

Emergent Ruralities

Revisiting Village Life and Agrarian Change in Haryana

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Based on a revisit to two villages of Haryana after a gap of 20 years (1988–89 and 2008–09), this paper provides a historical overview of the process of development and change in a micro setting. Locating the process of social and economic transformation witnessed in the two villages after the green revolution and later after the introduction of large-scale industrial projects in the area, the paper tries to explore the nature of changes taking place in the internal structure (caste and class relations) of the agrarian economy; the changing nature of relationships of villages with the neighbouring urban settlements in terms of employment and aspirations; and the emerging nature of power relations in local political institutions.

Adoption of green revolution technology in select pockets of India during the 1960s and 1970s had a significant impact on the imaginings of the rural/agrarian landscapes of India. Even when critiques pointed to its limited spread and possible social and ecological “side-effects”, it produced a sense of pride in the Indian development community and among the landowning rural elite. The face of the Indian countryside in the green revolution pockets started changing very rapidly. In terms of social groups, the most visible beneficiaries of this change were the substantial cultivators from locally dominant caste groups, who constituted the upper segment of the agrarian economy. The locally dominant castes consolidated their position in the regional power structure and acquired a new sense of confidence.

However, this excitement about the green revolution and modernisation of Indian agriculture did not last for long. By the mid-1980s the Indian countryside began to show a new kind of restiveness. Interestingly, this restiveness was pronounced particularly in pockets that had experienced the green revolution. The surplus-producing farmers began to mobilise themselves into unions demanding subsidies on farm inputs and higher prices for their produce. The market economy, they argued, was inherently against the farm sector and favoured urban industry and the middle-class consumer. Given the unequal power relations between the town and countryside, they argued, agricultural sector suffered from unequal terms of trade, the evidence of which could be seen in the growth of indebtedness among the cultivating/farming classes.

Farmers mobilised themselves in different parts of India quite successfully for over a decade. Though the movements had local characters in terms of leadership and strategies of mobilisation, they coordinated their activities across regions. In a sense they were also successful in getting their agenda accepted at the level of national politics. The farmers’ movements of the 1980s also signalled the rise of a new social category of rural people who had prospered with the green revolution and were connected closely to the market economy and saw their fate as being conditioned by the market but also aspired to go beyond the village. The agrarian economy could not satisfy their aspirations for social and cultural mobility. They began to move out of the village, from their local seats of power to legislative assemblies in the state capitals. The surplus they generated from agriculture went into education, urban trade and other non-agricultural activities (Upadhyaya 1988; Rutten 1995; Omvedt 1992).

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By the early 1980s, the social profile of this class had begun to change. The following lines of Balagopal provide a lucid account of this process of growing diversification:

...a typical family of this class has a landholding in its native village, cultivated by hired labour, *bataidar*, tenant or farm servants and supervised by the father or one son; business of various descriptions in town managed by other sons; and perhaps a young and bright child who is a doctor or engineer or a professor. It is this class that is most vocal about injustice done to the village (Balagopal 1987: 1545).

The Indian village was undergoing a social and cultural transformation that had been unprecedented. However, it was not simply a story of economic growth but also of social transformation wrought with difficulties and contestations.

Research Questions, Then and Now

It was around this time when agrarian issues had already been intensely worked on by the social sciences for nearly a decade and a half and had become politically sensitive that I initiated my doctoral research on rural indebtedness and the changing nature of debt-dependencies in three villages of Karnal district of Haryana. The district typically represented the prosperous agrarian terrain of north-west India. I began my fieldwork in March 1988 and completed it by the middle of 1989.

There were three sets of questions that interested me at the time. The first were the general questions relating to the nature of changes taking place in the structure of rural credit markets. The second were a set of questions related to the nature of indebtedness among the farmers, particularly their growing involvement with the market and how their relations with the *arhtiyas* (commission agents) in the marketing centre structured their choices on farming. The third were a set of questions related to the role that credit played in institutionalising certain kinds of dependency relations of the labouring classes with their employer farmers.

Though the Indian village had been an important and fashionable area of research for sociologists and social anthropologists, they rarely looked at the kind of questions I had identified for my research. Economists, mostly using the framework of political economy or conceptual frames drawn from the “neoclassical” tradition, had done most of the empirical work on agrarian change in India. While the economists researching on agrarian change worked with the category of “class” for classifying and analysing rural social structure, sociologists and social anthropologists were preoccupied with “caste”. Even when caste seemed a relevant factor in the study of the rural social structure and change, it was rarely seen in relation to the agrarian social structure. Economists found it meaningless to talk about caste and the sociologists/social anthropologists saw its core lying in the ritual domain and the value framework of social hierarchy. Castes were also seen to be functionally integrated and ideologically overdetermined in a manner that questions of power and social inequality or marginality and exclusion either seemed secondary or simply irrelevant for understanding the “essence” of Indian rural life (Jodhka 1998).

This textbook conceptualisation of caste did not make much sense to me. On the other hand I found the economists’

writings on the political economy of agrarian change much more useful and inspiring. Unlike the sociologists and social anthropologists, the economists in India had also been pre-occupied much more with state policy and development related questions. Though the mainstream economists did not focus too much on relational structures, questions of poverty and social disparities had been among the core concerns with them.

The shift in India’s economic orientation during the early years of the 1990s had several implications for the agricultural sector. Apart from other things, it marginalised agriculture in the development discourse on India. Social science research on the rural and agrarian economy also declined. Agrarian questions no longer generated excitement in university seminars, or in the popular media. Unfortunately, it was only when incidents of farmers’ suicides began to be reported from several different parts of India in quick succession during the late 1990s that agriculture returned to academic and political platforms.

By the early years of the 21st century, a new discourse on Indian agriculture began to take shape. The preoccupation this time was with “crisis”. While the Indian economy was growing at a much faster pace, the agriculture sector was experiencing stagnation. The relative share of the agricultural sector in the national economy began to decline quite steadily. Rural India once again appeared as a site of gloom and depression where real incomes were declining and farmers committed suicide all the time.

Interestingly, in this new discourse of “crisis of agriculture” only occasionally were any references made to internal inequalities in agrarian India, not even by those who swore by the political economy framework and had participated in the debate on agrarian class relations and mode of production. In fact very little research was being done on the internal dynamics of the political economy of agriculture. Most of their formulations also seemed to be emerging from analysis of journalistic reports, or the large data sets produced by official agencies, such as the National Sample Survey Office. It was in this context that I decided to revisit two of my three study villages.

Over the 20 years that had gone by, the face of social science research had changed significantly in India and globally and so had my orientation to social science research. My questions during the revisit were of a different nature. They were mostly exploratory in nature, with a comparative context in mind. What exactly was happening to the village and agriculture? Has the village really been socially and economically stagnant over the last 20 years or did it continue to change? If it has been changing, what has been the nature of this change and how has this change affected different categories of rural population? How did the cultivating farmers of different categories relate to agriculture as an occupation? Who has moved out of agriculture in this 20-year period and why? What kinds of changes have come about in the patterns of labour/production relations? What kinds of changes have come about in caste relations? How did dalit groups relate to

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agriculture? How has the rural power structure changed in the two decades?¹

The Two Villages

The idea of a typical Indian village, which represents the traditional social structure and cultural values of Indian society in a microcosm, is a complete myth. It was a construction of colonial ethnography and served their political interests (Cohn 1987; Inden 1990). But the project of village studies initiated by social anthropologists during the 1950s and 1960s further reinforced this idea (Jodhka 1998). Historically, Indian villages varied significantly in size and in their social fabric. Their character was determined more by regional agrarian histories and the local trajectories of social, economic and ecological processes. No single village, or a group of villages, could represent all of rural India.

The two villages selected for the study represent a particular type of rural setting, which is becoming increasingly common in different parts of the third world. These are villages that are actively connected to urban centres and are being changed very rapidly by the processes of industrialisation and technology. Though the two study villages are still sufficiently far enough from urban centres to be treated as urban-peripheries, they are certainly not economically “backward” or socially and culturally “traditional”. Of the two study villages, Village-I is located at a distance of around 9 km from the town of Panipat and other (Village-II) around 17 kilometres. Both are multi-caste villages with diverse caste communities living within the villages and both experienced the green revolution during the 1970s.

Around the mid-1970s the Government of Haryana decided to set up a thermal power station close to Panipat. Some of the farmers from Village-I lost a part of their agricultural land to the power project. However, it did not directly affect the agrarian economy of the village very much. The villagers whose land was acquired were considered for jobs in the thermal power station and some of them managed to get regular employment in the plant. It also generated a lot of new employment for casual labour. Over the years, the plant has been expanding and new ancillary industries have also been developing in the area. The Panipat oil refinery, which came up during the 1990s, is also located close to the two villages, within a distance of around 4 to 7 km. However, so far the two villages have not lost much land to the refinery project. But quite like the thermal power station, it has generated a lot of new employment for casual labour for the locals.

Demographics and Changing Social Ecology

As I walked around the villages, the first thing that struck me was the growth in the size of the two villages. They looked quite different from the way they did 20 years back. There were many more streets and the villages had grown on all sides. Though there were cases of outmigration, the absolute population of the villages had grown considerably. Table 1 gives a good idea about the extent of change in population of the two villages over the past 20 years.

Table 1: Total Number of Households and Population in the Two Study Villages

Village	No of Households	Per Cent Increase	Total Population	Per Cent Increase	SC Population	Per Cent of SCs to Total Population	Per Cent Increase in SC Population
I	636 (358)	77.65	3,783 (2,256)	67.68	750 (331)	19.83 (14.67)	123.60
II	617 (359)	71.86	3,536 (2,538)	39.32	584 (360)	16.52 (14.18)	62.22

Figures in brackets are taken from Census of India 1981.

Source: Census of India 2001 and 1981.

The physical and demographic expansion of the villages has also had several long-term sociological implications. Though most of the *baras* (localities) were still around caste lines and most people lived in *bara* of their own castes, the villages had lost their old residential pattern. For example, dalit communities no longer lived away from the village, or in segregated quarters. The villages had grown on all sides and in some cases non-dalits had come to live quite close to dalit households. In Village-II, for example, in one of my group interviews I met respondents from four different caste groups living next to each other. Though none of them was from a landowning dominant caste of Jat or Ror background, all were not dalits. In fact one of them was a brahmin. Another one was a Jhimmar (a local caste belonging to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), traditionally landless) and yet another one from another non-dalit caste. They all lived in close proximity to the extent that a non-dalit’s house shared a wall with a dalit house.

Both the villages had grown demographically, but the growth of Village-I was more than Village-II. While 20 years back Village-II was slightly bigger than Village-I, the latter was now bigger both in terms of the number of houses as well as the total population. This can perhaps be attributed directly to its proximity to the thermal power station. Also proximity to the town has kept back even those households within the village who have their businesses and jobs in the town. Table 1 also shows a significantly higher growth of the scheduled caste (SC) population in Village-I. This has happened because of the recent inclusion of an additional community of Badis, or Bajjigars, into the list of SCs.

Demographics has interestingly become a contested subject and this contestation has larger implications in the context of the new development regimes of the post-colonial world. Development and underdevelopment do not remain mere structural locations but they also become sources of identity for the common people. Demographics are part of the state enterprise used actively for formulating and implementing development strategies. As Akhil Gupta writes about underdevelopment:

...underdevelopment is also a form of identity, something that informs people’s sense of self. Who people think they are, how they got that way and what they can do to alter their lives have been profoundly shaped by the institutions, ideology, and practices of development (Gupta 1998: ix).

Residents of the two villages recognised the crucial significance of numbers and modes of representing themselves to the state in the larger discourse of development and underdevelopment. It is not only the administrative categories of SCs and backward classes that have come to be part of the local parlance of self description but even categories like family and

household are increasingly defined and described keeping the state processes in mind. This was quite evident from my field experience of trying to estimate the number of households.

Table 1 above provides us with a figure for the households as it was calculated during the 2001 Census enumerations. However, the experience of ascertaining this number during the fieldwork turned out to be quite an interesting one. When I first inquired from the village sarpanches and some other knowledgeable informants about the approximate numbers of households in the two villages, I was given an estimate of around 900 to 1,000 households for each of the villages. It sounded much higher than what I had expected it to be. I asked my field assistants to begin the process of listing streets and households. Given their local context they too were sure that the figure would not be very far from the numbers suggested by the village officials. However, when we completed the listing process we discovered that the number of households in Village-I was around 550 and in Village-II around 540, lower than the numbers reported to the census enumerators in 2001. Of these we were able to interview 503 and 491 households, respectively, from the two villages.

Why did this *demographic inflation* happen? The local administration had recently undertaken a survey of the rural households for the purpose of identifying poor families so that they could be given ration cards of appropriate colours. Being listed as a family “below the poverty line” entitled them to certain benefits and the amount of benefits would obviously go up if the units reported were more. Interestingly, the operational category used by the local administration for the poverty survey was the “family” and not “household”. However, the earlier survey being fresh in their mind, the subtle distinction between the two categories was of little significance, and could not be reported to “outside” enumerators.

Communities and Their Social Profile

When I worked in these villages in 1988-89, I presumed land-ownership and non-ownership to be the most important factor in determining the structure of opportunities and socio-economic well-being of households in rural India. Thus, I worked with the category of social class loosely defined through land-ownership. This was perhaps partly an effect of my own academic orientation and the fact that economists had produced much of the literature I read on agrarian social structure.

However, over the years, social sciences in India have become much more sensitive to several other social variables and indicators of development. While the mainstream Economics has moved from simple calculations of income and productivity to the complex realities of “human development”, sociologists and other social scientists have rediscovered “communities” (Jodhka 2001) and have begun to give much more importance to other forms of subjectivities, the manner in which people constructed their own notions of “well-being”.

Interestingly, the idea of the community as a category of development experiences of the village seemed to work much better than any other grouping during the fieldwork. My respondents often articulated the differentiated experience of

development of sections of their village over the past 20 years through the prism of communities, particularly, caste communities. They classified the village population through communities and viewed the economic experience of the rural population in terms of communities. Some had done very well while some others had not done so well and still others had done badly and over the years were seen to have either gone down, or remained where they were 20 years earlier.

Village-I had two main communities, the “locals” and the Punjabis. This village had a large Muslim population, a majority of which migrated to Pakistan at the time of Partition in 1947 and the land and homes vacated by them were allotted to Hindus and Sikhs who had to migrate out of western Punjab because of the Partition related violence. The Punjabi settlers coined the term “locals” for the “native” inhabitants of the village who spoke the local Haryanavi dialect. The natives of the village referred to the Punjabis as “refugees”. This was particularly so 20 years earlier. However, over the years the term “Punjabi” has replaced the term refugee. Only some older respondents still used the term refugee for the Punjabis.

The Punjabis were all from one caste community, Aroras, and they all came from one district of western Punjab. Of the 503 households surveyed, 67 were Punjabi Arora households. However, they had varied economic profiles. A small number of them (around 15 households) could be classified as big farmers with holdings ranging from 20 acres to 60 or more. Except for one, all big landowners of the village were Punjabis. Another 20 to 25 households could be classified as middle and small or marginal landowners. A small number of them were also poor. They owned no land and had been working as sharecroppers and wage/attached labourers in the village. A good number of them (nearly 30 households) had members of the household employed in non-farm occupations. They either had small grocery shops in the village or had petty businesses outside the village, mostly in the neighbouring town of Panipat. Punjabis were also occupationally the most diversified group.

The second major caste community of the village was that of Gujjars (97 respondent households). Though they had now been listed amongst the OBCs, they qualified to be a “dominant caste” (Srinivas 1959). They were mostly landowners and farmers. They were substantial in numbers, locally and in the region, were ritually far above ex-untouchables and had enough members of the community educated and connected to the town. They too were internally differentiated but not as much as the Punjabis.

The village also had a good number of brahmin households (30). With the exception of one family, which came to the village from western Punjab, they were all “locals”. The brahmins of the village did not see themselves as being superior to the other two dominant communities of the village. Ritual ideology has been quite weak in the region and being a pandit was rarely seen as a dignified identity (see Tandon 1961; Saberwal 1972, 1973; Jodhka 2002). Most of them were small landowners and tended to see themselves as such, closer to the *chhote log* (poor and the marginal) of the village than to the *bade log* (rich and powerful).

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The largest chunk of the population was in the category of “backward castes” (nearly 125), which were now listed amongst the OBCs. While the “OBC” had not yet become a popular category of description in these villages, the word “backward” has been in usage for a long time. The state government has had a quota of jobs for the listed backward caste at the state level for quite some time, which was introduced much before the Mandal commission recommendations came into effect. However, it is very critical to make a distinction within the backwards, between those who have traditionally been landowners/cultivators and those who have been predominantly landless. Apart from Gujjars, the Malis (or Sainis, as they are now called) have also been landowning cultivators, though the average size of their landholdings has been smaller than the Gujjars.

Jhimmars (who now like being called Kashyap Rajputs) were the largest caste group in the category of OBCs in Village-I. In fact with 99 respondent households they were the single largest caste group in the village. Since a large majority of them were landless, they worked as casual labourers in the village or outside in the neighbouring towns and industries. Some of them were also employed in regular jobs outside the village. They were among the poorest of communities in the two villages. Their position had clearly gone down. Twenty years ago they were certainly better off than the local dalits in terms of their incomes and quality of housing.

The second major community in this category was that of Kumhars. They now called themselves Prajapats. Traditionally, they were the potters. They also kept donkeys for carriage work. Their traditional occupations had over the years become redundant and they too had mostly been landless. But unlike the Jhimmars they had been more enterprising. While some of them had been leasing in land on a share basis from the local farmers, others had invested in carts and trucks. However, the success stories were not too many and a majority of them continued to struggle on the borderlines of poverty.

The village had several SC communities. The most prominent of them were the two traditional communities of the scavengers (the Balmikis) (48 households) and the Chamars (36 households). Quite like the “lower” OBCs, the dalits too had changed their names. The Balmikis were earlier known as Chuharas. Though non-dalit villagers still used their old caste names in conversations with me, while interacting with them everyone addressed them as Balmikis. Similarly, the local villagers tended to identify the Chamars as harijans. A majority of them seemed to like the title harijan over Chamar, and they had also begun to identify themselves as Ravidasis. Many of the villagers were familiar with the category dalit, but very few of them used it in everyday conversation. Apart from these two major groups, there were also some other SCs. Most prominent of them were the Badis or Bajjigars. Unlike the other SC communities, the Badis had never been an untouchable caste. They had been living in a settlement away from the village but interacted with all castes without hesitation. The village also had several small groups listed as OBCs and SCs. They included the Dhobis, Jogis, Nais, Badhais and several other dalits and non-dalit servicing castes.

Village-II too had a similar caste profile. Quite like Village-I it had two major landowning caste communities, the Jats (92 households) and the Rors (104). Much of the agricultural land in the village was owned by these two “dominant castes”. Like the Punjabi Aroras of Village-I, the bigger landowners of the Village-II too belonged mostly to one community, the Jats. However, unlike the Punjabis, the Jats had always been living in the village. Village-II too had a few households of migrant Punjabis but they moved out to neighboring towns during the 1980s. Village-II also had a much larger number of brahmins (60 households). Here also brahmins were small cultivators and lived closer to the OBC communities of the village than to the dominant castes.

Among the non-landowning OBCs, the largest population was that of the Jhimmars (43) though they were not the largest community in the village. Jogis (36) and Kumhars or Prajapats (25) were the other major OBC caste groups of the village. The social and economic profile of these communities in Village-II was quite similar to their status in Village-I. Same was the case with dalit groups. Here too the two major communities were those of Balmikis (40) and Chamars (50).

For the purpose of analysis, I have clubbed caste communities into four categories. First, the dalits or SCs; second, the backward castes (BCs); third, the dominant castes (DCs); and fourth the ritually upper castes (UCs), which include the brahmins, Baniyas, Aroras and Rajputs. I have classified the Gujjars and Jats as DCs even though they are both listed as OBCs.² Table 2 gives us an idea about the caste composition of the village population as shown in our survey and as per our categories. The proportion of dalits was more or less equal in both the villages. However, the proportion of BCs was significantly larger in Village-I. The proportion of ritually upper castes was also larger in Village-I, which was primarily because of the Punjabi Aroras in the village, who could also be clubbed with the dominant castes because a good number of them were in fact cultivators.

Table 2: Village-wise Caste Composition of Respondent Households
(in number and as % of total)

Caste	Village-I	Village-II	Total
Dalit	91 (18.09)	92 (18.73)	183 (18.41)
BC	178 (35.38)	131 (26.68)	309 (31.08)
DC	122 (24.25)	206 (41.95)	328 (32.99)
UC	112 (22.26)	62 (12.62)	174 (17.50)
Total	503 (100)	491 (100)	994 (100)

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Family, Gender and Some Other Aspects of Social Life

The family continued to be an important institution in the two villages. Almost everyone lived in a family. A few individuals lived alone but that was rarely out of choice. As expected, men headed most families and households. Women-headed households were rare and in most cases it happened only when the male member died or left home. Unlike some other parts of India, not many men had gone away from home to work. Even when they worked outside, they got back home in the evening. The size of the households was also not very small. Nearly 75% of households had five or more members living together and 28% of households had seven or more members living together. The incidence of joint households was also not insignificant. Nearly 35% of all the households were joint households. Their

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proportion was a little higher among the landowning dominant castes than among the BCs and SCs.

The two villages typically represented the patriarchal landscape of north-west India. According to the Census of 2001 the sex ratio in the two villages was 894 and 890, respectively, well below the national average. At first glance nothing much seemed to have changed in family life. Women continued to be invisible in the public sphere. It was only after a month of interaction with the villagers that I came to know that a woman had actually won the seat for village sarpanch during the last elections in Village-I and that it was currently a reserved seat for SC woman. Whenever I enquired about the sarpanch I was either told the name of her father-in-law or husband.

However, at a more subtle level, things had changed. For example, fewer women wore purdah and educating a girl child had become much more acceptable. Sending daughters to school was much more common across communities than it was 20 years back. In fact, there were several families who had sent their daughters out of the village for education. They lived in hostels on their own and aspired for careers, for a more dignified middle class urban life.

Education was valued. Both villages had government schools up to class 12th. Village-I also had a separate school for girls up to Class 8. These villages also had private schools run by religious trusts. A good number of children also went to neighbouring towns to study. As per the official data of 2001, the literacy rate for Village-I was 66% (77% for men and 55% for women) and for Village-II 67% (78% for men and 54 for women). Though nearly 30% of our respondents were still illiterate, there were only 4% households with no educated members and nearly 80% of the households had three or more educated members in the family.

Economic Life

Until sometime back rural life was almost completely identified with agriculture and activities that supported agriculture. Though there were a large number of households that never owned land, they too largely depended on agriculture for their livelihoods. They either worked as casual/attached labourers with the cultivators or provided other supporting services to the cultivators. Mediated through the institution of caste, rural society of Haryana had a system of patron-client relations within which the agrarian economy was socially organised.

This system of *jajmani* ties had begun to weaken with the introduction of commercial agriculture during the colonial period (Bhattacharya 1985) and had nearly completely disintegrated by the 1980s. However, 20 years earlier the two villages still had a predominantly agrarian character. Agriculture was at the centre of the rural social life. It provided employment to a majority of the working population of the village and it gave them their primary identity. Poor dalits and other landless villagers looked up to the big farmers for employment, and occasionally for credit. Through credit the farmers tied the labouring poor to work on land and at home. Those who owned big plots of land also controlled political institutions at the local level and commanded respect and authority in the village.

This has almost completely changed. The change is more visible in Village-I than in Village-II but the pattern is similar. Less than 30% of all households identified cultivation as their primary occupation. This was even less in Village-I (23%). As is evident from Table 3 the largest proportion of the households is in the category of labourers. However, they were not necessarily agricultural labourers. In fact, a large majority of them earned most of their livelihoods from working outside the agricultural sector and only occasionally worked on land.

Table 3: Primary Occupation of the Respondent Households (in number and as % of total)

Primary Occupation	Village-I	Village-II	Total
Cultivators	117 (23.26)	172 (35.03)	289 (29.07)
Labourers	206 (40.9)	153 (31.16)	359 (36.11)
Shopkeepers/business	39 (7.75)	45 (9.16)	84 (8.45)
Regular service/government job	108 (21.4)	63 (12.8)	171 (17.20)
No regular employment	33 (6.55)	58 (11.8)	91 (9.15)
Total	503 (100)	491 (100)	994 (100)

More important perhaps was the number of people who had employment outside the village (17.20%). This becomes particularly interesting when we see it in relation to caste. Land-ownership and cultivation continued to be a prerogative of the dominant and upper castes in the two villages. Nearly 92% of all the cultivators were from these caste communities. In contrast more than 80% of those who reported their primary occupation as labourers were either dalits or were from "backward castes".

However, diversification had occurred among all the caste groups. As is evident from Table 4, a good proportion of households in each category had a primary occupation outside agriculture. Interestingly, proportionately the number of dalits with regular jobs was the highest and that of the BCs the lowest. Though they had both been poor and lacking in social and cultural capital required for securing a regular job, dalits had been able to get these jobs partly because their statutory quotas in education and employment were more effective than that for the BCs.

Table 4: Caste-wise Primary Occupation of the Respondent Households (in number and as a percentage of the total)

Caste	Farming	Wage Labour	Shopkeeping/Business	Regular Job	No Regular Employment	Total
Dalit	7 (3.8)	106 (57.9)	0	51 (27.86)	19 (10.38)	183 (100)
BC	17 (5.5)	202 (65.37)	14 (4.5)	42 (13.5)	34 (11.0)	309 (100)
DC	201 (61.28)	25 (7.6)	23 (7.01)	55 (16.7)	24 (7.31)	328 (100)
UC	64 (36.78)	26 (14.94)	47 (27.01)	23 (13.21)	14 (8.04)	174 (100)
Total	289 (29.07)	359 (36.11)	84 (8.45)	171 (17.20)	91 (9.15)	994 (100)

Apart from economic activity, the number of working members in a household also determined the social and economic well-being of a household. Notably, nearly half of our respondent households had more than one full-time working member in their households

Table 5: Number of Working Members in the Respondent Households (in number and as a percentage of the total)

Category	One	Two	Three	Four/Five	None	Total
Dalit	82 (44.82)	65 (35.52)	24 (13.11)	9 (4.91)	3 (1.64)	183 (100)
BC	144 (46.60)	109 (35.28)	37 (11.97)	16 (5.19)	3 (0.97)	309 (100)
DC	162 (49.39)	99 (30.18)	40 (12.20)	19 (5.80)	8 (2.43)	328 (100)
UC	95 (54.60)	46 (26.44)	15 (8.61)	6 (3.45)	12 (6.90)	174 (100)
Total	483 (48.60)	319 (32.10)	116 (11.67)	50 (5.03)	26 (2.60)	994 (100)

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and in some cases the number of working members in the household was as high as five (Table 5, p 11). Further, the pattern across caste groups was almost the same. There were also some households where there were no full-time working members.

Another manifestation of growing diversification was that the households in rural Haryana were increasingly becoming pluri-active (Lindberg 2005; Jodhka 2006a). Different members of the household pursued different occupations. Further, more than 15% (152) of the respondents also reported having a secondary occupation either within the village or outside. In most cases the secondary occupation was a petty business, either some kind of shop within the village, or outside in the neighbouring village.

A striking change in the two villages over the last two decades was a manifold expansion of the local market. Twenty years back the number of shops in each of the villages was around 15 to 20 and most of them were grocery shops, which provided almost everything the villagers needed for their daily consumption. Most of these shops were owned and run

Table 6: Caste-wise Shop-ownership of Households in Study Villages

Caste of Shopkeepers	Village-I (Shop-owning HHs)	Village-II (Shop-owning HHs)	Total
UC	35 (31.25)	11 (17.74)	46 (32.39)
DC	17 (13.93)	19 (09.22)	36 (25.35)
BC	22 (12.36)	25 (19.08)	47 (33.09)
Dalit	4 (04.40)	9 (09.78)	13 (9.15)
Total	78 (15.51)	64 (13.03)	142 (100)

(Figures in brackets are percentage of shop-owning household in each category of HHs).

by the local Banias or the Punjabi Aroras. This had changed significantly over the years. The number of shops in Village-I was 78 and in Village-II it was 64. More significantly the local market had also witnessed diversity and differentiation of various kinds. Members of all castes and communities were running them (Table 6). Only 32% of all the shops were now owned and run by the upper castes who used to have a near complete monopoly over the local market in the past. Interestingly, even though none of our dalit respondents reported shopkeeping as the main occupation of the household, there were a few shops being run by the dalits. However, the caste element continued to be significant in the local market. Not only was the proportion of dalit shopkeepers in the total much less than their presence in the total population, their shops were also either located in dalit localities or they provided some specific kinds of manual services, such as cycle or shoe repair.

The villagers could access all kinds of odd services from within the rural settlements, ranging from fertiliser bags and pesticides to jewellery and electrical goods and their repairs (Table 7). This indeed reflected the growing consumer culture in the villages and the fact that villagers had much more disposable incomes in their hands. The growth of the local market was

also a consequence of the near complete disappearance of the traditional jajmani economy. Though ideologically the jajmani system had lost its appeal long ago and I could see it beginning to disintegrate 20 years ago, the services traditionally provided by local caste groups had not become completely commodified as was the case in 2009. Now there was a shop for almost everything and there were newer services and commodities for which there were specialised outlets. Some shops provided multiple services and kept different categories of goods under one roof. For example, one could buy shoes from the local *kirana* (groceries) shop, or fertiliser bags from a shop that also sold cement bags.

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Agriculture

Technologically speaking, there had not been much change over the past two decades in the manner in which the agrarian economy was organised in the two villages. Despite the growing shadow of industry over the two villages, not much land had been lost to "outsiders". On the contrary, land under cultivation had grown in size as the *banjar* (uncultivable/barren) land was improved for cultivation. In Village-I most of the panchayat land, which was lying fallow, had also been encroached upon by the local farmers and was being regularly cultivated.

As was the practice two decades earlier, the two main crops in the region were still wheat and paddy. Some villagers also grew sugar cane in 1980s but not any longer. Some farmers also grew a third crop of peas or lentils, as was the case 20 years before. Use of fertilisers and pesticides continued to grow. Farmers had almost completely stopped making their own

seeds and depended entirely on the market for supply of hybrid seeds. Water from the canal (around one-third) and the tube wells (two-third) met their irrigational needs. Though the water table had not gone down much, farmers installed tube wells using a new technology, the submersible pumps. These were more expensive but they provided a better flow of water.

Mechanisation had also grown. A large number of farmers owned tractors even during the late 1980s, but a good number of villagers also kept bullocks. I also came across some cases where the relatively smaller farmers, after working with tractors for some time, had gone back to bullock farming, finding it more economical for their size of holdings. This was no longer the case. There were no bullocks in the two villages. The small and marginal farmers who could not afford to buy tractors hired it from tractor-owning farmers for ploughing their fields. There were 72 tractors in Village-I and nearly 90 in Village-II.

The use of combine harvesters had grown at the cost of threshers for the harvesting of

Table 7: Types of Services Provided by Local Shops in the Study Villages

Type of Shops	Village-I	Village-II	Total
Barber shops	4	6	10
Cobbler shops	1	2	3
Kirana/grocery shops	32	27	59
STD booths	3	4	7
Cement/bricks shops	2	1	3
Liquor shops	1	1	2
Tent houses	1	0	1
Bike repair	2	4	6
Electric shops	3	2	5
Vegetable shops	3	1	4
Jewellery shops	2	1	3
Cloth stores	2	0	2
TV/radio repair shops	3	1	4
Tailors	4	3	7
Photo studios	1	1	2
Medical stores	1	2	3
Clinics	2	0	2
Cable services for TV	1	0	1
Sweet shops	4	1	5
Hardware shops	2	3	5
Flour mills	3	1	4
Furniture shops	0	1	1
Tea stalls	0	1	1
Fertiliser stores	1	1	2
Total	78	64	142

wheat. Initially there was some resistance to their use because combine harvesters only picked up the seed and left behind the plants on the field, which was a useful source for cattle fodder. Threshing machines were preferred because they also processed the plant and converted it into hay for cattle fodder. However, the arrival of a new machine called the reaper had to an extent solved this problem. The reaper plucked the plant left behind by the combine and processed it into hay. Mechanical harvesting machines were available for paddy as well, but they did not work for the taller plant of basmati rice, which is popular with most of the farmers in the two villages. One of the implications, and perhaps also a reason, for this second phase of mechanisation was a steady decline of human labour for agriculture. Combine harvesters mostly came from outside and finished the work in a village in a week or so. Some enterprising individuals mostly owned them, and they would invariably be from agrarian castes. One of the big farmers in Village-I owned a combine harvester but it was not in use for some technical reasons. Some farmers still preferred harvesting their wheat crop with threshers, owned or rented. Reapers and other machines were all locally owned by tractor-owning farmers. They too were leased out, but only after work of the owner-farmer was completed.

Landholdings and Agrarian Social Structure

Despite the declining significance of agriculture in national life, agriculture continues to employ the largest numbers of working Indians. Though this held good for the two villages as well, there was clearly a declining trend in the number of people working on land. As mentioned above, less than 30% of the households in the two villages reported agriculture or farming as primary occupation. Also there were significant disparities in the landownership patterns. As evident from Table 8 as many as 66% of the households in Village-I and 48% in Village-II reported owning no land at all. On the other hand, a small number of households owned large plots of land.

Table 8: Patterns of Landownership in the Two Study Villages (in number and as a percentage of the total)

	No Land	Less than 2 Acres	2-5 Acres	5-10 Acres	10-25 Acres	25-50 Acres	50+ Acres	No Response	Total
Village-I	333 (66.2)	25 (4.97)	101 (20.1)	30 (5.96)	7 (1.39)	5 (0.99)	1 (0.19)	1 (0.19)	503 (100)
Village-II	235 (47.9)	36 (7.33)	130 (26.5)	50 (10.2)	30 (6.10)	7 (1.42)	2 (0.40)	1 (0.20)	491 (100)
Total	568 (57.1)	61 (6.13)	231 (23.2)	80 (8.04)	37 (3.72)	12 (1.20)	3 (0.30)	2 (0.20)	994 (100)

The number of farming households owning and cultivating more than 10 acres of land appears to be under-reported for the obvious reasons.

When seen in relation to caste, this picture of disparity becomes even more significant. Despite many radical changes in rural social life over the last century or so, the agrarian economy of the village continues to be almost exclusively under the control of dominant and upper castes, those who have traditionally been the landowning and agrarian communities. As is evident from Table 9 nearly 95% of the dalits and BCs are completely landless. On the contrary only around 12% of the DC households are landless.

Table 9: Landownership Patterns across Caste Groups

	No Land	<1 Acre	2-5 Acres	5-10 Acres	10-25 Acres	25-50 Acres	50+ Acres	No Response	Total
Dalit	174 (95.08)	2 (1.09)	6 (3.28)	0	0	0	0	1 (0.55)	183 (100)
BC	293 (94.82)	4 (1.29)	9 (2.91)	3 (0.97)	0	0	0	0	309 (100)
DC	39 (11.89)	27 (8.23)	156 (47.56)	61 (18.6)	35 (10.67)	7 (2.13)	2 (0.60)	1 (0.3)	328 (100)
UC	62 (35.63)	28 (16.09)	60 (34.48)	16 (9.19)	2 (1.14)	5 (2.87)	1 (0.6)	0	174 (100)
Total	568 (57.14)	61 (6.13)	231 (23.24)	80 (8.05)	37 (3.72)	12 (1.21)	3 (0.3)	2 (0.2)	994 (100)

However, there have been very important changes in the agrarian social structure, both in terms of relations across caste groups and class categories, as also in the attitudes of the landowners towards their occupational callings.

Land, Labour and Caste

Twenty years earlier agrarian relations in these villages had already changed quite radically. Farmers no longer gave their land on lease to tenants on long-term basis. Relationship with attached labourers had also become completely formalised (Bhalla 1976; Jodhka 1994). Most of the labour needs of the farmers were met by casual and contractual labour, mostly on a fixed cash rate basis. A good proportion of the peak season work was done by migrant labour from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. However, local dalits and other local labourers also worked on farms and did a good amount of peak season work. Most of the middle and big farmers, who owned more than 15 acres of land, also employed attached labourers. Some of the big farmers employed upto five attached labourers. With the exception of one or two, all the attached labourers came from within the village. Only the locals could be trusted with an advance wage. Though the mechanisation process was a part and parcel of the green revolution technology, it did not lead to labour displacement. In fact demand for labour went up considerably with the new agrarian technology making it possible to intensify cropping patterns and considerably expand land under cultivation. Even when labour came from outside during the peak harvesting sowing seasons, local labour also had enough work available on the farm.

This had changed considerably over 20 years. First and foremost there had been a clear decline in the demand for labour over the years and this had happened because of the second phase of mechanisation. The decline had not only been of the demand but also of supply. Dalits had nearly completely withdrawn from the local agrarian economy. As mentioned above dalits have mostly been landless and they no longer like working as labourers with local farmers. As I had earlier observed in Punjab villages, the dalits did not wish to work on land with cultivating farmers primarily for social and political reasons (Jodhka 2002). Working with farmers implied accepting their domination and power. By refusing to work on land dalits expressed their dissent against the traditional structure of patron-client ties. Even if it meant cycling to town for casual labour for no higher a wage or secure income, a dalit did not like working on land. Some of them also

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told me that work on a farm was much more arduous and demanding and the number of working hours invariably exceeded eight hours.

Availability of alternative sources of employment in the industries nearby and the vibrant urban centre of Panipat being not so far off had, of course, made this distancing of the dalit from the agrarian economy possible.

At the community level also dalits seemed to be consolidating themselves. They had been quite successful in getting regular jobs thanks to the caste-based quotas for them in government jobs. As mentioned earlier, nearly 28% of dalit households reported regular jobs outside the village as their primary occupation. This would have also reduced their dependency for short-term credit on the local cultivating farmers. In contrast, the economic position of those from landless BCs seemed more vulnerable. They also worked more often as wage and attached labourers with the local farmers.

The two villages still had attached labourers mostly employed by big farmers. However, their numbers had considerably declined. This was particularly the case with Village-II. The total number of attached labourers in the village was not more than 15 or 20. Two decades earlier there would have been nearly 70 such labourers. Village-I too had around 25 to 30 attached labourers, employed mostly by Punjabi farmers. Gujjar farmers no longer hired attached labourers. The social background of those who worked as attached labourers had also changed significantly. During the late 1980s, a large majority of attached labourers were local dalits. Twenty years later, not even one of them was a local dalit. However, the terms of their hiring and the nature of relationship had not changed much (see Jodhka 2012). Newer modes of sharecropping had also emerged as a substitute to attached labour for the big farmers.

Future of Agriculture and Rural Life

The two villages have experienced some very important economic and social changes. However, there is no clear indication of the classical type of capitalist development taking place where a few farmers are able to buy large plots of lands and the rest are proletarianised (Lenin 1956). There has also been no move towards corporate agriculture or contract farming. Only occasionally some farmers were contracted to produce seeds by seed companies. But there was no sign of this emerging as a trend in the two villages. Not much land was being sold or purchased, unless it was acquired by industry or the state. The smaller farmers, who found their holdings unviable, were getting out of agriculture but without selling-off their land. Land sales happened only when the entire family moved out and was unable to keep in touch with the village. Some of the middle and bigger landowners, who had found viable urban employment, also preferred leasing their land out to selling it.

Interestingly, even though there was still a strong sense of attachment to land, agriculture was not seen as a desirable occupation. The younger generation across caste groups disliked farming. When we asked our respondents about their

preferences for their children and grandchildren practising agriculture, only around 8% answered in the affirmative. Surprisingly, responses to the question were quite similar across caste and occupational categories. Dalits and UCs (5% to 6%) were least interested in their families staying in farming, but even cultivating farmers of BCs (9%) did not want their children to practise agriculture. Only among BCs was there some desire to continue with agriculture (11%).

However, these villagers were less opposed to living in the village (Table 10). Many of the households, or individual members of the households who had jobs in the neighbouring towns, continued to live in the village. Cities are invariably seen as polluted and expensive to live in.

Not only has social and economic organisation of the village changed, but the meaning of the village for its residents has also undergone a complete change. Choosing to live in the village did not imply any kind of commitment to or identification with the village and its ethos. The social order of the caste hierarchy is a thing of past and the collective identity of village is fragmented.

Local Power and Panchayats

How could we talk about the nature of power relations in the two villages? Social science literature on the subject has invariably pointed to land and caste as being the two major sources of power in rural India (Srinivas 1959; Dumont 1970). Introduction of democratic political processes and adult franchise helped the landowning middle-level agrarian caste groups acquire dominance at the local and regional levels during the post-independence period (Srinivas 1962; Kothari 1970). Over the years, scholars have also pointed to new emerging trends, which assign greater importance to the growing role of individual political entrepreneurship (Krishna 2001) and growing political mobilisation among dalit castes (Jodhka 2006b).

Twenty years earlier, dominance in the two villages was clearly located in caste and land. Big landowners (the *chaudharies*) were also the most powerful individuals in the two villages and they were all members of the dominant/upper castes. With the introduction of competitive politics, operationally the power of dominant individuals had to be institutionally reproduced through electoral politics. Universal adult franchise also gave a new sense of identity to dalits. "Every individual began to matter and everyone had a single vote", was the way one of my dalit respondents articulated the change in local politics. However, on the ground the local democratic politics worked through factional alliances. Factions were always vertical in nature, with some members of all castes being loyal to the leader, who was always a substantial landowner. Even after a representative system of electing

Table 10: Perceptions on Preferred Place of Residence for Children and Grandchildren
(in number and as a percentage of the total)

Caste Group	Village	City	No Response	Total
Dalit	92(50.27)	85(46.44)	6(3.27)	183(100)
BC	236(76.37)	68(22.0)	5(1.61)	309(100)
DC	180(54.87)	140(42.68)	8(2.43)	328(100)
UC	85(48.85)	86(49.42)	3(1.72)	174(100)
Total	593(59.65)	379(38.12)	22(2.21)	994(100)

local leaders came into force, the *chaudharies* of the village continued to enjoy influence in the local setting. However, they had to be constantly aware of the need to keep partners in the faction together.

There have been some interesting changes in this over the last 20 years.

Coupled with changes in the agrarian political economy and caste system, the democratic electoral system has radically transformed the authority structure of the village. “*Chaudhar* is a thing of past”, was a statement made by several of the big landowners. Another respondent from a BC community articulated the general feeling of the landless castes towards the changing power structure in the following words:

No one cares for anyone simply because he thinks he is a *chaudhary*. *Chaudharies*, if they are, they must be in their homes. We do not care.

In other words there has been a clear decline in the power of the “individual” and “individual family” in local politics. “Power” has become much more fluid and no more seems to be determined, or shaped by caste and land alone. Though Jats were the big landowners in Village-II the sarpanch was from the caste of smaller landowners, Rors, who owned around six acres of land. Village-I had even a more interesting trajectory. As mentioned earlier, the big landowners of the village were all Punjabi Aroras. A Punjabi landowning family commanded a lot of authority in the village. S Ram, the patriarch of the family was also the sarpanch of the village for nearly 20 years. After he died his eldest son became the sarpanch. However, over the last 10 years or so, the sarpanch has neither been from this family or from any other family of the big Punjabi landowners. If the post was not reserved for SCs, the sarpanch was likely to be a small landowner from a caste like the Gujjars or brahmins.

What has brought this change about? What is the nature of the new power structure of the village? Does it have any influence on the development process?

Perhaps the most important factor that has brought this change about is the general disintegration of the “village community”. As I have argued elsewhere in relation to rural Punjab (Jodhka 2002), here also one can observe the processes of dissociation, distancing and autonomy. With the exception of a small number of those from the scavenging community, dalit families of the village were no longer engaged in traditional caste occupations. They went out of the village for work, and many of them had regular employment (Table 4). Their dependence on local landowners for credit had also declined. They had also moved away and distanced themselves from the agrarian economy of the village. Rarely, if ever, they participated in the ritual life of the village or those of other caste groups in the traditional mode on any occasion. In other words, they no longer saw themselves as being a part of the social order of caste. This gave them a sense of independence and political agency.

The other “poor” communities of the village, the so-called BCs, too had alternative sources of employment outside agriculture and many of them indeed went out of the village

for work. However, a small number of them had regular government employment.

Do the local poor feel politically empowered? The answer is both “yes” and “no”. As I have discussed above, the disintegration of the traditional hierarchical structure has indeed given them a sense of citizenship and they are quite aware of their political rights. They interact and participate in the larger world of caste and community politics at the regional level, which also gives them political resources that they can use in times of crisis. However, they are also acutely aware of their vulnerabilities that come with poverty and marginality. When I asked a respondent from the Jhimmar community as to why they did not contest elections and become sarpanches? His answer was very candid:

We are poor people. We know our votes are more than any other caste community of the village. However, we also know our limits (*aukat*). I want to live in this village. If I were to take your words seriously, I may even have to leave the village.

Some other respondents also pointed to the money one has to spend to contest an election for the position of sarpanch, “... at least a few lakhs..., who is going to fund it”.

Who has inherited power from the traditional patriarchs? Village politics today is integrated much more with regional politics and bureaucratic structures, and is shaped by a large number of factors. A new class of “political entrepreneurs”, who are not necessarily rich but are invariably from upper or dominant caste groups, seem to be the main actors in the emerging political scenario. Invariably young, in the age group of 25 to 45 years, they are required to have skills of coordinating with the outside world of politics and the development bureaucracy. But at the same time they also have to link themselves organically with different caste communities within the village and demonstrate to them their leadership qualities and ability to provide services, such as getting a ration card made or applying for a development scheme. Given their sense of pride and arrogance the old *chaudharies* find it difficult to do such things.

While some villagers complained about the local sarpanches being implicated in corruption cases and one of the sarpanches was in fact suspended on some charges of corruption in April 2008, they do have to be much more accountable and performance oriented than before. Development programmes meant for the poor indeed have better chances of being implemented in the emerging atmosphere of competitive politics at the village level, much better than the case 20 years earlier. This also shifts the local political discourse from power and dominance to service delivery and corruption.

Mobility and Marginalities

Who is rich and who is poor in the villages today? What are the patterns of social and economic mobility? How are the processes of social and economic change affecting different categories of the rural population? Even when the social and political grammar of village life has changed a great deal, land continues to be economically the most valued asset in rural north-west India.

REVIEW OF RURAL AFFAIRS

Over the last 10 years or so land prices have escalated by more than 10 times. An acre of land which could be sold for around three lakhs sometime in the late 1980s sold for 25 to 30 lakh rupees or even more in 2008-09. Not only has the value of land gone up, but the value of land products has also gone up. All this has happened very recently with the increase in prices of wheat and rice. Though their incomes and values of their assets have seen a sharp rise, the big landowners were never poor to begin with. After the green revolution, big landowners generated enough surpluses from their lands. Even after they invested in the required agricultural machinery, they had a surplus. Where were these surpluses invested?

Their main target had been to diversify the household economy. First and foremost priority for most of them was to invest in education of their wards. Over the years many of their children have been to schools, colleges and universities. Having studied outside they also found employment outside the village. While most of them continued to own their agricultural lands, they did not have the time or the inclination to be part-time farmers. The third generation of “green revolutionaries” does not want to have anything to do with agriculture. Even when they had not done well in their school and college, they wanted to stay away from agriculture. The younger kids seemed very clear about their dislike for agriculture. They want to move ahead in life, out of the village and beyond, to the life of the urban middle class and comforts of consumer goods.

Even while living in the village they had become urbanised. They owned cars, television sets, refrigerators and mobile phones. Nearly 4% of the households owned cars for personal use. More than 35% of the households owned motorbikes. Nearly 40% use refrigerators and had LPG connection. Television sets and mobile phones were even more common.

Table 11: Caste-wise Ownership of Luxury Goods (in number and as a % of the total)

Social Category	Car	Motorcycle	Refrigerator	LPG	TV	Telephone	Cell Phone	Computer	Total Households
Dalit	0 (00.00)	24 (13.15)	25 (13.66)	44 (20.04)	86 (46.95)	9 (04.92)	53 (28.96)	1 (00.55)	183 (100)
BC	1 (00.32)	32 (10.36)	50 (16.18)	61 (19.74)	171 (55.34)	11 (03.56)	97 (31.39)	2 (00.65)	309 (100)
DC	26 (07.93)	215 (65.55)	214 (65.24)	238 (72.56)	283 (86.28)	52 (15.85)	255 (77.74)	11 (03.35)	328 (100)
UC	12 (06.90)	96 (55.17)	114 (65.52)	142 (81.61)	151 (86.78)	31 (17.82)	138 (79.31)	6 (3.45)	174 (100)
Total	39 (03.92)	367 (36.92)	403 (40.54)	485 (48.79)	691 (69.52)	103 (10.36)	543 (54.63)	20 (02.01)	994 (100)

However, as evident from Table 11, there were significant variations across different caste groupings in ownership of luxury goods. Interestingly, despite the disparities, ownership of these “middle class luxuries” was not completely absent among the dalits and BCs. Even though proportionately much less than among the DCs and UCs, a good number of dalit and BC households also owned motorbikes, refrigerators, LPG connections and mobile phones. Inequalities were much more pronounced in “hard assets” such as landownership and urban property.

Expanding Vulnerabilities

The nature of changes taking place in the rural economy and social setting over the last 20 odd years has also created grounds for a new set of vulnerabilities. An important source of these vulnerabilities is the gradual but near complete disappearance of village common lands. Almost all the cultivable land is under cultivation in both the villages. Even the land owned by village panchayats in Village-1 (nearly 1,000 acres) had been encroached upon, mostly by dominant/upper caste cultivators, and was being cultivated for private gains. As has been argued by Jodha (1988), disappearance of commons makes the poor more vulnerable.

A related source of growing vulnerability of the poor is the changing patterns of cattle ownership in the two villages. Haryana has traditionally been a land of milk and ghee (clarified butter). A popular slogan describes Haryana as a land of milk and curd (*deshan mein desh Haryana, jit doodh dahi ka khana*). When I first did my fieldwork in these villages in 1988-89, keeping milch cattle was a norm across caste communities in these villages. The bigger farmers kept a large number of cattle, ranging from 5 to 40. Apart from being a source of nutrition, milk produced at home was also sold to the milk-vendor. Some of the farmers also raised calves and sold cattle to add to their incomes. The poorer households purchased buffaloes with integrated rural development programme (IRDP) schemes to add to their incomes. Only around 10% of the households did not keep cattle. Besides, some of the poorer households also raised sheep and made a living out of it.

Twenty years later this had completely changed. None of the households in any of the two villages kept sheep. Cattle ownership had also come down significantly. Around 42% of all the households did not keep any cattle. This figure was much larger for the dalit (69) and BC (57) households. While more than 90% of the households from the dominant caste kept cattle, nearly 80% of them kept only one or two. Twenty years earlier more than 70% households had more than two cattle and more than 40% of them had more than five cattle.

What has brought about this change? While there are several factors responsible for this change, the most critical is the disappearance of commons, the grazing grounds around the villages. “Where do we take them for grazing? There are no open lands left any more around the village and where do we have the money to buy fodder for them” was the typical response of the poorer respondents. The relatively well-off respondents also complained about the disappearance of the commons but their main problem was the difficulties in taking care of them:

They stay tied at home all day. Our women do not like working in the cattle shed any longer. Those from the traditional scavenging caste no longer come to clean the dung. Our own kids run away from this kind of work.

The implications of these changes are very important. Apart from providing nutrition and additional income to the household, milch cattle also worked as important buffers in times of crisis. For the landless poor, a cow or a buffalo was a source of additional income. The small/marginal farmers also earned additional income from selling milk, but equally important was the additional income they earned from selling a home-raised cow or buffalo. If a crop failed or money was needed for a wedding in the family, it sold a cow or buffalo and raised the additional money. The decline in cattle ownership expands the vulnerability of the poor and not so poor.

The Disappearing Community

It is not only the physical commons that have disappeared, the social and emotional commons are also rapidly disappearing from the rural landscape. Though the Indian village never had a community in the sense in which the category is understood in the western social sciences, there was a sense of collective identity that the villagers shared. The disintegration of the caste and hierarchical social order has also weakened this sense of collective identity significantly. It has different implications for different sets of populations and there can be different ways of looking at these changes. For those on the margins, particularly the ex-untouchable dalits, this change has only been for the better. It has freed them from the oppressive normative order of caste and the traditional valued frame of hierarchy. For the dominant and the upper castes, this has meant an end to their power and privilege. Not surprisingly, they were the ones who complained the most about the change. But, as discussed above, they wanted to move out of the village

and their younger generation was ready to move to other occupations. Some of them had already done so.

At another level, these changes have also generated a new sense of individuation in the village society and in the absence of viable economic opportunities and social support structures it has generated a new sense of anxiety, a kind of "ontological insecurity" (Giddens 1991). One of the visible manifestations of this is the rapidly growing popularity of some religious cults in the area. I was quite surprised to hear from several respondents about the extent of following that some of the babas and *deras* had in these villages. The two most popular religious sects in these villages were the Dera Sacha Sauda, located in Sirsa town of Haryana, around 100 km from the villages; and the Radha Soami Dera located in Beas in Punjab, around 350 km from the village. However, these *deras* had local branches, in the working of which the villagers took a lot of interest. Dera Sacha Sauda had nearly 500 followers from different caste groups from Village-1, most of them relatively poor. Even though caste identity and boundaries were carefully protected, this neo-religiosity seemed to be also producing a new sense of community among the members of these congregations through frequent participation and pilgrimage.

At another level, this "disintegration" of the community and the process of individualisation also produce a neo-liberal sensibility. Desire for mobility, growing reach of electronic media, cell phones and culture of consumption brings in the lifestyles of the urban middle classes to the village, a subject of much significance with multiple implications – social, economic and political.

NOTES

- 1 While the paper presents an understanding of the transformation over the past 20 years, I do not have quantitative data for comparing dimensions of change presented through tables in this paper. While I had resources to undertake a survey of the two villages during my revisit, the fieldwork during the 1980s was primarily qualitative, carried out for my PhD dissertation with limited resources.
- 2 The Jats of Haryana were included in the list of OBCs 2014 by the outgoing UPA-II Central Government in 2014 (Jodhka 2014).

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