wealthy landed people of the village have political leverage also and have come together to form an interest group in the environment of growing caste politics. It is only because of their aspiration to secure well-paying government jobs in urban centres that they lobby for acquiring an OBC

status. The recent case of the Jat community fighting to be declared as OBC confirms the agenda of these groups to gain through the route of reservation.

Against this background, the emergence of the new image of village is to be understood. The image of the rural areas being home to unsuccessful poor people is ingrained in the minds of people since a long time now. City is the new hope and is seen a place which would create avenues for growth. Nothing else can justify the growing migration to cities in spite of inhuman living conditions of the slums where the migrant population resides in cities. In such a scenario, the village as was understood since the colonial times would cease to exist. The cultural aspects of village only exist in urban nostalgia. It is described as the “waiting room” (Parry, 2003) from where everybody wants to escape as soon as they get a chance. With the growing cacophony of individual castes and the political agenda attached to it, the village has taken a backseat and caste is the new determinant of individual identity. To understand the new village it is no longer required for the social anthropologists to get immersed in a village. They would rather go to the slums and railway stations in cities where the erstwhile rural population subsists (Thakur, 2012). In the current economic and political environment, the regnant public policies have further marginalized the village. Right from the policies of rural development to the current focus on developing smart cities and bullet trains, the policies appear to bypass the anachronistically undeveloped “villages”. These policies are miles away from the pro-village philosophy of Gandhi or Tagore who wanted to bring life back to the villages. The influence of western education, and its extensive reach, has been an important factor in changing the imagery of village. The health system in villages is in a shambles, the villagers are dependent on urban centres for secondary and tertiary and at times even primary level health care needs. Village is therefore a place of dreadful diseases and limited opportunities for socio-economic growth.

Under the forces of globalization, liberalization and trans-national culture what is today important is to create a place for this new “village”. The ruralities have to be understood in an altogether different manner and the policy framework has to be shaped accordingly to cater to the new needs of rural India. With the growing agitation of people in the hinterland and the popular aspirations to achieve higher standards of living, policy measures have to be designed accordingly. The meaning that the word “development” has acquired perhaps needs revision as the existing modality has not been successful in achieving the goals of redistribution. In the absence of redistribution, rural areas which lacked resources have been further marginalized and urban centres are also home to several problems due to the rural-urban migration.

Agrarian Crisis

As demonstrated by Levein (2012), the recent phenomena of free market capitalism in post-reform India has been unable to address the agrarian crisis. Agrarian transformation in India is a unique one unlike the agrarian capitalism in the west. The recent emergence of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in India is an illustration of the concept of “accumulation by dispossession” of the Indian capitalism which has led to a very distinct form of agrarian transformation. This transformation is non-labour absorbing and real-estate driven and is therefore responsible for further marginalization of the poor. This is happening in the wider context of economic transition to establish a capitalist economy. In the broader ambit of development, the large scale dispossession is resulting in seizing of land in the hands of capital but not production. There is a real estate driven agrarian involution that is taking place resulting in the transfer of agriculture land for non-agriculture purposes.

Several commercial farmers due to the grabbing of their land by the capital have been reduced to subsistence level farmers. These peri-urban residents have been pushed into such livelihood activities as working in brick kilns or nearby shops. In several cases the effect of receiving cash in lieu of land has led to increase in idleness and alcoholism as the basic nature of their daily life has been changed with the dispossession of land. The impact of dispossession on the agrarian structure is deep and transforms the lives of farmers in more than one ways. The SEZ developer is a state appointed capitalist landlord which has made state a key player in the entire process of dispossession.

With respect to capital investment, agriculture sector remains neglected. More and more producers end up becoming labourers in the informal sector. In the entire process of land transfer from farmers to industrialists, the compensation received is spent in non-productive activities like paying off debts, building pukka houses, marriage or buying similar tracts of land in some other place. In this process, they not only end up buying land of a bad quality, but also have to incur transportation cost to work on that new piece of land. Such an arrangement is not in the interest of individual farmers or the overall agrarian economy. On rare occasions, they open small shops in the village but that is not an indicator of emerging entrepreneurship. These shops are merely avenues for subsistence and are not the beginning of enterprise. At other times, they have no other option but become part of the large informal sector.

According to Mehrotra *et al* (2014), the major driver of employment growth has been the unorganized sector. About 70% of the total non-agriculture force is employed in Medium Scale

Enterprises (MSE), which employ less than 10 workers. This mainly falls within the large informal sector which has left the workers vulnerable to the risk of retrenchment at the event of slightest economic shock. It is therefore important that more jobs in the formal sector are created. Employment in manufacturing sector declined in the period beyond 2004-05. This has been mainly due to the falling demand of manufacturing exports, rising import intensity of manufacturing output and rising wages (The Economist, 2014). These factors indicate that the manufacturing sector is becoming increasingly capital intensive. At the lower end of wage and skill distribution, due to the rise in the price of labour in the open market in rural areas, migration from rural to urban areas has decreased. This has created a need to mechanise the manufacturing sector. Further, on the upper end of the spectrum, a shortage of skill has emerged in both manufacturing and service sector. To achieve a growth which is accompanied by increase in real income, it is important that productivity of labour is increased on a large scale. Currently, there is an inverse relation seen between employment generation and gross value added. The unorganized manufacturing sector absorbing 65% of the employment, only contributes 35% to the total output, which results in very low labour productivity. With a large share of population working at such low productivity, the economic growth would not be sustainable.

Under the impact of global forces, India has been witnessing a shift in the pattern of demand of skills from the industry. In the job market, the demand grew fastest for the skilled workers, and slowly for the less skilled workers. Since the 2000s, employment among the least skilled workers (employed in cleaning of buildings or construction jobs) soared whereas jobs held by middle and high skilled workers declined. There is, therefore, a hole in the middle. Highly skilled work in the current times requires complex cognitive or interpersonal tasks which are even beyond the abilities of a reasonably qualified person. The innovation brought about by increase in technology has brought emerging economies to a “premature deindustrialization” stage as Dani Rodrick (2013) avers. Similar are the views of Arvind Subramanian, the Chief Economic Advisor to the Indian government, who claims that emerging economies today are less reliant on manufacturing in terms of output or employment than they have been in the past. China was probably the last country to be able to ride industrialization to middle income status. The emerging economies have lost the industry at low income levels mainly because of the change in the role of technology in development since the 1980s. Cheap and powerful ICT has led to the unbundling of the manufacturing sector and supply chain has scattered all around the world. Countries can grab pieces of this supply chain and get rewarded with lots of manufacturing jobs but these are highly vulnerable to shocks in other countries’ economy.

Another major change brought about by technology has been dematerialization of the economic activity. Goods shipments even though continue to occupy 80% of the global trade in terms of value added the importance of goods trade today stands at 57% (The Economist, 2014). This is because of the increasing demand of services in production of traded goods. It is referred to as “knowledge-intensive” trade which requires high level of skill if substantial value addition has to be made. The need for labour has been eliminated as the cost of automation has decreased.

These global forces would have definite impact on the structural transformation and seep down to the social and cultural realities of the villages as well. Technology has already penetrated to a large extent in rural India and the new policies to strengthen education and health outcome have brought about significant change in the aspirations of rural India. The recurrent farmers’ suicides and the persistence of agrarian distress call for the robust social safety net in the agrarian sector. Be that as it may, it is undeniable that more and more people are moving away from agriculture. In case of rural India, there is an absolute decline in the total employment in agriculture and allied activities. This decline has to be compensated with creation of quality jobs in the non-agriculture sector. This cannot be done without creating better environment to function for the small and medium scale industries and micro enterprises which employ majority of the labour force. Also the self-employed and enterprising people in the informal economy should be connected through Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to create better marketing and selling platforms for them. The market economy must be made amenable through the ICT for the informal sector to generate better income. Access to health care and Education could be enhanced through ICT to reap larger benefits in future. The government needs to craft policy in a manner that benefits of technological progress reach the maximum number of people. The market economy and ICT must be designed in a manner that inequality decreases and big businesses do not remain the only ones who benefit from globalization and innovation.

It is time our conceptualization of rural India moved beyond the nationalist glorification of the village. New ways of perceiving village is required especially in the changing global and national contexts. The upsurge in technology and the increasing influence of the environment activism would influence the way in which the new conceptualization of village is shaped. Village, for long, has been seen as a place which represents a serene paradise with a perfect community life which is opposite of the urban industrial problems prevalent in cities. Village is central to several environmental and alternative technology movements in India, and it impacts the various forms of politics and voluntarism. It has been seen as a place with

traditional wisdom and visions of sustainable life. It is likely that the newer perception of village would be shaped under the influence of the globalizing discourses of environment. Over a period of time, the caste structure and other factors which kept the village society hierarchical and were the major point of criticism for village have weakened. The influence of education and greater awareness about newer and sustainable ways of life would create a village based on the traditional wisdoms of living but with possibly a diluted caste structure. There is scepticism attached to this weakened social structure as expressed by Bardhan (2003). In his critique of the anarcho-communitarian's suggestion of decentralization in India, he brings out the hollowness and formlessness of the new village society which has led to new political boundaries and caste identities. According to him, the recent unrest in the hinterlands against the arrogance of the contemporary development model has less to do with the modernist vision but related to the institutional vacuum created by the weakening of the traditional village social structure. The traditional patronage system was vital to the keeping the village integrated, and with the elimination of these systems the citizens have come in direct contact with the state. The state however throughout the post-independence period has not been able to achieve its goal of redistribution and inclusive growth. The future of village as an alternate way of life assuring sustainability in the absence of the social structure which held it together remains ambiguous. The need therefore is to revive studies related to rural India in a manner that the social and cultural requirements in the context of the new global economic forces are understood.

Conclusion

In this module, we have told you as to how the changing aspirations of the village people, the increased movement of people from rural areas to urban centres, and the impact of education and the trend of transfer of land from agriculture to industries have changed the context in which the rural/agrarian has to be understood. No doubt, the agrarian system is subject to enormous changes. These changes are both exogenous and endogenous. As a consequence, the issues of the day are different from what they used to be earlier. However, the agrarian sector offers a fertile ground for the studies of different types. The multinational agribusiness corporations and their impact on the food security and sovereignty is an illustrative case in point. The clamour for the undoing of land-ceiling legislations is another area of potential research. The scant attention that the land question receives in our times is the reason enough for some of us to keep delving deep into the burning agrarian issues and their larger historical, economic and socioeconomic context.