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Malcolm Adiseshiah Memorial Lecture

**THE DISPLACED THRESHING YARD:
INVOLUTIONS OF THE RURAL**

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ABSTRACT

In understanding contemporary rural India, it is important to go beyond rendering the rural as synonymous with villages and agriculture or focussing on the 'agrarian question'. Given the multiple contradictions that the varied ruralities of India are exhibiting, it may be relevant to locate the rural as being constituted by the triangulated structures of reproduced caste, an economics of neglect, and a politics of rescue. The result of such triangulation is evident in the range of involutions that are manifesting across rural India. These include not only a sharpened differentiation of classes and households, but also forms of separation-integration of key rural institutions and structures, and the erosion of rural citizens. All these have implications for liveability and the nature of democracy in rural areas.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: A.R.Vasavi is a Social Anthropologist with interests in agrarian studies, sociology of India, and educational studies. Her publications include *Shadow Space: Suicides and the Predicament of Rural India* (Three Essays Collective, 2012) and *The Inner Mirror: Kannada Writings on Society and Culture* (The Book Review Publications, 2008). She was earlier a faculty member at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru and a Senior Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. She is currently a member of the PUNARCHITH ('re-think') collective that works on alternative education for rural youth.

THE DISPLACED THRESHING YARD: INVOLUTIONS OF THE RURAL

A.R. Vasavi

As an undergraduate student in Stella Maris (1977-80), I distinctly remember attending a graduation ceremony in college where Dr. Malcolm Adiseshiah was the Chief Guest and had delivered the valedictory lecture. Although my recollection of his full lecture is hazy, his exhortation to those stepping out of the portals of the college to be conscious of their citizenship roles and responsibilities has stayed with me. That nearly four decades later, I would receive this recognition made in his honour is indeed a privilege and I thank the Trustees of the Malcolm Adiseshiah Trust for conferring this honour on me, and I thank Stella Maris College, my Alma Mater, for hosting this lecture on its premises. And in tribute to Dr. Adiseshiah's call to citizenship responsibilities and his scholarship that represented engaged social science research and institution-building, I will focus on the involutions in rural India in which the citizenship rights of its residents are now in a state of freefall. At a time of hyper globalisation and intense delocalisation of economies, the restructuring of rural economies and societies has rendered the rural into an involuted space characterised by contradictory and complex conditions¹.

THE DISPLACED THRESHING YARD

These contradictory and complex features of the rural are perhaps best encapsulated in the displaced threshing yard which many of us have experienced while travelling on rural roads that have turned into threshing yards—where piles of harvested grains are laid out on tarmac roads, and village residents exhort vehicle drivers to go over them. The threshing yard—once a key agricultural site that was made on the field, in which rituals of worshipping the grain heap, threshing it, and then distributing the grains were conducted—is now a displaced entity. Small and marginal agriculturists, with handkerchief size plots and little or no new technologies or capital, no longer consider it worth their time and effort to

make the threshing yard, or to subject their grains and the land to ritual propitiation. Instead, grains, typically the staples of rice, wheat, a variety of pulses and millets, find their way to the roadside where they are crushed under the wheels of passing traffic. The sight of this displaced threshing yard is symbolic of the changes that India's agriculture and rural worlds are experiencing and indicates the persistence/resilience of small and marginal agriculturists—their dislocation from the social networks of agriculture, and their desperate strategising in the face of changing production conditions. In sum, it encapsulates the very foundation of changes in rural India: the retention of old, foundational structural characteristics while incorporating a range of new forces, structures, processes, agents, and practices.

While the ideas of continuity and change in rural and village domains and in the general socio-cultural fabric of India have been well accepted, there is need to pay attention to the multiple contradictions that such complex changes have generated. The key contradictions in the rural include the following:

- Although real wages have increased, poverty levels have declined, and improvements in living conditions (in terms of housing and civic facilities) are evident in most regions, there are extant forms of malnutrition, displacement and pauperisation.

*There is a deepening of the structures of democracy through the expansion of the panchayat system and the regularity of elections. But the question of political representativity/representation and the deficits of democracy persist and are growing.

*The decline of women's participation in agricultural labour is matched by an increase in the 'feminisation of agriculture' in some pockets of the nation.

*As the regime of rights (to food, education, housing) is formally promulgated, the citizenship rights of rural residents are being challenged.

These emerging contradictory and/or mixed trends encapsulate the complexity of changes in rural India and require us to have a comprehensive and holistic approach to understanding the rural. In addition, it is important to go beyond the deficit definition of the rural in official/government terms as that which is not urban and to dislodge the rendering of the rural as synonymous with agriculture. As scholars² have indicated, the focus on the 'agrarian question' overlooked the historical specificities of agrarian contexts, and overemphasised the role of capital. This view has been reinforced by the Lewisian paradigm of the inevitable transition from agriculture to industrialisation based on Eurocentric models. Overcoming these limitations, any understanding of India's rural worlds needs to factor in not only the state of agriculture but also the other questions related to issues of caste-class dynamics, sustainability, gender, labour, rights, citizenship, governmentality etc.,. Although there is a volume of literature, including my own work, that has sought to understand and represent rural India through the prism of the 'agrarian crisis' or suicides³ this is inadequate to understand the complexity and contradictions that mark the rural as a space and an entity. Instead, paying attention to the varied structuring factors, processes and trajectories of rural India must also compel us to reckon with the rural as "a constantly unfolding, mutating, unruly process and an infinitely intricate order of evanescent, often enigmatic relations" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: 19 cited by Mertz 2002: 358).

Drawing on a relational and processual perspective, I will consider the rural as consisting of a multiplicity of worlds in which specific physiogeographic characteristics have been marked by historical social formations which are now being integrated into larger political-economic structures and forces to impact the processes of rural production, reproduction, accumulation, appropriation, expropriation, identity formation, and belonging. Issues of livelihood, relations and mobility of labour, political and other movements, inter caste-class relations, decentralised governance, promulgation of a regime of rights, issues of environment/ecology, gender relations, patterns of development and maldevelopment all have significance. Within this framework of analyses,

it is pertinent to recognise the rural as consisting of and representing not only the predominant agricultural worlds of caste-based villages, but also that of tribals/advivasis, forest-dwellers, fishing communities, plantations, and a range of greenfield production sites that are enclosed rural spaces. As the body of revisit studies⁴ has highlighted for us, the rural is no longer predominantly agricultural, and there is now the growth of households with non-farm incomes (Sharma 2015), new rural-urban linkages, and a mosaic of agricultural practices ranging from subsistence cultivation to those integrated into the circuits of international capital and labour. Factoring in such trends requires us to see the rural not merely as a site of key developmental programmes or nation-building exercises but as also pertaining to the issues of 'rights, respect, recognition, and representation' (Fraser 1997) of its residents.

Locating the rural as a space that has been and continues to be constituted by triangulated forces is to highlight the impact of these structuring forces on the household/family, the village, and the rural as a region, and to identify the reasons for the complexities and contradictions and hence the involutions⁵ in the rural. As a force field of triangulated structures, it is a combination of societal factors, state, capital, and market, interacting and/or each working independently that mark the rural.

RETENTION AND REPRODUCTION OF CASTE AS THE KEY ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Although largely delinked from hereditary caste-prescribed occupations, the caste system continues to be the key structure that marks not only social relations but also determines life opportunities and therefore access to resources, assets, political power and social status. Largely coterminous with class, the caste system has reached what Wimstatt (1986), in the context of analysing biological processes, calls 'generative entrenchment' and it constitutes the grid on which the foundational processes of inequality—hierarchy, exclusion, differentiation, and discrimination (Therborn 2013)— are reproduced over generations. The resulting entrenched caste structuring, processes, and orientation is linked to a naturalisation of inequality, which Jan Breman (2016) identifies

as central to Indian society and accounts for the widespread acceptance of exploitation as inevitable.

A body of literature now substantiates the fact that caste continues to play a key role in economic opportunities and outcomes. Barbara Harriss-White's studies⁶ that focus on rural economies and their interlinks to urban worlds indicate the centrality of caste in defining economic opportunities and activities. Similarly Deshpande (2011) provides further evidence of the continued hold of caste on wider economic terrains, and Munshi's (2016) observations on caste networks that enable occupational and spatial mobility indicate the absence of such caste-based social capital for a larger proportion of low-ranked castes and tribes/advasis.

That caste, as a social and cultural system that regulates both social relations and economic transactions, continues to have currency and is the grid on which everyday rural life is constituted is visible in the extent to which residential layouts in villages continue to be formed on caste-based segregation. This is valid for even new layouts built with support from government agencies but in which caste-based allocations are common. Caste hostility and violence continue to be the key form of social control exercised by dominant castes against possible shifts or alterations in caste-prescribed relationships and status. The hold of caste affiliations and alliances is now expressed in the hostility and violence that inter-caste/jati marriages invoke in villages. The alarming growth in 'honour killings' of young couples⁷ indicates the upholding of *jati* endogamy, the bedrock of caste's mode of reproduction. The spread of *dalit* consciousness and the new wave of Ambedkarism among low-ranked caste groups have only strengthened the hostility and antipathy of upper caste persons to the new social and economic mobility of low-ranked persons and to the emerging ruptures in their hierarchical relationships. The reinvasion of caste panchayats, such as the *khap panchayats* of Haryana and Punjab, the *khatta panchayats* of Tamil Nadu and *jati panchayats* of Karnataka are reactions to the threats that new, decentralised democratic structures and processes pose to the power of dominant caste groups and indicate the hold of caste-based institutions.

ECONOMICS OF NEGLECT

Over the past seven decades, the logic and rationale of economic planning and programmes for rural India have altered their orientation from state-led growth to a more market- and capital-based one. Yet, underlying all these policies in both the immediate independence period and since the neo-liberalisation period, there has been the oversight of the structural deficits of rural India, its caste-based social and agrarian structure that is reflected in the allocation of resources, opportunities, and life chances. In addition, there is an oversight of the multifunctionality of agriculture (Losch 2004; IAASTD 2009), its linkage to a larger world of work, resources, institutions, life-worlds, knowledge and socio-political networks. The continued emphasis on agricultural productivity as the key goal and indicator of economic growth and rural development has failed to take note of the requirements/needs of the majority, which include the small and marginal agriculturists (including landless but cultivating groups), a range of non-agricultural groups, Adivasis/tribals, forest-dwelling and fishing communities, plantation workers, itinerant and skilled specialists, and a plethora of communities that produced a range of non-industrial and 'hand-made' goods or once provided vital rural services.

Instead, a hegemonic model of agricultural productivity has been promoted that has largely overlooked ways to address historically constituted and socially reproduced forms of disadvantage. Consequently, agriculture is defined and assessed by primarily production parameters and directed by technological and market interventions in which the state plays a role only at the time of crisis. This reductionism fails to recognise the embeddedness of India's agriculture in iniquitous social structures of resource distribution and use, which produce uneven allocations based on caste and gender, and the larger rural social and cultural context in which issues of capital, labour, knowledge, and risks are managed.

The vast body of literature on the Green Revolution highlights the extent to which these policies and programmes have exacerbated the already skewed distribution of resources and further eroded the capabilities of most agriculturists to rise over the poverty line. That there is now a 'Long

Green Revolution' (Patel 2016)—a continuity between the early Green Revolution and the second Green Revolution, and or the 'evergreen revolution'—which continues to be endorsed and called for despite the glaring problems of production and the subsequent production of problems, indicates the entrenched economic interests that promote such a model. The hegemony of this 'productivity-economic growth-high technology' spectrum that is the focus of all recent major agricultural and rural policies has several implications for the viability of India's agriculture, the sustainability of its ecological base, the social bases of rural life, and the sovereignty of the nation.

Official data sources indicate that the volume of small and marginal cultivators has grown, and 86.58 per cent of agricultural households have less than 2 hectares of land, with the land holding size diminishing over the years to the current average holding size of only 1.4 hectares⁸. This combined with the fact that small and marginal cultivators do not have access to capital, technology and to the range of new know-how and networks to markets means that their production is marked by a web of risks. As a result, small and marginal cultivators are now trapped into a 'debt-low price-loss' circuit, making it the single most important source of agrarian distress and suicides. A large proportion of rural citizens have borne the brunt of such priorities, and their overall livelihood sustainability has been subjected to declining levels of income, exposure to multiple forms of risks, and worsening of their vulnerabilities to poverty and distress. As analyses have shown, a combination of all these factors accounts for the fact that the average monthly income of rural households is only Rs. 6426, while the basic income recommended by the 7th Pay Commission is Rs. 18000 (Basole 2017). Little wonder then, that indebtedness marks a significant proportion of rural households.

Despite the onset of such trends and conditions, policies and programmes related to the rural and the agricultural continue to be piecemeal and lackadaisical. These policy gaps and negligence account for the failure to develop and provide comprehensive policies that can interlink the ecological, economic and social needs of rural citizens. These in turn are reasons for the reproduction of significant problems

such as the iniquitous agrarian structures, extant forms of maldevelopment (explicit in widespread malnutrition and low indices of social development), serious environmental degradation, and even the large number of suicides by agriculturists.

Over the years, national agricultural policy documents have also begun to reflect guidelines from international aid and development agencies. Many of these set the tone for the reproduction of 'agroscepticism' (see, Akram-Lodhi 2009: 613) in which the rural and agricultural are seen and represented as lacking any worth, and must, therefore, transit towards an urban, industrial or service economy. Such attitudes account for repeated statements by leading policymakers, think tank members⁹, and administrators that agriculture as the key source of employment and income cannot cater to the overpopulated rural regions, and that an overhaul in the very working of the land is non-negotiable. While each of these has legitimised the increasing externalisation of agriculture, it has also become the bases for calling for the inevitable movement of rural population to the urban areas and for industrialising agricultural production.

Added to such perspectives are the problems in the investment and administration processes of the rural. As Vaidyanathan has shown, contrary to popular perceptions, investments into agriculture have not declined over the past two decades, and "the total volume of investment is in fact large and growing" (2017:3) but the problems are primarily in the type of investments, and are results of the "deficiencies in their functioning and achievements" (page 10). State investments in infrastructure, especially irrigation, communication and credit have largely benefitted new entrants such as agri-business, marketing agencies, and large agriculturists. Subsidies that support large and commercial agriculture have received priority over meeting the needs of small and marginal cultivators including their access to credit and remunerative prices (Basole 2017). The failure to regulate the seed, fertiliser, and pesticide industries, which have only exacerbated the problems of poor quality of inputs, the subsequent cost burden and environmental degradation, are added burdens on agriculturists.

Despite evidence of the negative fallout of the Green Revolution, now fully expressed in the deep problems that key pockets of the Green Revolution are exhibiting and experiencing, it continues to be extended to the arid and semi-arid regions. Spectres of population growth, starvation, and the country's dependency on external food aid are invoked constantly to promote and support new external inputs of high-technology and science, such as genetically modified seeds. All of these are at the cost of losing the specificities of India's diverse agricultural complexes, inducing further ecological degradation and economic dependency, and integrating rural societies into a national and international grid where external finance, energy, and technology play dominant roles (Wise et al 2012, Fairburn 2014). Large swathes of rural India are affected drastically by global warming and climate change, yet a lack of preparedness and an overall failure to promote policies that could address the issue or enable people to understand and handle it are also indicative of the economics of neglect.

The integration into and submission to national and international capitalist demands include the state facilitating access and extraction of natural resources, and vast tracts of the nation have now become subject to land and resource grabs leading to the formation of 'new enclosures'. That near civil war conditions exist in the central belts of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand is testimony to how such resource extraction has become anathema to the norms and processes of democracy and human rights (Sundar 2016, Kumbamu 2017).

Neglect of Health and Educational Services:

The economics of neglect is also evident in the domains of health and education—two sectors which are central to marking the quality of life and liveability of people. Although education is supposed to be a leveller, a highly differentiated schooling system, consisting of at least nine different types of schooling systems¹⁰, the most varied and class differentiated in the world, has buttressed the inequalities and injustice generated by caste and class systems. The rural schooling system, especially those for Adivasis, forest-dwelling communities, and itinerant groups such as nomads and denotified tribes, is particularly dismal and

largely consists of basic institutions which act more as feeding centres rather than learning centres. And as reports¹¹ have consistently indicated, most rural schooling is marked by dysfunctionality and poor learning standards. Far from enabling equality of educational opportunities and equality of quality education, educational institutions for the masses in general and for rural masses in particular are increasingly sites of humiliation, and fail to cater to the abilities of youth. Incidences of suicides among educated, unemployed rural youth are significant and indicate the failure of the education system to either enable youth to gain formal employment opportunities or be oriented to a life in the rural areas.

Much like the poor and inadequate education system, the rural public health system and its institutions have also failed to be priorities in economic planning and administration. Although research indicates that health expenditure constitutes the single most common reason for households/families to fall back into poverty (Krishna 2011) and ill-health is one of the key factors for poor work participation, most rural areas and the surrounding towns are under-served by health facilities and personnel. Missions such as the National Rural Health Mission have largely failed to cater to the growing needs and requirements of the population. Health and education expenditure at the household level continues to be one of the key articles of expenditure that prevent families from making improvements to their land, housing and enhancing their standards of living.

Few cases better represent the economics of neglect than that of the imposition of demonetisation, a strategy made acceptable by a political narrative that sought forbearance for long-term national good. A measure meant to integrate the large mass of people, most of whom are outside the formal economy (Harriss-White 2003), into a new techno-financial regime, the demonetisation act indicated the nexus between the state and corporate interests and the distance of the state from the working, especially rural, classes. The onerous burdens that demonetisation triggered among the rural population included loss of wages, income and savings, and many fell prey to the cunning system of commissions that came into force. A mass of people, already in various

states of precarity, faced debilitation (Reddy 2017, Vijayabaskar 2017) and further erosions of their limited resource base. Horrifying and gut-wrenching stories¹², results of the poorly designed and administered system of demonetisation, will become historical markers of the burdens that were imposed on a rural populace.

POLITICS OF RESCUE

Complementary to the 'economics of neglect' is the politics of rescue, which is the political system's way of handling the rural in a competitive electoral democracy. Despite the continued and popular rhetoric of the '*kisan*' as the mascot of the nation and the periodic invocation of catering to rural interests, political agendas have not effectively addressed the structural deficits and complexities of the rural. Over the years, a problem of representation has risen, in which the interests of rural citizens have not been adequately represented in the parliament and state assemblies. For one, the running and consolidation of political and electoral processes on predominantly caste alliances and affiliations has led to the fragmentation of representatives, and they fail to come together on issues related to the rural and agricultural domains. Secondly, those elected also tend to represent the interests of larger and predominantly dominant castes, and issues of equitable resource distribution, equality of access to public institutions, etc have not been considered priorities. In lieu of formulating and implementing policies that can effectively address the economic neglect of the rural, the political apparatus has deployed schemes and programmes that seek to address periodic crises but which in reality do not address structural deficits. Instead, the plethora of programmes deployed only as part of electoral promises or to stem mass dissent has only created or added to the structural problems of rural India. As Sanyal (2008) articulated, a regime of 'welfare governmentality' has been deployed to camouflage or compensate for policies that enable 'accumulation by dispossession'. Programmes such as the moratorium on agricultural loans and the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREG) were promulgated at a time of increased criticism against the agrarian crisis (or suicides by agriculturists) and rampant corruption, and the government was preparing

for parliamentary elections. MNREG has been successful in challenging dominance by landowners and has enabled agricultural workers to become more assertive and to question subordination and exploitation. But, in its impact it has re-ordered rural class interests but not necessarily class relations (Jakimow 2014), nor has it enabled the rural disadvantaged to forge viable economic alternatives outside the purview of the power and interests of the landed class. In first promoting economic policies that ruin plural and viable livelihoods, erode the ecological bases of sustainability and overlook the structural deficits of a hierarchical social structure, and then deploying measures to synthetically alleviate the distress that results from these measures, the state has largely produced programmes that camouflage the foundational problems of rural India.

A plethora of development and welfare missions have created a large development bureaucracy which, in turn, has become self-serving. Dev (2004) and Sarma (2004) highlight how most government programmes that seek to provide the poor with either foodgrains, housing or employment are also subject to rent-seeking behaviour, in the form of commissions, bribes and misallocation, which means that the benefits barely reach the most deserving. The working of these programmes through these agents and entrepreneurs renders the disadvantaged further into the hands of these development middlemen, and has created new forms of patron-client relations and dependency. In such a context, the deployment of numerous and fragmented welfare programmes—ranging from providing housing, toilets, supplementary food for children, to those targeted as ‘relief packages’ for indebted agriculturists—has only compounded the gains made by middlemen and development entrepreneurs, leading to their rise as members of the ‘new rural middle class’. The inability of most rural settlements and citizens to demand accountability from local leaders and the bureaucracy (Ruud 2000) compounds the systemic inequities and results in the continued reproduction of these problems. In a context where only a small group or number of leading families, development agents or political entrepreneurs have access to the state and its apparatus of programmes and benefits,

the very absence of participation and the voice and representation of the majority renders such a politics of rescue ineffective.

Several regional/state agricultural and rural development policies are also primarily regional populist measures. For example, provisioning of free electricity to agricultural sites (primarily for pump sets) has gained popularity even at a time when neo-liberal policies stipulate withdrawal of such subsidies. Such populist policies defy both economic rationale (Balakrishnan et al., 2008) and environmental safeguards, and those who do gain are large farmers, new entrepreneurial agriculturists and agribusiness industries. Schemes such as the *Rytu Bandhu*, announced recently for Telangana and which encompasses both monetary transfer and administrative measures, indicate the need to appease agriculturists for political gain.

The expansion of democratic structures, primarily through the Panchayat Raj Act, has not had an even record. While its potential has been realised and the Act has made significant contributions to decentralising democracy and enabling people's participation and development in some states, in most cases the panchayat system has become an extension of the bureaucracy. The establishment of parallel structures and agencies that govern the functioning of the panchayat means that they bypass the decisions of elected representatives, and the democratic deficits continue. What Nancy Fraser (1997) identifies as 'the parity of participation' is largely missing in most states and regions and the promise of decentralised governance is largely a mirage.

The politics of rescue includes the promulgation, under pressure from movements and/or civil society groups, of Acts and policies that seek to provide relief, sustenance or address major grievances of rural citizens. Yet, in most cases, the failure to implement these either in spirit and/or through the governance mechanism renders them empty Acts and legislative processes that have no impact. One such case is the Forest Rights Act that has largely not been implemented, and much of the process remains truncated either through disputes and or litigation.

The impact of these triangulated structures and processes on the rural is evident in the range of complex and contradictory characteristics and conditions of the rural at the macro/regional level, at the village/hamlet level as a site of social and political reproduction, and at the household level, in which people devise strategies to negotiate their immediate and larger worlds. Three processes, of separation-integration, differentiation, and erosion, all interlinked, and which manifest in various ways, are the results of the impact of the triangulated structuring of the rural. In various combinations and in different contexts, they constitute involutions of the rural.

SEPARATION-INTEGRATION, DIFFERENTIATION, EROSION

Forms of separation from and within the rural contexts and then integration into capital and market networks, the state regime, or into the urban/industrial or non-farm economy have been triggered in the rural¹³. These include the separation of agriculture from ecology; of individual cultivators from locally-similar/shared cultivation patterns; of production from provisioning; and production from social reproduction.

Using productivity as the key trope for agricultural, rural and economic development of the nation has meant the promotion of dominant (external input and capital-based) forms of agriculture, which defy the established agro-ecological patterns of India's agriculture. The cultivation of commercial crops such as wheat, rice, cotton, groundnuts, and more recently soyabean, turmeric, ginger and vegetables and fruits, has been promoted (using a range of technical and external inputs), leading to the separation of ecology from agriculture¹⁴. Over the past decades, such a separation of agriculture from ecology and its impact (both economically and ecologically) has been sharpened with the reliance on the tube-well as a key source of production.

Complementing the 1960s promotion of Green Revolution and now the increasingly commercial and financialised agriculture, the tube-well has become an icon in India's rural landscape¹⁵. It represents the promotion of a capital-technological apparatus and can also be seen as "one of the most clandestine modes of extracting groundwater" (Acciavatti 2017:

206), creating not only new bio-political realms but also engendering significant shifts in the meaning(s) of agriculture, enhancing the skewed agrarian structure, and inducing drastic ecological changes. The spread of groundwater irrigation, used primarily by larger owner-cultivators, has facilitated what Navroz Dubash (2002) describes as 'groundwater-driven accumulation' and 'tube-well capitalism'. This hierarchical access to groundwater has led to the emergence of 'water lords' who not only gain additional power and position in their areas but who also act as catalysts in introducing new crops and new agricultural practices into their areas. In addition, many of the water lords access more land via sales, leases and other arrangements. Far from promoting agricultural productivity and economic growth, rendering agriculture into extractive economies via the tube-well has also initiated 'Distress-Inducing Growth', which Vamsi Vakulabharanam (2005) describes as the need for constant investments to sustain growth levels, leading both to indebtedness of cultivators and/or to making agriculture an economically negative proposition. Unregulated use (Kulkarni et al 2015) has resulted in the depletion of ground water, including that of deep and ancient aquifers. Much of this has led to what is now known as the 'groundwater drought' (Goldin 2016), a condition that is fostering a 'tragedy of the groundwater commons'¹⁶ in both rural and urban areas, with serious implications for the future of water security and quality.

Linked to the promotion of commercial agriculture is the separation of individual agriculturists from local shared/similar agricultural practices, which is locking them into the larger circuits of capital, input dependency and risks of market instability. Several cases of suicide by agriculturists, predominantly small and marginal cultivators, are the result of their 'adverse integration' into the commercial and new technology and input-based agriculture which then enmeshes them into a 'web of risks' (of capital, technology, know-how, market, and climate) and leaves them without the social and psychological scaffold that shared/similar agricultural practices used to provide. The continuation of the tragedy of suicide by agriculturists indicates both the failures of the dominant agricultural model and the schisms and tensions that economic isolation and individualisation of agriculturists creates in an agrarian society.

Inasmuch as there has been the spread of provisioning of food grains (at anganwadis, PDS, monthly allocations for BPL families, seasonal food provisioning for STs, etc) via programmes that seek to address issues of food security and poverty, there is an increasing separation of local food cultures from local production practices and content, which has serious implications for shifts in food cultures, staple grain cultivation, and nutritional levels. Even as they experience such separations from local food regimes, these food-security dependent/food insecure households are integrated into state structures and mechanisms for state-based provisioning.

A final form of separation relates to the separation of economic production from social and familial reproduction. As rural out-migration becomes a key channel through which life opportunities are defined and strategised, there are two streams of migration that indicate a separation of production from reproduction. A smaller proportion but those who generate a surplus (considered the elite or the middle classes) seek to have the urban as their base of social reproduction but retain the rural as their site of production. A larger proportion of rural residents, primarily small and marginal cultivators, the landless, and those in difficult economic circumstances, resort to urban migration but retain the rural as their base of reproduction while the urban/peri-urban becomes their source of production. Even as the middle class and elite locate their families in towns and cities (as life-style choices, for education and health purposes), the working poor, absorbed into the informal and formal economies of the urban and peri-urban, lead a life of circular and seasonal migration, working in the urban areas and returning to their rural homes where their families reside. These forms of separation-integration have significance for the sense of belonging or distanciation that families and individuals have for/from their village and the rural and for their political engagement or disengagement.

DIFFERENTIATION

A significant impact of these triangulated structures on the rural is the growing differentiation that is evident at multiple levels. There is now a differentiation of villages¹⁷ that is represented by two extremely varied

types of villages: the remote adivasi villages which continue to be largely outside the ambit of capitalist production, and the diaspora villages populated predominantly by a returning diaspora that has been integrated into national and global capital, labour and consumption circuits. At the level of agriculture there are sharp variations best represented by the extremes of pockets of subsistence agriculture and the increasingly commercialised agricultural belts whose agricultural processes are marked by high technology and capitalised and commercialised agriculture. More specifically and of sociological significance is the differentiation between households and classes and castes, signalling variations in economic and social mobility. Such household differentiation is markedly different from the standard three-layered structure of landless labour/coolie, maalik or middle peasant, and zamindar or landlord that was identified as typical for most of rural India. Instead, what has become the pattern is a wide spectrum of households and classes which include households such as landless labourers, agriculturists who combine own cultivation with sale of their labour, small cultivators, large landowners with zamindari backgrounds, or large landowners who cultivate with hired labour; small land owners who combine commercial work (shops, hotels, service work), government employees, and private sector employees, including a large body of youth who are now employed in varied service sector jobs. This differentiation of households indicates the growing presence of both state and capital in the lives of rural residents and their integration into the larger circuits of labour, capital, and markets. The implication and understanding of this differentiation of households is reflected in the trends and conditions of three sharply differentiated classes: a small class of rural elite; a growing and highly differentiated body of new rural middle classes; and a marginalised majority representing mostly the low-ranked caste and tribal groups.

The rural elite, consisting primarily of the landed classes, and those who have gained from the commercialisation of agriculture and governmental policies, and representing what Balagopal (2011) called the 'provincial propertied class', with characteristics of also being the dominant castes, have largely consolidated their position. With surplus invested in trade,

business, construction, and real estate, and with additional incomes from urban and governmental jobs, many have also emerged as regional satraps with significant positions in local, regional, and national political processes and power¹⁸. Their search for distinction in society is expressed primarily through consumption patterns and practices that reinforce caste-class boundaries and differences.

The New Rural Middle Classes

A spectrum of new rural middle classes has emerged consisting of those who have benefitted from commercial agriculture, urban and government jobs, and an engagement with a new rural service economy or the larger external economies. Once engaged primarily in agriculture (as owner cultivators or combining owner cultivation with labour, or even once landless groups), the new rural middle classes have emerged and grown since the onset of neo-liberal policies and are currently engaged primarily in construction activities, which absorb a large proportion of these classes (Krishnan and Hatekar 2017), small trade and business, and in varied activities of the new rural service economy. Accounting for about 19.20 percent of the total rural population¹⁹ (Ahalya and Paul 2017), the new rural middle classes are themselves a heterogeneous class and are marked by their caste variations. Although most of the new rural middle classes represent the middle castes, a smaller proportion is from the scheduled castes and tribes.

The middle classes are marked not only by their caste and class markers but are also increasingly being constituted by religious identities and boundaries, made more significant in contexts of intense economic competition, political contestations, and social animosity. Inter-caste and inter-religion hostilities have spread to make caste/ethnicity/religion the key source of identity. Shifts in caste boundaries, contestations over resources, defiance of caste boundaries and alliances constitute the new forms of tension and conflict that have spread in rural areas. Subscription to larger networks of support drawn from caste and religious organisations has facilitated a culture of impunity, especially among the dominant groups, and has resulted in incidents and events such as those that have most recently emerged in Uno, Kathua, and Unnao²⁰.

The failure of the rural economy to keep pace with the ambitions and aspirations of the elite and middle caste-classes also accounts for the growth of a culture of resentment. The demand for reservations by dominant castes (for example, the Marathas in Maharashtra, Jats in Haryana, Meenas in Rajasthan, Patidars in Gujarat) and the demand for a separate religion status as among the Lingayats in Karnataka (now qualified in the post-election scenario into a demand for recognition of OBC status for all Lingayats) highlight the new tensions created by a decelerating rural economy and the larger non-rural ambitions of these groups.

Marginalised Majority

In contrast to the new rural middle classes and the elite, a large majority of the rural population is now located in what Sanyal (2008) identified as the 'need economy', in which households are unable to create surplus for their own sustenance or to generate new capital and, therefore, require external support for their basic survival. Representing a heterogeneous group of people which includes small and marginal cultivators, the landless, the fishing community, Adivasis, forest dwellers, plantation workers, and itinerant workers, and former service caste groups who have been pauperised or rendered destitute, the marginalised majority are marked by conditions of precarity which include indebtedness, uncertainty, high risk, low security, and overall dismal conditions of living. The cumulative effect of these forces and conditions largely accounts for the fact that despite large-scale deployment of new funds in the mode of rescuing the rural and retaining rural votes, positive and poverty alleviating impacts on the everyday lives of the rural agricultural poor have had a mixed record across the nation. A majority of cultivators continue to be locked into conditions of marginality, with economically unviable holdings and lack of political clout, and are held in positions of subordination to the regimes of biotechnologies, capital and markets.

Drawn primarily from middle- and low-ranked caste groups, most of the marginalised majority are small and marginal agriculturists, have inadequate income, lack access to a range of natural resources and public service institutions, and are subject to processes of pauperisation,

displacement, and disenfranchisement. It is among this population that what Guerin (2013) describes as the rise of new forms of debt bondage—resulting from new capitalist relations and ‘adverse integration’ into the market and capitalist system rather than being vestiges of pre-capitalist relations—highlights the lack of economic and political scaffolding that renders such a large mass of people into conditions of near destitution. Breman’s (2016) description of this as ‘new pauperism’ (a combination of both exploitation by capitalism and exclusion from key sources of welfare and well-being, is apposite here and underscores the reasons for the high incidence of malnutrition amongst this population. Data and details about new forms of slavery linked to human trafficking not only of children and women but also of young working men further highlights the results of an economy of neglect. As a large body of marginalised persons with ‘awkward class positions’ and tenuous relations to capital and markets, the key problem they face is not merely loss of autonomy but also their “inability to reproduce a life worth living”. (Narotzky 2016: 311).

While much literature has been devoted to understanding the plight of small and marginal farmers in typical, multi-caste, plains villages, the condition of Adivasis/tribals and forest-dwelling communities needs to be explicated to highlight the worsening conditions of their lives and the violations against their citizenship rights. Two types of reterritorialisation are affecting the adivasis. One is the reterritorialisation of the forests into ‘sanctuaries’, ‘reserved forests’ and ‘animals only’ or people-free spaces by policies which in rationale and terms are antithetical to the biological evolution of the forests and to the citizenship rights of its inhabitants. Although reliable figures for the nation as a whole are not available²¹, studies indicate the displacement of a large number of forest-dwellers and their forced resettlement into poor quality dwellings and colonies (Gopalakrishnan 2012; Pathak-Broome and Fanari 2018). Displaced without adequate compensation, most of the original forest inhabitants are now proletarians who are increasingly integrated into local and national wage labour circuits, and face dire hardships (Sen 2016). Rendered ‘environmental subjects’ (Agarwal 2005), original forest dwellers are now largely de-rooted inhabitants of alien and resource-poor

spaces. The second type of reterritorialisation is the 'acquisition' for national purposes of Adivasi areas/regions in order to facilitate extractive mining and industries. In addition, the situation of plantation workers (Vijayabaskar and Vishwanathan 2016), especially those left to fend for themselves in abandoned plantations, and that of the fishing communities whose access to coastal belts and the ocean is increasingly being threatened, indicates the spread of impoverishment and the loss of rights among the most marginalised.

Such adverse conditions account for the fact that the marginal majority must resort to a range of survival strategies, which are manifested most prominently at the household/family level. These include the degree to which the marginalised must resort to self-exploitation only to make a bare living. As studies indicate, such households spend enormous number of hours working²² (on an average of about 17.5 hours in some districts in Uttarakhand) but continue to be in precarious economic conditions. The growing proportion of agricultural land that is abandoned, leased out or sold is also a sign of the inability of the marginalised to continue in cultivation or to sustain themselves economically. Such conditions also account for the fact that an anti-agriculture attitude has set in among the marginalised and as the NSSO data²³ indicated, nearly 40 percent of those interviewed asserted that they wanted to be out of agriculture. Analysing this data, Agarwal and Agrawal (2017) qualify that most of those who want to be out of agriculture are those with smaller holdings, are younger, and women.

EROSION

These interlinked triangulated structural inequalities produce not only 'structural violence', evident in widespread poverty, malnutrition, and pauperism (Breman 2016) on the national template but also, at a deeper level, forms of erosion among the marginalised and disadvantaged. These forms of erosion include the loss of local knowledge systems not only in agriculture but also in the domains of medicine, architecture, and ecological conservation, which results in deskilling²⁴ and the loss of autonomy of these populations. Additionally, there is a withering of existing social institutions, for example the loss of conservation

institutions (such as those that regulated the use and management of natural resources, the forests, lakes, tanks, wells, and grazing grounds) that were meaningful and provided social scaffolding. The disassembling of social institutions is evident in the dissolution of the practices of sharing labour, building collective threshing yards, and storing food grains that prioritised food self-sufficiency. At the social and familial level such disassembling of social practices is evident in the shift from bride-price to dowry and in the withdrawal of women from agricultural and manual labour, which has significance for the decision-making power, autonomy and well-being of women. A culmination of these multiple forms of erosion is visible in the extent to which there is an interiorisation of disadvantage and an acceptance of one's condition as given. Over the years, I have witnessed several instances in which this interiorisation of disadvantage is manifested. It includes cases of people accepting worm-ridden PDS rice as edible, the unusual forbearance towards the everyday abuse, negligence, and corruption which marks their transactions with the larger world, and the submissive acceptance of punitive regimes such as Aadhaar and demonetisation. A consequence of this is that rural citizens as a collective have not been able to challenge the multiple burdens that they bear or the infringement on their citizenship rights. Far from resistance and mobilisation against the multiple forms of depredations that they are subject to and the failure to recognise their citizenship rights, much of the mass of the rural population is in a state of political disarray.

A key reason for this emanates from the fact that macro policies have generated a 'differentiation among farmers without consolidation' (Aga 2018:2), and much of rural society is deeply fragmented²⁵. That rural differentiation has fed into the larger hierarchical and exclusionary regimes of inequality and un-democratic structures is evident in the conditions in the new states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. Both states were forged on the idea of catering to the needs of Adivasi populations, but, in reality, have seen a transfer of state power into the hands of a small elite class among them. The ongoing violence in these two states best represents the extent to which regional rural elites have now

deployed their political power to support capital's expropriation of resources. That the mass of the marginalised majority in these regions, primarily adivasis and forest-dwellers, must resort to or subscribe to other forms of political protectionism (such as anti-state or naxal activities) that has resulted in the near civil war conditions in these areas is testimony to the deep erosions that have occurred in these regions. Class fragmentation, evident in the inequality between castes, differences between regional groups, and multiple forms of erosion at the household and individual levels, account for the inability of rural classes and groups to forge unitary or collective fronts to challenge the depredations deployed against them.

Over the past two decades there have been only a few cases of successful mobilisation against expropriation of public and collective natural resources or land grabs, unfair policies and programmes, and myopic policies for the rural. Barring the case of Singur and Nandigram, the successful mobilisation (backed by international environmental groups) against Vedanta over mining in Odisha's Niyamgiri hills, and the movement against and withdrawal of SEZs in Goa, there have been no significant rural and/or agricultural movements that have challenged the violence that the state and capital have deployed against the rural.

The sporadic and periodic demonstrations and agitations across the nation have not yielded much success and indicate how rural and agricultural issues have been dismissed or deferred by ruling political parties and/or the state. Ekta Parishad's march for land rights, which resulted in the setting up of a Land Reforms Council, which took two years to meet, has not produced any substantial policy on land reform. The Tamil Nadu agriculturists' demonstrations in New Delhi went unheeded, and the protest in Rajasthan's Sikar was successfully quelled. The demonstrations by agriculturists in Madhya Pradesh's Mandsaur led to the death by police firing of six agriculturists and the state government's form of political rescue was to initiate a new MSP scheme, which in turn has been largely garnered by traders. The 'Long March' from Nasik to Mumbai, led by the CPI(M), received favourable media

attention primarily in terms of a public response to the good behaviour of agriculturists, but has not resulted in any significant gains to agriculturists.

Although these sporadic demonstrations and movements have gained momentum and spread across the country, they are yet to gain an all-India presence. A coalition of farmer organisations and civil society groups is now leading the demand for more just and equitable shares to rural India²⁶, and a small but concerted group of civil society actors are now seeking to implement post-Green Revolution, organic/sustainable agricultural models. How the key questions of land and resource access, the deficits and structural limitations of rural society, and the integration of even these new models into the larger financial networks will be addressed are questions that are still moot. They also pose challenges to the ability of these alternative models of agriculture to address the entrenched problems of inequities in resources, capital and networks in the rural.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RURAL INVOLUTIONS

The triangulated structuring and the processes of separation-integration, differentiation, and erosion, place the rural into conditions of subordination and subsumption to the demands of capital, market, and political regimes. In addition, the spread of larger cultural and religious networks feed into the involutions and make for an even more fractious rural public space. As capital and market take predominance in marking the rural, and land and labour become commodities, the relationship between the state and rural citizens becomes more tenuous. Reflecting and negotiating these tensions in a competitive, electoral democracy, rural society forges new boundaries and contestations within society itself.

The processes of separation-integration, differentiation, and erosion also result in involutions that make the rural a site of deep contradictions: islands of economic prosperity coexist with extant tracts of pauperism; pockets of pristine nature are conserved at the cost of dislocating large numbers of forest-dwellers; non-agricultural income enables a section of the population to continue to live in villages, and a decelerating

agricultural economy forces many to seek a life out of the rural. As populism and welfare governmentality spread, they effectively stem political dissent and ensure the reproduction of the triangulated structures and their structuring. Far from being a majority or predominant body of citizens who can influence political processes and outcomes, rural residents are increasingly rendered supplicants who must periodically appease, demand, and stage demonstrations to call attention to their needs. Even as state responses to their supplications/demands are largely deferred with false promises or compromised deals, rural residents are treated either as recalcitrant subjects whose activities (such as stubble burning in Punjab, bull-racing or *jallikattu* in Tamil Nadu, etc) must be curtailed, or as anti-state actors who are violently put down. The deployment of a spectrum of techno-financial instruments that includes Aadhaar, demonetisation, General Sales Tax, and the amalgamation of rural banks, indicates how the rural marginalised majority are sought to be fitted into the new financial regime in which the capital of the non-formal sector is to be absorbed into and by larger capital interests. Such a financial regime that combines identity surveillance, governance, and capital absorption, is a problematic (in both its technological and administrative processes) instrument and is now the most recent 'whipcord'²⁷ against rural and working-class citizens. The techno-financial regime encapsulates the combination of the economics of neglect and the politics of rescue in which the state, in collusion with big techno-capital, creates 'illusions of inclusion' (Kohli 2012, 77 cited in Jostein 2018) and incorporates the marginalised into the ledgers of capitalist accounts, and also largely stems any tide of protest or resistance.

What the involutions of the rural indicate to us is the need to rethink the dominant development paradigms and assert the need for new imaginaries and attendant policies. Such policies and programmes need to recognise a range of possibilities that the rural holds: as the foundation on which the pluralism of the nation rests; the importance of agro-ecological zones; the potential of its agro-biodiversity and low-external inputs agricultural practices to address the problems of ecological degradation and climate change; in the possibilities of forging new

models of rural-based production and distribution; to revive and sustain the possibilities of rural industries, and to forge new urban-rural linkages especially in post-industrial, post-urban production models; and finally, to build on the resilience and sense of belonging of rural citizens, and the centrality of the rural to a democratic society and nation

The displaced threshing yard, now located on tarmac roads, bereft of its earlier sociality, technologies, and sacrality, signifies not only the state of agriculture and village India but also the state of rural citizens. As evident in their labour and strife at the displaced threshing yard, marginalised cultivators, representing a majority of rural dwellers, must resort to a range of bricolage strategies to eke out a living. Such strategies, which are increasingly forms of 'make-do' adaptations, a fine balancing act between precarity and penury, represent what one former agriculturist, now a driver told me: 'life was just *jugaad*' (*jeevan vohi jugaad hai*)—strategies of merely making do with what was possible without attention to the problems inherent in them.

In the impact of the force field of triangulated structures—of an overarching and reproduced caste system, an economics of neglect, and a politics of rescue— are forms of rural involution which result in the processes of separation-integration, differentiation, and erosion. These forms of involution indicate that research needs to go beyond the 'agrarian question' in India and needs to factor in the complexities and contradictions which mark rural India. Whether the transition to a standard urban/industrial base will take place or the rural will persist over the long run is a moot question. But in the immediate future, the rural as a social space, a political entity, and an economic site will persist, and far from the death of 'village India', we will see the continuity of the rural as an involuted space in which its citizens will strategise in innumerable ways to make their life liveable.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Some of the ideas and descriptions in this lecture have been elaborated by me in earlier work such as in Vasavi (2012). Here I focus on identifying the triangulated structures and the more recent processes that are manifesting in rural India. Thanks are to Kala Sunder for editing this at short notice and for her support and friendship and to all the members of the 'Network for Rural and Agrarian Studies' for their continued engagement in all rural and agrarian issues.

² A recent update on the 'agrarian question' is the essay by Moyo et al (2015). Jun Borras (2009) provides a summative overview or call for new approaches to understanding rural changes.

³ Work on agrarian suicides includes a wide range of essays and books, and the most comprehensive ones include that by Reddy and Mishra (2010) and the recent one by Nilotpal Kumar (2016). My work on agrarian suicides can be reviewed at Vasavi (2012).

⁴ Revisit studies have been conducted primarily in and for the states of Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and more recently in Bihar.

⁵ I draw on the term involution not only from Geertz (1963), but also from a broader definition that calls attention to the multiple complexities that entanglements between society, capital-market, and state entail or initiate. For an earlier discussion of this see Vasavi (2012).

⁶ Barbara Harriss-White's writings are a comprehensive body of studies that indicate the hold and persistence of caste as agricultural economies absorb or are absorbed into capitalist systems and networks.

⁷ 'Honour killings' in North India include the prohibition of marriage within village and intra-gotra marriages. And the South and North share similarities where young couples defy inter jati and inter-religion choice of partners.

⁸ 70th round survey of the NSSO (2014), Government of India.

⁹ An example of such assessments and recommendations can be found in Ahluwalia (2015)

¹⁰ For details on the 'differentiated schooling system' see Vasavi (2015b).

¹¹ Reports by PROBE, ASER and several other studies have consistently indicated the low learning levels (see Vasavi 2015b) at schools.

¹² For details about the impact of demonetisation in various regions of India, see the Hot Spots special section on 'Critical Responses to India's Cash/less Experiment', *Cultural Anthropology*, September 2017, (<https://culanth.org/fieldsights/1222-demonetization-critical-responses-to-india-s-cash-less-experiment>).

¹³ My deliberations on the processes of separation are very brief here but the idea is part of a larger theoretical study that takes note of the manifestation of these forms of separation at the ecological, social and political levels.

¹⁴ For an excellent study of how such a separation of agriculture from ecology has been promoted and its impact, see Richa Kumar's (2015) study of soyabean cultivation in Madhya Pradesh.

¹⁵ The spread of tube-wells is evident in their scale and presence in the rural landscape. There were about 5 million wells in 1950-51 and their number has now (2018) increased to about 12 million. Tube-well irrigation accounts for more than 60 per cent of the net irrigated area in the country against 29.2 per cent of canal and only 4.6 per cent of tank irrigation (Gandhi and Namboodiri 2009).

¹⁶ I owe this phrase to David Poston (personal communication).

¹⁷ For regional variations in agricultural patterns see Lerche (2015); Agarwal and Agrawal (2017) identify three different types of agricultural regions: Region 1: mainly commercial - Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh. Region 2: subsistence + commercial - Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu. Region 3: mainly subsistence - Arunachal, Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Orissa, Sikkim, Tripura, West Bengal.

¹⁸ Social science research has, unfortunately, not paid sufficient attention to understanding how the rural elite and middle classes deploy economic, political, and social capital to generate and sustain configurations of power that endow them with better access to state and capital. New research, including in-depth and ethnographic studies of rural elite and the non-poor are required for us to better understand rural class dynamics.

¹⁹ Ahalya and Paul (2017) draw on a mixed approach (combining monthly per capita expenditure and household assets) and indicate the following rural class differentiation: those below poverty: 80.42 percent; middle classes: 19.20 percent; and the upper classes 0.38 percent.

²⁰ These are only the most recent cases but inter-caste/jati violence in villages has been reported in almost all parts of India and is intensified by inter-family and inter-political tensions.

²¹ Gopalakrishnan (2016) estimates around six hundred thousand forest dwellers have been displaced but these figures are not verified.

²² See Singh (2015) for details on work load and time. She indicates that Kumouni women spend an average of 17.5 hours per day on home and agricultural-horticulture-animal husbandry.

²³ See Government of India (2005) for details on the NSSO data and response to the choice of occupations.

²⁴ See Stone (2007) on deskilling, especially among small and marginal cultivators and the problems they face in the misuse and overuse of chemical inputs and seeds.

²⁵ Joshi (2017) describes class differentiation in rural Uttar Pradesh as accounting for the inability of agriculturists to mobilise themselves on collective grounds (unlike the 1980s when mass agrarian mobilisation was possible) and Swaminathan and Baksi (2017) indicate three types of inequalities (between small farmers in a village, between small and large farmers in a village, and between small farmers in different regions) as accounting for such social and political fragmentation.

²⁶ For example see the Jai Kisan Andolan's (2018) manifesto for agriculture.

²⁷ The reference is to Jyotiba Phule's seminal work, *Shetkaryaca Asud* (The Whipcord of the Cultivators), 1881, which is one of the earliest treatises to elaborate on the caste and colonial exploitation of the shudra cultivating castes.



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