

THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY MOVEMENTS IN
NEOLIBERAL INDIA

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Dedication

For Kasturi, Mom, and Tess, who have taught me the meaning of courage, strength, humor and dignity.

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Abstract

This dissertation considers the role of localized alternative agricultural movements, such as those promoting “food sovereignty”, in mitigating the impacts of neoliberal policies on poor rural regions in India. It uses a political ecology approach which combines a historical view of policies governing agriculture with a place-based study of local actors. It is based on 18 months of field work conducted in the semi-arid Telengana region of India. It finds that food sovereignty prescriptions based on localized, sustainable and subsistence agriculture do not resonate with most small farmers in rural Telengana and paradoxically constrain their chances of maintaining viable rural livelihoods in a harsh economic climate. Contrary to food sovereignty movements’ claims that food sovereignty is essential for food security, this dissertation argues that for farmers to exercise “food sovereignty”, they must first secure their livelihoods, which are determined not by their ability to opt out of the market economy, but rather by negotiating their position within it.

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CHAPTER 1.INTRODUCTION

This research came out of an interest and a naïve faith in alternative agricultural movements to address the predicament faced by small farmers in the era of India's new economic policies. A quarter of a million farmer's suicides in 15 years have brought to the forefront the precariousness of rural livelihoods and the desperate situation of small farmers in a rapidly changing environment. These vulnerabilities are not only the result of India's economic policies, but symbolize a convergence of several factors - ecological, economic and sociocultural - in the countryside and beyond. I use a political ecology approach to consider these factors in place, within the historical context of India's agrarian political economy and a global movement for food sovereignty.

My initial interest in alternative agricultural movements led to my spending the summer in India in 2006, exploring possible field sites and research questions. I spent a month with Navdanya, an environmental non-governmental organization (NGO) headed by Vandana Shiva who is one of India's most well known and outspoken activists. Conversations with local people and staff at Navdanya's farm and the surrounding villages, in the Himalayan foothills, quickly put to rest my idealistic notions of sustainable rural communities. One conversation really drove this point home, when Navdanya's star farmer and seed saver, whose face has graced brochures and websites and who has traveled to other parts of the world as an ambassador of grassroots sustainability, said that she could not afford to eat organic food grown on the farm with her salary and thus bought food on the open market. She lived just like the people around her and not like the ecofeminist I thought she was.

I realized then, that small farmers view the world differently from most NGO activists that I talked to and cannot afford the luxury of an ideology. Although they celebrate a connection to their places and foods, they also are not averse to “development”. This point has hit home several times over the years of working in India and I therefore redirected my interest to look specifically at food sovereignty movements as they were more concerned with the political economic conditions of small food producers.

Food sovereignty movements are transnational agrarian movements (TAM) whose roots lie in the struggle of small food producers against a hegemonic economic system (Edelman, 2003). The term food sovereignty was coined to highlight that “food security”¹ has been co-opted by states and agro-food corporations to perpetuate productivist modes of agriculture (Desmarais, 2002). Neoliberal economic policies enacted in the last few decades have enabled a global corporate food regime that concentrates resources in the hands of a few actors, and is implicated in a host of negative social, economic, environmental and cultural outcomes on both food producers and consumers (Friedmann, 1989; McMichael, 2005).

Food sovereignty movements are made up of a diverse network of actors that include not just organizations that represent food producers, but also NGOs, international funders, academics, public intellectuals, consumer advocates and others opposed to the

¹ The concept of “food security” originated in the 1970s to examine and address issues of famine, hunger and food crisis prevalent at that time. The initial concern was the problem of ensuring food supply at stable prices through international and national mechanisms. These reflected concerns that technological advancements in food production did not automatically ensure access to the poor and vulnerable. Today there are more than 200 definitions of food security which reflects its continually evolving and complex terrain as it attempts to incorporate wider concerns than initially defined (Clay, 2002).

threats posed by the global corporate food regime on livelihoods and lifestyles. At the local level, food sovereignty practices often involve promoting localized and sustainable agricultural practices amongst small peasant farmers, often with a focus on food crops to resist this global corporatization of agriculture.

Research Questions

The main objective of this research is to critically examine the narratives and practices of food sovereignty movements to consider their role in mitigating the impacts of neo-liberal economic policies in poor rural regions. In bringing into focus the potential of alternative agricultural movements to address the issues of the rural poor, this research engages with two main bodies of literature, namely political economic of agriculture in India, and more recent scholarly work on transnational agrarian movements.

Taking a political ecological approach, this research combines a historical analysis of policies governing agriculture with a place-based ethnographic study of local actors. Political Ecology takes into account how broader processes at regional, national and global levels shape actors' interaction with their environments. It illuminates how power mediates these interactions and also highlights the importance of understanding how place-based processes in turn influence larger discourses and practices.

My working questions are:

- What are the main issues affecting small and marginal farmers in agriculture today?
- What are the discourses, objectives and practices of food sovereignty?

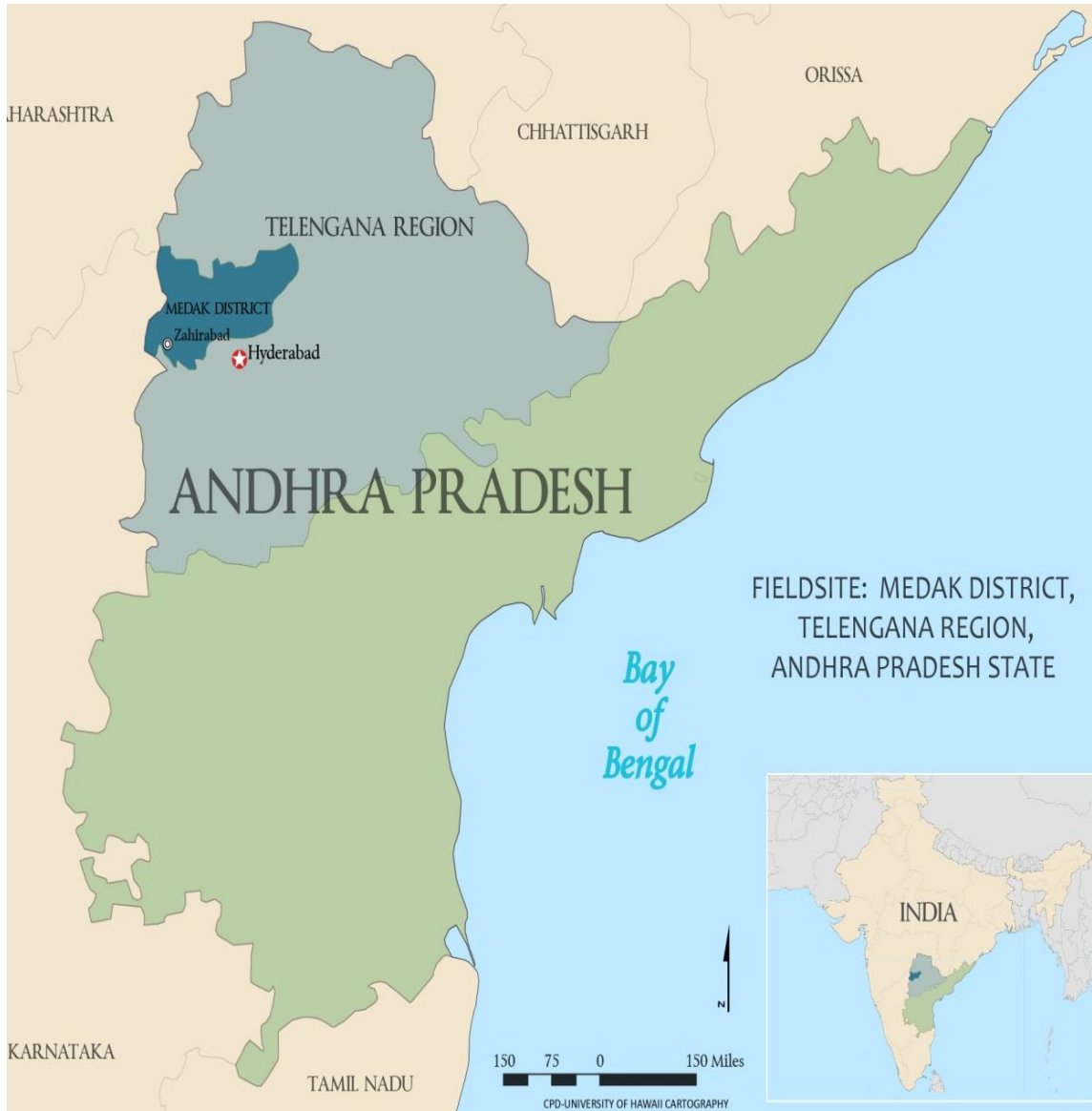
- How does food sovereignty reflect farmers' aspirations and address issues of agricultural viability?

Fieldwork for this research was conducted in the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh state, one of the first regions to display signs of extreme rural distress in the country in the form of farmers' suicides. This semi-arid region is characterized by rainfed agriculture, poor soils, drought, and cultural, political and economic marginalization and is considered "backward" in terms of its human development indicators in relation to the rest of the country. It also has one of India's leading food sovereignty NGOs, based in Medak District, which I used as a case study. Deccan Development Society (DDS) has been working among poor, mainly Dalit (untouchable) women farmers in the region since 1979. In addition to being very successful as a grassroots NGO, DDS has become a leader in the food sovereignty movement both in India and globally and its director, P.V Shateesh, is one of the leading ideologues of the movement.

From 2008 to 2009, I spent eighteen months conducting research within India, of which fifteen months were based in the rural areas of Medak district. The other three months were spent visiting other food sovereignty NGOs and interviewing other actors such as funders, NGO staff, policy makers, scientists and academics all over the country. Two pre-dissertation trips totaling four months were made in 2006 and 2007 to explore dissertation topics and locations.

The Field Site

Figure 1.1: Map of Medak District in Andhra Pradesh State of India



Map credit: Charles Daveny, Cartographer, Department of Geography, University of Hawaii

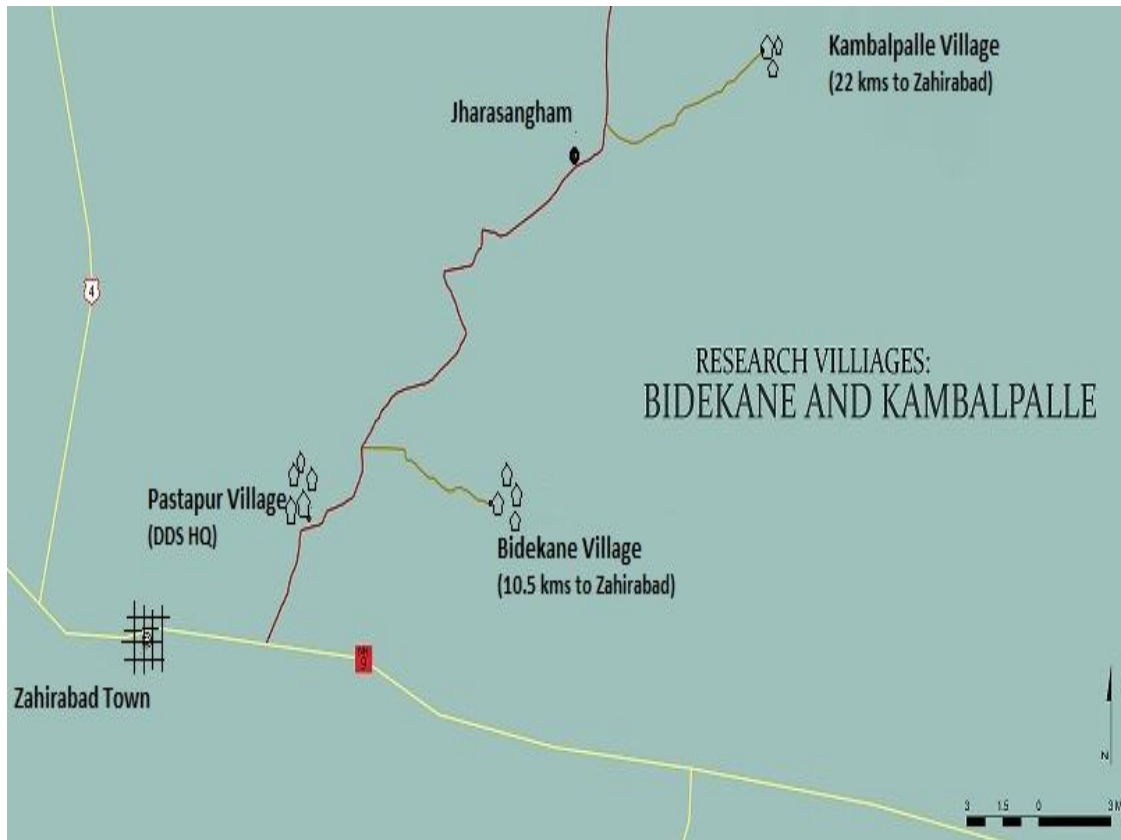
The field area is an undulating landscape with large expanses of hard exposed red earth interspersed with patches of green fields and scanty forests. The land is largely composed of red laterite soils with smaller areas of fertile black soils in the low-lying areas. Under rainfed conditions, black soils allow for two cropping seasons as opposed to one on red soils. Irrigation however allows farmers to grow all year round, allowing up to three seasons.

According to the 2001 census, Medak district has a population of about 2.7 million inhabitants, of which eighty six percent is rural. Thirty percent of the cultivable land is irrigated, and is primarily owner dug borewell irrigation (Government of India, 2001). The main urban centers are the mostly close to Hyderabad with the exception of Medak and Zahirabad towns. Zahirabad is the about four kilometers from DDS's field headquarters in Pastapur Village and is the center of rural commerce for the surrounding villages. The town is situated about 100 kilometers northwest of Hyderabad city, and lies on a major highway that connects the cities of Hyderabad and Pune. In addition to being a major thoroughfare, it has a few well established industries in the area including vehicle manufacturing, chemicals, meat processing, tires and pharmaceuticals.

Within DDS's project area of about seventy-five villages, there is a fair amount of infrastructural, geographical and climatic variation. These include degree of dependence on rain versus irrigation; susceptibility to drought; percentage of fertile black soils versus other soils; acreage under food crops; penetration of commercial crops such as cotton and corn; access to roads, transportation, markets, non-farm livelihoods; implementation of development programs; distance from and access to forest resources and so on. This diversity made for an excellent canvas to study how local geographies posed livelihood

constraints and opportunities for small farmers and their coping patterns under different levels of ecological and economic stress.

Figure 1.2: Research Villages Bidekane and Kambalpalle in Medak District



Map credit: Charles Daveny, Cartographer, Department of Geography, University of Hawaii

While the research conducted in several villages in the region, two villages, Bidekane and Kambalpalle became the focal points for my in-depth and ethnographic research. The villages were similar in their social make up but were different enough in geography to allow for some interesting observations. Bidekane for example, is the larger of the two villages, has approximately thirty to forty percent of its cultivable area under

irrigation, and has a greater area under red laterite soils. It is closer to a subsidiary highway, has better transportation infrastructure and connections to the town of Zahirabad. This makes access to healthcare, education and non-farm jobs and other aspects of urban life easier which affords more opportunities to diversify to non-farm activities. Bidekane has easier access to ground water reserves and receives more rainfall than Kambalpalle thus making it less drought-prone. It also has its own community forests and state-owned forests in its vicinity making it easier for fuelwood access and providing employment opportunities through the state's community forestry development programs.

Kambalpalle Village on the other hand has only about fifteen acres of irrigated land of a total cultivable area of about 800 acres, which is approximately only two percent of its cultivable area. Because of geological constraints to accessing the subterranean water reserves, there are no borewells in the area and the village has only three to four open and functioning wells owned by the richer households. Drinking water is piped into the village from a neighboring area. The village is further away from the main highway than Bidekane and has less transportation infrastructure. Both villages depend more on private than public transport, which are mainly 3-wheeler autorickshaws that ply the distance between Zahirabad and the villages a few times a day. Since the demand for transportation is higher for Bidekane autorickshaw trips are more frequent. In Kambalpalle on the other hand, a bus comes to the village twice a day, and if there is enough demand one can organize an autorickshaw trip, but people end up waiting around for hours for transport and often have to walk three to four miles from the village to the highway. Because of these constraints, Kambalpalle Village has less non-farm livelihood

options. Its deep black soils and minimal access to irrigation means that compared to Bidekane it has a higher amount of acreage given to rainfed cotton and corn, both are relatively new commercial crops to the area.

Methods

A range of primary and secondary data collection methods were used for this research. Initial methods included participant observation and informal discussions with farmers, local officials and DDS staff and visits to about 20 DDS and 11 non-DDS villages in Western Medak district. I then conducted gendered and caste/class based focus group discussions in twelve villages to acquaint myself with localized definitions of food sovereignty and to learn about the problems that small farmers faced in general. These were followed by 150 in-depth household structured interviews in three villages. I used structured interviews to document demographic information, assets, local agricultural practices, livelihood bases and diversification, safety nets, access to credit and the extent of farmer's debt among other things. About forty life histories and thirteen follow-up focus group discussions were then conducted in two research villages of Bidekane and Kambalpalle (see map above). Life histories were "land and livelihood" histories focused on generational changes in land, labor, livelihoods and traditional occupations. In the last months of field work about ten focus group discussions were conducted to validate trends that emerged from structured interviews and life histories.

My initial questions changed as a result of focus group discussions. When I first set out to look at how the term "food sovereignty" was defined, I was faced with a dilemma. Farmers were not really interested in talking about "food sovereignty" the way

it was defined by DDS, in fact, they were not even really able conceptualize or articulate this definition of “food sovereignty” that I was seeking. Instead, they wanted to talk about their problems in agriculture and in their livelihoods in general. I was forced to take a step back and reconsider my research questions and decided then that it was more interesting and relevant to broaden my research to first understand in depth what their problems were. This ended up being far more beneficial to my research and in a more indirect ways led to into discussions on their ideas of food sovereignty and agricultural viability.

Since I lived in the rural areas for 15 months, I spent most of my time in the villages and numerous informal interviews and discussions took place in village tea shops, during visits to farmers fields and homes, visits to work sites during summer work programs, village festivals, ceremonies like weddings, baptisms and naming ceremonies, coming of age ceremonies, religious gatherings for Easter, Christmas, *Eid*, *Sankranti*, *Diwali*, and so on. DDS organized gatherings, including a month-long traveling biodiversity festival, farmer exchanges, workshops and consultations, seed festivals etc provided opportunities to talk to a range of people from within and outside the region.

The Fieldwork Experience

Ethnographic research of this kind always presents its own set of opportunities and constraints which need to be articulated. My training in ethnographic research methods prepared me to stay vigilant in not only how I was being perceived, but also how I perceived people and situations based on my own class, experience and biases. Being a western-educated Indian woman, I was cognizant that my culture and class allowed me a

great deal of access to both women and men in villages, and with local state officials and other government servants at different levels. Within villages, I was viewed as a cultural insider but a class outsider.

Because I came from obvious privilege and was seen to be associated with DDS, many rural residents initially expected that they might receive monetary or other benefits from my work. During interviews they often played up their difficulties and did not reveal the extent of their assets or landholdings. It became necessary to constantly crosscheck my information, visiting households for follow up interviews and running information by community members and key village informants. I had to repeatedly reassure them that I was not attached to the NGO or the state and also clarify that I could not give them any monetary benefits. During structured interviews several DDS farmers also misrepresented their agricultural practices for fear of reprisal from the NGO. For example, they would report that they were growing food crops organically, but a visit to their fields would reveal that they were growing cotton or corn or other crops with chemicals. I had to reassure them that my work was independent of DDS and that I would not share any one individual's information with NGO staff.

I was fortunate to have three really good research assistants and several informants whom I interacted with regularly. Two of my research assistants came from the Dalit community, and were also farmers. One had worked with DDS for many years, was an expert permaculturalist and was involved with local politics. The other, a landless widow, had worked primarily as agricultural labor till I came along. Both were very familiar with the terrain, institutions, cultural norms, agricultural practices, and local politics and served as invaluable intermediaries. As I learned the language, I needed them

less for translation and more for helping me access households and other individuals in local level state institutions.

Working among Dalit (ex-untouchables) populations was also very interesting. Most Dalits in the research area were converts to Christianity. Smaller groups had converted to Buddhism. I was perceived as being Christian because of my name and was thus easily accepted by the Dalit community. While I never claimed to be of any religion, I was claimed by them, and would frequently hear women farmers tell others that “she is from our *kullam* [caste]”. This also meant that I had to deal with constant requests to attend their church services and prayer meetings. Occasional attempts were made by some very enthusiastic and optimistic Evangelical pastors to baptize me into becoming a ‘born again Christian’. Because I was also working with other farmers from Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim castes, I had to be very careful on how I associated with different groups, which made me cautious to not associate myself too intimately in the religious aspects of rural life, except as a slightly aloof observer.

Evangelical Christianity is taking root in these areas with some disturbing outcomes. The Telengana region is known for its syncretic Hindu-Muslim-Animistic and more recently Christian and Buddhist religions and cultures. The rise of Evangelism has concretized identities based on religion in ways that were not visible in the past. The implications of this are numerous, but I will touch on only one, which is that previously cultural practices related to agriculture are now being termed as “Hindu” and thus not followed among the Evangelical Dalit Christians. This is changing the way people view and practice agriculture and its rituals. However, Christianity is giving these groups a sense of themselves with their own religious ceremonies and own places of worship. For

populations that have been so degraded and marginalized this has been an important aspect of their self-worth.

During my fieldwork, I came to understand how vulnerable livelihoods that depend primarily on rainfed agriculture are for small farmers. In the fifteen months I spent in the Telengana villages, I witnessed first flooding in the rabi (winter) 2008 season, caused by excessive and untimely rains accompanied by warmer than usual temperatures. The following season in 2009, the region experienced a drought and I was able to observe the various implications of risks of rainfed agriculture where, in addition to crop loss, access to water, ground water recharge for irrigation, access to fodder, and wage work all suffered. Kambalpalle Village with very little irrigation and increased areas under commercial crops such as cotton and corn had heightened levels of distress and demonstrated extreme vulnerability when compared to Bidekane.

I witnessed many kinds of poverty including the “cringing” poverty that Robinson talks about in her book “The Law of Fishes”, where a combination of being asset poor, excluded from entitlements such as safety nets and basic needs because of gender, caste, age, ill health leaves people highly vulnerable (Robinson, 1983). My research is focused on poor farmers and regions and when I refer to the “rural poor” or “poor farmer” I include those who are not getting their basic needs met for food, clean water, adequate work, education, health and so on, and also include those who suffer from social exclusion based on caste/religion, gender, mental health and other factors.

It was impossible to conduct fieldwork and live among the villagers and not get involved in their daily lives, especially their struggles. I was asked to intervene in conflicts sometimes, to help monetarily, to accompany people to hospitals when it was

hard to access doctors and to petition local officials of people's behalf. Word soon got around I had a good working relationship with the Mandal Development Officer (sub district local government) and could walk into his office anytime. One particular issue that I casually raised during a visit to his office was that the villagers had not been paid for their NREGA summer work during the drought. I said this in front of the local official responsible for payment which resulted in payments being made soon after. This was good because farmers were desperate given the drought, failure of crops and severe cash constraints. At other times, I was not as successful, and also realized how insignificant my actions were compared to the almost relentless struggles of these households to get their most basic needs met on an everyday basis.

Synopsis of Chapters

Chapter 2 reviews political economic debates on India. The debates are numerous and complex but for the purpose of this research, it primarily reviews those that discuss the roles of the state and market in rural development. It suggests that there are two broad strands in the debates – the *Marketeters* who support neoliberal reforms and the *Interventionists* who are in favor of more state intervention while not being opposed to the reforms. It underscores that India's new economic policies have had differentiated impacts – with most of the benefits accruing to the upper and middle classes in the urban areas. By contrast, the vagaries of the markets combined with reduced state supports have made rural livelihoods more vulnerable.

Chapter 3 takes a historical look at the political economy of development in the Telengana Region and Andhra Pradesh starting with the era of late-Mughal rule in the

1700s, then considering the outcomes of state-led development after Independence, and finally addressing the adoption of neoliberal reforms in the last two decades. Drawing on historical, socioeconomic and ethnographic data, it demonstrates that rural India has changed profoundly in many ways. Dalits and lower castes have experienced quite profound and positive socioeconomic changes with the breaking down of caste institutions and the enabling reach of development. They have been able to challenge traditional structures that reigned in the countryside, to move out of culturally sanctioned poverty, menial labor practices, bonded labor and other forms of exploitation and extreme degradation.

Chapter 4 highlights that in spite of the “gradual revolution” in rural India, the poor are leading lives of high vulnerability, especially in the semi-arid regions that are dependent on rainfed agriculture. The suicides, and other coping and distress patterns show that small and poor farmers are being incorporated into a system that structurally marginalizes them. It reveals that decades of economic development have not significantly altered the structural bases of resource allocation. The landless and those with small holdings in the Telengana region are in general worse-off than they were the era of state-led development, even if they have attained many freedoms.

After considering the political economic landscape of India, the dissertation shifts focus to look at alternatives to state and market development presented by alternative agricultural movements. Chapter 5 considers the meanings and practices of transnational agrarian movements (TAMs) for food sovereignty. It highlights that movements play an important role in drawing attention to the negative impacts of the “corporate global food regime”. By developing horizontal and vertical linkages, the movements allow those

with less power and resources better political leverage in their struggles. But the same strategy also bring together stakeholders with varied ideological and class bases, which leads to contradictions within the movements.

In promoting the centrality of small farming and localization to agrarian reform, these movements represent a reenergized populism. This chapter highlights criticisms that a populist vision for agriculture advances ideas of a “third way” that is anti-capitalist and anti-socialist is ahistoric and unrealistic. Village economies cannot be separated from the reality of capitalist relations of production with a differentiated peasantry that is integrated to industrial development (Bebbington, 2000; Lodhi, 2007; Bernstein, 2009).

Chapter 6 considers the local outcomes of food sovereignty amongst small and poor farmers in the Telengana region of India. It examines food sovereignty NGO, Deccan Development Society (DDS), and analyzes why food sovereignty practices as put forth by DDS are not being widely adopted. It demonstrates that in the context of a significantly altered social, economic and cultural landscape, food sovereignty prescriptions that are based on localized, subsistence agriculture are of little relevance to a majority of small farmers in the semi-arid Telengana region who are struggling with to meet their basic livelihoods needs in increasingly monetized economies. Together Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate the limits of social movements in addressing the causes of contemporary rural distress and in providing a long-term vision for rural development.

This dissertation concludes by attempting to think about agriculture’s place in India’s development, in light of the highly complex and contradictory outcomes of development. It highlights that the kinds of transitions experienced by developed countries cannot be the basis of economic strategies for a developing country like India.

Social movements too need to recognize that contemporary peasants now live hybrid lives and so need hybrid solutions. Pitting the market against rural communities does not allow them to have meaningful lives. Peasants today negotiate their lives within the constraints and opportunities posed by state, market and civil society, and these should be the starting point of initiatives that aim to help them (Bebbington, 2000).

CHAPTER 2.SETTING THE STAGE: DEBATES ON NEOLIBERAL ECONOMIC REFORMS

Introduction

“The farmers, who are living, are living only just, because they are not dying.” – Vijay Jhawandia, Farmers movement leader (quoted in Hardikar, 2005)

In the satirical Bollywood comedy *Peepli Live*, two brothers hopeless and desperate in the face of failed crops and debt, and spurned and mocked by the local “big man” whom they go to for help in desperation, decide that their only recourse is for one of them to commit suicide for the somewhat substantial compensation offered to victims’ families. The film portrays the harsh economic realities of small farmers desperate to cash in on the promise of commercial crops and participate in the glory of India’s economic growth. However, India’s new economic policies are doing just the opposite, and small farmers are integrated into a system that is weighed against them. Since 1995, there have been a reported quarter of a million suicides in the country (Sainath, 2010), mostly concentrated among small farmers in the rainfed semi-arid areas (Nagaraj, 2008; Sainath, 2010; Suri, 2006; Ghosh, 2005). In addition to the farmers’ suicides, the spread of the Maoist-influenced extremist movement into more than half the districts of the country, the soaring prices of food and serious climatic and water stress all speak of the extreme difficulties of the rural poor in the face of a rapidly changing landscape.

Indian peasants are no strangers to distress, which have been around since pre-colonial times. In his book, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, Mike Davis traces the dismal condition of peasants in colonial India, where several famines occurred between the

nineteenth and the mid-twentieth century, killing millions because of a callous and unresponsive colonial administration (Davis, 2001). Even prior to colonization, the lower classes and castes lived a wretched existence. Irfan Habib's work on pre-colonial India highlights that they were kept at the brink of starvation in traditional rural societies in order to create a reserve of cheaply available and pliant labor (Habib, 1995). But starvation and death during times of undemocratic societies and scarcity is very different from tens of thousands of suicides in modern day India, at a time of relative abundance and democratic institutions. The suicides speak of reduced capabilities of the rural poor in the face of tumultuous changes brought about by the convergence of economic reform, state policies that have encouraged the shift to commercial crops (Sainath, 2010; Patnaik, 2005), the absence of state's investment agriculture and its role as a provider of safety nets, the breaking down of traditional institutions (Vasavi, 1999; Suri, 2006) and the relative unimportance of agriculture and rural areas in the national imaginary of progress today (Chatterjee, 2008; Gupta, 2005; Vasavi, 1999).

This chapter reviews political economic debates on market reforms as they relate to agriculture in India. In the following sections, it will first discuss the developments that led to India's adoption of economic reforms. It then lays out the two major strands of debates which broadly represent those that support the reforms and others that support more state intervention. After that it considers debates on five aspects of reforms as they relate to agriculture – growth, poverty and inequality; agriculture and public investment; agriculture and industry; agriculture and trade; and lastly social infrastructure and human well being.

This chapter suggests that both state and market-led development have helped and hurt certain sectors, regions and groups in very different ways with contradictory and sometimes unintended outcomes. The market, driven by profit, growth and competition is not the tide that raises all boats. It has however led to the more efficient use of resources and unprecedented growth, the benefits of which have been largely reaped by the rich and middle classes in the country, and are limited to the urban areas. The state, on the other hand, with its large bureaucracy has led to an inefficient use of resources, but its net is wider and is more able to deliver development in ways that benefit the poor. The state however, has always been open to cooption by elites, and has colluded with the market against the interests of the common man in ways that do not make the market 'free'. The role of India's electoral democracy and civil society actors nevertheless mitigate the total cooption of the state by elites and serve to rein in both state and market excesses.

The Era of Economic Reforms

India's adoption of neoliberal policies in 1991, following a balance of payments crisis, constitutes arguably one of the most profound changes in India's economic history. While the country made headway in opening up its autarkic economy in the 1980s, its adoption of neoliberal economic reforms in 1991 represented a radical shift in thinking reflecting a global trend wherein state-led development (Developmentalism) was being replaced by a new paradigm of pragmatism and economic reforms (Joshi and Little, 1996; Krueger and Chinoy, 2002; Srinivasan and Tendulkar, 2003; World Bank, 2000; Ahluwalia, 2002; Kohli, 2006a; Nayyar, 1998; Sen, 1996).

The crisis that led to this crucial move was due to both domestic and international factors. India's fiscal profligacy in the preceding decade led to a large deficit, which came to a head with the 1990 Gulf war. Oil prices skyrocketed and foreign exchange reserves plummeted due to evacuations of expatriate Indians from the Gulf countries, leading to a drop in remittances, which at that time constituted nearly a third of India's export earnings (Kohli, 2006a). Added to this, was the loss of export markets with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India's main trading partner (Kohli, 2006a). Further, the fall of the V.P Singh government in 1990 – 1991 led to shaken confidence in India by its lenders and plummeted India's credit rating in international capital markets leading to a massive outflow of capital (Nayyar, 1998). With default looming, India as a last resort turned to the IMF and World Bank, seeking a bail-out with the hopes of restoring lender confidence (Bhaduri and Nayyar, 1996).

The adoption of neoliberal economic policies unleashed a wave of unprecedented growth leading to an economic boom and brought material benefits to many, expanding India's middle classes by more than a 100 million (Ravillion, 2009). The economy grew annually from the "Hindu rate" of 3.5% in the first three decades after independence to averaging 5.7% in the 1980s, 6% in the 1990s and 8% after 2002 (Ahluwalia, 2011). India became the fastest growing economy in the world after China. The meteorical rise of the Indian information technology industry has been quite dramatic, followed by the growth in certain domestic manufacturing and service sectors (Ahluwalia, 2002).

India's high growth rate however hides the stagnation of growth in the labor-intensive agriculture and industry sectors that have the most impact on the poor (Ghosh, 2005). Even with the economy growing at an annual rate of 8 to 9 percent, the annual

growth rate in regular employment barely exceeded 1 percent (Bhaduri, 2010; Ahluwalia, 2011). Between 1970/71 and 2004/05, while agriculture's share of national income declined from 44.3 to 23.1 percent, its share of the workforce declined only from 69.5 to 58.2 percent (Birthal, Singh and Kumar, 2011). This disproportionate reduction means that as agriculture's piece of the pie has reduced, the populations dependent on agriculture has not proportionately reduced, indicating a lowering of living standards.

India, after independence, adopted an import-substitution model of development where agriculture's role as the handmaiden to industry was needed to create employment for the vast rural majority and to raise demand for mass consumer goods, which would further fuel industrial production (Frankel, 2005). Until the agricultural crisis of the mid 1960's - caused by severe droughts and the looming threat of discontinuation of food aid by the US - there was consensus among economists and planners about the institutional and policy options on agricultural growth. These included public investment, large-scale land redistribution and institutional reforms that were committed to the explicit goals of equity and poverty removal (Frankel, 2005; Rao and Storm, 2000; Basu, 2004; Bardhan, 2004; Bhaduri and Nayyar, 1996).

India's adoption of Green Revolution policies in response to the crisis represented a shift away from institutional and structural reforms to technological solutions to agricultural development (Rao and Storm, 2000). The Green Revolution's impacts were uneven and contradictory, but it did lead to a dramatic increase in production in certain crops and made the country food self-sufficient (Bardhan, 2002). With neoliberal policies and the stagnation of agriculture, India's path of agricultural development has been the focus of renewed interest. The reasons given for the poor performance of the reforms in

agriculture are numerous, complex and have been hotly debated. Most post-liberalization debates on agriculture focus on the stagnating agricultural sector in the Indian economy and what it means for the role of agriculture in development and its implications for poverty.

Pro Market or Pro State – Drawing the Lines

Pro-market supporters are those whose positions are informed by the neoliberal orthodoxy of laissez-faire economics that views the market as the primary engine of growth and the state as having a dampening effect on the market. This group, hereafter referred to as the “Marketeters”, favors a minimalist state, economic liberalization and privatization. The state’s role is reduced to being primarily an “enforcer of contracts” (Mohan, 2002, pg.9). Marketeters focus on supply-side responses where economic growth fuelled by private investment and trade provides the necessary resources for social development including education, healthcare and poverty alleviation programs and so on. They argue that private initiative will attract large amounts of foreign investment, which will solve India’s massive unemployment problems and lead to more efficient production (Bhagwati and Srinivasan, 2002; Lal, 2010; Aiyar, 2009).

The second strand of debates, are informed by Marxist political economy. Its supporters form an eclectic group ranging from those who see the market as the primary source of India’s rural problems and thus support State-led development, and those who are informed by Keynesian ideas of an interventionist state whose function is to help regulate the market and play an enabling role in equalizing the benefits of market-led growth. This group, hereafter referred to as the “Interventionists”, places more emphasis

on the socioeconomic contexts within which the reforms have taken place. They subscribe to the view that without far-reaching changes in the basic structures in which assets and power are unequally distributed (land reform for example), liberalization policies lead to higher growth but also higher inequities. They argue that macroeconomic stabilization, which relies on overall cuts to reduce fiscal deficits, has forced declines in public spending (capital expenditure deficit) which in turn has had a negative effect on the development of infrastructure, future growth prospects and private investment.

Today, several global and national events such as the rise in food prices, the crash of financial markets, farmers suicides and contradictory outcomes of both the market and state led development have caused some to reconsider their extreme stances on reforms and thus the categorization of ‘Marketeters’ and ‘Interventionists’ can sometimes be problematic as revisionist positions are not uncommon. However for the purposes of this chapter, the broad categorizations will be maintained.

Growth, Poverty and Inequality

Both Marketeters and Interventionists concede that India’s initial failure after Independence to fully implement land reforms and to redistribute assets has led to a deepening of unequal relations and the perpetuation of rural poverty (Sen, 1996; Ahluwalia, 2002; Bardhan, 2006; Frankel, 2005; Jha, 2005; Ravallion and Datt, 2002; Bhaduri and Nayyar, 1996; Joshi, 1975; Bhagwati, 1988; Varshney, 1999). However the way forward in the current situation is debated.

Interventionists continue to view redistribution through land reform and other redistributive policies as key to reduce rural poverty and inequality (Ghosh, 2005;

Bardhan, 2006; Frankel, 2005; Bhaduri and Nayyar, 1996; Patnaik, 2003). Marketeters, on the other hand, see the state as needlessly interfering in land markets and instead argue that a rational policy would ensure that land is put to its best use, either for farming or other purposes (Srinivasan, 2007; Lal, 2010; Ahluwalia 2011). These policies, they suggest, should include legalizing leasing, removing ceilings on landholdings, and instituting more transparent mechanisms for land acquisition for industry and infrastructure, where adequate levels of compensation would be granted to small farmers (Ahluwalia, 2011; Aiyar, 2011a; Das, 2011).

There is general consensus that reforms of the past two decades have increased economic and regional disparities, and that growth is excluding the poor and most of the rural areas (Kohli, 2006b; Ahluwalia, 2002; Ahluwalia, 2011). Increases in economic inequality suggest that there are adverse trends such as impoverishment of specific regions or social groups, heightened vulnerability in general and other hidden costs of economic development (Deaton and Drèze, 2002; Bhaduri and Nayyar, 1996). Within India, states such as Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, Orissa, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh have seen lowered rates of poverty reduction. While social indicators for education and health have improved, those of infant mortality and sex ratio have actually regressed (Deaton and Drèze, 2002). All these are due to diminished real expenditure in social and rural programs that has led to an absolute decline in non-agricultural employment, a slowdown in agricultural growth leading to a distress shift to agriculture and an increase in rural poverty (Ghosh, 2005a; Nagaraj, 2008).

Agriculture and Public Investment

Increasingly as the rural areas have had disappointing growth, there is a general consensus among political economists that gross investment in agriculture has been stagnating. Moreover, capital invested in agriculture has been more consumptive and not productive which has widespread repercussions on the rural poor. Consumption investments are those that include subsidies and welfare programs whereas productive investments include investments in rural infrastructure such as irrigation, roads, transportation, agricultural extension and research, soil conservation, water management (Bhaduri and Nayyar, 1996; Patnaik, 2003; Drèze and Sen, 2002).

Positions on subsidies for farmers however are contentious with Marketeers viewing rural subsidies as creating huge deficits for the states while distorting the markets for agriculture, and causing over production of grains such as wheat. They also highlight that subsidies have led to unsustainable use of resources with negative impacts on the environment. Additionally they feel that subsidies are inequitable and do not benefit the poor, and crowd out more productive investment in research, extension and infrastructure development (Ahluwalia, 2002; Vyas, 2000). They argue that states should instead spend on “targeted” subsidies for the poorest (Srinivasan, 2007; Das, 2011; Aiyar, 2011; Vyas, 2000; Lal, 2010; Alhuwalia, 2011). Interventionists highlight that small farmers are very dependent on government extension services, rural credit, subsidies and other support systems to survive in agriculture (Ghosh, 2005) and need higher state supports in these areas (Patnaik, 2003; Rao and Storm, 2000; Nagaraj, 2008; Ghosh, 2005a).

Marketeers argue that public subsidies curb private investments – in the agricultural retail sector, food warehousing, rural infrastructure, natural resources, grain purchasing, land ownership and education – that thwart agricultural growth and thus rural poverty reduction (Vyas, 2000; Lal, 2010; Das, 2011; Aiyar, 2011). They argue that large agri-businesses play important roles in providing solutions through the development of technologies. Furthermore, through contract farming, retail supply chain management, and growing high-value crops for export and urban markets, the agri-food sector could increase agricultural productivity. The role of private initiative needs to be harnessed in the development of a modern food processing sector, which is essential to the next stage of agricultural development. Private investment and corporatization of agriculture are currently constrained by outdated state regulation (Ahluwalia, 2002).

Drawing attention to the social outcomes of the corporatization of agriculture, Interventionists argue that the rural poor have already suffered as a result of the corporatization of agriculture, and highlight that farmers' suicides started in 1995 after the introduction of neoliberal reforms (Ghosh, 2005a; Vasavi, 1999; Suri, 2006). Therefore removing restrictions and subsidies will only make small farmers more vulnerable (Ghosh, 2005b; Frankel, 2005; Bhaduri, 2010; Bardhan, 2004). They argue that the corporate-led model of agriculture is premised on eliminating large numbers of small farmers without sufficient demand created for displaced agricultural labor from industry and services in the foreseeable future (Ghosh, 2005b).

With regard to the increasing number of farmers' suicides, Marketeers are not ready to assign the blame to neoliberal policies but instead view these crises as the normal hiccups of an economy that is undergoing a transformation (Bhagwati, 2010; Das,

2011). Bhagwati, an ardent supporter of neoliberalism, even posits that globalization is not responsible for the surge of suicides among cotton farmers in the Indian states of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh because cotton farmers in other states are doing well (Bhagwati, 2010). Das notes that “India has doubled its cotton crop in the past five years, yet there have also been farmer suicides in cotton-growing areas. Both facts are correct.The future, however, will be built by those who focus on the first...” (Das, 2011, pg.2).

Agriculture and Industry

The role of industry and services are important to the overall development of agriculture because of their potential to absorb rural labor, raise wages and to create demand for goods and services. Marketeers have argued that with economic reforms, industrial production through private investment would help developing countries like India to use their comparative advantage to export labor-intensive goods. The ensuing rapid employment growth would shift the terms of trade towards the countryside. This would benefit the rural poor and reduce regional inequalities over time (Bhagwati and Srinivasan, 2002; Kohli, 2006a). The performance of the manufacturing sector post-reforms has shown however that while industrial growth has done well in certain sectors, it has been based mostly on improvements in productivity due to mechanization and longer hours, and have not increased employment growth (Bhaduri, 2010). Those sectors that have the potential to absorb rural labor have done poorly (Ahluwalia, 2011).

Interventionists highlight that corporate-led growth in industry and agriculture has not proven to be labor-intensive. Corporations are cutting labor costs even more

drastically as they need to be internationally competitive (Ghosh, 2005b). This is a pattern of growth that is predatory (Bhaduri, 2010) in that it immiserizes agriculture and the countryside (Ghosh, 2005b; Suri, 2006; Bhaduri and Nayyar, 1996; Bhaduri, 2010; Patnaik, 2005). Marketeers concur with Interventionists that infrastructure constraints have been responsible for the poor growth of the manufacturing sector, but argue that industrial, labor and trade reforms, the expansion of foreign direct investment and privatization were not strong enough. Rigid labor laws prevent India from being competitive in labor-intensive industries that could employ millions (Ahluwalia, 2011; Aiyar, 2011; Lal, 2008). Instituting minimum wage regulation and labor rights for unorganized workers further hampers growth in manufacturing and industry (Lal, 2008). State protection for the relatively labor intensive small-scale sector (cottage industries) is seen to prevent their expansion and increase unskilled labor employment (Aiyar, 2011; Lal, 2008; Panagariya, 2005). They highlight that Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have the potential to overcome these constraints and will allow India to use its abundant low-skilled labor efficiently in industrialization and manufacturing (Panagariya, 2005; Lal, 2008; Aiyar, 2011; Ahluwalia, 2011).

Agriculture and Trade

Trade reforms are closely tied to both the performance of agriculture and industry and are one of the most contentious aspects of the reforms, especially the impacts of trade in the rural areas. Trade in agricultural products contributes to a sizeable percentage of exports of developing countries like India and developing this export sector is an important aspect of development, employment generation and poverty reduction (Ghosh, 2005b).

Interventionists and Marketeers agree that the poor are disproportionately hurt by the liberalized trade regime and that inequality has intensified. These are due to the rise in food grain prices, lowering of wages, the volatility of markets and price variations (Jha, 2005; Bardhan, 2004; Rodrik, 1996; Ghosh, 2005b). Marketeers however argue that in the long run, integration into world markets will have a stabilizing effect on prices and that domestic shocks like failed crops will not correlate with international shocks (Srinivasan, 2002). Following the comparative advantage thesis, they argue that the poor would eventually benefit as growth would ensue, creating employment and reducing poverty (Bhagwati and Srinivasan, 2002; Basu, 2004).

Interventionists acknowledge the importance of trade and comparative advantage in agriculture, but argue for more state intervention and regulation of trade (Bhaduri and Nayyar, 1996). While cheaper imports may have improved food access for the poor, rising unemployment, rising input and credit costs for farmers, and exposure to global price declines have reduced their purchasing power. Export-led growth has led to changes in cropping patterns where cereals and pulses are being replaced by sugar cane, horticultural crops, aquaculture, and oilseeds – resulting in decreased local grain production that threatens regional food security (Sainath, 1999; Patnaik, 2003; Ghosh, 2005b; Chandrashekar and Ghosh, 2010).

Before liberalization, domestic prices of agricultural products were higher but more stable than world prices. Trade adjustments have moved domestic prices closer to world prices to make the sector more competitive (Rodrik, 1996; Rao and Storm, 2000). Without state protection and regulation of prices Indian farmers have to compete with highly subsidized producers in developed countries (Ghosh, 2005b).

Social Infrastructure and Human Wellbeing

Public investment in social infrastructure has gained renewed interest and is closely linked to issues of governance and rural poverty. While social infrastructure has traditionally been the domain of those who support more state intervention, recently, even market advocates increasingly see the need for investment in health and education to bring inclusive growth (Ahluwalia, 2011). They however place very little faith in the state's ability to deliver these public measures and cite its poor record as proof that the state is highly prone to corruption and misallocation of resources. Therefore they support a system of vouchers funded by the state but implemented through decentralized mechanisms with the involvement of NGOs and the private sector to enable the poor to pay for private services (Lal, 2010; Aiyar, 2011; Singh and Srinivasan, 2006).

Interventionists draw attention to the enabling roles of basic education, health, and other social infrastructure in allowing the poor to participate in economic growth. Poverty alleviation is attributed to more than just economic liberalization, but also to the spread of Green Revolution in agriculture, large anti-poverty programs, higher investments in social infrastructure in the 80s and the significance of social movements in India (Deaton and Drèze, 2002; Bardhan, 2004). In general, India's record of public investment in basic and secondary education has poor, where a majority of the women and a large proportion on the men are illiterate. Secondary education has been confined to particular classes (Sen, 2011).

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed economic development policies in modern India and discussed pro-market and pro-state debates concerning the political economy of development of agriculture. It suggests that the impacts of economic reforms have been highly complex, contradictory and uneven. While they have benefitted certain sectors such as information technology and services and urban areas in general, by and far they have not been beneficial to the rural areas and the poor. This is understandable since rural areas and the poor in general have relied on support from the state for sustenance, which has decreased drastically since the reforms. By far the most enabling policies of the state concerning the poor have been in redistributive policies, the provision of safety nets and investment in social infrastructure.

Based on the debates discussed above, this chapter concludes by advocating for a more centrist approach to economic development. Two decades of neoliberal reform have brought into question the efficacy of free-trade, growth and outward orientation for India because the distributional outcomes have not been very promising. Rodrik (1996) argues that for more equitable distribution of economic growth states should focus more on high investment and macroeconomic policies, and less on outward orientation and privatization. These he says have been common features of those economies that have done well in the post-war period (Rodrik, 1996). Bruton (1998) also suggests that renewed emphasis needs to be placed on the internal aspects of the economy to strengthen its institutions, and promote knowledge accumulation and entrepreneurship.

Highlighting the success of the “center” economies, De Janvry suggests that more socially and sectorally articulated regions and economies are better able to take advantage

of the market. A well articulated economy means that there are forward and backward linkages between sectors and sub-sectors of an economy where for example, when agricultural technology displaces labor it is readily absorbed by the manufacturing sector (sectoral articulation). A more educated and skilled workforce is also important for the manufacturing sector (social articulation). He highlights that social and structural articulation are both important components of industrialization and the continued expansion of capitalist production processes (de Janvry, 1982). This could perhaps explain why some states in India have done better than others with the adoption of economic reform with reforms.

This chapter sets the stage for taking a more in-depth look at the political economy of development of the Telengana Region and Andhra Pradesh State where research for this dissertation was conducted. Combining historical and political economy literatures and with ethnographic research the next chapter considers the outcomes of development for the rural poor through the three distinct stages: from colonial/feudal rule through the era of state-led development and finally to the adoption of neoliberal policies in the 1990s.

CHAPTER 3. THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF DEVELOPMENT IN TELENGANA REGION AND ANDHRA PRADESH

Introduction

The last chapter reviewed general political economic debates centered on agriculture and India's neoliberal economic policies. It demonstrated that the impacts of economic reforms have been highly complex, contradictory and uneven. The market, driven as it is by profit, growth and competition is not the tide that raises all boats. Although neoliberal policies have led to spectacular growth, the rich and middle classes and the urban areas have largely benefitted, leaving out the rural areas and the poor. While the interventionist state has led to an inefficient use of resources and has been open to cooption by elites, it has been able to deliver development in ways that benefit the common man.

This chapter traces the political economic development of the Telengana region and later Andhra Pradesh State (hereafter Andhra) from the time of the princely Nizam's rule (Asaf Jah Dynasty) in the 1700s to the present era of neoliberal reforms in three distinct stages of development. In the first stage, the Telengana region was under the princely Hyderabad state and was characterized by colonial and feudal systems of administration. The rural areas were incorporated into world commodity markets driven by mercantile capitalism. In the second stage, covering the decades from India's independence to the early 1990s, the Telengana region was merged with the other Telegu speaking regions of British India to form Andhra Pradesh State and its development was subject to Andhra's policies. The second stage reflects India's socialist democratic

leanings, where state-led development was centered on the national agenda to modernize through industrialization and increased agricultural productivity. The third stage, from 1991 to the present, considers Andhra's development with the adoption of neoliberal economic reforms. In the second and third stages, starting with Independence when India became an electoral democracy, rural development policies were closely tied to the electoral fortunes of Andhra's two main political parties, the Congress and the Telegu Desam Party (TDP).

In addition to reviewing historical and political economic literatures, this chapter draws on ethnographic field research such as life histories, in-depth interviews and participant observation to consider what livelihoods were like amongst the Dalit and other poor farmers in the region.

Hyderabad State 1700s – 1948: Land, Labor, Caste and Exploitation

“Rural poverty is not simply due to lack of funds or technology. Frequently the rural depressors are built into the political-economic system” (Khan, 1978, quoted by Robinson, 1988)

The Telengana evokes images of rurality and backwardness, of exploitation and violent struggle, of drought and hard red soils, of cotton and farmer's suicides. It also brings to mind a culture of multiple languages, Muslim flavor and syncretic religions, with diverse crops and a distinct cuisine. Over the years, the region has been in the news for its struggle for separate statehood and also for the very violent and radical Naxalite (Maoist) movement, active mainly in its forested tribal areas. The region is also

remembered for one of the longest and most successful peasant uprisings in the sub-continent against feudal oppression that raged between 1946 and 1951 (Sundarayya and Chattopadhyay, 1972; Elliott, 1974). Today, as it experiences a dramatic economic transformation, it is not hard to recognize how the history of the region, along with its distinct physical and sociocultural characteristics, in its interaction with the forces of development and globalization, has engendered a trajectory of underdevelopment and inequality.

Ecologically the region is semi-arid and characterized by rainfed agriculture. It is constrained by large areas of infertile soils and frequent droughts. Added to these ecological constraints (and also because of them) the region has been sidelined with regard to investment and development in favor of the more fertile coastal belt of Andhra (Vakulabharanam, 2004). Even though the Telengana is drained by two major rivers for example, the Krishna and the Godavari, a majority of the water is used for irrigating coastal Andhra districts which has a higher level of irrigation infrastructure than the Telengana region (Vakulabharanam, 2004).

The region has a higher percentage of lower castes/classes comprised of Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and *Adivasis* or Scheduled Tribes (ST) when compared to the rest of Andhra (Rao 2010). Dalits account for about sixteen percent of population which is the same for the rest of Andhra, but the percentage of Muslims and Scheduled Tribes is considerably higher (Rao, 2010). Overall the socially and economically disadvantaged castes constitute not less than eighty five percent of the population in Telangana (Rao, 2010). The high percentage of marginalized groups combined with low investment and the region's ecological constraints contributes to it being perceived as

“backward” – a fact borne out by its low productivity and low human development indicators (Subrahmanyam, 2002).

Before it became part of the modern-day Andhra Pradesh state in 1948, the Telengana region belonged to Hyderabad State under the late-Mughal Asaf Jah dynasty, also referred to as the Nizam’s state. Revenues from agriculture made up the largest contribution to the Nizam’s purse and came from taxes and customs on crop production (Pavier, 1981). The region was divided into two administrative areas, *Khalisa* and *Jagir*, which were distinguished by the form of revenue collection. In the *Khalisa* areas taxes went directly to the Nizam, whereas in the *Jagir* areas, feudal lords (*Jagirdars*) were the tax-collecting intermediaries who were not only given tax-collecting privileges but also had police and judiciary authority (Pavier, 1981). Official positions were given to the handful of prominent high caste households from both the Hindu and Muslim castes. These feudal positions were a source of enormous power and wealth and were used to control resources, extract money, extract free labor, occupy land, and siphon state resources (Sundarayya and Chattopadhyay, 1972; Pavier, 1981).

Feudal estates comprised more than a third of the Nizam’s territory, and they resembled small kingdoms. Much of princely state’s resources were siphoned off before they reached the state coffers, allowing *Jagirdars* to amass fortunes leaving the state constantly in heavy debt and the rural masses at the mercy of these feudal lords (Elliott, 1974). These feudal lords wielded absolute power because they were also vested with police and judiciary authority (Elliott, 1974). All these led to a high concentration of landholding among these feudal families and intermediaries in the Telengana (Elliott, 1974; Sundarayya and Chattopadhyay, 1972).

Examples of the hardships posed by these feudal lords abound in the historical texts and were recounted several times during by older village residents in the field area. One Muslim village resident in her 80s remembers standing in the hot sun bent over with the weight of a large rock on her back as punishment for not paying taxes. Another old Dalit farmer relates that his parents had to walk all the way into Zahirabad, the closest town, to pay taxes because the local feudal lord would not accept payment directly from untouchables. This entailed a two to three day walk barefoot, in the blazing sun, to the town of Zahirabad which was about twenty kilometers away. Being untouchable and poor, it was not easy to access food and water and they would sometimes have to go without food for the entire length of their trip.²

Even though the Nizam's state was a protectorate of the British, the internal affairs of the Nizam were not subject to British interference. The British who ruled the adjacent areas under the Madras Presidency were known to be better administrators and unlike the Nizam had more oversight over their intermediaries and bureaucracy, and devolved resources and authority. They also invested in developing the agricultural economy and compared to the Telengana, the coastal Andhra districts under British India were agriculturally well developed due in no small part to canal irrigation provided by the colonial administration (Elliott, 1974; Pavier, 1981).

Land, caste and the labor institutions it fostered were integral to the agrarian economy in the Telengana. Land was considered to be the most valuable asset and caste institutions ensured a plentiful labor supply and perpetuated structures of inequality and

² Life Histories of Dalit and Muslim farmers July-September 2009, Kambalpalle Village

dominance, while also serving as a source of political mobilization. They were so intricately intertwined that changes in any one aspect had far-reaching implications on the others. In addition to the high and land owning castes that were in the minority, the service castes³ formed the majority of the village population and were generally all quite poor. Labor and traditional occupations were determined by caste and each caste had a specific set of roles to play in the village. In exchange for their services, they were given small pieces of land, either communal or individual, and a certain amount of provisioning in what had the makings of a “moral economy”, but as several studies suggest, were not very moral (Habib, 1995; Pavier, 1981; Sundarayya and Chattopadhyay, 1972; Robinson, 1988).

These service castes include the Hindus as well as the Muslims, where the *Pakiris* (in other areas known as Fakirs and are wandering mendicants) for example, took care of the religious shrines and *dargahs* (tombs of Muslim saints) and the Hindu caste *Jungums* took care of the Hindu temples. The other castes, generally referred to today as backward castes (BC), performed services such as laundry (*Chakali*), haircutting (*Mangali*), pottery (*Kummari*), grazing and weaving (*Golla*), weaving baskets (*Yerkalas*), and so on. The middle Hindu castes, referred to as Other Backward Castes (OBCs), were generally the larger peasants and traders and formed the middle tier of the rural economy.

The lowest castes are the former untouchable castes, who are also called Dalits or Scheduled Castes (SCs). They belong to two main sub-castes, the *Malas* and the *Madigas*. *Malas* today are also referred to as Ambedkarites, having converted to

³ The Hindu service castes are designated as Backward Castes (BC) and Other Backward Castes (OBC). Muslims are categorized as Minority (MIN) and BCs in Indian political society

Buddhism in the footsteps of their leader Ambedkar, a Dalit himself and a champion of Dalit rights. The *Madigas* in this area are Christian. Both groups say that conversions are acts of opposition to their degradation and low status in the Hindu caste hierarchy. There are other nomadic and begging castes in the area called *Bichapols* and some others like the *Vodlas* that do stone work, and *Bairgamlos* who do blacksmithing. In addition to these castes, there are tribal groups in the area called *Lambadis* who usually live in their own hamlets called *thandas*, but some families live in villages alongside with other castes. While these castes are not untouchable, they are very low in the caste hierarchy, generally very poor and are marginalized in similar ways as the Dalits.

Land records indicate that land was accessed in numerous ways in the area. Traditionally it was given or gifted by the colonial administration or feudal families to village residents in differing quantities and qualities based on their caste, position and types of services they performed in the village. For example, Dalits and lower caste Muslims received *Inam* or gifted land in exchange for their traditional caste occupations. These were not the best lands in the village and were generally red and stony and far from the village. Lands near tanks and with fertile black soils were generally reserved for the higher castes. In Bidekane village for example, land records from 1963 show that the high-caste Hindus largely owned these fertile lands. Later, as land reform was carried out, some landless households, especially tenants and servants of large landholding families

received good fertile lands allowing some Dalits households to become small to medium peasants⁴.

In the Telengana, the incorporation of these “traditional” or "pre-capitalist" societies into global capitalism depended on the availability of an unfree labor, which was enabled through the institutionalized (caste) degradation of workers (Habib, 1999). As mentioned previously, colonial regimes used and consolidated these structures of power to meet their own revenue and governance agendas, and in some cases were known to actually create these structures by creating an imported class of nobles who had no roots in the rural economy and in many ways were more exploitative than the traditional caste institutions (Habib, 1999).

Untouchables and lower castes provided agricultural and other labor under either bonded or the *vetti* system of compulsory unpaid labor (Pavie, 1981). These caste institutions kept them landless, oppressed, illiterate, and divided and they provided wage and unfree labor despite the abundance of land (Suri, 2002; Pavie, 1981). Mughal Historian, Irfan Habib describes their condition:

At the bottom was the landless proletariat, created in Mughal India not by capitalism but by the age-old operation of the caste system for the benefit of peasant agriculture. Although the proportion of the menial ('untouchable') castes varied from region to region, it is certain they constituted from a sixth to a fifth of the rural population; and they were prevented from holding land or setting themselves up as cultivating peasants. Living at the brink of starvation all the time, they formed a reserve, cheaply available to the peasants when they needed labor at the time of sowing and harvesting. There are, perhaps, few parallels in the

⁴ In fact in Bidakane, in 1979, about eighty acres or about seven percent of the land changed hands from rich landowning families to mainly four Dalit families. This was more the exception and most Dalits were still very poor and landless.

world when the oppressors and the oppressed majority in society have joined together to keep a minority in such utter degradation (Bagchi 1996, pg. 91, quoting unpublished talk by Irfan Habib, 1980).

Life histories of Dalits in the field area have revealed three different aspects of traditional labor institutions. The customary work related to their caste occupations, intermittent forced “free” labor referred to as *vetti*, and daily bonded labor or *jitham*. All three were highly degrading and exploitative. Along with these occupations were the institutions of provisioning that included traditional begging and payments in grain. Most service castes were able to cultivate land in addition to their traditional duties, however this was generally not the case for the Dalits, who were so burdened with their traditional labor obligations and did not have the time and resources to dedicate to cultivation and often did not have much land.

Dalits traditional work included the disposal of dead animals in the village and using the hides to make slippers and other things, digging graves, cleaning the village center during festivals time, beating the drums during the Muslim Muharram festival, preparing wood for weddings and supplying *tendu* leaves used to make Indian cigarettes, bonded agricultural labor, preparing the grain processing areas and guarding grain during processing.

The Dalits also did compulsory unpaid labor called *vetti* which caused great hardship and was abhorred by them. In fact, one the main grievances in the famous Telengana peasant uprising was their resistance to the burden of *vetti*. In this region, *vetti* involved carrying land records and belongings for visiting local officials and landowners when they traveled from the towns to the villages or between villages. An old Dalit

woman from one of the poorest households in Kambalpalle Village, for example, remembers that her father-in-law carried land records for the *Tehisldar* (revenue official) once a week. When he died, her husband took on those duties and after his death she did them. She remembers walking miles, from their village to Jharasangham, the sub-district headquarters without any footwear and carrying a heavy load. Another Dalit farmer from Bidekane relates that their *vetti* involved being beasts of burden for the big landlord in the village, carrying all their luggage on foot to Hadnur another village about seven miles away. *Vetti* could take the most able-bodied people, who were often the breadwinners, from their work and families for days and even weeks with no compensation. The practice of *vetti* was officially stopped after the Telengana uprising in the early 1950s but continued in several areas where feudal relations persisted. By the accounts of some Dalit respondents, the practice was still prevalent in the research area until about thirty years ago.

Today, in most villages in the area, traditional occupations are still practiced, but in hybridized and less exploitative forms. For example in Kambalpalle, the *Mangali* (barbers) still do business, but the Dalits must go into town for haircuts because untouchability is still prevalent. Laundry is still being done by some *Chakalis*, the *Kumari* make pottery, the *Yerkala* make baskets, *Chippes* sew clothes, the *Gollas* are pastoralists, the *Bairgamlos* do blacksmithing and make agricultural implements by hand, even though they can also be bought from the hardware store in the market town of Zahirabad. Payments are made in both in grain and cash. Dalits report that bonded labor is not prevalent in the area anymore.

For Dalits and some other castes like the *Pakiris* (Muslims) and *Jungums* (Hindu), traditional begging was a major form of food provisioning. For the Mala sub-caste it was performed in exchange for *tendu* leaves gathered from nearby forests, used to make *beedis*, a local cigarette. It remains an important aspect of food provisioning especially among the older Dalit members in the region. However as the number of households has increased quite drastically from the two to three extended families in a village a few decades ago, these begging privileges are now rotated annually amongst a few families. One of the older Dalit respondents from Bidekane village for example, sets off every morning on her begging rounds at around seven in the morning having gathered the *tendu* leaves earlier. She returns with about six to twelve sorghum *rotis* and some flour and rice. She says that this provides a basic kind of food security for the family.

In addition to the daily begging, most of the menial service castes including the Dalits were entitled to beg for grain at harvest and threshing times when they would get two open palms full of grain from each field. This was one of the main ways that payments were made to the service castes. Today this privilege is practiced in both villages but again the privileges are limited to only a few households because of demographic pressures. One Dalit farmer notes that traditional begging could earn them about 15kgs of grain everyday during the harvest season, a substantial amount, when harvests were good. They were also allowed to sweep up leftover grain from the threshing areas.

Another very important form of food provisioning was payment for wage labor in crops instead of cash. In the past, agricultural laborers were paid in crop wage of one kilo of grain a day. Dalit respondents reported that this barely sufficed to feed an extended

family and usually the daily crop wage was all they had to eat. Today, crop wage continues to be an important aspect of food security. However the practice is decreasing as people grow less food crops and have less to spare. In 2008 crop wages were preferred because the actual value of the grain was much higher than the wage rate and was especially appreciated as the cost of buying staples like rice, pulses and sorghum skyrocketed. Crop wages are preferred by the women in general as they are not always in control of cash wages in the household. A landless woman Dalit farmer from Kambalpalle notes that these practices are changing:

“Before we used to get most of our food from crop wage because our land was not very productive. Now people tend to pay cash instead of crop wage because there are less food crops being cultivated. It is better for us to get paid in crop wage”.⁵

Even though food provisioning was built into the traditional labor institutions, most Dalit farmers felt that they were not adequately taken care of by their employers and patrons especially during times of severe droughts and shortages. One poor Dalit woman from Kambalpalle Village, for example notes that:

During the drought the big people in the village, the big landowners [former feudal households] did not help us much. A Reddy from Narsapur [a large peasant from a neighboring village] helped. We used to get grain in advance in exchange for labor when they needed us. If for some reason we could not provide labor, we would have to pay back the grain at 1 ½ times the grain borrowed.⁶

⁵ Life history interview conducted in Kambalpalle Village, July 2009.

⁶ Life history interview conducted in Kambalpalle Village, July 2009.

For Dalits, the more demeaning aspects of traditional work such as dealing with dead animals and humans have died out. A small Dalit farmer from Bidekane notes that:

After the church came, the Madigas [untouchable sub-caste] stopped their traditional occupations. With the church came blessings of God and things became much better for us. We stopped listening to the Kapus [landlords] and before we depended on the Kapus for everything. The church made us more *ushaar* [aware].⁷

These are just a few of the numerous examples that demonstrate the lives of extreme insecurity, degradation and bondage that Dalits have suffered. Having to beg and depend on others for food provisioning was one of the most degrading acts that Dalits did. They talk about how changes have not only brought material improvements in their lives, it has also allowed them to live their lives with more dignity. Self respect is an important theme that runs through all their stories.

From the 1800s onwards, the transition of agriculture occurred through commodity production driven by imperialism and world demand for cotton, castor, groundnut and sugarcane. Most commodity crops grown were exported to neighboring British India to be sent to England and beyond (Pavier, 1981). Several of these crops were introduced from neighboring regions under the British, by entrepreneurial peasants mostly from the Reddy caste who were encouraged to settle in the Telengana region bringing with them commercial crops and new methods of cultivation. Interestingly this is a trend that has continued till today. Tobacco and chilies were also grown commercially but were not exported. In fact, tobacco was grown under contract

⁷ In-depth interviews conducted in Bidekane village with Nagappa's household, August 2009

arrangements with the Charminar cigarette factory where peasants were provided with fertilizer and a guaranteed market (Pavier, 1981). Tobacco was also used as payment to wage workers by the landlords⁸. Main food crops grown during the early to mid 1900s were rice, sorghum, corn, redgram (pigeonpea), green gram, and sesame (Pavier, 1981).

From the 1930s on, the State played an active role in promoting commodity crops by investing in irrigation infrastructure, providing credit and distributing hybrid seeds for cotton, groundnut, sugarcane, castor, rice and sorghum. The cultivation of commercial crops was widely practiced even by middle and small peasants, however only the feudal elite who controlled access to capital and land were able to create surpluses. Even the large peasants were liable to taxes and illegal extractions by the Nizam's intermediaries (Pavier, 1981). Many peasants were in debt bondage as a lions share of the rural credit was serviced by money lenders who provided 90% of the credit (Vakulabharanam, 2004). The introduction of oilseeds like groundnut, sesame and linseed that could be grown on what was previously considered unproductive lands brought large areas of uncultivated lands into production by the landlords by taking land away from tenants leading to dispossession and to further concentration of land by landlords (Vakulabharanam, 2004).

Being integrated into world markets the region experienced upheavals with severe deflation followed by inflation during the Great Depression and World War II. Small commodity farmers suffered when prices crashed leading to more debt and dispossession. While the war increased prices, the demand for commodity crops, especially oilseeds, fueled a shift away from food crop cultivation – leading to food

⁸ Interview conducted during fieldwork landholding family in 2009

shortages, inflation and further dispossession. Landlords and grain traders controlled about ninety percent of grain production and experienced a rapid increase in wealth while the small farmers became even more impoverished (Vakulabharanam, 2004, Pavier, 1981).

These conditions were ripe for discontent, ensuing in looting and attacks on the wealthy. The state increased its interventionist role to protect its interests and created a system of procurement and distribution of food crops for the poor, while also placing limits on the cultivation of non-food crops like cotton and ground nut. This however served to worsen the situation of the peasantry who became increasingly indebted and impoverished as they were forced to sell about a large portion of their grain to the state at below market prices, while the rich feudal families were able to wield their influence and to escape state levies (Vakulabharanam, 2004).

Rural discontent and a wave of nationalist fervor sweeping all across India created the right conditions for the mobilization of the rural masses in the Telengana. The communist parties were successful in uniting a diverse population opposed to a highly repressive Muslim regime on issues of Telegu and Hindu identity, bonded labor, the repressive *Jagidari* system and the grain levy (Pavier, 1981). In 1946, the murder of a landless Dalit laborer by a *Deshmukh* (former tax-collecting intermediary in the Nizam's government) became the catalyst for the peasant uprising that swept through the Telengana. The communist party by then had well organized networks in more than 4000 villages (Elliott, 1974). Unlike the British, the Muslim regime failed to broaden its support among the Hindu peasants and elite, which would have mediated popular pressures and might have staved off a rebellion (Elliott, 1974). The rebellion was

violently repressed by the Nizam's regime but eventually the Nizam and later the Indian state instituted reforms leading to a substantial decline in feudal dominance, the abolition of the abhorred *Jargirdari* system, tenancy reforms and the doing away of the *vetti* system of compulsory labor. The struggle was successful in the large scale politicization of the masses and also of women (Sundarayya and Chattopadhyay, 1972) but the areas unaffected by the peasant struggle continued to experience feudal oppression until the 1970s (Srinivasulu, 2002) and some areas well into the 1980s⁹.

The growth and development of agriculture in this period was typical of colonial regimes in India demonstrating that caste, feudal and colonial institutions colluded to mediate access to the market (Pavier, 1981). Growth of agriculture was low as surpluses were extracted out of the rural economy, labor was abundant and technological innovation was low. Commodity production and the collection of taxes led to a monetization of the economy, but to what extent is unclear (Bagchi, 1996).

After Independence: The “Creeping Revolution” 1948 – 1991

“(T)he old order of the countryside is not what it used to be and their best days are over” (Wolf Ladejinsky, 1972, quoted in Robinson 1988)

The Indian government carried out a military takeover of the Nizam's state in 1948, a year after independence. The Nizam was unwilling to join the Indian union, wanting instead to stay an independent kingdom and appealed to the British crown for

⁹ Interviews conducted during fieldwork in 2009

help in vain (Sundarayya and Chattopadhyay, 1972). After Independence, India adopted a socialist democratic model of government which was a radical departure from colonial and Muslim rule. Its ruling classes chose the path of modernization where the role of agriculture was to provide cheap food for the expansion of industry and urbanization (Frankel, 2005; Ghosh, 2005b).

Riding on the momentum of the national freedom struggle, the state was able to bring about changes in the rural landscape by introducing land and tenancy reforms (Robinson, 1988; Suri, 2006). These reforms were the earliest form of public interventions into poverty alleviation and led to increases in the proportion of land under owner-cultivation (Parthasarathy, 1995). They disproportionately benefitted the middle castes/classes of tenants at the expense of large landlords and poor tenants, thus creating a new class of middle and rich peasants (Robinson, 1988).¹⁰ However, while land reforms did not change the ownership structure of landholdings directly, it had two indirect effects. First, more land under owner-cultivation led to higher growth rates in agriculture that trickled down to affect the poor. Second, it freed rural labor from the grip of the feudal class and their control over common property resources (Parthasarathy, 1995). As mentioned above, areas under feudal tax-collecting intermediaries covered two-fifths of Andhra and included the Telengana region (Parthasarathy, 1995).

In the late 50s, the region witnessed two historic events, the creation of Andhra Pradesh State and the institution of the Panchayati Raj system of decentralized governance. In 1956, after a prolonged struggle, the Telengana region was merged with

¹⁰ It should be noted that land reforms were not as successful in many parts of the region and the country, however in many parts of the Telengana, the peasant uprising and high levels of mobilization amongst the lower classes led to better implementation of land reforms (Suri, 2002)

the two Telegu-speaking districts formerly under the British-ruled Madras Presidency to form Andhra Pradesh State. It was the first state in independent India to be formed along linguistic lines (Suri, 2002). Sharp regional disparities existed in the levels of development in the three regions at the time of the state's formation due to variations in colonial political legacy, land relations, infrastructure, education, human development and so on (Suri, 2002). In 1956, Telengana's level of development was only about half of coastal Andhra. Telengana's literacy rate for example, was 17.3 percent as opposed to coastal Andhra's rate of 30.8. Its per capita income was Rs. 188 while Andhra's was Rs. 292. In road infrastructure large differences existed where the Telengana had only 9 miles of road per 100 square miles as opposed to Andhra at 37 miles (Kirk, 2005).

Several including Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, questioned the wisdom of merging the Telengana region with the rest of Andhra given the region's distinct cultural identity. Many feared that as part of a larger state, the region's interests would not be well represented (Srinivasulu, 2002). The promise to have separate Telengana statehood after a few years did not materialize and not surprisingly the region continues to be politically underrepresented. Continued regional disparities have intensified identity politics, which has led to a resurgence of the struggle for separate Telengana statehood (Suri 2002, Chakrabarti, 2010; Rao, 2009).

In 1957, the Congress Party instituted decentralization reforms known as the Panchayati Raj which has had far-reaching consequences. The reforms created a system of rural local government to promote democratic decentralization (Suri, 2002).

Considerable funds were made available at the local level for development as a result. The new rich peasant class who benefitted from land and tenancy reforms were able to

consolidate their power in the countryside by capturing these local government positions and funds (Suri, 2002; Rudra, 1992). Later amendments introduced a reservation system for women and lower castes allowing for the contestation of power of the rural elites (Suri, 2002). The processes of change have been slow but they have nevertheless shaken the hold of traditional rural elites, a process that is continuing today (Robinson, 1988).

In the 1960s, India adopted Green Revolution policies where the government directly intervened to commercialize the more productive rural areas using technological innovations in hybrid seed, along with chemical input intensive agricultural practices. The effects of the Green Revolution were dramatic but uneven (Harris-White, 2008). It led to large grain surpluses in certain grains which allowed India to become food self-sufficient. However, the interaction of new technologies with differential access to land, water, labor, credit and marketing led also to inequality, concentration of wealth, impoverishment and environmental degradation (Harris-White, 2008; Robinson, 1988).

Since the Green Revolution focused mostly on irrigated crops like rice and wheat, the state's technological advancements and investments in agriculture benefitted mostly the rice-growing Coastal Andhra – which served to further enhance regional disparities (Vakulabharanam, 2004). The Telengana region was introduced to the technology through diffusion when peasants from coastal Andhra, newly enriched by the Green Revolution, moved to the Telengana in search of fertile lands. Their access to technologies, credit and willingness to pay higher wages allowed them to take advantage of the best lands and cheap labor in the region (Vakulabharanam, 2004; Srinivasulu, 2002).

The Green Revolution was a technological solution to agriculture that circumvented the need to institute structural change through redistributive reforms (Posani, 2009; Suri, 2006; Rudra, 1992). Redistributive reforms were unpopular with the rural elites, who were increasingly becoming political force in their own right (Frankel, 2005). This period saw the ruralization of politics in which peasants became a political force to contend with all over India. Led by iconic leaders who rose from the ranks of the newly market-rich peasant class, these 'new farmers movements' and their tremendous organizational capabilities changed the face of Indian politics and marked the rise of populism in Indian politics (Brass, 2000). While the issues espoused by these movements were not always the most important to the lower classes especially the landless they were nevertheless were able to get political buy-in of the lower classes through their populist postures on economic, ecological, gender and nationality issues, while at the same time sidelining land reforms and wage issues, which were the main concerns of the rural poor (Frankel, 2005, Brass, 2000).

By the late 1960s, Indian planners began to question whether the prevailing strategies to promote rural growth and productivity would suffice to resolve the problems of rural poverty (Mathur, 1995). The increasing availability cheap industrial goods had marginalized rural artisans, the effectiveness of land reform proved to be limited, and the Green Revolution had not benefited the less endowed regions (Vakulabharanam, 2004). Most of the poor were concentrated in the non-irrigated and semi-arid regions of Andhra which included the Telengana where agricultural productivity was low (Parthasarathy, 1995). The state was once again faced with rural discontent and violence as rural poverty

persisted and the rural populace became increasingly differentiated. (Parthasarathy 2002, Vakulabharanam, 2004).

To address the growing rural discontent, the Congress Party implemented a series of anti-poverty programs in the 70s and 80s to target its largest electorate: the Scheduled Castes (Dalits), Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis) and lower classes (Mathur, 1995; Reddy, Galab and Rao, 2003). They implemented programs like the Small Farmer Development Agency and the Marginal Farmer and Agricultural Labor Scheme to provide resources and agricultural inputs to small and marginal farmers. Additionally, the National Small Industries Corporation was set up to provide technology and marketing support to small industries in the hopes of providing large-scale employment. Schemes like the Drought Prone Areas Program focused on the issues of water shortage and management. Later the National Rural Employment Program and the Integrated Rural Development Program promoted self-employment and the building of assets for the poor (Parthasarathy, 1995; Reddy, Galab and Rao, 2003; Vyasulu, 2005). Because these programs did not challenge the structural bases of society they were politically acceptable and supported by the rural elites (Vyasulu, 2005).

The 70s and 80s also saw the mobilization and emergence of lower castes and under-represented high castes such as the Kammas, allowing them to challenge the dominant traditional elites and the Congress Party. This development posed a serious threat to Congress Party's thirty-year uninterrupted run and also to the dominance of the Reddys who comprised the majority of the rich peasant classes in the state (Reddy, 2002). Congress Party's dominance had lasted longer in Andhra than many other states,

including the post-emergency election of 1977 when most of India turned against the party (Elliott, 2011).

The Telegu Desam Party (TDP) was the first regional party that emerged. Its leader was the charismatic ex-actor N.T. Rama Rao – also referred to as NTR. When he came into power in 1983, he introduced a range of measures aimed at garnering support of the rural poor (Kirk, 2005) Amongst the most popular of NTR’s programs were the subsidized Rs. 2 rice scheme, the free power for irrigation to farming communities, the largest subsidized housing program in the country,¹¹ free lunch for school children, and a prohibition on alcohol (Mooij, 2002; Manor, 2006; Kirk, 2005). He also abolished the *Patwari* system, a hereditary feudal institution of village officers, which substantially impacted upper-caste dominance and altered rural power structures (Reddy, 2002).

The policies were extremely popular with the masses and improved the quality of life for many. Food subsidies were especially important, because by the early 1980’s Andhra the proportion of agricultural workers who were landless or had unviable holdings, was more than fifty percent. While land reform had increased the number of cultivators during the 50s and 60s, demographic pressures on small and marginal farms had forced many to become agricultural laborers. They along with many small farmers were net buyers of food, and the food subsidy program contributed greatly to their food security (Parthasarathy, 2002).

Political observers labeled NTR’s welfare measures as “populist” because they were handouts to the poor which came at the cost of building up social and physical rural

¹¹ During NTR’s terms as Chief Minister (1983-89 and 1994-95), Andhra Pradesh alone built more than 50 percent of India’s subsidized housing for the poor.

infrastructure in the state (Elliott, 2011; Suri, 2002). While both the Congress and the TDP resorted to populist measures to secure their rural vote banks, under NTR, welfarism reached new heights and was blamed for the deterioration in Andhra's fiscal position. Spending in physical and social infrastructure such as primary education, health, agriculture, and irrigation (apart from input subsidies) declined in real terms and eventually impacted Andhra's growth rate negatively (Kirk, 2005). Furthermore, with the prohibition on alcohol the state forfeited considerable revenue in excise taxes (Kirk, 2005).

The massive deployment of welfare measures for the rural poor in the 70s and 80s the state resulted in the reduction of rural poverty (Kirk, 2005) leading Andhra to be ranked as the second highest in rural poverty reduction during the period of 1970 to 1988 (Kirk, 2005). Andhra's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) grew at an average annual rate of 5.65 percent during the 1980s and even outstripped the rate of GDP growth for country as a whole (5.47 percent during the same period) (Ahluwalia, 2001). Fertility reduction and *per capita* income grew faster than the national average, and continued to hold steady during the 1990s (Kirk, 2005; Reddy, Galab and Rao, 2003).

Even while the state was able to bring development to the masses, peasant struggles continued to be waged in the state especially in areas that were on the periphery of the Telengana peasant uprising where extreme forms of feudal exploitation persisted (Srinivasulu, 2002). These included the Northern Telengana districts, where tribal populations are concentrated in the forested zones. In these areas, what has come to be known as the Naxalite movement (led by different radical factions of Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML) also called the Peoples War Group has sought to

mobilize the rural masses (Srinivasulu, 2002). After the Telengana peasant struggle was aborted in 1951, many of the revolutionary fighters went underground into the forests and have been active in these districts. The movement gained impetus after the state of emergency that lasted for two years between 1975 and 1977 and threw the country into political turmoil (Srinivasulu, 2002). While initially followed a largely non-violent line, severe and violent repression by the state from the mid-1980s led to an armed struggle as the way to eliminate class enemies, whether landowners, businessmen or politicians (Srinivasulu, 2002). In many ways the Naxalite movement was seeking to complete the process that had remained unfinished since the 1940s (Parthasarathy, 1995).

While the lower caste Hindus were able to become a political force with the TDP in the 1980s, the Dalits and *Adivasis* in the state continued to be marginalized as their interests within the political machinery were not as important (Srinivasulu, 2002; Suri, 2002). They have benefitted to some extent from affirmative action, development, education and employment opportunities. Conversion to Christianity has helped take Dalits out of the oppressive Hindu caste practices, and given them some amount of self-respect (Srinivasulu, 2002). The elimination of feudal intermediaries and exploitative labor regimes such as *vetti* gave the Dalits and lower castes more freedoms. They were able to sell their own labor and those who had land became independent growers, but by and large they continued to live lives of severe hardship. Life histories with Dalits at the field site revealed that food provisioning and exploitative labor institutions continued to cause great hardship well into the 1980s.

Most Dalit households and several other lower class households relate that hunger was a seasonal reality. For some of the poorest Dalits, it was a daily reality for long

periods of time. The lean months generally started in the early summer in March and extended all the way into September or October till the first of the rainy season crops were harvested. They talk about drinking millet porridge (*ambali*) of broken rice or other grain because they did not have enough grain to make *rotis*. One woman explained: “One glass of rice will feed one person, but when you make *ambali* from one glass of rice it feeds four people”.¹² She also remembers foraging in harvested fields for left over ground nuts and roasting them for the children whom she said they always fed first during hungry times.

People talk about two major droughts that hit the area in 1972 and 1987 and the older people remember a third one sometime before 1972. The 1972 drought is referred to as the “food drought” which was severe and brought hunger. People from Kambalpalle village said that they had to leave in search of food and work as cultivation came to a standstill and there was no work available locally. They talked about selling their valuable bullocks for only fifty rupees because there was no fodder. Some speak of giving their land in exchange for borrowed grain or selling their land for almost nothing just so they could eat. Another drought occurred in 1987 and was referred to as *nilu karavu* or water draught. During the water drought they did not go hungry because of safety nets like subsidized rice, but there were severe water shortages and also a lack of work. The higher castes were able to buy water from nearby areas but the poor had to walk to a well three kilometers away in the town of Singitham and would wait for hours near the wells scooping muddy water as it percolated up.

¹² Life history interview conducted in Kambalpalle Village, August 2009

Most poor families have talked about migrating for two to three years during prolonged droughts to take *jithams* or wage work in other villages, sometimes moving from one area to another in search of work. One extended family from Kambalpalle for example migrated to the historic fort town of Bidar (about forty kilometers away) to work on a government project to dig wells for wages of three rupees a day. The head of the household remembers being so hungry and having to walk eight kilometers every three days to buy sorghum with their wages. Because of the drought food was expensive and they used to get only three kilos for nine rupees. After that work was done they migrated to Ram Teerth village a few months later to harvest sugarcane. They recounted that they drank cane juice all week till they got paid and could buy food

Institutions of bonded labor for agricultural work persisted and were prevalent in the area till about ten to fifteen years ago. Most men and boys from poor families did some form of *jitham* in the past. *Jithams* typically paid a very low annual salary ranging between Rs 60 - 200 a year and one or two meals a day. They worked in the fields or took care of animals, bullocks and ploughing, served as watchmen, cleaned cowsheds and the outsides of houses and so on. Children worked with grazing livestock, taking them everyday to the forests and commons. Being untouchable, Dalits were not employed inside homes as these duties were usually done by the ritually 'cleaner' castes such as lower caste Hindus. People did not have the freedom to leave *jithams* and were often in debt bondage with employing households for generations.

Today, the word *jitham* is used to refer to salaried employment arrangements and are still arranged between poor and rich families. Rich and middle class households employ lower caste/class men and older boys to take care of bullocks and managing

ploughing operations, irrigation, labor on fields, build fences, serve as watchmen, and supervise wage workers, however the prevalence of younger children doing *jithams* is greatly reduced and arrangements are a lot less coercive. People will sometimes take *jithams* for a fixed number of years for a lump sum to pay off a major expense or debt for weddings, building houses, medical expenses and the like. These payments can range anywhere from Rs. 9000 to Rs. 30000 thousand a year, sometimes going up more depending on the kind of work.

An important difference between the feudal landlords and the more recently wealthy peasants who were benefitted from land reforms such as the Kapus, Reddys and Velamas sub-castes is the nature of the relations of production. The feudal landlords recruited labor by taking advantage of exploitative customary obligations such as forced “free” labor, whereas the rich peasants recruited labor through contractual market-based relations (Srinivasulu, 2002). In the research area, several of the older Dalit farmers talked about their dislike of the Brahmin and Marati (ex-feudal) households still in existence in villages. They claimed that the Reddys took better care of them and consequently they preferred to work for them. By the time the Reddy’s became dominant, institutions such as the *vetti* and the *jagirdari* system had been abolished. But where the feudal landlords persisted, it was harder to break the traditional ties and the subservience of the Dalits to these families continued. In fact, relations between former feudal households and the lower classes in the villages continue to be tinged with feudal subservience and the heads of these households are still referred to by their feudal names.

NTRs party – the TDP – lost to the Congress Party in 1989. The Congress was in power in Andhra when India adopted neoliberal economic reforms in 1991. Thanks to

NTR's decade long policy, the bar had been raised on what Andhra's constituents could expect from the state with regard to state support (Elliott, 2011). Political parties competed against each other to ensure that their largest vote bank, the rural poor were not too disgruntled. The Congress for its part introduced its own programs to subsidize fertilizers, fuel and so on (Mooij, 2003). Studies began to show that by the 1990s however, that the poor received only a small portion of these subsidies even though they became a large part of the budget (Kirk, 2005; Manor, 2006; Mooij, 2003; Vyasulu, 2005).

The end of this phase marked the shift from an era of state-led development to one of market-based reforms. This stage saw the transformation from feudal to capitalist systems of production, the emergence of a class of rich peasantry, and a growing stratification among the peasantry. Changes in relations of production due the distribution of land and the breaking down of caste institutions of labor led to a growth of agriculture at rates much higher than pre-independence rates and to decent strides in poverty reduction. Social activism and socio-political movements especially by communist parties and associated institutions have played an important part many of these changes. In this phase, India experienced a "creeping" (Robinson, 1988) or "gradual revolution" (Frankel, 2005). The state actively aided to contest the power of the rural elites. Even though the local elite are still powerful, they no longer serve as interpreters of the poor (Robinson 1988). "The poor remain politically unorganized; however they are in general no longer organized for the benefit of the rich, which is a major achievement" (Robinson 1988, pg. 13).

Politics of Neoliberal Reform: 1991 to Present

In 1991, India adopted neoliberal economic reforms. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the reforms were adopted due to the balance of payment crisis in 1991. The crisis was fueled by the Gulf war and decreased foreign exchange from remittances, soaring oil prices, and profligate spending on entitlement programs. In Andhra, the Congress lost the election in 1994 to NTR who continued his large-scale welfare measures portraying himself as the champion of the poor in contrast to the Congress as a pro-rich party because it moved ahead with economic reforms (Mooij, 2003). NTR's second term as Chief Minister of Andhra however was short-lived. Chandrababu Naidu, his son-in-law, also from the same party, staged a political coup in 1995 by winning support of the majority of legislators when NTR was traveling overseas (Kirk, 2005; Mooij, 2005). Until Naidu took control of the Andhra in 1995 however, reforms in the state moved at a very slow pace (Kirk, 2005).

As Chief Minister, Chandrababu Naidu, the self-proclaimed "CEO" of Andhra (Kirk, 2005) enthusiastically adopted neoliberal policies. The state's profligate spending had become a major issue, and led to a crisis in fiscal management, for which NTR was blamed (Mooij, 2005). Naidu used the crisis to his advantage to further his neoliberal agenda without much opposition. These reforms were a radical departure from NTR's populist policies of the 80s (Kirk, 2005).

Naidu entered into direct loan agreements with the World Bank and implemented structural adjustment programs starting in 1998 (Kirk, 2005). The World Bank granted about three billion dollars to the state to develop different sectors such as primary

education, primary health, rural roads, irrigation, and public sector enterprise restructuring (Kirk, 2005). The loans however came with conditions that the state would reduce public expenditure on safety nets, agricultural subsidies and salary structure. In addition, the state was to actively promote private investments in the public sector with advice and expertise from the World Bank (Reddy, 2002; Kirk, 2005; Manor, 2006). Naidu also made attempts to implement a more efficient administration (Kirk, 2005).

His pro-reform actions and rhetoric made him the darling of international financial institutions and corporations and he made regular appearances at the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland and New York, all of which paid off handsomely as Andhra soon became India's leading recipient of multilateral development assistance from the World Bank (Kirk, 2005). It also received generous bilateral aid from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and other European governments (Kirk, 2005). Andhra's independent dealings with the World Bank were the first of its kind in India, reflecting a shift in the Bank's strategies to lend directly to promising states (Kirk, 2005).

At the time of the reforms in the early 1990s, Andhra lagged behind the other southern states in its overall development and poverty reduction (Kirk, 2005). Although it had improved in the areas of fertility reduction and health, its human development was ranked 23rd of the 32 states in India and its literacy rate was lower than the Indian average (Mooij, 2003). When it made a case to fund Andhra, a World Bank report listed it as a development underachiever, highlighting its below average growth rate in the 1990s when compared to the Indian average, and its rapidly worsening fiscal condition (Kirk,

2005). It however made no note of its good poverty alleviation record of the 70s and 80s (Dugger, 1999).

Naidu poured massive amounts of money into building Hyderabad and its environs into a world class city to encourage private investment (Kirk 2005). As a result of Naidu's salesmanship and reform efforts, the state went from 22nd to 5th on the list of business worthy states in a few short years (Dugger, 1999). Corporations like Microsoft opened its first non US facility outside the US in Hyderabad and its biggest facility outside the US (Mooij, 2009, Dugger, 1999).

The reforms that were popular with the global business community and the urban middle classes were hugely unpopular with the TDP's rural base. According to a White Paper issued by the state titled Vision 2020, agriculture was envisioned to be integrated to global markets through contract and corporate farming (Kirk, 2005). In addition to cutting subsidies and reducing safety nets, several of Andhra's key institutions for agriculture were shut down, undercut or handed over to the private sector (Ghosh, 2005a). External financial and trade liberalization enabled the entry of foreign private capital into the countryside and the private sector into the seed and pesticide sectors that were previously controlled by the state (Suri, 2002; Nagraj, 2008; Ghosh, 2005a). The education and health sector were also privatized. Going back on NTR's promises to rural women, Naidu lifted prohibition on all but the cheap local liquor that is consumed by the poor, thus restoring the state's liquor-tax income but not completely angering rural women (Dugger, 1999).

In order for the unpopular neoliberal reforms to be accepted however, Naidu could not do away with welfare measures completely (Mooij, 2003). He however reduced

the number of welfare recipients by targeting certain groups (Mooij, 2003). He specifically targeted poor rural women and but also other groups with “sops” such as building Muslim wedding halls, tool kits for artisans and so on (Elliott, 2011). He also introduced a package of “governance” reforms at the local level in rural areas called *Janmabhoomi* (the literal meaning is “land of birth”) (Reddy, 2002). These measures represented a massive effort to wean rural people off of state supports and enable them to become “partners in development” (Suri, 2002, pg. 39) through the creation of “grassroots” institutions by the state (Suri, 2002; Reddy, 2002). Large amounts of funds were disbursed through self-help groups (SHGs) to rural women for various things such as gas connections, credit etc (Manor, 2006; Dugger, 1999). Later these SHGs groups became the foundational institutions through which private microcredit organizations channeled their funds (Young, 2010).

While these programs were instituted under the rubric of governance reforms and empowering the common man, they were created as “parallel bodies” that bypassed the panchayats created through decentralization during the previous era of state-led development (Manor, 2006). This was done to undermine the Congress Party’s support base in the panchayats and to promote TDP’s own supporters within local authority structures (Suri, 2002; Manor, 2006; Dugger, 1999). Funds intended for the panchayats were diverted and further delegitimized the already weak panchayats (Reddy, 2002). Naidu’s programs thus undermined democratic processes at the local levels crowding out the already weak panchayats (Manor, 2006). It also marginalized other genuinely autonomous civil society organizations at the grassroots levels (Kirk, 2005). The women’s groups that Naidu formed were called Government NGO’s (GONGO) and

oxymoron since they were not autonomous and were formed by the state (Manor, 2006). Ultimately, Naidu reforms contributed to a further centralization of power in Andhra (Manor, 2006; Mooij, 2009).

Regardless of Naidu's agenda, the reach of these programs especially the self-help groups has had a considerable positive impact on local-level governance (Manor, 2006). Self-help institutions enabled previously excluded people to enter into the public sphere for the first time and politicized the rural sector in ways that no other Indian state had done (except for Kerala) (Kirk, 2005). Naidu's focus on empowering the lower classes and women is ironic given that Andhra had been one of the most reluctant state governments in India towards democratic decentralization and the empowerment of panchayats at lower levels (Manor, 2006; Kirk, 2005; Mooij, 2003).

Despite all of Naidu's targeted benefits to his rural constituents, his TDP Party was summarily routed in the 2004 elections that brought the Congress Party back into power (Suri, 2006). Several observers attribute Naidu's loss to the emphasis on economic growth that had overshadowed the need to address the spreading agrarian crisis (Suri, 2006). While large expenditures were spent on the program described above, the rural areas in general suffered from even more disinvestment in the 1990s and negatively affected the bulk of rural dwellers (Ghosh, 2005a; Ahmed and Varshney, 2008; Dev, 2011; Dugger 1999; Dev, 2007; CESS, 2008; Nagraj, 2008).

Andhra was one of first states that saw the precipitation of an agricultural crisis in India (Ghosh, 2005a). Between 1998 and 2005, nearly six thousand indebted, mainly cotton farmers, committed suicide in the state alone (Patnaik, 2005). The suicides had become a very public issue leading up to the 2004 campaign (Elliott, 2011). The

Congress opposition labeled Naidu an ‘agent of the World Bank’, and accused the TDP government of indiscriminate privatization, neglecting farmers and pursuing lopsided development (Mooij, 2005). Others suggest that the electoral outcome can be interpreted partly as a verdict against the reforms and partly as the anti-incumbency sentiment among voters observed in India (Elliott, 2011; Kirk, 2005).

The Congress returned to power in 2004 on promises to focus on agriculture and the widespread distress in the countryside (Suri, 2006). Seeing that the reforms were negatively affecting the middle and lower classes of its rural constituents, it expanded investment in irrigation and free power in rural areas (Suri, 2006). These measures were very important to tube well and well owners in rainfed areas like the Telengana (Elliott, 2011). Under the Congress, the state invested \$37.5 billion, nearly twice the state’s annual budget, in large irrigation projects – the first major investment in years (Elliott, 2011).

By the 2009 elections, which the Congress won again, water was already flowing to more than 2 million acres (Elliott, 2011). Responding to the crisis of debt amongst small farmers the state wrote off institutional loans and made efforts to increase institutional credit (Ghosh, 2005a). The state also raised the procurement prices of grains and passed a new seed bill to improve regulation of private seed supply (Ghosh, 2005a; Elliott, 2011).

In terms of safety nets, the Congress-led administration continued the Rs. 2 subsidized rice scheme, implemented new schemes to provide private hospital care for the critically ill, heavily subsidized housing projects, and provided funds for social security and education targeting the lower classes (Elliott, 2011). Another key safety net

and one of the most valued amongst the poorest rural dwellers, is the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) implemented in 2006-2007¹³. The policy effectively raised real wages and reduced gender wage gaps and reduced open unemployment rates of women (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2011b). This improvement of rural women's bargaining power would have a long-term impact on the social and economic dynamics in rural India (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2011b).

The Congress won the elections in 2009 in great measure because it continued to invest in agriculture and the rural areas (Elliott, 2011). Unlike the TDP's more targeted schemes, the Congress Party was able to introduce "saturation schemes" where welfare benefits were long-term and made available to a larger section of the rural poor (Elliott, 2011). This was possible with enhanced state revenues from real estate, VAT and liquor taxes in the post-reform period, while similar welfare schemes brought the TDP to near financial crisis (Elliott, 2011). Elliott (2011) notes that an important outcome of the Congress saturation schemes and improvements in governance has been a decrease in clientelism. Traditionally, access to most entitlements by the lower classes had to be mediated by intermediaries built on customary patron-client relationships. While this is still the case in India, access to entitlements and welfare benefits for the poor has improved in Andhra, lessening dependence on patron-client relationships and the need for intermediaries (Elliott, 2011).

The economic reforms led to rapid growth and by 2009 Andhra was listed as one of the top three states for "economic freedom" along with Tamil Nadu and Gujarat

¹³ Most marginal farmers and landless workers in the field area were very vocal in their support of NREGA

(Debroy, Bandhari and Aiyar, 2011, pg. 14). A report called *Doing Business in India 2009* ranked Hyderabad as the second easiest place to do business among 17 top cities in India (Debroy, Bandhari and Aiyar, 2011). The state aggressively promoted private investment in manufacturing and development projects including dam building, mining, Special Economic Zones (SEZ). In addition to providing incentives and subsidies to corporations involved these projects, the state government has played an important role in the acquisition of land for the corporate sector (Alivelu, Srinivasulu and Reddy, 2011).

However, many of Andhra's large scale SEZ, development and irrigation projects are facing severe opposition and are being blamed for contributing to rural distress. Land acquisition by the State has given rise to allegations of land scams and large scale displacement of rural population resulting in local protest movements (Reddy and Kumar, 2010; Basole and Basu, 2011; Dev and Sharma, 2010; Rao, Deshingkar, and Farrington, 2006). Today the Congress faces strong fiscal challenges due to a recession and decreased revenues from real estate and thus the new model of welfarism may not be sustainable in the long term (Elliott, 2011).

Summary

The three stages of development covered in this chapter suggest that the lower castes/classes have always faced extreme marginalization and have never really been in control of their livelihoods. While forms of exploitation and agrarian distress have been present in all these phases of the history of the region, the role of the interventionist state in correcting the impacts of feudal systems, bringing about a green revolution in

agriculture, implementing large anti-poverty programs, and regulating the market have been the most beneficial for the poor, albeit to different degrees. Civil society and social movements has been key in pressuring the state in respecting rights and entitlements (Bardhan, 2004).

The next chapter will discuss the impacts of economic reforms on the lives of the poor in rural Andhra Pradesh. This period has been characterized by acute agrarian distress as evidenced in the thousands of farmers' suicides in the region. The next chapter will attempt to contextualize agrarian distress by looking at the underlying causes of distress, shedding light on how rural livelihoods have become riskier for millions of small and marginal farmers. It demonstrates that the compulsion to participate in the market economy in the face of reduced safety nets has integrated the poor into a system that is structurally biased against them and has operated to make their material conditions more adverse (Ghosh, 2005a).

CHAPTER 4. THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF AGRARIAN DISTRESS

Introduction

The last chapter traced the political economy of the Telengana region and Andhra Pradesh state through three distinct stages of development: feudal-colonial regimes under the Nizam, state-led development after Independence, and the adoption of neoliberal reforms in the 1990s. It highlighted the extreme marginalization faced by the poor and the efforts made by the state to address rural poverty. The interventionist state attempted to correct the impacts of the feudal systems – dismantling exploitative feudal and caste institutions, bringing about land reform and the Green Revolution in agriculture, implementing large anti-poverty programs, and regulating the market – which has brought positive changes in the lives of the poor, even as its impacts have been uneven and contradictory. The last chapter also demonstrated that the era of neoliberal reforms represents a major shift in the trajectory of the state's economic development where large-scale privatization and liberalization led to high economic growth but also to led to disinvestment in the rural areas and large-scale rural distress.

This chapter considers the actual impacts of market-based reforms in the post-reform period in the rural areas of Andhra. This period has been marred by an upsurge of acute agrarian distress as evidenced in the thousands of farmers' suicides in the region. It demonstrates that the reforms have been detrimental to the rural areas and made the lives of the poor more vulnerable. This chapter seeks to understand the underlying causes of

the distress by shedding light on how rural livelihoods have become riskier for millions of small and marginal farmers.

The first three sections of this chapter consider the impacts of reforms on growth, wages and employment; cropping patterns and food security; credit availability and indebtedness. In the following sections, the chapter looks at coping and distress patterns using examples from the field area and the work of other scholars. Together these sections highlight that the monetization of the economy, higher costs of cultivation, lack of institutional credit, rapid adoption of commercial crops, lack of state extension, few options to diversify out of agriculture, high costs of private education and health, along with environmental factors such as drought, degrading soils, and water stress have contributed to the extreme precariousness of rural livelihoods in the Telengana. The compulsion to participate in the market economy in the face of the factors mentioned above has integrated the poor into a system that is structurally biased against them and has worsened their material conditions (Ghosh, 2005a).

The last section considers the impacts of neoliberal reforms on historical patterns of landholdings and power. It demonstrates that the power of the rural elites have been contested but by and large the structural basis of rural society remains unchallenged, even if the lower castes have experienced better material conditions and more political freedoms.

Impacts of Neoliberal Reforms on Growth, Employment and Wages

The impacts of the reforms on growth rates, employment and wages have been mixed. Up to about 2005, the initial years of the reforms saw massive decreases in

investment in the rural areas of Andhra, which impacted growth, wages and employment (Ghosh, 2005a). The annual growth rate of agriculture between 1980 -81 and 2005 -05 averaged only 2.5 percent (Vakulabharanam, 2004). Telangana as a region has done better than Andhra in terms of agricultural growth. It recorded a growth rate of over 4.7 percent per annum between 1990 and 2005 which is higher than Andhra as a whole at 2.7 percent per annum and the all-India rate (Vakulabharanam, 2004). The growth has however been referred to as “high investment growth” because the costs of growth were borne by farmers who made individual investments in infrastructure such as borewell irrigation (Rao, 2011; Dev, 2007; Vakulabharanam, 2004). It has also been referred to as “distress inducing growth”, because growth in the region was accompanied by an increase in rural poverty as seen in a significant decline in the consumption levels of both small farmers and laborers (Vakulabharanam, 2004).

Table 4.1 below highlights that growth rates from 2004 onwards were higher but also very volatile, due to poor rainfall. The state’s average agricultural growth rate increased to 6.82 percent per year in the period 2004-05 to 2008-09, more than double the all-India average of 3.26 per cent per year. Higher growth rates were partly due to higher public and private investments in irrigation (Aiyar, 2011). It is important to note, however, that a large part of the growth in agriculture sector in the post-reform period was due to growth in livestock sector. Growth in the crop sector did not fare as well and was very low at only 0.59 percent between 1993-94 and 2005-06 (Dev, 2007; Vakulabharanam, 2004).

Table 4.1: Sectoral Growth Rates at Constant (1999-2000) Prices: India vs. Andhra

(Percent/Year)	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
All-India					
Agriculture	0.05	5.84	3.95	4.86	1.60
Industry	10.34	10.17	11.00	8.10	3.88
Services	9.13	10.59	11.23	10.85	9.67
Andhra Pradesh					
Agriculture	4.44	4.44	2.73	16.86	1.20
Industry	12.20	13.22	17.66	10.45	0.22
Services	8.27	9.53	12.29	8.01	9.58

Source: Office of the Economic Advisor to the Chief Minister, Andhra Pradesh (from Aiyar, 2011, pg. 52)

Andhra had one of the lowest employment growth rates in the country in the post-reform period, much lower than the all-India rate of 1.9 percent per annum (CESS, 2008). Statistics show that growth of employment declined from 2.72 percent in pre-reform (1983 to 1993-94) to 0.95 percent in the post-reform (1993-94 to 2004-05) period. The low employment growth has been attributed to losses of manufacturing jobs and the poor labor-absorbing capacity of agriculture, which underscores that the presumed diversification out of agriculture has not happened (CESS, 2008). The share of agriculture of the GDP decreased from about a third at the beginning of the nineties to less than a fifth at just 17 percent for 2006-2009 (Mani, Bhalachandran and Pandit, 2011), even as the population dependent on agriculture has decreased only minimally. For sixty percent of the population of Andhra agriculture continues to be the primary basis of livelihood activities (CESS, 2008; Dev, 2007).

More troubling is the fact that unemployment grew higher during 1999-2005 relative to the earlier post-reform years of 1993-2000 (CESS, 2008). It is not surprising that census data shows a greater reliance on agriculture as a source of livelihood (Rao, 2011) and an almost total absence of alternative livelihood opportunities in rural Andhra (Nagraj, 2008). Even though many parts of the country have been experiencing an agrarian crisis since the advent of neoliberal economic reforms, the epidemic of farm suicides is not as bad partly because of the availability of non-farm livelihood options during times of crisis (Nagraj, 2008). Tamil Nadu is an example where, while it has had distress related suicides, the presence of alternative non-farm livelihood opportunities are available to the poor and so suicides have not been increasing (Nagraj, 2008).

A village level study in the three different regions of Andhra highlights a related issue concerning underemployment in the rural areas. It showed that for households who primarily sell their labor that there is not enough work to employ people year round. Table 4.2 below, for example illustrates that in a sample Telengana village male workers worked a total of 113 days and women a total of 93 days in the year. Men worked about sixty percent of the time in non-agricultural work and women about seventy percent of the time in agricultural work. There were very few options for women outside agriculture for laboring households (Ramachandran and Rawal, 2009).

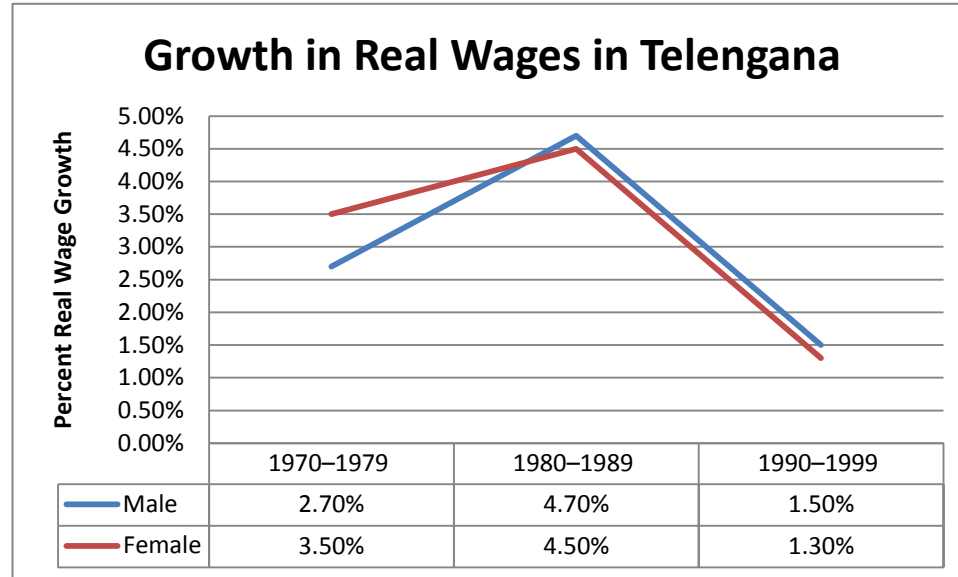
Table 4.2: Average Employment in Manual Labor Households in 3 Andhra villages

Village	Male Workers			Female Workers		
	Agri-culture	Non-agriculture	Total	Agri-culture	Non-agriculture	Total
Ananthavaram (South Coastal Andhra)	64	42	106	65	0	65
Bukkacherla (Rayalseema)	53	5	58	67	1	68
Kothapalle (North Telangana)	44	69	113	73	20	93

Source: Foundation for Agrarian Studies (from Ramachandran and Rawal 2009, pg. 80)

While agricultural growth can have an indirect effect on poverty reduction through wage and employment increases, the growth of real wages is the best indicator of poverty reduction as they also respond to forces outside agriculture (Subrahmanyam and Reddy, 2001). A larger proportion of the poor/lower castes depend on wage labor in India and in Andhra, the proportion of Dalits in the labor force is higher than the rest of the country (CESS, 2008). In Andhra as a whole growth of real wages declined from 1.5 percent in the post reform period (1999-2005) to 4.3 percent in the pre-reform period (1993-2000) (CESS, 2008). Data for the Telengana show that real wages for both males and females grew in the in the 70s and 80s, but it has significantly slowed after liberalization as Figure 4.1 indicates below (Vakulabharanam, 2004).

Figure 4.1: Growth in Real Wages



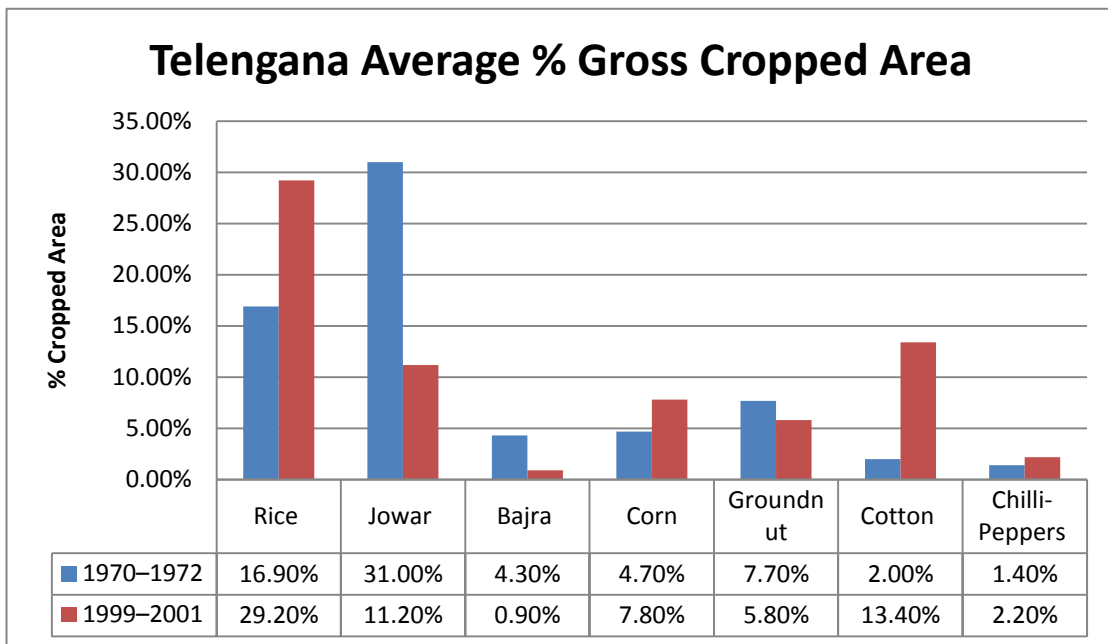
Source: Generated from Season and Crop Reports, Directorate of Economics and Statistics of Andhra Pradesh (Graph based on table from Vakulabharanam, 2004)

Neoliberal Reforms, Cropping Patterns and Food Security

State policies, in their push to commercialize the rural landscape, have directly contributed to a decline in food crop cultivation especially in coarse grains. Coarse grains are an important source of food security and nutrition in the diets of the poor in the Telengana region. The state minimum support prices for coarse grains like sorghum and fine grains like rice used to be the same. Beginning in 1982, however, rice was favored – leading to a decrease of coarse cereals cultivation. In the non-rice growing areas the availability of cheap subsidized rice through the Public Distribution System (PDS) also suppressed the demand for coarse grains (Deb, Rao, Rao and Slater, 2002). The decline in coarse grains relative prices served as further disincentive to cultivate them and the

devaluation of their benefits (Rao, 2008). The Telengana region has experienced significant changes in cropping patterns since the 1970s (Vakulabharanam, 2004). The graph below illustrates this point where the cultivation of coarse grains like sorghum for example decreased from 31 percent of the gross cropped area to only about 11 percent.

Figure 4.2: Telengana Average Percent Gross Cropped Area



Source: Statistical Abstracts Andhra Pradesh (Graph based on table from Vakulabaranam , 2004, pg. 98).

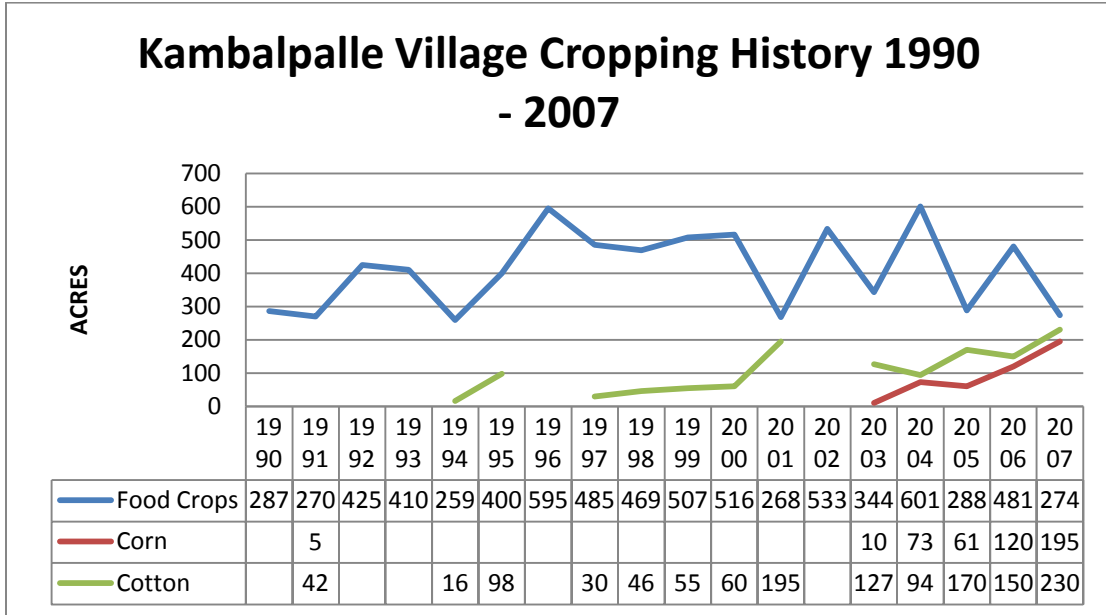
More recent data at the village level show that cotton and commercial corn are directly replacing food crops including pulses (lentils) like green gram and chickpea, sorghum, pigeonpea and corn. Sorghum is one of the staple foods in the region and pulses contribute protein to poor household’s diets. In fact the most common meal one can have in a small farmer’s home is sorghum bread and/or rice with *dal* made from pigeonpea, greengram, blackgram or red gram.

In the last decade, there have been drastic changes in cropping systems practiced by Telengana farmers as cultivation of commercial crops became widespread.

Commercial corn cultivation using new hybrid varieties, grown for chicken feed, was introduced by the Andhras in the last ten years. Although commercial corn is categorized as a food crop by the state, it does not contribute to the local food supply. Small amounts of local corn varieties are traditionally grown on irrigated fields as food along with sugarcane. It is eaten in small quantities and does not form part of the main food basket for most rural households in the region.

In Kambalpalle Village for example, crop acreage data shows that cotton has been around at least since 1991, but until 2002 it only averaged about ten percent of the acreage. Cotton cultivation rapidly increased beginning in 2002. See Figure 4.3 below. The growth of commercial corn and cotton cultivation came at the expense of food crops cultivation. By 2007, food crops were grown on only one third of the approximately 700 acres of cultivable land, while cotton and corn together dominated the rest.

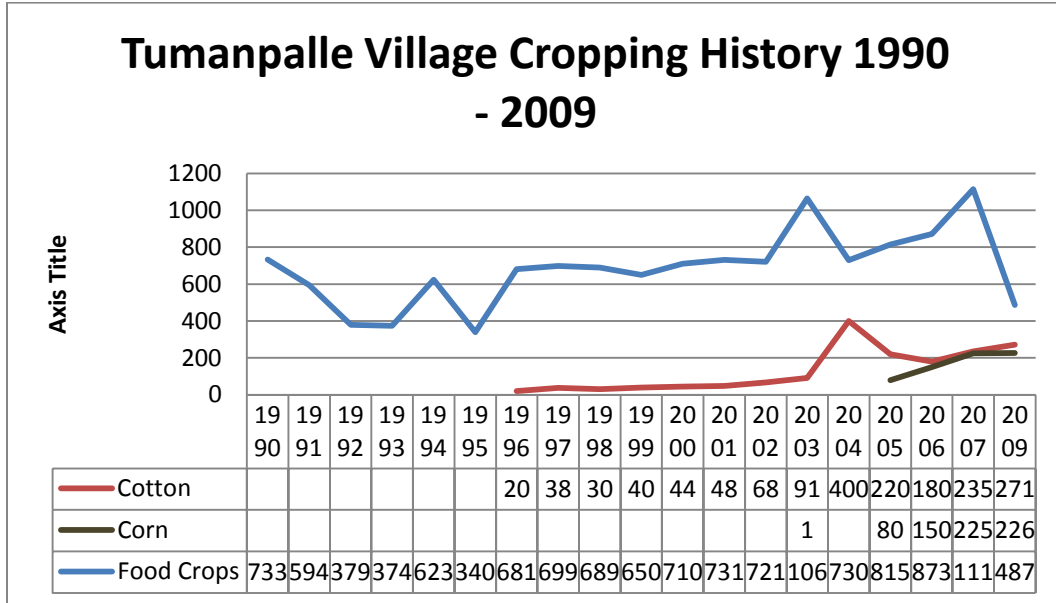
Figure 4.3: Kambalpalle Village Cropping History 1990 -2007



Source: Mandal Office Kambalpalle Village Land and Cropping Records

Similarly in Tumanpalle, a neighboring village, crop records since 1990 indicate that cotton was first planted in 1996. Till 2003 it averaged less than ten percent, but after 2004 it averaged almost thirty percent of the cultivable area, in 2004 almost half of the cultivable area was given to cotton. In 2009 cotton and corn together averaged fifty percent of the cultivable area. These are major and drastic shifts in cultivation.

Figure 4.4: Tumanpalle Village Cropping History 1990 – 2009



Source: Mandal Office Tumanpalle Village Land and Cropping Records

Food grain absorption is an indicator of nutritional and food security as the poor derive almost their entire calorie intake from cereals (Ghosh, 2005a; Patnaik, 2005). Some observers argue that the reduction of food crop cultivation has led to the lower food grain absorption. In the Telengana, average cereal consumption and average calorie intake among the bottom thirty percent of the rural population declined due to changing consumption patterns away from traditional diets that include coarse cereals like sorghum and other millets toward cereals such as rice and wheat (Vakulabharanam, 2004). This has major implications for nutritional security in the Telengana with especially negative impacts on women (Subrahmanyam, 2002; Patnaik, 2005; Ghosh, 2005a). Linking food grain absorption to poverty is however a contentious issue because a decreasing calorie intake and dependence on cereal consumption can also be viewed as an indicator of diversification of the food basket, away from cereals to other higher protein foods. While

this may be true among those in relative affluence, it is not the case with the lower income groups who are not getting enough calories and fall into food insecurity (Vakulabharanam, 2004; Patnaik, 2005).

Until the mid-1990s, it was possible for poor families to depend on subsidized grain, but under the new liberalization policies, the number of eligible households has decreased and the quantity of rice per household has been reduced (Ramamurthy, 2000). The all-India data for 2004-2005 show that fifty two percent of agricultural worker households were excluded from the PDS. While Andhra tops the list on inclusiveness of PDS after Tamil Nadu, 30 percent of the poorest households are still excluded (Ramachandra and Rawal, 2009). At the field site most households have indicated that even if subsidized rice is available, the reduced quotas means that PDS rice lasts only ten days to two weeks after which they have to buy rice on the open market or PDS rice on the black market¹⁴.

The bottom third of the population spends two thirds of their expenditure on food in rural areas – of which nearly thirty percent is spent on cereals. Furthermore, cereals constitute more than sixty percent of the caloric source for the poor (Dev, 2011). Having to buy food on the open market has burdened the poor as food prices have increased globally the last few years and poor consumers are sharply affected. The increased international trade of agricultural items without quantitative restrictions has accentuated the sensitivity of domestic prices relative to global prices (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2011a).

¹⁴ Participant observation and interviews conducted at research site

Extreme food insecurity is visible in the spate of hunger deaths reported in the cotton growing regions of the Telengana. A Supreme Court committee set up to investigate hunger related deaths in Medak District in the Telengana Region in 2009 revealed that most deaths occurred in families involved in petty trade, agricultural labor, and marginal farming among the lower caste households. The sub-districts where these deaths were concentrated were characterized by drought and commercial crop cultivation (in this case it was cotton). The deaths also revealed a failure of the state's entitlements system where these households could not access even the subsidized rice available for the poorest households. Kodand Ram, a lawyer on the committee predicts that as increasing acreage is given to commercial crops in rainfed areas, it is only a matter of time before hunger deaths in vulnerable populations start occurring in areas previously free from them.¹⁵

Agriculture in these parts is still highly interdependent. There exists close relationships between animals, plants/fodder and crops, fertilizer, soil fertility, firewood and food security, which depends on the cultivation of diversified food and commercial crops like sorghum, minor millets, oilseeds, pulses and sugarcane. The introduction of high stakes commercial crops can disrupt this interdependence, especially in a drought-prone non-irrigated semi-arid area where risk management strategies are integral to cropping systems for small farmers. While there have always been commercial crops like groundnut, cotton, and chickpea, farmers would rotate crops or grow food crops along with commercial crops. The new commercial crops like cotton and corn are however

¹⁵ Interview with Kodand Ram conducted during fieldwork in July 2009

generally monocropped and entail a higher use of fertilizers and pesticides¹⁶.

Furthermore, in the past a majority of the farmers participated in the cash economy with commercial crops were middle and large farmers, and not small famers.

Marginal farmers and the landless who sell their labor working on land that grows food crops have another layer of food security. This is because in the Telengana, labor usually gets paid in crop wage, and while working in the fields also have access to other cultivated, semi-cultivated and uncultivated foods including vegetables and greens.

Uncultivated greens form an important aspect of food security for the poor in this region. During the rainy season till about October, large amounts of uncultivated greens such as those in the *Amaranthus* and *Hibiscus* families can be found on fields and are used by women to supplement their diets and are also high in nutrition. Even greens of the winter crops such as chickpea, safflower can be eaten. Most poor households in the area eat only rice or sorghum *rotis* and *dal* (made from pulses) as vegetables, meat and eggs are expensive and rarely eaten. In areas where food crops are grown and farmyard manure is used as fertilizer uncultivated greens are more prevalent.

The following vignette of a small DDS farmer planting her non irrigated red soil land illustrates this interdependence and the nature of low-risk agriculture. When planting her field, she mixed pigeonpea and a lesser amount of green gram and sesame in one pouch, in another she mixed white and yellow sorghum along with chili seeds. In another she had okra seeds, in another horse gram, sunflower and safflower. She explained that they have a specific pattern of planting, where a few rows of the main crops of pigeon pea and sorghum, are interspersed with one row of the minor crop. Minor crops include

¹⁶ Kambalpalle village focus groups April 2009

safflower and sunflower; green gram, sesame, horse gram in smaller amounts keeping their food and fodder needs in mind. For example the green gram pods when young make a good snack for the children and the safflower and sunflower are pressed for oil for their home needs. She also intercroops a few rows of field bean for fodder. Pigeonpea stalks are used for firewood and the sorghum plant especially local varieties are the preferred fodder for livestock. In all, she planted fourteen crops on her their non-irrigated red about one and a half acres.

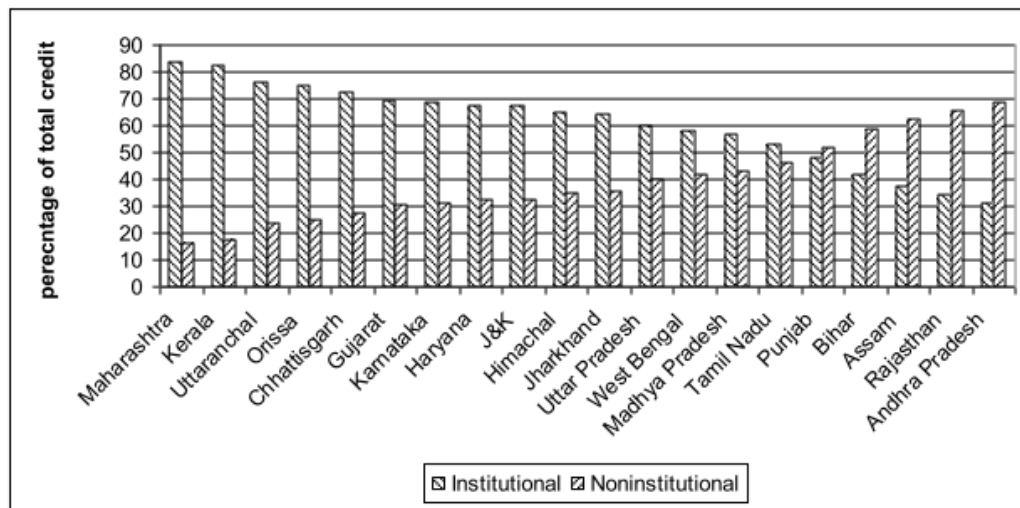
Impacts of Neoliberal Reforms on Debt, Credit and Agricultural Viability

The costs of cultivation of most commercial crops rose substantially when the state reduced institutional support to small farmers. The state's withdrawal from the credit sector means that institutional credit for small farmers is scarce (Ghosh, 2005a). Women and tenants are especially vulnerable because their names are not on land titles, nor are they legally recognized as cultivators, which prevent them from borrowing from institutional sources. This puts farmers into new levels of indebtedness (Ghosh, 2005a). Figure 4.5 below indicates that Andhra Pradesh tops the list of all states in India with the lowest amount of institutional credit available in the rural areas.

The lack of institutional credit at a time when cash needs are high has forced farmers to opt for much more expensive and usury credit sources, adding to their debt burdens (Ghosh, 2005a). The 59th round of NSS in 2003 revealed that an astounding eighty two percent of farmers in Andhra Pradesh are in debt, topping the list of all states in India (Posani, 2009; Suri, 2006). An NSSO survey revealed that in Andhra about sixty

seven percent of total loans taken by farmers are from the informal credit sources, typically at usurious compounded interest rates of between 36 – 100 percent (Posani, 2009).

Figure 4.5: Institutional versus Non-institutional Credit Across States in 2003



Graph taken from Basole and Basu, 2011 pg. 40

Moneylenders are making a disturbing comeback in rural India, after declining substantially between the 60s and 80s (Basole and Basu, 2011). In addition to the traditional landed households that also serve as moneylenders, new entrants that are different in social composition are increasingly visible. They include non-landed but relatively well off rural dwellers such as traders, those selling inputs, and governments servants who capitalize on lucrative interest earning opportunities in the absence of formal credit institutions (Basole and Basu, 2011).

Due to the lack of institutional credit available for small farmers, they have to use a variety of forms of informal credit to meet their agricultural production and cash needs. In the study area, for example, farmers usually get inputs like seed, fertilizer and pesticide on credit from dealers/traders for cotton, corn and potato (the capital intensive commercial crops), which they pay back after harvest. They often get into contractual agreements to sell their harvests to these dealers. For cash needs - to rent tractors or bullocks, or to pay labor for weeding, spraying and harvesting - farmers usually go to the *saukar* or local money lender. These loans can be substantial for high value commercial crops even for one or two acres of land.

If the crops fail or do poorly however as they did in 2008 and 2009 in the research area, those who had taken large loans and invested in commercial crops took even more chances in their desperation for high profits to pay off their existing debts. As a result, many were pushed into deeper debt. An added difficulty is that both moneylenders and banks are reluctant to lend to those not cultivating high value commercial crops. Farmers are thus compelled to grow commercial crops if they want to avail of credit.

In non-irrigated areas, one notable source of crushing debt for many farmers is the digging of wells and borewells. To make up for the dearth of public irrigation sources the state encouraged private investments in irrigation. They are a prohibitively expensive investment for small farmers who are however willing to take the risks because they have no other irrigation options. About 75 percent of the borewells currently in the Telengana region were dug between 1993 and 2005 (Vakulabharanam, 2004). Desperate farmers will often make two or more attempts to find water if the first time borewells fail. In the

study area, one small farmer made as many as five attempts to dig a well, the last time being successful. He paid Rs. 150000 (\$3300) for each attempt.

Another new source debt since the arrival of cotton are the costs of leasing land for land poor and landless famers who want to grow cotton or corn. These newer commercial crops are leading to increasingly monetized transactions within villages, which further marginalize the poor. For example, the promise from cotton and corn has buoyed the land market in Kambalpalle and Tumanpalle villages. Good land suitable for cotton cultivation now leases for a whopping five to eight thousand rupees an acre per year, a price that was unheard of a few years ago. Farmers say the more common form of tenancy then was sharecropping, while leasing of land for money was rare.

While production loans dominate in current rural indebtedness, non-productive loans taken for paying for medical and educational expenses are also quite significant. The deterioration of public health services and the poor access to secondary and higher education for the poor has led households to seek private services, dramatically increasing their financial costs (Ghosh, 2005a). A study on main livelihood risks to rural households in Andhra Pradesh found that health risks constituted fifty percent of the total household level risks reported and were highest among the Dalits and tribal communities (Dev, 2011). The most commonly reported outcome of ill health was loss of work and wages and almost all households responded by borrowing, thus falling further into the debt trap (Dev, 2011).

A look at the reasons for debt in the research villages gives an indication of what farmers' main needs for cash are. Of the 151 households surveyed, 50 percent reported borrowing money to pay the costs of cultivation (including costs of leasing, digging wells

etc), about 40 percent borrowed to pay for marriages and other ceremonies, 30 percent borrowed to pay for housing construction, and 25 percent for education and health needs. The Indramma Pathakam subsidized housing program for small farmers has forced many to borrow large sums of money, as only forty percent of the materials are subsidized at about Rs. 40000. Farmers usually have to raise anywhere from Rs. 50000 to Rs. 100000 to complete their houses. While it does put many farmers in debt, they view it as an opportunity to build *pacca* homes made of concrete and laterite stone or brick, which are more sturdy than adobe homes with tin or tiled roofs.

Farmers in the Telengana region say that health and education costs are two relatively new expenses that they have to deal with¹⁷. In most Dalit and lower caste households surveyed, children are being educated for the first time. While education is free in the villages, many rural households send their children to private institutions because they believe the quality of instruction is better. Secondary education is usually not free and mostly provided by private institutions which can be very expensive as private colleges charge “capitation fees” that are onerous for the rural poor. As one poor Dalit farmer explains:

One of my sons studied up to his degree, but for his post-graduation (graduate education) he has to pay Rs. 90000 (\$2250) just to get into college, which we cannot do, so now he has to come back and work in agriculture.¹⁸

¹⁷ Focus group discussions conducted in 2008 and 2009 in research villages.

¹⁸ Interview with Dalit farmer Kambalpalle Village

Health expenses in the area are also alarmingly high and there is very little access to decent and affordable health care in the rural areas. Farmers report that rural health is degrading with the breaking down of traditional food systems and exposure to agricultural chemicals: “We are having so many health problems that we are spending so much in the hospital. The diseases are coming because of the food”.¹⁹

For serious problems, people usually end up going to the larger towns and cities to private hospitals, and they borrow heavily for their expenses. Many women in their twenties and higher have problems with their reproductive health, and several have had hysterectomies. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to look into the links between the exposure to pesticides and women’s health, several farmers have noted the drastic changes in reproductive health that were not common in their parents’ generation. Government hospitals either do not perform these surgeries or are not trusted. A hysterectomy in Hyderabad could cost Rs. 40000 (\$950). This is equivalent to two to three years’ income for a small farmer or wage laborer.

Another need for cash is for marriages and other ceremonies that people feel socially obliged to perform and spend large amounts of money. In the surveys, more than fifty percent reported borrowing to pay for marriages and ceremonies like the *pedda pilla* (coming off age), child’s first year, and other ceremonies that are becoming increasingly elaborate, as lower castes/classes have started to feel the social pressure to imitate their richer/higher caste neighbors. In fact, the practice of dowry was not prevalent among the

¹⁹ Pesticides like endosulphan are quite deadly, have been banned in eighty four countries. The Supreme court in India instituted a ban on the pesticide in 2011 after the effects of spraying endosulfan on cashew crops over the last 40 years in Kerala came to light (NDTV 2011). It is still however available on the market and is regularly used by small farmers at the field site on their chickpea crops.

Dalits till about thirty years ago, when bride price was paid by the groom's family for a bride²⁰. An anthropological account of the Christians in the Telengana also found this to be the case (Luke and Carman, 1968). Today, however, dowry among Dalits is the norm where the girl's family has to give her husband's family gold, money, vehicles, consumer goods, and so on, and can get families into very heavy debt. It is not uncommon to pay Rs. 100000 (\$2100) for a daughter's wedding, even among the small farming households.

A landless backward caste (BC) woman from Bidekane Village for example, spent Rs. 150000 on her daughter's wedding in 2008, giving ten thousand rupees in cash, Rs. 50000 in gold and spent the rest on the ceremony. In addition to selling fifteen goats, she borrowed money from the state's microcredit program DWACRA and her older son helped by sending money from Hyderabad. She has one more daughter to marry off. A medium farmer with nine acres of non-irrigated land in Kambalpalle Village explains that debt from his daughter's wedding expenses influenced his decision to grow only commercial crops in 2009:

I did not plant any food crops this year but only cotton and corn because I got my daughter married last year and wanted to earn some money to pay back the debt. We paid Rs 51000 for dowry, spent Rs 75000 for gold and spent another Rs 100,000 on the wedding.²¹

More recently needs for cash are being met by private and public microcredit institutions. Microcredit was made popular by the Grameen Bank, founded in 1983. Its founder Mohammed Yunus, who won the Noble Prize in Economics in 2006, innovated a

²⁰ Life story of Dalit household in Kambalpalle Village, 2009

²¹ Life History with Telgolu family in Kambalpalle Village

system of microfinance for the rural poor in Bangladesh. The model, which was widely replicated in many developing countries, was based on the creation and leverage of social capital among rural women through horizontal and vertical networks in lieu of collateral (Dowla, 2006). Women are considered to be more reliable by creditors.

While NGOs like DDS had also been providing microcredit along with savings and thrift on a small scale, the provision of microcredit by private firms through self-help groups (SHGs) grew exponentially in Andhra Pradesh from the early 2000s. Microcredit was seen as the way forward, a grassroots poverty alleviation strategy that would empower poor women, build their capacity by providing them credit to invest in entrepreneurial activities and thus use the market as a poverty-alleviation tool. It was part of the neoliberal restructuring of the economy aided by the World Bank and the United Nations (Young, 2010). In Andhra, money is lent to groups of poor women, usually categorized by caste/class to capitalize on existing social cohesion within groups to enforce group accountability.

Microcredit has however mainly benefitted women that have the capacity to repay loans on a regular basis, and these are not generally the poorest. Puniamma, one of the microcredit group leaders in the research area notes that:

Microcredit does not suit households that are dependent only on agriculture because they do not have the cash to pay back in regular intervals. However, if one member of the family has a regular cash income then it makes sense. Most poor households in the area are dependent primarily on agriculture and thus while the availability of a large sum of money is attractive, making regular payments is a whole other issue²².

²² Interview conducted in Bidekane Village, March 2009

Furthermore, while it has infused cash into the local economy, microcredit has put the burden on poor women who take relatively large loans in their names and are held accountable for repayment, but do not always decide on how the money is spent. To meet their loan quotas, agents aggressively sign on women who are illiterate and unfamiliar in the ways these institutions work. They take the money offered without understanding the consequences of non-payment. Many women report that they end up going back to moneylenders or selling of their jewelry and other assets to meet debt deadlines because the social pressure and shame deployed on women who do not make their payments is unbearable. In the research villages the negative outcomes of this practice were apparent on already vulnerable households as this example illustrates.

Samamma is a poor and landless woman with two young children fled her village in shame and returned to her paternal village. She had borrowed money from DWACRA the state's microcredit institution and SKS, a private group to pay down her husband's Rs. 20000 debt. Her husband was unreliable and drank heavily. She had to make a payment of Rs. 2000 to SKS and Rs. 4000 to DWACRA. The DWACRA group did not hound her, but the SKS members found out where she was and threatened to come after her. She was so desperate and scared that she contemplated committing suicide, but was not sure that her husband would take care of their children. After several months of leading an unsettled life, she found a place to live and regular weeding work and started to slowly pay off her debt. She however could not go back to her village because of acrimonious relations with other group members.

Microcredit is most useful when it is geared to allow women to acquire productive assets like land, livestock, and grain processing machines. These can make a

considerable contribution to their security and empowerment. Households that are landless or have very small holdings are able to benefit by leveraging their productive assets to gain access to food and in the case of bullocks or grain machines, to considerable amounts of land in sharecropping arrangements. However, most women borrow money to meet rising expenses for agriculture, or to pay for consumption expenses such as weddings, education, and healthcare etc.

A crisis in the microcredit sector has been brewing since 2006 (Young, 2010) and imploded in 2010 in Andhra Pradesh State. Suicides were widely reported due to pressure of unpaid microcredit debts. Investigations revealed the coercive and irresponsible practices of private microcredit agents and highlighted more importantly, the huge profit margins that microcredit firms have made off the backs of poor illiterate women. SKS, one of the leading microcredit firms and a success story (Kazmin, 2010), had its beginnings in the villages where this research was conducted. It became a Wall Street darling, posting high profits and advancing ideas that market-led poverty reduction was possible under neoliberal economic policies (Polgreen and Bajaj, 2010). But since then the microcredit bubble has burst. In the research villages, several women stopped borrowing from private microcredit lenders and now take loans only from the public sector microcredit program DWACRA and NGOs like DDS²³.

²³ Interviews and focus group discussions with SHG members 2008 and 2009

Coping in the Contemporary Telengana Landscape

Although most small farmers continue to struggle to meet their basic needs, a majority of Dalits and other lower classes feel that they are definitely better off when compared to the past. A small Dalit farmer in Kambalpalle Village explains that:

Things are better now. We are eating well because of PDS rice and NREGA work, our ability to cultivate our land and our own hard work brings in wages that are high. Before we could not work in our own fields and had to work the landlords fields. If we did not work for them they would not give us the grain we needed to survive. They also used to command us to give them big trees from our lands, without payment, to make agricultural implements.²⁴

However, small farmers are still up against insurmountable obstacles in their quest to eke a livelihood from agriculture in the Telengana countryside. When asked what problems they faced in agriculture today, a focus group participant explains:

There are problems in agriculture. We are working hard and still there is no yield. We go to Zahirabad and other places for weeding and are working on Andhra farmer's land now. After sowing seeds on our own land, we don't have money to weed and chemical fertilizers are not available on time. We do not have capital to invest in agriculture, that's why we are going backward. We are getting fifty rupees a day in wages but are not able to buy anything even, one kilo of tomatoes as prices have risen to Rs 80 a kg and Rs 30 a kg for green chillies. We are getting Rs 50 wages a day but are not able to even buy soap for washing and bathing²⁵.

The following two examples illustrate the daily struggles and coping mechanisms of poor farming households in the research area. One household is landless and

²⁴ Life history interview conducted in Bidekane Village, July 2009

²⁵ Focus group discussion with Tumkunta small Dalit women farmers, 2008.

completely dependent on agriculture and the other has a more diversified livelihood. Both however are small and poor. The stories demonstrate that households must use a host of strategies to cope and stay above water including keeping animals, selling labor, self-exploitation, depending on traditional caste occupations, growing food and commercial crops, depending on state subsidized food and work among other things. The case studies also highlight that the compulsions to participate in the market economy by growing commercial crops is very strong given that there are very few options for unskilled rural dwellers to make more money or diversify to non-farm based livelihoods. These make their lives very precarious.

The Landless Household: Anamma is a landless Dalit widow who lives with her daughter-in-law, also a widow and her two young grandchildren. Her son died a few years ago after drinking heavily and falling into a well. Tragically, the daughter-in-law feels it is better to not have him around because his drinking had become a major drain on their meager resources.

In 2008, because of the 'cotton rush' in Kambalpalle, they decided to try their hand at cotton and leased two acres of land for Rs 8000 from a relative in a neighboring village. The relative helped them with ploughing but they borrowed money to pay for all other inputs including seeds, pesticides, fertilizers and wages for spraying pesticide, weeding and harvesting. 2008 was a bad year for cotton and harvests amounted to only six tons instead of the expected twenty tons of cotton. They spent about Rs 20000 on production costs and made Rs 12000, and therefore taking a Rs 8000 loss. In 2009, they decided against growing cotton because of this experience. The daughter-in-law has keenly expressed her desire for land to grow sorghum, green gram and pigeonpea (staple cereal and pulses) for food security. Luckily, their debts are low and they borrowed only from the government microfinance group DWACRA for which interest rates are relatively low.

Being landless, they depend primarily on wage work and together they make about 80 to 100 rupees a day (\$2). However wage work is not available everyday and is especially low in the summer months. Kambalpalle and the neighboring villages have little irrigation which means that there is less weeding and agricultural related work available in the winter and summer seasons when compared to a village like Bidekane where crops can be grown year round. As widows, they both get pensions of Rs 200 (\$3.5) each every month. They have two goats and also are able to sell a goat once every six months to a year for Rs 2000 (\$35), which will meet their subsistence needs for a month. The NREGA has been a boon to them as they can each earn 100 rupees a day in the summer, which is double their usual wage rate. It is however not guaranteed that they will get 100 days of promised work every summer. All their earnings together bring in an average of \$2.50 a day for the household of four (based on six days/week).

This family meets its food needs mostly through crop wages and the subsidized Public Distribution System. In 2009, the village experienced a drought and very few crops survived. This meant that they would have to buy sorghum (staple) and pulses on the open market. Around this time food prices had escalated sharply in the area. A kilo of pigeonpea went from Rs 50 to Rs100 in the space of a few months. A quintal (100kgs) of winter sorghum, the preferred variety, has doubled in price since 2009 from Rs 2000 to Rs 4000. They complained that people who cultivated food crops were increasingly reluctant to pay them in crop wage as food crops were becoming scarcer.

Being widowed, Dalit, landless and poor, they are on the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder in the village. Because they depend completely on their labor for survival, anything that prevents them from working, such as an illness in the family would spiral them rapidly into debt and eventually dispossession.

A Diversified Small Farming Household: Mariamma's household described here is an example of a small farming household whose livelihoods are less precarious because of diversification. This household owns four and a half acres of land in four different plots. Two acres are more fertile black soils and two and a half acres are red soil. They have five buffaloes and three goats. Mariamma's husband is the head of household and has a *jitham* (salaried job) with a big landowner in the village. They live together in an extended family along with older parents, one married son, their daughter-in-law and three unmarried daughters. Their son has a 'company job' with a steady income. The daughter-in-law who is sixteen does all the housework and the older parents take care of the animals. Mariamma does her traditional begging duties in the morning and then spends the rest of the time working on her own land and selling her labor. They have a well but it is dry so they now grow mostly non-irrigated crops, some are high value food crops such as chickpea and sunflower, and the rest are grown mostly for subsistence. They manage to take care of all their subsistence needs from their land, crop wage and the PDS system. They also sell milk for Rs 800 a month and made Rs 10,000 from breeding and selling goats and one buffalo in 2009.

Last year they grew chickpea, safflower, green gram, pigeon pea, sorghum, sunflower, field beans, niger (oilseed), a total of about sixteen different crops on their four acres. It is not uncommon to see a high diversity of crops especially on red, non-irrigated lands. Through traditional begging and provisioning, they also earned about fifty kilos of wheat, fifty kilos of chickpea, 150 kilos corn and about six to twelve rotis a day. Half an acre is fallow because it is too far away, red and stony and they do not have the resources or time to bring it under cultivation.

This household is able to manage simple reproduction because there are two earning members in the family, someone to take care of house work and livestock. They are able to self-exploit their labor to a maximum when all family members pitch in during heavy work periods in the fields. They have about Rs. 60,000 in debts due to the son's wedding and crop loans. Rs. 50,000 is from institutional sources (bank, microcredit and DDS) and the remaining Rs 10,000 is from a moneylender. They made two attempts to dig a borewell but it failed both times and had to pay Rs.150,000 for these attempts. While they are managing for now, in spite of their debts, the marriage of her three young daughters is something that they expect to incur large debts for.

This household is considered poor, but their ability to participate in the cash economy through non-farm livelihoods have freed them from the compulsion of taking risks with commercial crops such as cotton. They are thus insulated from major losses in times of drought. They however are vulnerable because of the looming prospect of marrying off three daughters.

From the case studies above, one can see that even small farmers who are not the poorest in the village struggle to just maintain simple reproduction of their households. Another layer of vulnerability is added in women-headed households or households with older or sick people, with very young children or with unmarried daughters. Because agriculture is still relatively uncapitalized, the ability to self-exploit labor is key to maintaining agricultural viability. However given the precariousness of livelihoods, it does not take much to push households over the edge. Farming and laboring households are able to manage a to keep their heads above water if rains are good and no major life events such as sickness occur that could lead into a downward cycle of debt and dispossession.

Distress and Suicides

While the area where fieldwork was conducted was not in the main “suicide belt” of the Telengana, there were about six cases reported in the area between July and September 2009 when the area experienced a drought. These following examples are used to illustrate the layering of social, ecological and economic factors that put farmers in the predicament where they feel compelled to commercialize their agricultural operations and but are not able to cope with the high risks that come with these practices. They also highlight that it is not only cotton cultivation and its attendant risks that can cause these high levels of distress, as any commercial crop combined with other factors can lead to these acts of desperation.

A local newspaper reported on August 9th 2009 that a suicide occurred near the town of Siddipet about forty five minutes away from Zahirabad. A small farmer was

dealing with crop failure of his half acre paddy (rice) and one acre corn which had failed because of the drought. Two years before his death, he had tried to sink two borewells, both of which failed. His open well had a little water but had since dried up because of the drought. In July 2009, the newspaper reported that the area got only 227 mm of rain, only about one third of the average. To respond to the falling water table, farmers generally must dig deeper at great cost. Unable to come up with the resources to do so, the farmer hung himself in his house on August 8th, 2009. He had one son and four daughters, two daughters were married off.²⁶

In September 2009, the local newspaper reported another case where two people committed suicide in the neighboring Kuppanagar village in the field area. It reported that both the husband and wife from one family drank pesticide separately without the knowledge of the other, after arguing about money. They had considerable debt and needed another Rs. 100000 (\$2200) to pay the capitation (entrance) fee for their son to attend a private engineering college. They also had three daughters of marriageable age.

That same day two suicides were reported in Vikarabad about thirty kilometers away, where one farmer committed suicide because he had Rs. 100000 (\$2200) debt from cotton and corn and failed crops. He had five children to support. Another farmer committed suicide because he had Rs. 30000 (\$850) debt from growing corn²⁷. A little closer to home, one of the research respondent's brothers committed suicide in November 2009 after an argument with his wife. They argued over selling their bullocks which they had received as dowry from the wife's family. They were cash strapped and the husband

²⁶ Taken from researchers field notes diary 2009

²⁷ Taken from researchers field notes diary 2009

was also finding it too hard to manage the animals. When his wife threatened to leave with the children and he drank pesticide. They had one and a half acres of irrigated black land that they used to grow mainly sugarcane.

Socioeconomic, Market-Driven and Ecological Dimensions of Distress

The socioeconomic aspects of distress are becoming increasingly obvious. A majority of the suicides in the region are among the lower caste households (Vasavi, 1999), including the six examples referred to above. Many have highlighted that suicides have occurred mostly in poorer households who have dedicated most of their land to cotton or other commercial crop cultivation as opposed to a more diversified agriculture practiced by middle and rich farmers, thus exposing themselves to higher risk (Vasavi, 1999; Mohanty, 2005). Furthermore as traditional occupations and provisioning break down and alternate livelihoods are few, many of the traditionally non-agricultural castes such as artisans are resorting to agriculture. As they take up risky commercial crops without any agricultural knowledge or networks in place, they are highly prone to fail (Vasavi, 1999).

Stone (2007) highlights the role of the market in pushing farmers over the edge. He notes that farmer's practices are increasingly influenced by private actors who aggressively market their seeds. He found in Warangal District of the Telengana region that there was intense competition between among cotton farmers that led them to rapidly adopt technologies to outdo each other. The rapid adoption bypassed the usual process of innovation-diffusion among farmers has resulted in a general death of agricultural knowledge related to the new technologies (Stone, 2007). This has been exacerbated by

the absence of rural extension and research and the state's inability to adequately regulate the industry which led to spurious seeds and pesticides being sold to unsuspecting cotton farmers (Ghosh 2005a; Reddy, 2006; Dev, 2007; Vasavi, 2009).

Global market factors are also contributing to the crisis particularly with regard to cotton farming. Indian farmers are known to be highly responsive to relative price signals. When cotton prices rose on the world market, it caused a large shift in cropping patterns (Ghosh, 2005a). With the deregulation of the cotton sector in India, a drop in world prices led to a sharp rise in cotton imports, crushing local cultivators who were no longer protected from global price fluctuations. Within a short span India went from being a cotton exporter to a cotton importer in 1998 (Hardikar, 2006). The flood of cotton on the global market was due to US subsidies to its cotton growers and the consequent overproduction of cotton. In 2001, twenty percent of US cotton exports went to India. A year later, the figure rose to sixty percent. In Vidharba region, the locus of the worst of the cotton crisis, US cotton was sold at Rs. 1700 a ton whereas Indian cotton was priced at Rs. 1900 a ton due to the higher cost of production of Indian cotton. Furthermore the State had reduced the minimum support prices for cotton – thus exposing Indian cotton farmers to the risky markets (Sainath, 2006).

It is not only cotton farmers that have suffered from price deregulation and trade liberalization. Oilseeds are another example, although they have not been as implicated as cotton in the farmers suicides. Before liberalization, India was an exporter of oilseeds but import restrictions dropped with liberalization leading to a flood of cheap edible oil imports creating major livelihood crisis for millions of oilseed farmers (Patnaik, 2005).

Ghosh (2010) highlights that the ecological dimensions of rural distress are many. The high use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides for example, has laid severe pressure on crucial resources like soil and water. Cotton consumes fifty five percent of all pesticides produced in India and Andhra Pradesh accounts for twenty five to thirty percent of the total use of pesticides in the country. Furthermore, in all of the cotton growing areas, pesticide costs are highest in Andhra Pradesh. Numerous pesticide multinational corporations have entered India post-liberalization (Ramamurthy, 2000).

Falling yields and fluctuating and worsening insect predations have been plaguing cotton farmers who have little knowledge of how to deal with them. In Warangal for example, agricultural monitoring studies on cotton in 2000-2002 revealed that many farmers were ignorant about pesticides and how to use them. Stone (2004) found that many farmers were applying combination of up to eight different pesticides and spraying their crops sometimes up to twenty times in a season. To make matters worse, the almost complete doing away of state extension and research institutions has left farmers with nowhere to turn for help. Most end up going to seed and pesticide dealers for advice when pests attack or crops fail (Ghosh, 2005a; Nagraj, 2008). This is not a problem that is exclusive only to cotton. In one of the research villages for example, a large sugarcane farmer also complained that he went to the state extension office for help when his sugarcane crop was inflicted by a fungus only to be told to go to a local private pesticide dealer for advice.²⁸

²⁸ Interview with large sugarcane farmer in Bidekane Village, July 2009

The region is also experiencing a crisis in water. Borewells have led to the overuse of groundwater and most of the traditional cooperatively managed water tanks that used to be a source of irrigation have dried up and fallen into disrepair. As a result, the rate of ground water recharge has also gone down leading to a crisis in water for agriculture (Ghosh, 2005a). Even before genetically modified cotton was introduced, state policies in the 1990s encouraged cotton cultivation through subsidies on hybrid seeds and pesticides, including in areas where climatic, soil and irrigation conditions are not suited to the crop (Ghosh, 2005a). When genetically modified cotton was introduced in the early 2000s, it specifically stated its poor suitability under non-irrigated conditions. However, the state played an active role in promoting cotton cultivation in the semi-arid areas and in not providing farmers other seed options (Hardikar, 2006).

A recent report on the crisis of suicides highlight that suicides have been spreading to many of the non-cotton growing states (Sainath, 2011) bearing witness to the very real problems of commercialization of the countryside that go beyond cotton or biotechnology. Both the Center and state level governments have made efforts to address suicides by increasing rural credit, writing off institutional loans, increasing the minimum support prices for some crops, providing suicide relief packages for affected families (Ghosh, 2005a).

Table 4.3 below reports more recent evaluations and highlights that some states are doing better than others in responding to the crisis. For example, Kerala is the most globalized economies of all states, growing mostly commodity crops such as coffee, vanilla, and pepper and has also suffered from volatile global markets. It has however had some success in addressing agrarian distress. It set up a debt relief tribunal in 2005, raised

support to the farm sector and doubled support prices for paddy from Rs. 700 to Rs.1400 in the food sector (Sainath, 2011). West Bengal is another state that has started taking the crisis seriously (Sainath, 2011).

Table 4.3: Farm Suicide Annual Averages in Select States

Farm suicide annual averages in select States 1995-2002 & 2003-10			
State	Farm suicides annual average		Difference (2nd Avg - 1st Avg)
	1995-2002	2003-2010	
Andhra Pradesh	1590	2301	+711
Assam	155	291	+135
Karnataka	2259	2123	-136
Kerala	1292	1071	-221
MP + Chhattisgarh	2304	2829	+525
Maharashtra	2508	3802	+1294
Tamil Nadu	992	866	-126
Uttar Pradesh	640	531	-109
West Bengal	1426	990	-436

The table only includes States whose annual averages have risen or fallen by over 100 farm suicides between the two periods. It also treats Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh as one unit for data purposes.

Source: National Crime Records Bureau, Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India, Reports 1995 – 2010. (Table taken from Sainath, 2011)

States like Andhra however have still not created an adequate response, resulting in an increasing number of farmers suicides (Sainath, 2011). Although Andhra has made taken some positive steps, the crisis in agriculture is widespread and the conditions of farmers remain precarious. Andhra’s rural public institutions have been so drastically affected by neoliberal policies and disinvestment that unless they are built up and

reinvestment in rural areas is adequate farmers will continue to be distressed (Ghosh, 2005a).

Today, as the region suffers from droughts, crop failures and rural distress, the unfairness of state's irrigation policies that favor Coastal Andhra have been a source of much grievance and one of the reasons that the struggle for separate statehood has gained widespread support in the rural areas when it was initially driven by urban interests (Suri, 2002; Chakrabarti, 2010).

Impacts of Neoliberal Policies on Land, Caste and Power

“Change may have happened economically in the village, but are the big families and castes still people on the top?” (Bharat Bhushan, Dalit Activist, 2009)²⁹

Several scholars and activists have highlighted that the social moorings of capital remain unchallenged and are getting further consolidated under neoliberal reforms. Caste is becoming more, not less, important in the landscape of power in the rural areas of Andhra in spite of the gradual revolution (Vasavi, 1999; 2009; Andhra Pradesh Social Watch, 2007; Singh, 2010). Landlessness, land alienation, concentration and displacement are serious problems in Andhra, and Dalits and *Adivasis* are disproportionately affected (Ghosh, 2005a; Andhra Pradesh Social Watch, 2007).

²⁹ Question posed to me during an interview with Bharat Bhushan, Dalit activist and writer, September 2009

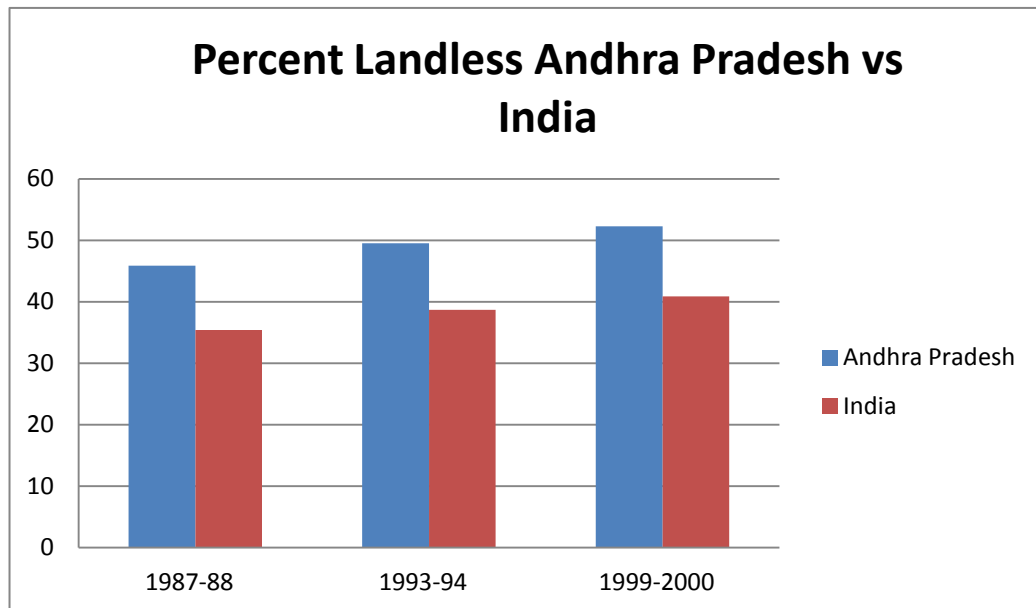
New laws passed by the state since neoliberal reforms to enable land acquisition for the private sector have intensified concentration, alienation and displacement. For example state lands known as “Assignment Lands” distributed to poor farmers as part of land redistribution policies are “assigned” without titles. New legislation allows the state to take back these lands for what are supposed to be “public purposes” without compensation or resettlement of farmers. The state has acted as mediator in acquiring these lands for infrastructural and industry sectors and Special Economic Zones (SEZ) all benefitting large corporations. This has serious implications for Dalits as 2005-2006 census in Andhra Pradesh shows that fifty percent of landholdings of Dalit households are assignment lands (Andhra Pradesh Social Watch, 2007).

Tribal areas have historically dealt with high amounts of land alienation and expropriation, an issue that is widespread and very visible in Andhra Pradesh (Mohanty, 2001; Andhra Pradesh Social Watch, 2007; Reddy, Gopinath, Anil Kumar, Rao and Springate-Baginski, 2010). In some districts such as the Telengana, non-tribal people own between fifty and seventy percent of the land in designated tribal areas (Reddy, Gopinath, Anil Kumar, Rao and Springate-Baginski, 2010). In addition to expropriation of lands by landlords, tribal people face alienation and dispossession because of development projects such as mining and dams and Special Economic Zones, and also because of state forest management and conservation programs, leading to sometimes violent contestations for land (Reddy, Gopinath, Anil Kumar, Rao and Springate-Baginski, 2010).

Access to land is critical in the absence of very few livelihood diversification opportunities, and Andhra’s neoliberal policies have created very few opportunities for

livelihood diversification in the rural areas. Figure 4.6 below indicates that Andhra Pradesh has the second highest extent of rural landlessness of any state after Punjab. Over 52% of rural households are landless compared to a National average of 40.9% (1999-2000). Landlessness is heavily concentrated among the Dalit and *Adivasi* populations (Reddy, Gopinath, Anil Kumar, Rao and Springate-Baginski, 2010). A 1993-94 survey revealed that around 75.3 percent of rural Dalit households in Andhra were landless (Andhra Pradesh Social Watch 2007). Landless, small farmers and laborers continue to be drawn from the lower castes and large farmers continue to be predominantly from the higher castes a trend that is also visible in the field area and will be discussed later (Reddy, Gopinath, Anil Kumar, Rao and Springate-Baginski, 2010; Andhra Pradesh Social Watch 2007).

Figure 4.6: Percent Landless Andhra versus India 1987 - 2000



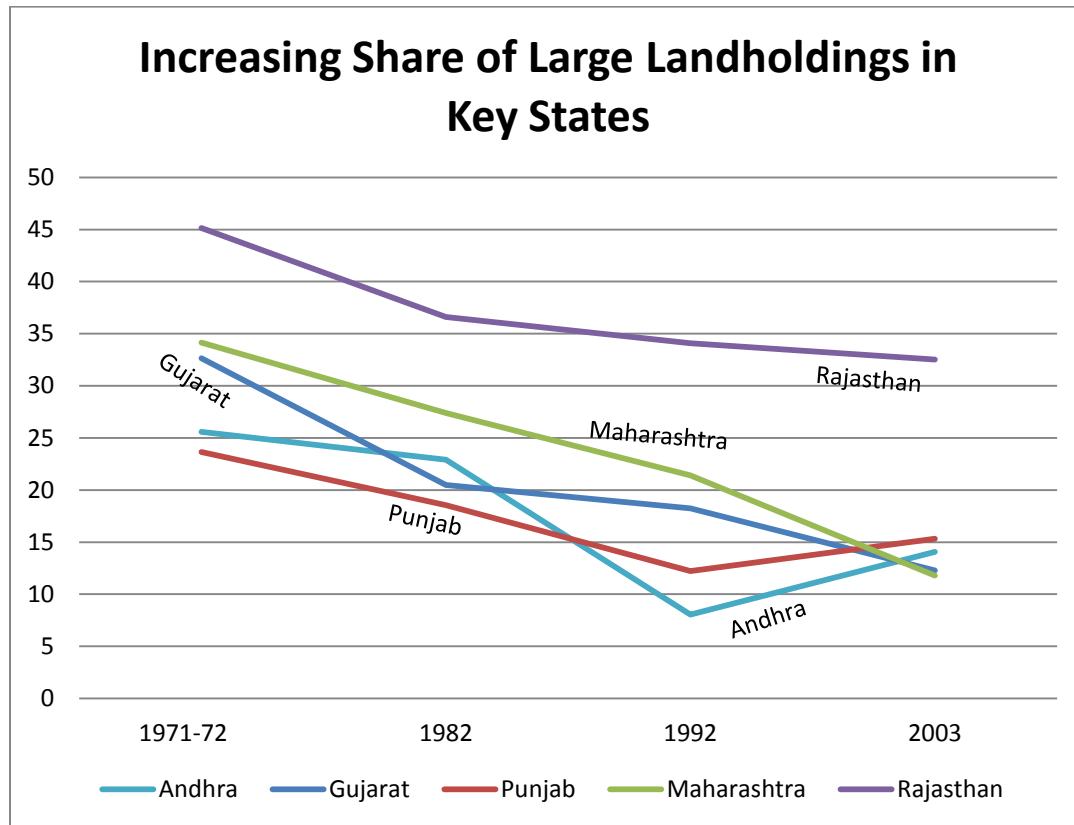
Source: NSS Surveys on Employment and Unemployment (Graph based on data taken from Ghosh, 2005a)

Landholdings in Andhra are also highly skewed. The Agricultural Census of 2005-06 shows that about 62 percent of the holdings are marginal of less than 1 hectare, and they account for about 22 percent of the total area operated. Small and marginal holdings together comprise 84 per cent of all land held but amounts to only 49 percent of the operated area. On the other hand, semi-medium and medium holdings constitute about 16 per cent of the holdings and 56 per cent of the total operated area (CESS, 2008).

In the Telengana region, the share of population of Dalits has been increasing while their share in land ownership has been decreasing. For *Adivasis* however their share in total holdings and area has significantly increased (Andhra Pradesh Social Watch, 2007), which can be attributed to the contemporary Naxalite movement in the tribal pockets. Poor record keeping especially the Telengana, hides the true extent of the division and fragmentation of holdings over generations. Some households are virtually landless with holdings that are unviable to cultivate even if they are listed as owning land. Because land is mostly in men's names, women are rarely listed as the owners of land, even when they are the actual cultivators (Ghosh, 2005a).

In addition to landlessness, concentration of land is another issue that has helped perpetuate inequality and deprivation (Mohanty, 2001). Figure 4.7 below indicates that land concentration was decreasing until the 1990s is now increasing in Andhra, another telling sign that neoliberal policies are leading to higher inequality.

Figure 4.7: Increasing Share of Large Landholding States



Graph based on data from Basole and Basu 2011. Source:Statement 5, Report No. 491, NSS 59th round, January-December, 2003.

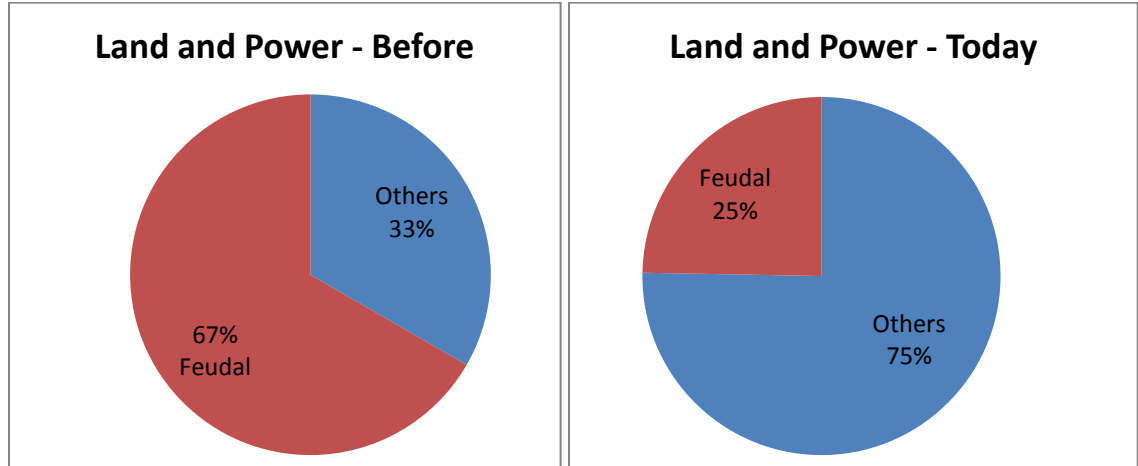
Landlessness or unviable size of landholdings force many get into illegal and exploitative tenancy arrangements to gain access to land for cultivation. These are understandably not recorded, a problem that is especially acute in the Telengana. Official statistics put tenancy at fourteen percent but other evidence indicates that tenancy can be between thirty and sixty percent and are often higher in irrigated areas and areas that grow commercial crops (Ghosh, 2005a). Tenancy arrangements raise production costs for small farmers. As unregistered tenants, farmers are not eligible for institutional credit, subsidies on fertilizers and seeds, compensation for crop losses and natural calamities.

Not having land in their names to use as collateral they are driven to the informal usurious credit market (Ghosh 2005a). At the field site it was observed that tenants also invest less in their lands because of insecure tenure, resulting in degradation of lands and decreasing productivity.

Land and Power Concentration in the Research Villages

Historical patterns of dominance in the two research villages in the field area validate the point that the social moorings of capital have not changed. Former feudal families and castes continue to be the largest landowners and also the most powerful and dominant players in the rural political economy. Figure 4.8 below is based on informal discussions with the “old man’s *panchayat*” in Kambalpalle Village, a group of male farmers that would gather to talk near the village teashop on summer afternoons when agricultural work was light. It highlights that historically dominant families are still the main power brokers in one village even if the extent of their landholdings have diminished. Today six out of 177 households control a little under one third of the village cultivable land of roughly 850 acres. In the past, five families controlled more than two-thirds of the about 600 acres in the village. Land records were not available for this village and the size of the actual landholdings may not be too accurate but they are a fair estimate.

Figure 4.8: Historical Land Concentration in a Telengana Village



Source: Informal Discussions with Farmers in a Telengana Village

In addition to land, members of the landed households also hold key positions of power. In this village, the *Sarpanch*, NREGA supervisor and the owner of the dealership that sells inputs such as seed and pesticide are all from these formerly feudal families. The NREGA supervisor and *Sarpanch* especially have access to state funds. These families are also into money lending, contracting and are active in Andhra Pradesh party politics. However, there are changes too. There are now two large Dalit households that can be considered large peasants and own between fifteen and twenty five acres of land. One has the ration shop dealership, which again is a source wealth and is considered one of the village “big men”.

Another way to understand changes in power is to look at the history of local political power in the villages. Table 4.4 below shows that to some extent the dominant castes have been shaken if not rooted out of their traditional strong holds of power. For example, if one looks at the list of elected *Sarpanchs* in both villages, the high castes/classes such as the Reddys, Brahmins and Lingayats dominated till the mid-90s

when the first *Sarpanch* elections were made mandatory in Andhra Pradesh. After that, Dalits and Backward Castes and women held these positions. Often these changes may not mean too much and are the result of quotas and affirmative action. For example the *Sarpanch* in Kambalpalle is the wife of the dominant ex-feudal “Police Patel” family that was and still is one of the most powerful households in the village. She is however a *Sarpanch* only on paper and rarely leaves the house and leaves all the official duties to her husband who is even referred to as “Sarpanch Patel” by the local people. When Dalits held these positions, it was only those from the well off Dalit families that were able to win the elections because they had considerable resources and political backing to do so. Respondents say that however that having women and Dalits in these high positions has changed perceptions that that socioeconomic mobility is frozen.

Table 4.4: Historical Sarpanch Positions in Bidekane and Kambalpalle Villages

Bidekane Village		Kambalpalle Village	
2006	Dalit (low caste, rich family)	2006	Police Patel Woman (high caste)
2001	Muslim (high caste)	2001	Dalit (low caste, rich family)
1996	BC Woman (low caste)	1995	Marati (woman) (high caste)
1992	Dalit (low caste, rich family)	1985	Reddy (high caste)
1987	Reddy (high caste)	1970	Reddy (high caste)
1978	Lingayat Mali Patel (high caste)	Pre 1970	Police Patel Marati (high caste)
1973	Reddy (high caste)		

Source: Taken from discussions with farmers in a Telengana village 2009

Several higher caste members have noted the improvement of the lower castes.

One small farmer from a formerly dominant family notes:

We used to be the Police Patels and were big people in the village. Marati [a high caste] people were big in the village then. Now all are equal. Before we had more knowledge, but now everybody has knowledge because of help and capacity building by the government.³⁰

Similarly Dalits also talk freedoms and improvements that they have experienced over the last few decades. In addition to improved material welfare, many have talked of being freed from hierarchical relationships and intermediaries (high caste/officials) in their dealings with the outside world. This quote is an example of farmer's traditional dependence on these exploitative high caste officials in the Telengana:

Now we all have access to information. Before the Patels [former feudal households] were powerful because they had all the knowledge, they were educated we had to go through them to access anything from the government. Now we can talk directly about our problems to people like you. Now we are *ushaar* [clever].³¹

In spite of positive changes in many areas however, the patterns of dominance visible in the concentration of landholdings, resources and political power, reveal that the structural bases of society remain uncontested and are getting further consolidated with commercialization (Vasavi, 2009; Ghosh, 2005a). This can be seen in many different aspects of livelihoods in Andhra Pradesh. For example, farm incomes are positively correlated with caste, with Dalits and *Adivasis* at the bottom (Singh, 2010). Furthermore,

³⁰ Interview with Marati farmer, Kambalpalle Village, August 2009

³¹ Interview with Dalit farmer, Kambalpalle Village, August 2009

an important study in Andhra Pradesh found that a person's ability to positively diversify out of agriculture is determined more by caste and political patronage than by agricultural productivity (Farrington, Deshingkar and Johnson, 2002). The importance of political alliances and party politics is not an exaggeration. In the research villages all the big families have been able to accumulate or maintain land, assets and other benefits largely because of their involvement in local politics. This is the case even with Dalits. While as a caste they are at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, the two research villages of Bidekane and Kambalpalle had one or two prominent Dalit families, who were involved in local politics which enabled them to access money, contracts and other resources.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the implications of neoliberal reforms for the poor in rural Telengana and Andhra Pradesh state. It considered the impacts of neoliberal reforms on growth, employment and wages; on cropping patterns and food security; and on debt, credit and agricultural viability. It demonstrated that Andhra's neoliberal policies have not contributed to growth in agriculture or real wages. Nor have they generated enough employment to absorb rural labor and enable a diversification out of agriculture. This has impacted the poor negatively and led to an increased dependence on agriculture even as landlessness and fragmentation of land make it difficult for rural populations to support themselves. It also highlighted that neoliberal policies are leading to massive shifts from food to commercial crops which have negative impacts on food security for small and landless farmers. They are compelled to grow risky commercial crops due to very few

opportunities to diversify, but the shrinking of rural credit, rising costs of cultivation and reduction of safety nets has made agriculture very risky for them.

It then considered coping and distress patterns of small farming households and demonstrated that households use a range of strategies and are very dependent on selling their labor. Small farmers who depend solely on agriculture-based livelihoods are worse off and when diversification into non-farm activities are possible, it makes their lives less risky. Using examples from the field area, it demonstrated that suicides are a sign of widespread distress and are not limited only to cotton-growing farmers and regions. Crushing indebtedness has led to dispossession and death as small farmers are barely equipped to capitalize on opportunities provided by the market as commercialization penetrates the countryside, safety nets are diminished and environments are degraded (Gupta, 1995; Vasavi, 1999; Ghosh, 2005a).

In the last section this chapter demonstrated that patterns of dominance visible in the concentration of landholdings, resources and political power are getting further consolidated with neoliberalism. The landless and those with small holdings, are in general more vulnerable and in some cases worse-off than before. Increased freedoms and material benefits have enabled the lower classes/castes to move away from a life of degradation and extreme insecurity. But for many, the freedoms have also made livelihoods riskier. Furthermore, they have not experienced a major shift in their relative socioeconomic condition nor have they been able to break out of culturally sanctioned poverty and vulnerability. They continue to be plagued by low bargaining power and lack of assets (Ghosh, 2005a).

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 have given us an overview of the political economic debates and developments of Andhra Pradesh state and the Telengana region over the last few decades. They have considered the outcomes of state and market led development on India's rural poor. The next two chapters represent a shift in the focus of this dissertation to consider the discourses and practices of alternative agricultural movements and their local level implications for poor farmers' livelihoods in rural Telengana.

CHAPTER 5: TRANSNATIONAL AGRARIAN MOVEMENTS AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The world desperately needs food sovereignty. It is our best hope to solve the planet's most pressing crises. - Genetic Resources Action International (GRAIN) 2011

Introduction

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 focus primarily on examining the roles of the state and market in the development of agriculture and their impacts on the livelihoods of the rural poor in India. They demonstrate that, historically vulnerable groups (lower castes and women) and regions continue to be vulnerable in the contemporary globalized landscapes of rural India. Indeed, these groups and regions seem to bear the brunt of ‘development’ as they are integrated into a system that is structurally biased against their interests, bringing rising inequality and vulnerability.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, transnational agrarian movements, networks and coalitions have put forth the ideas of “food sovereignty” as alternatives to state and market-led development. They place small farmers and sustainable agricultural practices at the center of their strategies to resist the impacts of the global corporate food regime which is seen as the main cause of a host of social, economic, health and environmental issues. This chapter interrogates the different meanings and underlying ideologies of food sovereignty espoused by transnational agrarian movements to understand how these affect their vision for alternative agriculture. It highlights that the creation of transnational coalitions brings together various actors but the diverse class bases,

historical contexts, and the ideological positions of stakeholders lend themselves to contradiction and contestation within these movements.

The chapter also questions the centrality of small farming and localism in the movement's vision for alternative development; highlighting the fact that their espousal of the 'peasant way' obscures class differences and local politics, while failing to provide a realistic vision for rural development. Without taking into account the reality of capitalist relations of production, the hybridity of rural landscapes, and the necessary link between agriculture and industry, movements are hampered by contradictions that hinder the effectiveness of their progressive political agendas.

Transnational Agrarian Activism

Transnational agrarian movements for food sovereignty have their roots in national peasant struggles in Latin America. Early transnational organizing began with the world farm crisis in the 1980s that was an outcome of the rapid liberalization of global trade, negatively affecting farmers (Edelman, 2005). The crisis brought together several radical, national and independent peasant organizations leading to a Latin American-wide peasant movement (Edelman, 2003). Older forms of cross-border peasant organizing existed as far back at the late 19th and early 20th centuries in different regions of Europe and North America as part of the vast political solidarity networks of both the left and right in the context of feudalism, national liberation and anti-dictatorship movements (Edelman, 2003).

Transnational peasant organizing became truly global in the 1990s following the end of the Cold war, when a new phase of neoliberal globalization increased market-based threats and caused greater insecurities amongst rural populations (Edelman, 2003). The liberalization of the media, internationalization of organizations (Tarrow, 2005), advances made in mass communication (Edelman, 2009; McMichael, 2005; Featherstone, 2003; Desmarais, 2002) and the globalization of moral economic norms (Edelman, 2009) enabled new patterns of transnational organizing and led to the creation of vertical and horizontal linkages among diverse stakeholders (Edelman, 2009). These movements, networks and coalitions have been variously referred to as Transnational Agrarian Movements (TAM), Transnational Peasant Networks (TPN), Food Sovereignty Movements³² and so on. They differ from alternative agricultural movements that have emanated from the Global North which are primarily driven by urban consumers and market-based activism. TAMs, on the other hand, highlight producers' agendas and represent a globalization from below (Borras, Edelman and Kay, 2008).

One of the early and most visible actions that demonstrated the cohesiveness and dynamism of transnational alliances occurred when peasant organizations and other civil society actors came together to oppose the trade liberalization agenda contained in the Dunkel Draft of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), the predecessor to WTO, in 1992 (Desmarais, 2002). They were opposing the patenting of seeds and other life forms by corporations and the liberalization of agricultural exports and imports in general. Huge demonstrations attended by

³² From here on out, these movements will be referred to as TAMs

peasant/farmers organizations, NGOs and activists from Asia, Africa, and the Americas, as well as from all over Europe took place (Desmarais, 2002). As a result of these anti-GATT protests, representatives of peasant and small-farmer organizations from several dozen countries met in Belgium the following year and founded a transnational peasant coalition called Via Campesina or The Peasant Way (Desmarais, 2002).

Via Campesina coined the term ‘food sovereignty’ in 1996 as “the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity” (Via Campesina, 1996, pg. 1). Since Via Campesina’s conception in 1993, many more actors have come on board. Today there are numerous regional, national and transnational networks, coalitions and movements that espouse food sovereignty principles (Edelman, 2003)³³. Large NGOs and transnational civil society networks³⁴ have joined forces making these networks, coalitions and movements very dynamic and diverse (Edelman, 2003, Desmarais, 2002; 2007).

Over the last fifteen years the definition of food sovereignty has broadened to reflect this diversity of members and their respective agendas. At the World Food Sovereignty Forum held in Mali in 2007, referred to as the Nyéléni Forum, several

³³ These include the International Planning Committee (IPC) for Food Sovereignty, the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), Asian Peasant Coalition (APC), Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo (CLOC, Latin American Coordination of Peasant Organizations) and the Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l’Afrique de l’Ouest (Network of Peasants’ and Producers’ Organizations of West Africa, ROPPA), the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF), World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), International Collective in Support of Fish Workers (ICSFW), the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers’ Associations (IUF), International Federation of Adult Catholic Farmers’ Movements (FIMARC) (Edelman, 2003).

³⁴ Such as the FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN), the Land Research and Action Network (LRAN), the Erosion, Technology and Concentration Group (ETC Group), the Genetic Resources Action International (GRAIN) and Friends of the Earth (Edelman, 2003).

important food sovereignty actors came together and a comprehensive definition of food sovereignty was officially adopted as follows:

the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. (Food Sovereignty) puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers and users. Food sovereignty prioritizes local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal - fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all peoples as well as the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations (Via Campesina, 2007).

As the first line of the definition suggests, “food sovereignty” was framed within the context of rights, specifically the *right to food* articulated in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Desmarais, 2007). This overt reference to human rights reflects a shift in the politics of transnational, environmental, and indigenous movements in general and responds to the growing space within UN organizations that recognize autonomy and rights to basic needs (Edelman and James, 2011; Borras, 2008; Patel, Balakrishnan and Narayan, 2007).

The term “food sovereignty” was coined to highlight that “food security” has been co-opted by the global corporate food regime to advance modes of large-scale, export-

oriented corporate agriculture (Desmarais, 2002). The definition of food security by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), an international body created to address food security and hunger for example states that: “ Food security is a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 2002, quoted in Clay 2002, pg. 2).

Via Campesina highlights that the traditional definition of food security does not include important questions of who produces the food and who benefits from its production and sale - the social control of the food system (Via Campesina, 2002). This is especially important because under a neoliberal globalized regime, the concerns of global food insecurity are now in the domain of the market - as opposed to states and communities - which is guided by different motivations (Patel, 2009). Food sovereignty advocates suggest that the right to farming and to produce food and the right to food are mutually linked since most of the hungry and malnourished in the world are smallholders and landless farmers (Via Campesina, 2002; Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005; Desmarais, 2002;2007; McMichael, 2005; Patel, 2009).

Windfuhr and Jonsén (2005) highlight that while ‘food security’ is more of a technical concept, and the ‘right to food’ a legal concept ‘food sovereignty’ is a political one. Henry Sarigh, Via Campesina’s current coordinator elaborates that food sovereignty fills the lacuna between the right to food and food security where “the right to produce food is much more fundamental to fulfilling the rights to food” (Saragih, 2005, 7, quoted in Edelman and James, 2011). Food sovereignty then is not the antithesis of food security

but rather a precondition for genuine food security (McMichael, 2005; Desmarais, 2002; Via Campesina, 2002).

The global spread of TAMs reflects a growing concern over the deepening reach and concentration of the agrifood sector that suppresses “particularities of time and place in both agriculture and diets” (Friedmann 1992, pg.272). The “global corporate food regime” (Friedmann, 1992; McMichael, 2005) now exerts control over a large share of different sectors in all stages of the cycle from seed to table that include research, inputs, production, distribution, marketing and retailing (McMichael, 2005; Edelman, 2009). This concentration has reordered agrarian landscapes in some very fundamental ways (Bernstein, 2009) and has incorporated and simultaneously marginalized people in the Third World (Friedmann, 1992) as well as in developed nations. The most recognizable of these corporate agrifood giants are Wal-Mart/Asda (the world’s largest retailer and grocer), Carrefour, Royal Ahold, Tesco in retail, Monsanto, Sygenta, Cargill, Pioneer, ADM, Nestle, Bayer, BASF, Novartis (McMichael, 2005; Scrinis, 2007).

Food sovereignty advocates highlight that international trade instruments like the WTO, and organizations like World Bank and IMF create conditions that are favorable to the development of the global corporate food regime. They have together undermined the sovereignty of nations, communities and peoples in deciding their food and agriculture policies (McMichael, 2005; Patel, Balakrishnan and Narayan, 2007; Bello, 2009; Desmarais, 2008). The WTO minimum import rule for example, takes away the right of states to ensure their own food self-sufficiency because they are required to allow imports of at least five percent of food for their own consumption (McMichael, 2005). State supports given to farming populations have also been curtailed by trade agreements

and neoliberal policies which have affected their ability to stay viable and have led to dispossession and large scale destabilization of rural populations (McMichael, 2006). Furthermore, fossil-fuel based agricultural practices propagated by the global corporate food regime have imposed severe ecological and cultural costs, altering the diverse agroecological systems of smallholders, and are eroding cultural knowledges in many world regions (McMichael, 2008; Bello, 2009; Altieri, 2009).

Via Campesina's rise has demonstrated the dynamism of these movements in responding to pressures of globalized markets and the demands of transnational collective action (Desmarais, 2007). At the global level, these movements have acquired political sophistication as they form new alliances with others in very diverse geographical and institutional spaces (Edelman, 2005; Peluso, Rachman and Affif, 2008; Ayers and Bosia, 2011). These networks and coalitions allow for an easy sharing of information and strategies and have physically brought peasant movements, NGOs and other stakeholders from different geographical locales together for campaigns, protests, research and so on (Edelman, 2005). Solidarity across different geographies including between peasants in the Global North and South has been quite remarkable, given that the conditions of stakeholders can be highly varied and their respective country's positions within the WTO are often opposed (Friedmann and McNair, 2008).

Strategic alliances and coalitions were formed through emblematic battles such as opposition to genetically modified crops (anti-GM) and the associated concerns of corporatization, biopiracy and ownership of resources; land grabbing; biofuels; land reform; free trade, and other problems that are seen to threaten rural livelihoods. Some coalitions, such as Via Campesina and IPC, take a more confrontational stance to effect

reforms in their favor (Borras, Edelman and Kay, 2008). In India, for example, they have participated in dramatic GM crop burning events, and regular rallies and demonstrations at Monsanto's research locations (Scoones, 2008; Herring, 2006). In France, Jose Bové, a farmer and activist and one of the founding members of Via Campesina, popularized food sovereignty in highly publicized events of burning crops, dismantling a McDonalds and going on a hunger strike (Desmarais, 2002). Others, especially those associated with middle and rich farmers such as IFAP, sit at the negotiating table with important international institutions (Borras, Edelman and Kay, 2008). The more radical movements/networks advocate for taking food out of the WTO, arguing that "food is first and foremost a source of nutrition and only secondarily an item of trade" (Via Campesina, 2002, p. 8).

While they have definitely been quite visible on the global stage and have been able to politicize issues globally, several concerns have been raised with regard to TAMs in the realm of the discourses and practices. Some of these criticisms are also true of other anti-globalization, peasant and indigenous movements and are not exclusive to TAMs. They highlight 1) problems with the definition of "food sovereignty" that lack practicable alternatives; 2) contradictions that arise from bringing together diverse actors by TAMs; and 3) the limits of populist discourse and strategies that essentialize peasants and fetishize localism.

Definitions: the Right to Food and Food Sovereignty

To organize a transnational social movement and to establish a universalizing alternative to food security requires balancing several ideological tendencies and agendas

(Carney, 2011; Boyer, 2010). Within Via Campesina for example, a radical neo-populist outlook is the strongest ideological position of members (Borras, 2008). But there are also various strands of radical Marxist, feminist, environmentalists, and anarchist traditions, along with others who do not hold ideological positions that co-exist uneasily within this broad coalition (Borras, 2008; Edelman, 2003).

Newell (2008) highlights that “food sovereignty” is a concept that is broad enough to allow for political buy-in of very diverse groups that might not otherwise work together. For example, for the landless movement MST of Brazil, food sovereignty gets tied into their demands for land redistribution; and for farmers/peasant movements it serves as a rallying cry against the impacts of trade on peasants livelihoods (Newell, 2008). For those in favor of autonomy food sovereignty symbolizes a defense of local economies while, environmental groups deploy the concept to argue for ecologically sustainable (non-GM) food production (Newell, 2008). Patel (2009) explains that its inclusivity and broadness makes it “simultaneously about farming technology, democratic policymaking, public health, the environment, and gender, but also how the process of increasing food sovereignty is integral to its achievement” (Patel 2009, pg.672).

Several scholars point out that while the definition is politically acceptable by its very diverse membership, it is unrealistically broad and can be quite confusing. This makes it unworkable in the creation of feasible alternatives for policy and practice (Newell, 2008; Clay, 2002; Boyer, 2010; Borras, 2008). Boyer (2010) highlights that Food First, a well known international NGO and advocate for food sovereignty, lists the different aspects of food sovereignty as: “(1) food: a basic right, (2) agrarian reform, (3)

protecting natural resources, (4) reorganizing food trade, (5) ending the globalization of hunger, (6) social peace, and (7) democratic control” (Boyer, 2010, pg 334 in foot note). He suggests that the multiple and overlapping meanings is cause for semantic confusion (Boyer, 2010).

Raising issues with the use of “autonomy” as a desired outcome of “food sovereignty”, Kay (2008) suggests that for a rural community to be autonomous in the neoliberal globalized economy usually means that they do not participate in the market. However, some factions within the movements do not to eschew trade completely, but to call for trade on better terms whereas others are more explicit in their pursuit of autonomy or self-sufficiency (Kay, 2008). Food sovereignty advocates Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck (2011), agree that “a major shift from societies embedded in the market economy to economies that are embedded in society” is the ultimate goal, but is beyond the scope of food movements. They however suggest that food movements could be part of social transformations toward broader change. In defense of this broad definition of food sovereignty, Windfuhr and Jonsén (2005) suggest that food sovereignty offers a new policy framework to counter the current trajectory of rural development that do not support the interests of small food producers. They suggest that policies to achieve food sovereignty have become clearer in various national and local contexts, but the comprehensive nature of the concept would require highly complex strategies that play out differently from one organization, locale, region, country, and transnational setting to the next.

At the Neyleni Forum in 2007, when a meeting of major food sovereignty actors took place, it was recognized that while it was important to have a common

understanding and framework of food sovereignty, the task of coming up with food sovereignty prescriptions belonged to members' respective communities, regions and nations and would reflect their own unique set of circumstances (Patel, 2009). Jose Bove, key food sovereignty convener in Europe best known for the dismantling of a partially built McDonalds restaurant in France also shares this sentiment:

The strength of this global movement is precisely that it differs from place to place. The world is a complex place, and it would be a mistake to look for a single answer to complex and different phenomena. We have to provide answers at different levels – not just the international level, but local and national levels too (Bove & Dufour, 2001, pg.168, quoted in McMichael, 2005).

More recently, the food sovereignty definition has also included consumers' agendas, which may not be congruent with the political agenda of peasants and small farmers. At the Nyéléni forum in 2007, for example, the definition of food sovereignty was moved beyond the producers' rights to guaranteeing "the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition" (Via Campesina, 2007, Desmarais, 2007). While this is seen as a positive development by movement advocates, it could be argued that the inclusion of consumer groups will lead increasingly to the neoliberalization of activism as consumer's needs trump those of producers within TAMs. Consumers and producers in various geographical and culturally distinct settings from the 'freegans' of Vermont, to those espousing food democracy, to the peasant and solidarity movements in Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa (Ayers and Bosia, 2011) have adopted the concept of food sovereignty.

This cooptation by consumers' agendas has a precedent and is seen in the critiques leveled at alternative agricultural movements in industrialized economies. These

movements were initially influenced by radical politics for social change such as the back-to-the-land, anti-war, civil rights and environmental protection objectives that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. They were characterized by small-scale producers and face to face interactions with consumers. But as movements grew and organic products became more popular, it led to the entry of large corporate farms and retail firms who captured the market on organic foods. As the logic of capitalism entered with commercialization it led to a watering down of the social justice agendas of the initial movement participants (Guthman, 1998). Neoliberalism has thus led to the weakening connections between the organic movements and broader social movements for labor justice and environmental regulation, subduing the radical rhetoric and today the movement reflects the health and environmental concerns of rich urban consumers (Guthman, 1998; Allen, FitzSimmons, Goodman, and Warner, 2003).

Clay (2002) highlights that using the language of rights can be problematic because the “right to farming” is only a right if a national or international body can be held accountable which is not the case right now. While Via Campesina has been actively working to get the U N Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) to adopt its peasants charter entitled ‘Declaration of Rights of Peasants, Women and Men’, it is unlikely that this will be supported by member states (Borras, 2010). The difficulties of implementing a human rights framework that includes not just civil and political rights, but economic, social and cultural rights as well are many. Patel, Balakrishnan and Narayan (2007) however suggests, that the use of rights and democracy is a shrewd move by food sovereignty advocates to deploy the language of liberal governance against US hegemony

and to call attention to states' reluctance to acknowledge that the rights of many small food producers are ignored in the pursuit of "food security".

Contestation and Contradiction in TAMs

The implications of the diverse meanings of food sovereignty to actors concerned with wide ranging themes such as environment, agriculture, trade, land and other matters is still an underexplored aspect of TAMs (Borras, Edelman and Kay, 2008) but studies have started to shed more light on these issues. While food sovereignty actors mobilize to create a cohesive front to counter the threats posed by the global agrifood regime, in actual practice, actors within the movement take contradictory positions and actions that range from accommodation with the market and state to a more radical delinking of the state and market in defense of the local. Therefore trade-offs are made and strategic silences about basic issues are voluntarily maintained, but at other times, the voices of weaker actors get submerged within the larger narratives (Akram-Lodhi, 2007; Edelman, 2005; Desmarais, 2007; Borras, Edelman and Kay, 2008; Herring, 2006; Bownas, 2008). These contradictions highlight that the class bases, historical contexts, and the ideological positions of stakeholders are very diverse.

Within Via Campesina for example, while the farmers' movement members align themselves with transnational anti-GM and other NGO-led campaigns, they continue to be more interested in subsidies from the state as in free power, irrigation, modern inputs and price controls (Herring, 2006; Bownas, 2008). For example, opposition to Monsanto and genetically modified crops actually split the ranks of one major peasant movement in India, as several farmers did not view genetically modified crops as a threat (Herring,

2006; Bownas, 2008). Contradictions were also highlighted when one of the main conveners of Via Campesina, an organization that represents middle to rich farmers, opposed the membership of landless wage worker organizations and Via Campesina's land reform agenda as it directly threatened their interests (Borras, 2008; Borras, 2010; Scoones, 2008). As a result landless workers' organizations were excluded or stayed away from participating in Vía Campesina (Borras, 2008). This is ironic since Via Campesina claims to represent small and poor farmers but as one can see some of its member organizations are made up of middle and rich peasants.

Some suggest that peasant and farmers movements in general have lost the kinds of political leverage they had in national arenas in the 70s and 80s due to liberalization, reduced social cohesion and a lack of funds (Boyer, 2010; Bownas, 2008). NGOs and transnational organizing networks provide the political opportunity structures to keep their concerns alive and could potentially act as a lever for change by putting pressure on states (Newell, 2008). This has been referred to as the "boomerang effect" (Borras, 2008; Newell, 2008; Peluso, Rachman and Affif, 2008). They however have to creatively adjust their materialist agendas to the more populist agendas of TAMs (Edelman, 2009; Borras, 2008; Newell, 2008; Peluso, Rachman and Affif, 2008). How much this really happens is unclear and often the more quotidian struggles of rural dwellers get ignored (Nanda, 1999; Herring, 2006; Bownas, 2008; Newell, 2008; Edelman, 2009; Scoones, 2007).

Several scholars highlight that the most controversial and contentious alliances in TAMs are between peasant/farmers movements and NGOs. Many peasant activists for example feel that NGOs, - especially those that receive donor funding and are not comprised of grassroots actors - do not and cannot represent the rural poor and are

undemocratic (Borras Edelman and Kay, 2008; Newell, 2008; Desmarais, 2007; Herring, 2006; Edelman, 2009). While this is a broad generalization, NGOs involved in these movements are generally led by urban educated professionals and as organizations they are less downwardly accountable to their constituents than they are to their funders. Peasant/farmer organizations on the other hand elect their leaders (Boyer, 2010). NGOs however are very diverse and play an important role in advocacy of marginalized groups. Some are more representative of grassroots voices whereas others serve as intermediaries, and many play different roles simultaneously as they collaborate with, oppose or negotiate with the state, work with international funders, participate as actors in a transnational movement (Batterbury, 2004; Sen, 1999; Edwards, 1999; Bownas, 2008).

Similar contradictions were clearly visible between the local level strategies and discourses propagated by the food sovereignty NGO used as a case study in this research and the aspirations and daily material realities of small farmers in the Telengana. These will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, but briefly, small farmers are largely preoccupied by trying to eke out a living from farming and other non-farm activities and are not as concerned about ‘food sovereignty’ principles. They in general view food sovereignty as having “control” over their livelihoods through access to credit, support prices, subsidies, extension services, market supports and safety nets – for which they assign responsibility to the state. Those in Telengana who primarily earned a living from wage work or were landless viewed food sovereignty as equivalent to food security (as in getting their basic food needs met), dependable wage work, access to cultivable land, and getting jobs in other sectors such as manufacturing and public offices etc. Food sovereignty for these small and landless farmers thus had less to do with localization and

self-sufficiency strategies that many of the NGOs promote. Boyer (2010) similarly found historical, cultural and structural constraints that prevent the acceptance of “food sovereignty” among Honduran peasants, and concluded that Honduran peasant understandings of “food security” were at odds with Via Campesina’s discourse of food sovereignty (Boyer, 2010).

While transnational movements are able to help frame the global debate on agrarian issues and link local and national struggles horizontally, Scott (2005) is skeptical about their influence to effect a meaningful change. He suggests that the real platform for resisting neoliberal globalization is at the national level where states have the best chance of blocking neoliberal governance and protect peasant communities. Others highlight that the circumvention of local and national-level politics resembles in many ways the neoliberal project’s of watering down the states’ sovereignty in favor of supra-national and global forms of governance (Baletti, Johnson and Wolford, 2008).

Furthermore TAMs cannot adequately confront deep rooted structural inequities that underlie endemic rural poverty in states such as India (Bernstein, 2009). States need to step in to support rural populations using other macro-economic policy tools such as import substitution to protect the production of staple foods, providing credit, promoting sustainable agricultural practices, promoting rural diversification and so on (Kay, 2008; Baletti, Johnson and Wolford, 2008; Boyer, 2010; Akram-Lodhi, 2007). These are not new ideas as political economists in very different national contexts have suggested that the problems of the countryside are in fact larger than the countryside and thus need both a focus on agriculture and beyond.

Re-energized Agrarian Populism

TAMs represent a re-energized and radical agrarian populism (Bernstein, 2009) and share a cultural politics with peasant, alternative agricultural, environmental and anti-globalization movements worldwide (Borras, Edelman and Kay, 2008; Akram-Lodhi, 2007). The defense of the peasant way, discourses of “difference” and “resistance” and the power of horizontal alliances of local actors to forge solidarity with each other (Escobar, 1992; Esteva and Prakash, 1992; Desmarais, 2002; Patel, 2009; McMichael, 2005) highlight the confluence of populist and post-developmental ideas common to most new social movements (Nanda, 1999; Hart, 2006; Leach and Scoones, 2007). The “local”, “rural” and similar ideas have been reified to symbolize the moral goals of viable rural livelihoods, environmental sustainability and social justice, and give the perception of safety, authenticity, trust, transparency, confidence, cultural authenticity, autonomy etc. (Hart, 2006; Lockie, 2008; Goodman, Maye and Holloway, 2010; Nanda, 1999). These ideas provide a powerful draw in the creation of an alternative ideal to resist the universalizing nature of capitalism and the globalization of food and agriculture (McCarthy, 2006; Neilson and Pritchard, 2010; DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; DuPuis and Gillon, 2009; Hart, 2006; Mohan and Stokke, 2001; Leach and Scoones, 2007).

The enduring influence of populist discourse in transnational agrarian movements needs to be understood within a much longer history of reactions to capitalist and socialist production. Populism in its simplest form is defined as “a mode of thought opposed to orthodox large-scale concentrated production in favor of small-scale individual enterprise” (Watts 1983, pg. 80). Its main concern is with equality and a just distribution of income. Populists see farmers as supporters of a decentralized socialism

who would normally base their practices on ecological values (Cochrane, 2007). Agrarian populists are known to express opposition to industrialism, urbanism and modernity to resist the threats to a vanishing and idealized rural existence (Bernstein, 2009).

Neo-populism is the economic doctrine based on populist ideas. Neo-populists posit that the small-scale peasant mode of agriculture has definite economic advantages over large-scale capitalist or state-led agriculture, because it is both equitable and efficient (Byers, 2004). The ability to combine productivity and ecological sustainability constitutes a key dimension of superiority of peasant or small-scale agriculture over industrial agriculture (Bello, 2009; Torres and Rosset, 2010; Desmarais, 2002; Altieri, 2009). This doctrine presents a third way that is simultaneously anti-socialist and anti-capitalist (Byers, 2004; Watts, 1983). Neo-populist economic doctrine dates back to the work of Russian neo-populists such as Chayanov from the early 1900s (Watts, 1983). Later the work of E.F.Schumacher author of *Small is Beautiful*, and influential writers and scholars such as Wendell Berry and Michael Lipton and others kept these ideas alive in the 1960s and 1970s (Watts, 1983).

Prior versions of populism were deployed against the state as state intervention was seen as inimical to sustainable ecological and land use practices (Watts, 1983). Neo-populist practices are however not just in the realm of progressive social politics. In the 70s, many states and international organizations implemented programs that upheld smallholder expertise and on-farm experimentation such as the Basic Needs program and “farming systems research” which Watts points were characterized as populist by Cowen (1976) (Watts, 1983). These benefits of smallholder agriculture continue to be popular among certain international organizations. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to

Food, Olivier DeSchutter is a big advocate for small-peasant based farming systems, and has on different occasions called for immediate investment by governments and international agencies in ecological farming techniques as the best way to address global food insecurity (Carney, 2011; IIED, 2011).

In its current iteration, contemporary agrarian populists view suprastate forms of governance and the market as detrimental to the fate of small farmers. The state, however, is viewed ambivalently as both an important support to farmers but going against their interests when they promote large scale and productivist modes of agriculture (Edelman, 2005). TAMs underscore that peasants and small farmers continue to be the backbone of global food production, constituting over a third of the world's population and two-thirds of the world's food producers. They argue that small producers are more productive, that they use their land and other resources more efficiently when compared to large-scale commercial operations and are more likely to act as its stewards (the efficiency argument). Advocates also argue based on equity, as millions of small and landless tenants and farmers all over the world often operate under conditions of insecure tenure. They highlight the morality of small farming systems and land reform to be central to food sovereignty movements (Bello, 2009).

Desmarais (2002) for example explains that Vía Campesina's goal is to

build peasant cultures and economies based on principles which *have not yet completely disappeared* such as moral imperatives and obligations, fairness, social justice and social responsibility. This, according to the Vía Campesina, is what building rural community and culture is all about" (pg. 100 quoting Via Campesina, 1996, emphasis added).

Torres and Rosset (2010) suggest that *capitalist market relations are external* to indigenous and peasant communities whereas non-capitalist relations based on a moral economy of reciprocity and production for subsistence *exist on the inside* (Torres and Rosset, 2010, emphasis added). Food sovereignty advocates aspire to transcend capital-labors relation through “revalorizing rural cultural-ecology as a global good” (Bernstein 2009, pg. 74, quoting McMichael, 2006). This idea of equity and efficiency that small farms provide is highly appealing when juxtaposed to the painful capitalist transformation (Byers, 2004).

However, the assumption that ‘local’ and smallholder farming is inherently more moral however has several problems. Size cannot be equated with social and citizenship values (Johnston, Biro and MacKendrick, 2009; Lockie, 2008; Dupuis and Goodman, 2005; Guthman, 2008; Allen et al 2003; deLind and Bingen, 2008; MacIntyre and Rondeau, 2011; McCarthy, 2006). Similarly, the economic logic of local farms are not distinct from those of other capitalist production systems (Watts, 1983; Byers, 2004; Bernstein, 2009). Fetishizing “local” and similar such ideas obscures local politics, including undemocratic institutions, patriarchal relationships, inequitable labor practices, unequal distribution of resources, economic and other exclusions based on race, gender, caste, political affiliations. Indeed, local capital may be as exploitative as global capital (McCarthy, 2006; Dupuis and Goodman, 2005; Guthman, 2004; Allen et al 2003; deLind and Bingen, 2008).

These views are also static and ahistorical as they neglect those political and economic relations within highly differentiated peasant societies, which can affect the efficacy of small farms (Watts, 1983; Akram-Lodhi, 2007; Bernstein, 2009; Byers, 2004).

Political economy scholars have shown that to understand contemporary rural challenges, we need to consider the issues of accumulation by peasants; their tendencies to diversify out of agriculture; the necessary relations between agriculture and industry; the role of the state in these processes; the relationship of peasants to other classes; the accompanying structural change; and the inequality of access to resources (Watts, 1983; Kitching, 1980; Brass, 2000; Bernstein, 2009; Akram-Lodhi, 2007; Byers, 2004; Borras, 2010; Kay, 2008).

Furthermore, rural development strategies that are based solely on small farms ignore the changing realities of the contemporary countryside where diversification out of farm-based livelihoods has been going on. In India, as in many other developing countries, many “peasants” no longer can (or want to) depend only on agriculture alone (Bernstein, 2009). Solutions based only in agriculture therefore do not reflect their material and social realities. Because of this fragmentation of labor, rural people do not fit into categories of “peasant” or “laborer” anymore as their livelihoods often consist of a combination of urban/rural, agricultural/non-agricultural, and wage/self employment (Bernstein, 2004).

When “local” and “traditional” are discursively positioned in opposition to Western science and modernism it has come to serve as a mobilizing ideology for those who advance ideas of exclusionary nationalism, and anti-modernist and patriarchal values (Nanda, 1999; Cochrane, 2007; Brass, 2005; Ziai, 2004; Featherstone, 2003). In India for example, the cultural authenticity of “traditional” agricultural practices are advanced by the relatively well-to-do rural beneficiaries of development and also by those who espouse a right-wing Hindu politics (Nanda, 1999). In Europe the focus on local to

promote protected origins and geographical indications of food –has fed into ideas of defensive localism of the right with xenophobic overtones. In Italy for example, funding for the Slow Food Movement’s recent Terra Madre conference came from the neoliberal state and from the right-wing National Alliance. In France the threat to ‘vibrant rural communities’ is taken up by left social movements as well as those on the radical right (Dupuis and Goodman, 2005).

The use of ‘local’ by advocates speaks more to “post-materialist values” of states that have solved the subsistence problem (Herring, 2006, pg. 489) or to situations where the self-sufficient village economies exist (Gupta, 2005). However, both are not true for India and other developing countries. India has not solved its subsistence problem (Herring, 2006) and needs have escalated beyond the village. The village, dominated by small and fragmented holdings, is no longer able to provide any future or employment for scores of its landless youth (Gupta, 2005; Chatterjee, 2008).

In promoting peasant farming as central to agrarian reform, populist do however raise important questions about the need to take seriously the environmental consequences and full social costs of industrialization and technologies that have affected millions of peasants. They underscore that direct and hidden subsidies give modern capitalist farming its very high levels of productivity (Bernstein, 2009; Watts, 1983).

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the definitions, meanings and ideologies of food sovereignty espoused by transnational agrarian movements. It highlighted how the meanings of food sovereignty and the positions and strategies that are adopted by diverse

movement actors lend themselves to contradiction and contestation. It questioned the centrality of the 'peasant way' in TAMs vision for the future of agriculture, highlighting that these populist notions do not provide a realistic vision for rural development and can hinder the effectiveness of their progressive political agendas. The multiple and contradictory impulses within movements reflect actors diverse historical and ideological underpinnings and class bases (Baletti et. al, 2008; Edelman, 2003, 2008; Borras, 2010; Borras, Edelman and Kay, 2008; Kay, 2008).

Ultimately this chapter seeks to ask the rhetorical question of whose interests are primarily served by TAMs? If the radical neo-populist discourse is the strongest in movements like Via Campesina, does this really address the issues of the most poor and marginal of rural dwellers? This brings into question the issue of representation and its implications for those whose voices are weaker within movements (Borras, 2008). Many critiques of TAMs and new social movements in general are concerned that losing sight of class obscures the deprivations of those who have little power (Herring, 2006).

Some however suggest that with transnational capital as the point of resistance, class or cultural differences are less of a barrier than they once were for transnational collective action because peasantries around the world share the same global problems even though they confront different local and national realities (Edelman, 2008; Torres and Rosset, 2010; Desmarais, 2007). Furthermore, shifting alliances between different components of these movements make it more difficult to define the issues by class (Borras Edelman and Kay, 2008). Many highlight that environmental issues especially unite cross-class coalitions across the rural–urban, political, ideological and South–North

divides (Borras, 2010; Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 2010; McMichael, 2006; Peluso et al., 2008; Wittman, 2009).

The critiquing of the contradictions of food sovereignty movements is not intended to dismiss progressive struggles, but in not highlighting the complexities, tradeoffs, new shifts in power, new dominances and new pathways, the danger is complacency, one dimensional solutions and simplistic understandings of outcomes as is evident in the discourse of movements that uphold romantic rural ideas. This will hopefully lead to a more reflexive path and greater representation for its very diverse stakeholders.

CHAPTER 6.SITUATING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN THE TELENGANA LIVELIHOOD PRACTICES

Introduction

The last chapter considered transnational movements for food sovereignty, their strategies and the contradictions within movements. It highlighted that the movements' diverse constituents leads to competing values based on class, ideological leanings, unique historical and socioeconomic contexts and the nature of threats they are responding to. It suggested that a food sovereignty model that focuses on localism and the glorification of the peasant way do not resonate with most rural producers as it does not reflect their material realities. Nor does it provide a realistic vision for the future of agriculture in developing countries with vast rural populations who are still struggling to meet their basic needs.

This chapter examines how food sovereignty is played out in the rural Telengana region of India. It uses as case study the work of Deccan Development Society (DDS), a well known food sovereignty NGO, and leader in the food sovereignty networks in India and beyond. It first considers DDS's history in the region, its strategies, and its prescriptions for food sovereignty at the local level. It then highlights the constraints faced by small farmers in adopting food sovereignty practices. It demonstrates that while DDS's development work has improved the lives of poor Dalit farmers in numerous ways, its strategies to promote food sovereignty is problematic for its constituents and does not resonate with small and poor Dalit farmers' material and social realities.

The commercialization of the countryside poses enormous constraints to maintaining or achieving “food sovereignty”. In the current economic climate poor rural households are forced to employ a range of strategies that creates a vicious cycle where capital intensive commercial crops increases their immersion in a system that makes them take larger risks, a system that they are not well equipped to handle. The NGO’s prescriptions for food sovereignty, however, are at odds with their economic realities. The need for cash and the promise of profits along with the corollary breaking down of traditional institutions have made it difficult for farmers to depend on subsistence food crops. For most farmers, participating in food sovereignty initiatives could paradoxically constrain their options for maintaining viable rural livelihoods.

DDS, Rural Development and Food Sovereignty

NGOs like DDS have been part of the rural development and social movement landscape in India for decades. India’s voluntary or NGO sector has its roots in urban socio-religious organizations that emerged in the 1800s to address illiteracy, polygamy, child marriage and other social issues (Sen, 1999). As providers of services, indigenous NGOs like DDS have been collaborating with the Indian state since after Independence, focusing on issues of social welfare, empowerment, conscientization, income generation, environmental degradation, poverty alleviation and human rights (Sooryamoorthy and Gangrade, 2001). In the 80s and 90s, NGOs saw an increase in direct funding from international donors leading to a burgeoning of the sector (Townsend, Porter and Mawdsley, 2004). Today the NGO sector represents a fluid and contradictory web of relations that work simultaneously as an extension of the state, as social movement actors

that provide spaces for resistance, even as they work as instruments that enable and strengthen the reach of neoliberal civil society (Townsend, Porter and Mawdsley, 2004).

India also has a long history of social movement mobilization that include peasant, tribal, women, nationalist, environmental, anti-development and civil rights movements. The movements represent struggles for cultural, economic and ecological survival against colonial regimes, the state after Independence, and more recently against the market. More recently grassroots and “new social movements” have connected with NGOs, civil society actors and transnational networks and have globalized their struggles (Routledge, 1993).

DDS came into the area at a time when small and marginal Dalits farmers were highly vulnerable to food shortages, wages were low and livelihood options were few. The NGO was founded by a dedicated and idealistic group of urban professionals in the late 1970s, as a project of a private firm that invested in rural development due to favorable tax policies. It eventually spun off into its own non-governmental organization (NGO) in 1983 and continued its rural development work with funding from the state and international donors³⁵.

DDS’ initial programs included the provision of wells for irrigation, rural housing and summer wage work for poor farmers in the villages around the town of Zahirabad in collaboration with the state. They later moved into thrift and savings and spearheaded several innovative grassroots programs that focused on food security and building the capabilities of poor rural women. At the local level, DDS has organized its beneficiaries

³⁵ DDS lists 18 international funders, all in Europe or Canada, and 6 Indian government agencies

into semi-autonomous collectives, also referred to as *sanghams* which have become the main focus of their programs.

Sanghams are a predecessor to the ubiquitous self-help groups (SHGs) that sprung up around the state in the 1990s. Today's SHGs reflect the neoliberal turn in governance where civil society was harnessed as collaborators in poverty alleviation and rural development (Young, 2010). In its heyday in the 1990s and early 2000s, DDS was active in about seventy five villages involving about 5000 mostly Dalit women and their households. Villages had between one and three *sanghams* depending on the size and caste make up and each *sangham* had anywhere between twenty and fifty women. Today however, *sangham* membership has dropped quite drastically and several villages have *sangham* meetings only on paper.

From the early 1990s, localization and agroecological farming took center stage in DDS' strategies. It promotes traditional millet-based farming systems as the best way to achieve food security (and food sovereignty) for the semi-arid dryland (rainfed) areas. According to P.V. Shateesh, DDS' current director, "millet is a concept, not a crop as it represents a farming system, an ecological understanding of agriculture, a culture"³⁶. He explains that practicing a localized agriculture focused on subsistence crops, where all inputs are sourced locally and sustainably and outputs are marketed locally, allows the poor and marginalized to gain economic autonomy and protect their ecological resources and knowledge systems in the face of commercialization of the countryside.

³⁶ Informal discussion with Shateesh, October 2008

DDS food sovereignty programs include monetary and other support for women to bring their fallow lands under cultivation and to collectively lease land to cultivate traditional food crops. The loans are paid back in grain into a community grain bank called the Alternative Public Distribution System (APDS). Through the APDS, *sangham* members identified the poorest households in their villages and made grain available to them at highly subsidized rates or even for free for the poorest during the lean summer months. Another key initiative was the creation of a community seed bank aimed at reviving local knowledge and promoting in-situ seed saving especially of the diverse local landraces in the region. Other activities include mining and documenting local knowledge, providing summer wage work to improve lands (removing rocks, building bunds etc.), loans for livestock acquisition, education on permacultural practices and a host of other strategies aimed at increasing household food security, self-sufficiency and agrobiodiversity. DDS also manages the state agricultural extension center Krishi Vigyan Kendriya (KVK) (Farmer Knowledge School) for the Medak district. The KVK is run with state funds and through this institution DDS conducts research on traditional and organic agriculture, reaches out to farmers all over the state through workshops and field schools, and hosts visiting farmers from other parts of the country and even farmers from other parts of the world. The table below categorizes DDS' main programs and strategies at different levels:

Table 5.1: DDS Programs and Strategies

DDS Programs and Strategies	
Grassroots Livelihood Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer Wage Work (intermittent) • Microfinance for livestock, savings, basic needs (ongoing) • Community Forestry (ongoing) • Land Acquisition and Housing (one time various villages)
Food Sovereignty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective Land Leasing (intermittent) • Alternative Public Distribution System (APDS)(ongoing) • Community Gene Fund (Seed Bank) (ongoing) • Permaculture/Ecological Farming Workshops (Intermittent) • Composting Programs (ongoing) • Documenting Local Knowledge (ongoing) • Participatory Certification (ongoing) • Organic Farming Groups (ongoing)
Grassroots Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green School (ongoing) • Adult Literacy (terminated) • Childcare and nutrition (barely running) • Community Indigenous Medicine (ongoing) • Women's <i>Sanghams</i> (ongoing, but reduced participation)
Grassroots and Public Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers Exchanges and Field Visits (Local, National, International) (ongoing) • Café Ethnic (ongoing) • Mobile Organic Store – Hyderabad (ongoing) • Biodiversity Festival (ongoing) • Community Radio/Film (ongoing)
Research, Information Creation, Networking, Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KVK (ongoing) • Citizens Jury (two events 2000 and 2009) • Collaborative Research with Scientists/ NGOs (Dryland Farming, /Millets etc) (ongoing) • Millet Network of India (ongoing) • Consultations/Workshops (Themes include: Democratizing Agricultural Research, Climate Change Impacts) (intermittent) • Anti-GM and various other networking coalitions (ongoing)

Contradicting mainstream notions of subsistence agriculture as non-progressive, Shateesh argues that:

Subsistence farming should be the *basis* of our farming. It does not have to be farming of the deprived. It is an extremely rich vision in terms of our resources, our agriculture and the entire ecological future of the world. We regard it with a tremendous amount of respect. Nearly six hundred million farming families belong to the subsistence level. In India more than seventy percent of Indian landscape is in dryland farming areas, we don't *see any other* future for India except something that depends upon this, respects this and promotes this.³⁷

This quote on subsistence agriculture above represents DDS's somewhat radical stance to food security given that Andhra's Pradesh's neoliberal development agenda has enacted policies to promote concentration and capitalization in agriculture. Localized and subsistence-focused agriculture is thus a key arena for resistance against the entrenched class interests in the countryside represented both by the state and corporations. Terms such as "autonomy", "sovereignty", "self-sufficiency", and "democracy" are deployed as the ultimate goals of DDS's programs. They recognize that food sovereignty is necessarily a deeply political project and that localization of agriculture and a focus on subsistence will bring control back into livelihoods that are now captive to commercial interests.

Their position on subsistence agriculture is consistent with their long history of rural development and activism in the region in support of the poorest, most marginalized and deprived Dalit households. DDS recognizes that to increase access to food it is essential that food be grown locally. While it is well recorded that those who grow their

³⁷ Interview conducted with Shateesh, November 2007

own food have access to food most of the year, what is less understood is that food grown locally also ensures food access to laborers, the majority of whom are poor women, in the form of crop wages. In addition wage workers usually also have access to other benefits such as uncultivated greens, fodder for animals, vegetables grown along the edges, firewood, and other produce from the fields, which can contribute substantially to a poor households food security. Shateesh stresses that farming in the “hands of women” ensures both food security and food sovereignty, since women are in charge of food security in their households and are more interested in growing food crops. Shateesh stresses that farmers own knowledge of the seed and farming practices are central to this vision.

DDS’s deep and complex history in the region and their long engagement with Dalit women farmers and local communities in general has given them substantial amount of credibility with local people. *Sanghams* members feel that DDS has had a tremendous impact on their social consciousness and socioeconomic upliftment as this quote suggests:

DDS has given SC [Scheduled Caste, also known as Dalit] women the courage to speak up. The Reddys [upper castes rich peasants] did not want us to come here and build homes, but their power has decreased because we were able to stand up to them because of the *sangam*. Later, education and government programs also helped, but DDS came first and really changed our lives.³⁸

Women relate that *sanghams* have created a sense of solidarity, allowing them to stand up to male family members, and generally become more empowered in their

³⁸ Focus groups of small Dalit farmers Kambalpalle Village, June 2009

households and the community. As one woman below explains what happens if her husband does not allow her to attend the *sangham* meeting:

All the *sangham* women come to the house to see what is wrong and to demand that we be allowed to attend the *sangham* meeting. This has given us much confidence. We are also able to confront husbands who drink and beat their wives because of the *sanghams*.³⁹

Women have had to deal with vociferous opposition from male family members as *sangham* participation required time away from household duties, especially since meetings were held at night. *Sangham* leaders relate that in the early years, meetings would last many hours and men would come to the door demanding that the women returned home. As benefits of *sangham* participation, especially the economic ones, materialized, this resistance died down. Women reported that wages went up in their villages after *sangham* formation because of their improved collective bargaining power, and that they have greater control over their household income. They also feel that the *sanghams* have allowed them to become more vocal and aware of their rights in gaining access to their entitlements⁴⁰.

While the actual depth and scale of impacts are impossible to measure, they are visible in numerous ways. For example, in focus group discussions, *sangham* members' capacity to articulate their issues, envision different options, and speak out was noticeable when compared to non-DDS member focus groups in other villages. Non-DDS members at the local level also perceive DDS' beneficial impacts on member farmers with

³⁹ *Sangham* meeting Tumkunta Village, November 2007

⁴⁰ Focus group discussions with DDS *sangham* members in several villages between 2008 and 2009

comments like “DDS members have food security” or “DDS members are better off than us”⁴¹.

Another sign of their empowerment is the conflict, bitterness and backlash faced by DDS member farmers and its staff by entrenched rural power structures. They have had to deal with resentment from powerful interests in the village and local state officials as their work has led to a direct confrontation of their power. In Kambalpalle village for example, women reported that DDS had to take the big Patels (former feudal family) to court for trying to stop the water supply for the community forestry project that DDS initiated. One woman said “this was the first time that anybody took the Patels to court. They were not happy that DDS was helping us”⁴². When land was given by the state to build houses for the lower castes they faced resistance from the higher castes who wanted the Dalits to stay in their traditional enclaves away from the main village. DDS however was able to stand up to them and build homes for the Dalits in the main village.

DDS also sued one of the largest and most powerful ex-feudal *Deshmukh* families in one of its project villages for illegal occupation of land which was then redistributed to landless farmers. They have protested outside the sub-district headquarters (*Mandal*) to demand land for landless farmers and used the Right to Information Act to ensure transparency of payments made to women farmers in community forestry programs by the local forest officials. Because of their association with Dalits especially, there is resentment by higher caste Hindu families. One wage worker for example said that her

⁴¹ Comments made at focus group discussions in Bardipur village 2008.

⁴² In-depth interview of Dalit household, Kambalpalle Village, July 2009

“husband will beat me if I join *sangham*”⁴³, even though she is poor and would benefit from its membership.

DDS has invested heavily in promoting, documenting and researching indigenous and local agricultural systems. This has resulted in their member farmers being more knowledgeable about their traditional agricultural and dietary practices and taking pride in their traditional crops. A study done on differences in nutrition between DDS and non-DDS villages for example, showed that DDS women and their children were incorporating a more diverse range of traditional and nutritious grains in their diets and had more knowledge about traditional agriculture than their non-DDS counterparts (Schmid, Salomeyesudas, Satheesh, Hanley and Kuhnlein, 2007). In general, DDS women are also known in the villages for their seed saving practices and other farmers, including the high castes, go to them for seeds.

Their work has been widely recognized and is borne out by the almost continuous stream of journalists, film makers, researchers, social movement actors, funders and others that visit their field office in Pastapur Village from all over the world.⁴⁴ There are numerous articles and films in the mainstream and alternative media and a fair amount of academic research have been generated by this positive interest in DDS⁴⁵. There are

⁴³Informal discussions with lower caste wage workers in Pastapur Village 2009

⁴⁴ Participant observation and interviews during 15 months of fieldwork based at Pastapur, DDS’s rural headquarters near Zahirabad

⁴⁵ For example, Indiatogether.org, Down to Earth Magazine; Newspapers -Times of India; Hindu and Indian Express, The Nation; Outlook Magazine; Environmental Ethics Journal; Capitalism Nature and Socialism; Community Development Journal; Economic and Political Weekly; books published by IIED; Bina Agarwal Journal of Agrarian Change etc.

however also others that have taken a critical look at their work⁴⁶. Their programs including the Community Grain Bank and the *balwadi* (child care centers) have inspired larger programs by the state and even the World Bank.

Constraints to Food Sovereignty

While DDS has had innumerable and complex positive impacts on their lives, its member farmers are not always able to adopt localized subsistence focused agriculture, even though they know that these would improve their capacity to subsist. These are due to constraints farmers face including (1) compulsions to participate in an increasingly monetized economy with all the opportunities and risks that markets brings; and (2) changing geographies of labor; and (3) changing values and knowledge relating to traditional agriculture. These constraints pose severe challenges to DDS in their attempt to promote food sovereignty. This section will consider these constraints in-depth.

In addition to the political economic constraints that will be discussed below, there are other concerns that have been raised which are beyond the scope of this dissertation to address in depth. These include physical and ecological factors such as water stress, climate change and soil degradation that make traditional rainfed agriculture unviable. Other constraints concern the functioning of DDS and the *sanghams* that impede farmers' ability to practice sustainable agriculture. These include problems of elite capture, corruption, and individualization that challenge the cooperative spirit of the *sanghams*. Some women expressed a distrust of the NGO as the obvious benefits of

⁴⁶ Most notably, Herring, Bownas, Allesandrini in their critique of the anti-GM movement in India.

donor funding are not shared with them. Many *sangham* members also feel that they have more options to participate in government microfinance and other programs which have taken priority over their participation in DDS and thus weakened DDS' presence in many villages. These are of course important concerns that could impede the success of food sovereignty programs, but when compared to the larger political economic constraints they seem to not be as important from the local farmers' perspective.

Neoliberal Markets, Commercial Crops, Debt, Risk and a Monetized Economy

“We don't plant food crops because we need cash”

-Marginal male farmer Kambalpalle Village

“Those days we did not have high expenses in agriculture, now we have high expenses”

-Small woman farmer, Kambalpalle Village

Kambalpalle Village was the locus of the 1995 anti-cotton protests led by DDS with the participation of local farmers. The protests were an attempt to draw attention to the displacement of food crops by cotton cultivation and educate farmers about the negative impacts of the increasing commercialization of the countryside. DDS was prescient regarding the potential of commercial crops to cause major upheavals in the lives of poor farmers in a primarily food crop cultivating area. In 1995, the spate of suicides by cotton farmers had not yet occurred, neither was genetically modified cotton being cultivated; however hybrid cotton varieties were being grown and actively promoted by the state through incentives (CES, 1998).

When DDS staged the protest, mainly rich Andhra⁴⁷ peasants and a few larger local farmers were cultivating cotton. Today, many small farmers, including DDS *sangham* members who participated in the anti-cotton protests, grow cotton. In fact, more than half the *sangham* members in Kambalpalle village cultivate *bt*-cotton even though they have been educated about the risks. Most said that seeing their neighbors reap the benefits of three good harvests had motivated them to do the same. In focus group discussions on agricultural viability one small farmer explained: “Traditional crops are not being cultivated as much because with a crop like cotton one can make twenty to thirty thousand rupees in profit as opposed to very low profits from traditional crops.”⁴⁸

This sentiment was echoed several times during fieldwork. A poor DDS woman who is the head of her household similarly shared that:

When we got the land fifteen years ago we planted yellow sorghum, paddy, pigeonpea, green gram, field bean, climbing green gram, cowpea, and horsegram, mostly food crops to eat. More recently we have been planting green gram and chickpea. From this year we started planting cotton.⁴⁹

She explained that she needed the money because she had to buy her daughter Rs. 30000 worth of gold that she could not provide at the time of her daughter’s wedding.

Another small farmer notes that:

⁴⁷ Andhra peasants are high-caste outsiders who have moved into the area looking for opportunities to invest their surpluses from agriculture in the fertile coastal belt of the state

⁴⁸ Focus group discussion Kambalpalle Village, 2009

⁴⁹ In-depth interview with poor Dalit household, Kambalpalle Village 2009

Traditional crops are good only for subsistence, not for earning money. We cannot get credit from moneylenders if we grow traditional crops. If we had more land then we could afford to plant food crops, but since we have only one acre we plant only cotton to maximize our earnings.⁵⁰

Table 5.2 summarizes the cost comparison among major crops grown in Kambalpalle, drawn from an informal group discussion with small male farmers in the village. It should be noted that costs and profits can vary quite dramatically based on who is growing the crop, the kind of soil and the level of inputs. Thus while small farmers in Kambalpalle Village spend Rs. 10000 on cotton and Rs. 5000 on corn cultivation, an Andhra farmer who is generally rich and has access to ample amounts of pesticide and fertilizer could spend Rs. 15000 on cotton and Rs. 8000 on corn cultivation, but they also usually get higher returns.

⁵⁰ Life history of poor Dalit farmer, Kambalpalle Village, 2009

Table 5.2: Costs of Cultivation of Select Crops in Kambalpalle Village

Cost of Cultivation for select crops in Kambalpalle Village					
Crop	Prod. cost (Rs/acre)	Yield (quintal)	Yield (Rs)	Profit (Rs)	Comments
Cotton	10000	10	25000	15000	Cash Crop
Corn	5000	15-20	16000	11000	Cash Crop
Green Gram	2000	2.5	5000	3000	Subsistence/ Cash Crop
Chickpea & Safflower	2000	2	4000	2000	Mainly Cash Crop (some for subsistence)
		0.25	300	300	
Foxtail Millet	1000	4	4000	3000	Cultivate for subsistence
Yellow Sorghum & Pigeonpea	1000	2	-	-	Cultivate for subsistence
		0.5			

Source: Based on farmers assessment in Kambalpalle Village

The table above highlights the large difference in earning potential between food crops and commercial crops like cotton and corn. This is seen as a major reason why small farmers have shied away from growing food crops and following food sovereignty practices. For example, a farmer with an acre of black land who can grow in both the rainy and winter seasons can earn up to Rs. 5000 from growing high value food crops such as green gram in the rainy season and chickpea/safflower in the winter. A farmer with red land could grow subsistence food crops such as sorghum intercropped with pigeonpea in the rainy season and the total investment would cost about Rs. 1000 per acre. By contrast, if a farmer grows commercial crops he/she could earn a profit of up to

Rs. 15000 for cotton and Rs. 11000 for corn per acre. Localized agriculture focused on food crops imposes other limits as noted by one star DDS woman farmer:

Although we have control over our agriculture, and are secure in food, shelter, and agriculture we do not have enough cash to educate our children, for marriages, sickness and so on.⁵¹

These illustrations demonstrate why farmers are willing to take the risks of commercial agriculture, especially where there are few options to diversify out of agriculture.

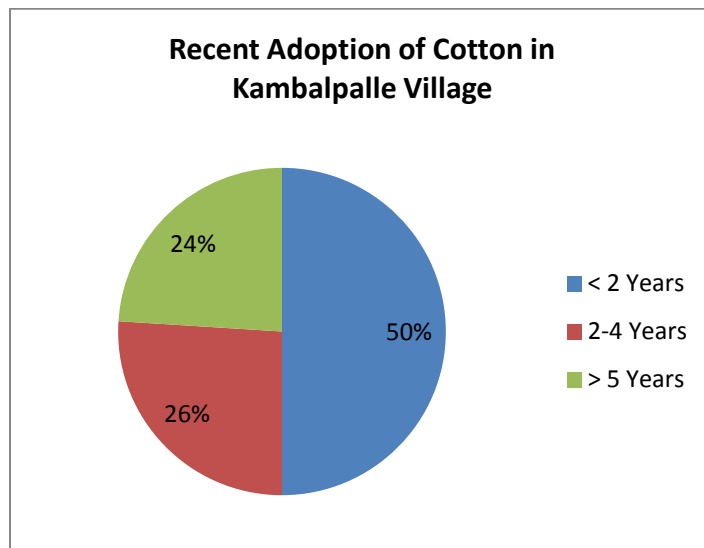
Many Telengana farmers would like to emulate Andhra's agricultural practices, although small and poor farmers cannot mobilize the kind of resources that the Andhras have. While growing cotton and corn promises high monetary returns, they also require high input costs and is therefore riskier for them. For example, an Andhra farmer and his partner moved to the area in 2005 and have been cultivating cotton, chilies, chickpea and corn. In 2009, they leased 69 acres of land in Bidekane and a neighboring village and planted 32 acres in cotton and 37 acres in corn. They spent Rs. 300,000 upfront on leasing land and another Rs. 450,000 on production costs. The production costs for inputs and labor⁵² work out to be approximately Rs. 15000 per acre on cotton and Rs. 8000 per acre on corn. In order to do this, they borrow money from their hometowns in Coastal Andhra at much cheaper rates and bring their own seeds and pesticides as costs of inputs are also cheaper there. They expect to make a profit of Rs. 300,000 from both crops if the weather cooperates.

⁵¹ Focus group of small women Dalit farmers, Edakulapalle Village, September 2008

⁵² Production costs include tractor ploughing, bullocks to create seed channels, labor for planting seeds, pesticide and labor for spraying, labor and bullocks for weeding, and labor for harvesting.

The rapid adoption of cotton and corn in these areas, particularly bt-cotton, gives one a feeling that the casino has come to town. As Figure 5.1 illustrates, out of the sixty-five households surveyed in Kambalpalle for example, eighty percent were growing cotton. More than fifty percent had planted it for the first time only in the last two years, and twenty six percent in the last two to four years. Only twenty four percent had been planting it for the last five years of more.

Figure 5.1: Adoption of Cotton Cultivation in Kambalpalle Village



Source: Survey of Agricultural Practices in Kambalpalle Village

Farmers say that cotton and corn are being rapidly adopted in Kambalpalle for two primary reasons: 1) the village has black soils that are suited to the crop (deep black soils are especially suited for cotton), and 2) there are very few other income earning opportunities for small farmers. However some farmers plant cotton even on soil that is not ideal, such as red and stony soils, which results in poor performance of the crop. But

since the village lacks irrigation, these are the only two crops that will bring high returns, to a much lesser extent are pigeonpea and chickpea.

NGOs like DDS have tried to educate farmers about the risks of crops like cotton and corn and most farmers, especially DDS farmers, are very aware of the risks. In focus groups discussions in Bidekane Village, a few male farmers assessed the different risks of the main commercial and food crops grown in the area. They include risks of failure due to pests, sensitivity to climate, the amount of capital needed and the stability of markets. These are presented in a grid below.

Figure 5.2: Risk and Returns of Select Crops in Bidekane Village

Risk and Returns Grid in Bidekane Village									
Risk	Crop	Cotton	Corn	Sugar-cane	Potato	Chick-pea	Pigeon-pea	Green/Black Gram	Sorghum
Capital		X X X	X X X	X X X	X X X	X	X	X	X
Irrig/Power		X	X	X X X	X X X	X	X	X	X
Climate		X X X	X X	X	X X X	X X	X	X X X	X
Pests		X X X	X	X	X X	X X	X X X	X	X
Market		X X X	X	X X X	X	X	X	X	X
Risk Index		13	8	11	12	7	7	7	5
Returns		X X X	X X X	X X X	X X X	X X	X X	X X	X

Source: Based on farmers assessments in focus groups in Bidekane Village, 2009

Cotton was listed overall as the riskiest crop but also with the highest potential of returns, followed by potato, sugarcane and corn. According to farmers, cotton is sensitive to the weather, most capital intensive and also prone to pests. Potato and corn are

considered high returns crops because in addition to good product prices, their growth cycles are short (sixty days for potato and three months for corn), allowing the land to be used for other crops after. Corn is also a preferred crop because it does well even if the rains do not come on time whereas green and black gram are very sensitive to timely rains. On the other hand, corn seeds are expensive and must be purchased every season. Pigeonpea is tolerant to weather uncertainty, but it is most prone to pest attacks. Pulses in general are lower risk and medium returns and finally sorghum was assessed as a low risk and low return crop.

Sugarcane used to be considered to be a crop that never fails, although the recent problem of wells drying up has posed a new problem because it requires irrigation. But the biggest challenge in sugarcane farming is the volatility of prices for the cane. One DDS farmer for example relates her extreme difficulties with growing sugarcane:

Last year we could not sell our sugarcane and it was wasted after cutting. Last year we got Rs 800 to 900 a ton. Even then they have not taken our entire crop. We took our crop to the factory and when they did not accept it we brought it back and burned it. We planted sugarcane on two acres of land. We wanted to commit suicide – husband and wife – because of the problem of the factory not taking our crops. We lost our entire crop. We told both DDS and the government but we received no help.⁵³

Even though food crops are considered less risky, the relative costs of their cultivation have increased as the economy gets monetized. Although direct input costs (seeds and few chemicals) are relatively low, labor needs for ploughing, sowing, weeding, harvesting, and threshing are still high. The prevalence of higher wages in the

⁵³ Focus group discussion of small Dalit women farmers, Mamidgi Village, November 2009

area presents high opportunity costs for small farmers who would rather earn wages than expending time and labor on food crops that would limit them to a subsistence lifestyle.

At a focus group discussion in Malchelma Village, one small male farmer remarked on the difficulties of depending on food crops when compared to working for wages:

We only grow rainfed crops like sorghum, pigeonpea, chickpea, corn and green gram. We have to weed on time otherwise we lose our crops. From one acre I can get 3 bags [300kg] of sorghum, but I have to weed twice. If I weed my field, I lose my daily wages from other work. To hire bullocks costs Rs. 300 a day. The investment is so high for only 3 bags of sorghum. For this reason many small farmers prefer doing wage work to cultivating their own fields.⁵⁴

Unlike farmers growing commercial crops, those who grow traditional food crops do not receive any monetary or other incentives from the state.

DDS buys organically produced grain from farmers in the region and sells it in their store in Zahirabad town and in Hyderabad, but the supply has dwindled as more of its farmers change their cropping systems and move away from growing organic food crops. In spite of DDS' support to improve their lands through removing rocks and bunding, and to produce organic compost and biopesticides, the high labor demand of organic crop production and related activities makes it unattractive to small farmers.

DDS' strategy to not focus on improving irrigation⁵⁵ also makes it unresponsive to the immediate needs of farmers who struggle with the unpredictable weather patterns due to the changing climate. For them, building irrigation is key to making agriculture

⁵⁴ Taken from transcript Malchelma Village small Dalit farmer's men's focus group, October 2008

⁵⁵ DDS director Shateesh said in an interview that "we do not believe that irrigation is important for agriculture. DDS only focuses on rainfed agriculture."

viable and ensuring food security. For example, one of the poorest DDS women farmers stated that “after irrigated sorghum (*Nila Jonna*) came to the village we do not deal with hunger anymore”.⁵⁶ *Nila Jonna* is a hybrid sorghum that was introduced to the area a few years ago by the state. It is the only irrigated sorghum variety in the area and is planted in the summer months, with harvests in the typically lean months of June-October. It has been able to fill the gap in sorghum demand especially when rainy season and winter varieties have failed due to unpredictable rains. In terms of taste preference, *Nila Jonna* is ranked relatively poorly but it does provide food security as women get paid in crop wages. Women laborers say that they can earn as much as hundred kilos of grain for two weeks worth of work at a time when food scarcity is at its highest. This can provide between six months to a year of food for a household of four to six members.

Many poor farmers in DDS villages own fragmented and marginal holdings, which they do not cultivate because they are too small to merit the efforts. Land ownership does not automatically confer farmers with the ability to secure livelihoods as marginal farmers depend more on wage earning opportunities. In focus group discussions with landless women, many more expressed the desire to earn a steady and assured income of Rs. 50 a day (\$1.10 - the current wage for women) than those who wanted land. They mentioned that in order to be able to practice agriculture one has to be able to mobilize all kinds of resources and money, which poor women rarely have access to.

⁵⁶ Small Dalit woman farmer, Bidekane Village, December 2008

Changing Geographies of Labor

Since DDS first started working in the region about thirty years ago, local geographies of labor have changed due to several interrelated factors that include the monetization of the economy, the weakening of traditional institutions, and changes in Dalit communities that have resulted from the social reforms implemented in the last five decades. Dalits are now able to work in many more occupations, as well as have access to lands to be owner- cultivators. These changes are influencing peoples' values around agriculture and their relationships to the land and have a direct impact on the ability to mobilize labor for labor-intensive farming practices that food sovereignty advocates for.

Food sovereignty practices are more labor intensive in all aspects of the agricultural cycle from selecting and storing seed, to preparing the land (ploughing and tilling), to building soil fertility through the application of organic matter (as in farmyard manure and compost), to controlling weeds and pests, to harvesting, processing and storing grain. In addition, livestock rearing is a critical activity because it provides farmyard manure – a key input into sustainable agricultural systems. Since agriculture is becoming increasingly feminized in the state (Rao, 2011), most of this work burdens women more.

A household's ability to maintain or accumulate livestock depends on labor availability. Children have traditionally taken care of livestock in the Telengana, but many households are selling off their livestock as their children are either not around and not willing to help with tending the animals. Almost all cultivators indicated that finding adequate labor supply has become a problem for them. At a focus group discussion, small

farmers expressed their views vis a vis their challenges with household labor and livestock.

If we want traditional agriculture and food security we should not send our children to school. We can only have animals if we have people to graze them. This was done by our children. Animals give us farmyard manure that we can use on our fields. In school children are not learning anything, neither are they useful at home..... If I go to graze cattle then who will earn the money? We need at least two boys to graze 50 cattle.⁵⁷

As the quote above indicates, the formal education system not only takes people physically away from agricultural work, it also leads youth to devalue an agriculture-based livelihood. Unfortunately, a sub-standard education means that they are barely equipped to pursue non-agricultural work. Thus, many youth are caught in the middle: being educated but with no real skills to make a living outside agriculture. It is not uncommon to see droves of young men spending all day in groups dressed in ‘city clothes’ playing with their cell phones and talking or gambling. They all aspire for government jobs or ‘company *pani*’ (factory or blue collar jobs) and only work in the fields when absolutely necessary. The limited opportunities to diversify out of agriculture – when they are available – are mostly available to men. Young, uneducated women and girls also have little desire to work in the fields, many of them preferring factory jobs to laboring in the hot sun. This is corroborated by the last census in India which showed that more than sixty percent of farming households expressed a desire to leave farming (Government of India, 2001).

⁵⁷ Taken from transcription of Bardipur Dalit Male Farmers Focus Group, December 2008

In 2005, the State implemented the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in Andhra. In its current form it guarantees a hundred days of summer work at Rs. 100-120 (\$2 - \$2.5) per day to each individual. For many poor and landless households, summer is a lean period when wage work is scarce, leaving them vulnerable. Seasonal migration is often the only option for these households. Because NREGA has provided substantial summer work and has raised farmers' expectations of wages it has however created problems especially for middle and large farmers who depend on hired labor. They are vociferous in their condemnation of the program complaining that "(b)ecause of the introduction of NREGA, no labor is ready to work in our fields. Because of NREGA, agriculture is spoilt. It has collapsed our agriculture."⁵⁸ Since lower caste groups generally are the ones who take advantage of NREGA, this condemnation reflects large farmers' fear that the poor have become less dependent on them and demand higher wages.

Traditional systems of cultivation co-existed with traditional and exploitative labor institutions. As those institutions have broken down, it becomes increasingly harder to maintain those practices. A rich, high caste farmer from Malchelma Village talks about these changes alluding to their difficulties as Dalits now have more freedom to sell their labor:

We had livestock, land, labor, and per year we used to produce sixty to seventy cartloads of manure. We had our own seed, somebody has ten varieties, somebody two varieties, and we used to exchange. Nothing was purchased from outside. We raised sorghum, little millet, pearl millet, green gram, black gram, foxtail millet. We ate *rotis*, milk, curd, different types of green leafy vegetables, we ate so much ghee. Today we even

⁵⁸ Taken from transcript of Malchelma big farmers focus group discussion, November 2008.

forgot the smell of ghee. No one use to sell milk or curd, it was free. *We were kings in our village.* Now milk, curd, vegetables, everything is packaged and brought from outside. We have same fields even today, *but no one is prepared to work, mostly because they are lazy.* To get back those days, it takes years, but today, everybody is looking at selling crops. Sugarcane, potato, cotton, maize, sunflower, soyabean, redgram, greengram, black gram, banana are our preferences, because they have market demand, give higher yields and high price.⁵⁹

Newer crops like cotton and corn have also impacted labor opportunities. Farmers report that corn for example needs less weeding than other crops like green or black gram that it usually replaces. Cotton changes the seasonal pattern of labor requirements because it uses less labor during the growing cycle, but requires a lot of labor during harvesting. For food crops, farmers are less concerned about controlling weeds as they are with commercial crops. They tend to mobilize their own labor and weed their food crop fields over a few weeks, whereas with cotton they employ hired labor and to get it done in one or two days.

Changing Values around Traditional Agriculture

The values DDS places on millets and traditional cropping systems clash with those who view them as poor people's food or a system of agriculture that does not represent progress. As a result, many talk about their food in terms of marginality and poverty and the younger generation especially seek to distance themselves from these

⁵⁹ Transcript of focus group of high-caste middle and rich landowners, Malchelma Village, November 2008

foods. For example one Dalit farmer expressed that “*ambali* [finger millet porridge] is poor peoples’ food but now poor people eat rice”⁶⁰. Another explains that:

Ambali is associated with the hungry days. In those days, there was no summer work and that was the hungriest season. Now that there is *chai* and PDS rice, there is no need to make *ambali*.⁶¹

Indicating that increased material wealth has changed their diets, another woman adds:

Now we eat white sorghum, PDS rice, market rice, green gram, pigeonpea, and chickpea and less uncultivated greens like *punti koora*, *doggal koora* and *payal koora* [referring to uncultivated greens from the Amaranthus and Hibiscus families]. Those days we ate more greens and less *dal* [prepared lentils] and hardly any vegetables. Now we eat more vegetables and also eat mutton one or two times a month.⁶²

Changes in food preferences and traditional cultivation have been greatly impacted by the arrival of the subsidized rice program to the state in the 1980s. Before rice became cheaply available, most poor households ate pearl millet and foxtail millet as “rice” and thus also cultivated it along with other minor millets. Rice was rare, and if it was eaten, it was the cheap form of broken rice. Lesser amounts of locally grown dryland paddy were available in season, especially if they received them as crop wage. Rice is not as nutritious as millets and is being attributed to the nutritional insecurity in the rural areas (Ghosh, 2005a; Patnaik, 2003), but the increased availability gives the poor some

⁶⁰ Transcript of life history of poor Dalit farmer in research village September 2009

⁶¹ Life history of poor Dalit farmer in Bidekane village, October 2009

⁶² Life history of poor Dalit farmer in Bidekane village, July 2009

form of food security. Even though it is not the preferred food for many, women especially appreciate the reduced labor needs of preparing a meal, because processing millets is very labor intensive and can take more than an hour per meal. One woman respondent explains that:

PDS [subsidized] rice has made things easy for us. We had to do a lot of work to prepare *korra* [foxtail millet], *taida* [finger millet] and other grains pounding them with our hands to dehusk the grain. Dryland paddy grown organically then tasted so good, but PDS rice does not taste good, as it is full of chemicals, but we eat it anyway⁶³.

Another woman explains that:

There is no easy access to machines in the villages to husk millets. Also millets have low yields and there is no good rate in the market. PDS rice has changed people's eating habits so people do not grow millets anymore.⁶⁴

Within households, there is a clear generational shift in food tastes away from traditional crops especially the coarser grains. Farmers confirm that since their children are not interested in eating the coarser traditional millets there is less incentive to cultivate them. While some forms of sorghum are widely eaten in the region and form a staple along with rice, many kinds, including the more drought resistant or nutritious varieties are not as preferred because they are considered to be coarser, do not taste as good or do not make white flour or soft *rotis*. As Dalit woman farmer succinctly puts it

⁶³ Interview conducted in Bidekane Village March 2009

⁶⁴ Transcript of life history of poor Dalit farmer in research village October 2009

“people do not even eat yellow *jowar* [sorghum] because it is not white”.⁶⁵ In a focus group discussion of small male farmers, the older farmers said that their diets comprised of 50 percent rice and 50 percent sorghum bread, whereas the younger farmers said that they preferred rice to sorghum bread and it made up around 25 percent of their diets. The teenagers and young men in the group reported that they hardly eat any sorghum *rotis*.

Since tastes and values on traditional food crops have changed, younger farmers have less knowledge about their nutritional benefits and even on how to grow them. Shateesh, DDS’s director feels that one of DDS’s biggest challenges is motivating the younger generation to value traditional agriculture as their situations are vastly different from their parents and grandparents generations. When talking about DDS’ work among poor Dalit farmers he explains that:

Most of these people were farm labor and were earning small wages, sometimes as grain. They have felt hunger and complete deprivation what they have achieved [with DDS] is precious for them. But we are not sure what will happen twenty years from now when the children go to school. The two generations that we have worked with will continue to practice in this way⁶⁶

Andhras farmers are influential in introducing commercial crops such as cotton and corn and in reshaping the way agriculture is practiced. They were the first ones to cultivate genetically modified *bt* cotton in the area. They were also the first to grow commercial corn to supply chicken feed agro- industries. Commercial corn is different

⁶⁵ Transcript of life history of poor Dalit farmer in research village October 2009

⁶⁶ Taken from field notes of informal discussion with Shateesh 2008-2009

from the local varieties that are traditionally grown on the edges of irrigated sugarcane fields. These are eaten as a snack and the plant is used for fodder. One farmer notes on how their use of inputs has changed:

When Andhras arrived about 15 years ago, they brought cotton and corn and taught us how to use pesticide and fertilizers. We learned how to grow their crops by working on their lands.”⁶⁷

In general, farmers are very aware of the pitfalls of using modern and capital intensive methods, and they respect those who adopt them because they represent progress. These views are predominant amongst male farmers, but surprisingly even women farmers shared them. When farmers were asked the best agriculturists in their villages were, they always named the largest and most successful farmers in the village, including the Andhras. They view the Andhras with a combination of admiration and resentment. A poor farmer expressed his contrary view of the Andhras as follows:

They are good at ‘technical’ agriculture and use more money on land, do hard work from morning to evening, and do not allow laborers to bring goats to the fields. They gave better wages. But they also leach the soils on our lands before abandoning them. Afterwards, we have to use more fertilizers otherwise we will not get good yields.⁶⁸

Other differences with regard to cultivation practices exist. Andhras for example, rarely use local varieties of seed even when they cultivate food crops like green gram using hybrid or high-yielding varieties instead. Unlike local farmers they never intercrop

⁶⁷ Focus group discussion with Dalit farmers in Kambalpalle Village, July 2009

⁶⁸ Focus group discussion with Dalit farmers in Kambalpalle Village, July 2009

their fields either. Local farmers often intercrop both cotton and corn fields with other food crops such as pigeonpea and winter crops like chickpea and safflower that they press for local oil consumption. Farmers say that not only does intercropping provide food, it also reduces the incidence of pests. They also say that Andhras do not maintain soil fertility on the lands they lease from them, but instead depend on high amounts of fertilizers. For example, when harvesting green gram, Andhra farmers pull out the whole plant whereas local farmers only pluck the beans and leave the crop residue to build up soil fertility. Andhras also weed their fields differently and keep them 'clean', whereas local farmers are more tolerant of weeds. These are changing however as the younger generation of farmers desire 'clean' fields and want to imitate Andhra farmers' practices.

All these changes have led to different ways of relating to the land. The rhythms of a household working their own land are very different from those who are not fully dependent on agriculture. Within small farming households, many parents are completely immersed in agriculture but their children are in school or have non-agricultural jobs. To older farmers, the "land" is central to their lives and all their activities. Even on days when there is no planned work, they spend their time on their land grazing the animals and doing minor tasks. Even as land has been divided and is owned by nuclear households, older farmers still conceive of their land in terms of the larger family holding and will often spend all day in their fields with brothers and cousins in neighboring plots, sharing irrigation systems and helping each other out. A majority of the younger generation however do not relate to their land in these ways.

Conclusion

This chapter suggests that food sovereignty practices as prescribed by DDS in their current form bear little relevance to most small farmers' livelihoods, as they are not rooted in the changing material conditions of peasant existence in the Telengana region. While many of the solutions put forth by DDS are intended to improve farmers' capacity to subsist; they do not (and cannot) adequately address the constraints faced by small farmers today in maintaining livelihood security. Instead, they end up essentializing peasant motivations.

Dalits and other poor farmers talk of the past as being healthier in terms of the food they ate, the diversity of grain, the closeness of the community, the taste, texture and nutritional value of different grains and uncultivated greens. But the degrading caste system and exploitative labor practices rendered their lives more precarious and harsher than they are today. DDS' prescriptions of promoting traditional agriculture thus do not resonate with especially the younger generation who want to move away from lives of exploitation and degradation. Dr. Ambedkar, a famed Dalit leader in India, and a champion of Dalit rights captured this sentiment when he noted that "Gandhianism, with its call of back to nature, means back to nakedness, back to squalor, back to poverty and back to ignorance for the vast majority of the people" (Ambedkar, 1998, pg.148, quoted in Cochrane, 2007).

In spite of the constraints posed by the contemporary economic system, small farmers are interested *both* in being able to participate in the market on more favorable terms and, in having the option to practice a more localized agriculture. Farmers have talked about the many benefits of subsistence production and have mostly expressed a

preference to eat their own crops. In the current situation in the Telengana, those farmers have more land are able to practice a diversified agriculture growing both subsistence and commercial crops. In addition, those who have diversified their livelihoods to include non-farm work are also able to grow subsistence food crops because their livelihoods are not solely dependent on agriculture. On the other hand, those with less land and who have to depend mainly on agriculture have no choice but to maximize on the cash-earning opportunities and are more constrained in their cultivation choices. *As a result, those who have a higher degree of livelihood security in the Telengana are more likely to practice food sovereignty.*

In the foothills of the Himalayas for example, where subsistence farming is still very prevalent, food sovereignty and seed sovereignty are very clearly articulated by members of *Beej Bachao Andolan* (Save the Seeds Movement), a grassroots movement for seed sovereignty. Here, the ability of some household members to diversify out of agriculture has enabled those working in agriculture to grow subsistence crops and focus on food sovereignty. This is because to a great extent their livelihoods are not solely dependent on only on agriculture.

From conversing with farmers and observers all over the country, not just in Andhra Pradesh, food sovereignty interventions seem to be most successful where subsistence farmers have limited options of engaging with the market, adequate labor with few opportunities to diversify out of agriculture, and a high dependence on localized inputs. Food sovereignty also seems to be more fully embraced when issues of land contestation, loss of livelihood and identity come into play, as in many indigenous communities that are dealing with potential land alienation, dispossession and loss of

agricultural-based livelihoods. This is an angle that will be further explored in future research.

As highlighted in Chapter 4, practicing organic and localized agriculture does not necessarily confer social equity or fairness. Small farmers may still not be in control of their livelihoods if exploitative institutions continue to exist. An example is the agricultural system of *Adivasi* (tribal) farmers in Orissa who are mainly subsistence farmers and are organic (by default). However they are still not in “control” of their livelihoods, as a deeply-entrenched and exploitative class of middlemen who also serve as moneylenders have used debt bondage to keep them oppressed and food insecure. This raises a critical question to food sovereignty advocates: *can addressing primarily agro-ecological practices alone make agriculture more viable for the lower socio-economic classes?*

The rural poor need intervening institutions to help build their capabilities to access all their basic entitlements, not just food and also to address structures that keep them poor and degraded. Therefore, unless food sovereignty movements are able to recognize and address the constraints faced by small farmers effectively they only present a weak expression of resistance to the neoliberal policies. A narrow focus on agriculture, especially in communities that are integrated into the market, cannot adequately address the poor farmers’ issues that now dwell in significantly altered political, economic and cultural landscapes.

CHAPTER 7. RETHINKING AGRICULTURE'S PLACE IN CONCEPTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNITY

“More viable livelihoods will not be romanced into existence”
(Bebbington, 2000)

“Though the majority of Indians live in villages, the village leaves little impress upon the national culture today” (Gupta, 2005).

Incorporating ethnographic and historical analyses, this research attempted to highlight the complexities and contradictions of solutions that are put forth by state, markets, and civil society actors for rural development within the context of India's new economic reforms. It investigates the trajectory of development in the Telengana region and its current predicament as it experiences high levels of agrarian distress; the rise of transnational social movements for food sovereignty as a response to the effects of globalization of food and agriculture; and finally the situated meanings and practices of food sovereignty in the lives of small and poor farmers in the Telengana region.

This dissertation has highlighted that rural India has changed profoundly in many ways. Traditional structures that reigned in the countryside have been challenged, leading to more favorable conditions for lower castes/classes. They have been able to move out of culturally sanctioned poverty, menial labor practices, bonded labor and other forms of exploitation, and extreme degradation. Dalits have reported that they now live lives with more self-respect. Materially, they are better off because social reform and enabling policies have allowed them to cultivate their own lands, sell their labor freely, and participate in the labor market with higher wages. The role of social movements such as

the Telengana peasant movement and civil society organizations such as NGOs like DDS has been an important aspect of their social and material improvement.

However, in spite of the gradual revolution (Frankel, 2005) in rural India the lower castes, landless and those with small holdings are in general more vulnerable and worse-off than during the era of state-led development, even if they have attained many freedoms. Farmers at all levels feel that reduced state supports and the erosion of public institutions have made their lives more vulnerable and agriculture unviable. Neoliberal policies and an integration of the rural areas into global markets have brought higher levels of uncertainty and desperation into their lives, as evidenced by the high number of suicides. The lower castes are still the poorest and are thus disproportionately affected. Neoliberalism has led to a reconsolidation of rural power structures.

Even with neoliberal policies however, states have not been able to completely do away with supporting rural communities who make up the largest vote bank. In Andhra Pradesh, safety nets are widespread and have made an important contribution to the livelihood security of millions of rural poor. Without these state supports, such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act which provides summer work, subsidized food and other welfare measures, their already precarious livelihoods would be far worse off. The lessons learned from investigations into hunger-related deaths in Eastern Medak highlight that for already vulnerable individuals, the failure of entitlements such as subsidized food and pensions caused them to die of hunger-related issues. Thus these supports are especially crucial for the poorest in a rural economy where underemployment and unemployment are high and the growth of real wages is low.

In the current economic scenario, farming is not able to support India's large rural populations. Neither are there adequate opportunities to diversify into non-farm based livelihoods. Labor has become fragmented and the rural poor use a host of different coping strategies to keep their heads above water. One of the other problems that suicides highlight is that limited options to diversify out of agriculture and changed aspirations of small farmers make the lure of profits from risky commercial crops such as cotton attractive. For many, it is their only chance to break out of limited subsistence-based livelihoods. Many farmers who are in debt at the field site have reported that they do not want to go back to growing only food crops even if their lives would become less risky.

It is because of these changes that social movements that promote "food sovereignty" based primarily on agroecological practices and small farming systems cannot serve as an adequate response to the current issues of rural distress nor provide a long-term vision for rural development. The discourse of food sovereignty has been highly influenced by populist ideals that espouse a romantic ruralism of the "peasant way". While alternative movements seem to provide spaces for resistance within neoliberal schemes of governance, their vision for agriculture fails to adequately acknowledge that peasant farmers do not exist in isolation from capitalist relations. They interact with other classes, experience inevitable differentiation, and are linked with industry and other parts of the economy. Even if ecological practices are changed they do not ensure food sovereignty in the face of structural constraints.

At the local level, DDS promotes localized farming and traditional food crops as its food sovereignty strategy. It is believed that these practices would protect farmers from the negative effects of commercial agriculture by making them self sufficient and

would provide a degree of autonomy from globalized agricultural regimes. These strategies have been most effective when farmers were very food insecure and socioeconomically marginalized, depended primarily on subsistence agriculture and were less integrated into the market economy. At the field site this situation was largely prevalent twenty to thirty years ago with small and marginal Dalits and other lower caste farmers. Food sovereignty prescriptions combined with other development initiatives were used to counter the excesses of the State's modernization project or to provide development in areas where the State did not reach its desired constituents.

However today, livelihoods based entirely on agriculture and focused on growing food crops do not reflect the contemporary needs, expectations and constraints faced by poor rural dwellers in the Telengana. For most farmers participating in food sovereignty initiatives by DDS could paradoxically constrain their options for maintaining viable rural livelihoods. At the local level, contradictions exist between DDS' discourse of food sovereignty and the actual practices of member farmers. These contradictions exist because DDS' prescriptions are not rooted in the changing material conditions of peasant existence and end up essentializing peasant motivations.

Therefore those advocating for food sovereignty must take into account what peasant farmers must do in the short term to make a living and what long-term strategies are necessary. In the Telengana, marginalized populations have never experienced "food sovereignty" where they existed as self-sufficient and autonomous agricultural communities. In fact, Dalits lived lives of utter degradation and high food insecurity. Since then, they have experienced livelihood diversification, differentiation and now have higher aspirations for themselves and their children. While the impacts of DDs in their

lives is not easy to measure, their ability to access land, housing and other entitlements with DDS' help has enabled them to move out of extreme poverty. Therefore a harkening back to an idealized past can be problematic especially for poor Dalit farmers.

However, when livelihoods are secure, farmers are interested both in being able to participate in the market on more favorable terms and, in having the option to practice a more localized agriculture. Therefore in order for farmers to exercise “food sovereignty”, they must first secure their livelihoods, which are determined not by their ability to opt out of the market economy, but rather by negotiating their position within it with the help of the state. This is in direct contradiction to food sovereignty movements like Via Campesina that argue that “food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security” (Via Campesina, 1996).

In light of the current situation of agrarian distress in the rural areas, what is the way forward in India? Theories of agrarian transitions applicable to the industrialized economies, where the path to modernization entailed the elimination of the peasantry cannot be applied to countries like India where a majority of the population still derive a significant portion of their livelihoods from agriculture. In developing countries like India, the contradictory and uneven outcomes of global capital have created a fragmented proletariat that do not make a living wage (Bernstein, 2004). Much of India's phenomenal growth has been jobless growth dominated by corporate capital in non-labor-intensive sectors and therefore based on current trends, the unskilled poor are unlikely to be absorbed into these high-growth sectors. Thus the dissolution of peasant society is not an inevitability in the foreseeable future.

However the narratives of agrarian transition as experienced by industrialized nations are very prevalent among India's policy makers and influential institutions like the World Bank. Chandrababu Naidu's Vision 2020 plan for Andhra Pradesh is an example. Vision 2020 envisioned a planned transition from agriculture to corporate farming where peasants would either become entrepreneurial farmers or wage workers. It however had little planned for those who would be displaced by these policies. Li (2010) highlights that these narratives of linear transitions are also very alive in international organizations like the World Bank. Their World Development Report (2008) *Agriculture for Development* has similar notions to the Vision 2020 report, suggesting that those who are not able to succeed in commercialized agriculture should quit agriculture but not really addressing the needs of those who will be displaced (Li, 2010).

This research has shown that there is a need to move beyond discursive critiques of capitalism and development to engage continually with alternatives and strategies that are practicable. When based on ethnographic and historical analyses, interpretations of development can shed light on the ways in which the state, market and social movements interact with people in their places and what the outcomes have been for various groups.

There are several questions that need to be asked and prioritized. Are we trying to save "peasant" societies? Are we trying to make agriculture viable? Are we trying to make agriculture the engine of development? Are we trying to feed the hungry? These are actually very different questions that require very different means, and they thus need to be pulled apart.

Food sovereignty and sustainable agricultural practices in general do have a place in alleviating rural distress. Growing food crops supports poor rural dwellers and makes

food available locally and more accessible for the poor. Industrial capitalist agriculture, even as it has made cheap food available has so many obvious and hidden externalities. Its high profitability is also due to the subsidies it receives from the state. Furthermore, cheap food, which is the most obvious benefit of industrial agriculture on the poor, is really no longer available to them. Soil degradation and water stress are a growing concern and more sustainable practices are badly needed.

During fieldwork, from September 2008 to December 2009, the price of basic foods such as rice, vegetables and cereals increased by sixty to a hundred percent in the region. Those farmers who grew their own food or worked on fields that were growing food crops were able to protect themselves from soaring prices and could depend on their own food stocks. Many others had to buy poor quality sorghum at exorbitant rates on the open market. Poor families in the area stopped eating vegetables completely depending instead on low grade sorghum, broken rice (which is cheaper than regular rice) and lentils. Vegetables are definitely not within the reach of the poorest on a consistent basis at the best of times, unless they are the highly nutritious wild, semi cultivated or uncultivated greens and gourds that are grown on fields.

Prices are still high. What used to cost Rs. 2000 (\$60) for a 100 kg bag of winter sorghum (a preferred variety for its nutritional value and taste) in 2009, is Rs. 4000 (\$90) today in the villages. It is increasingly difficult for local people to find any sorghum in the local economy unless they cultivate it in their own fields⁶⁹. To put these prices in perspective, a poor landless wage worker usually earns Rs. 40 to 70 a day if there is

⁶⁹ Phone conversation with research assistant January 2012

work, which adds up to an average of Rs.1400 (\$35) a month for a family, if there is one earning member.

Food sovereignty practices however, need to be a part of a larger plan, which involves other aspects of development and a wider safety net for the poor. The ‘Right to Food’ campaign in India, for example, has been working to get food entitlement as a legally defensible right. They sometimes clash with food sovereignty advocates, since they are less concerned with sustainable farming practices and more with ensuring access, where food is a universal right for all. They have made good progress using collective action and litigation. The introduction of compulsory noon meals in all government elementary schools and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), are two developments that were a result of this campaign. Several other important programs are on the agenda including a universalization of the public distribution system which includes a variety of grains, oilseeds and cooking oils, the implementation of which would also reinvigorate production of other more nutritious food grains.

Several political economists have stressed that reinvesting in agriculture, labor-intensive rural industry and infrastructure are important for economic development and would create employment opportunities for the rural poor which would lead to the alleviation of rural distress. Furthermore, they have stressed the need for investment in social infrastructure will enable the poor to actually benefit from state and market led development. In response to the suicides some states have taken on the challenge more seriously to support rural dwellers and the benefits can be seen in the reduced number of suicides. Others such as Andhra Pradesh are not doing enough and the rate of suicides

continues to rise. Kerala for example has doubled the procurement price of paddy (rice) for farmers and has invested in rural institutions to support them.

Where small and poor rural dwellers are concerned, the state is key in alleviating agrarian distress and can only be done by continuing to investing in rural areas especially in agricultural research and extension, institutional credit and social infrastructure like education, health and provision of safety nets for those the bottom one-third of the population that have been most adversely affected by reforms. Even though the workings of the state are messy and contradictory, in the Telengana, a majority of the rural poor put their faith in the state's ability to improve their lives.

Sen (1999) has argued that market reforms would only be more inclusive if the poor are able to build up their capabilities through better access to education, health and democratic participation. While the state's role is key, the role of civil society is important. One reason for DDS' success with rural Dalit women was its ability to build up their capabilities and contribute to their empowerment. Furthermore, Chapter 4 touched on how even neoliberal civil society initiatives such as DWACRA are bringing previously excluded populations such as poor Dalit women into the gambit of development. These have had positive impacts on their capabilities even as criticisms exist as to their circumventing democratic local government.

This demonstrates that it is unhelpful to treat the state, civil society and the market as distinct systems as in reality they are inexorably intertwined. The most valued of DDS's actions from the farmers' perspective for example, have been its role as mediator to help them avail of the states benefits in housing and land redistribution and community forestry programs. Therefore, even though these entitlements existed, they

were not accessible to the poorest without an NGO like DDS intervening on their behalf. There are numerous such examples of state-civil society collaboration in development in rural India.

In India, civil society has been a vibrant force to deal with and in fact, more than ever, the importance of civil society organizations is key in balancing the excesses of the state, and to rein in the insidious outcomes of neoliberal policies on the poor and their environments. Civil society also has a good record of innovating rural development programs, so much so, that the state has tried to replicate and scale up some of these programs even if this scaling up and democratizing process also dilutes them. A good example of this is the Non Pesticide Management (NPM) program in Andhra Pradesh, touted to be quite successful all over the state. Many feel that they have lost effectiveness and steam as they are now being implemented by decentralized institutions called Mandal Mahila Sanghams (sub-district level women's collectives). But a state-wide effort to include sustainable agricultural practices is nevertheless a step in the right direction and is more democratic. This is where the state, local communities and NGOs working on their behalf have an important role in ensuring that the vulnerable are not trampled on in the name of development.

Yet, in much of DDS and other food sovereignty actor's discourse, the state and market are seen as external to their vision for agriculture. In the struggle to reign in the forces of neoliberal globalization, Scott (2008) reminds us that without the state's intervention, there no doubt which player has the economic and geopolitical advantages to push the game in their direction.

Bebbington (2000) has demonstrated that alternatives to capitalist landscapes can emerge from all sorts of ‘development’ activities in Andean communities in their interactions with social movements, the state and the market, aided by churches and NGOs that are integral to these alternatives. He suggests that it is more useful to look at how people are actually building strategies by negotiating unique relationships with development that are neither agricultural nor rural but that allows them to live in rural areas and sustain their link to rural places. These would highlight human agency and the room to maneuver that exist within constraining institutions and structures (Bebbington, 2000). The messy encounter between the often ineffective state, NGOs, local forms of resistance and to that mix, the market, produces “hybrid confections” (Scott, 2005, pg. 400) that meet no one’s ideal vision of development.

Rural dwellers in the Telengana have a strong sense of place, history and identity that have been shaped by both marginalization and development. While the realities of living off the land are harsh and many would like to most see diversification out of agriculture as improving their lives, they also want to maintain their connection to their places. Those that farm want to grow commercial crops and make profits in cash but they also want to cultivate and eat their own traditional foods. Thus, they want to be traditional and modern and see the state as key in enabling them to engage with the market on better terms but also engage with NGOs and other institutions in ways that benefit them. Their coping strategies in a harsh economic climate suggest what Bebbington has highlighted with Andean social movements “that more than defending or resisting, people seem to seek means of using, controlling and making meaningful these processes of hybridization” (Bebbington, 2000, pg 511).

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