What's Happening to the Village

Revisiting Rural Life and Agrarian Change in Haryana

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Abstract

Based on a revisit to two villages of Haryana after a gap of 20 years (1988-89 and 2008-09), the 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 in the context of Green Revolution technology, and later, the introduction of large-scale industrial projects in the area, it 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 the relationship of villages with neighboring urban settlements in terms of employment and aspirations; and the emerging nature of power relations in the local level political institutions.

I Introduction

The success of Green Revolution technology during the 1960s and 1970s, though confined only to some pockets of India, generated a great deal of excitement. 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 newly emergent rural elite. Looking back, it appears as though it was a surprising thing to have happened. Deliberations on Indian agriculture in development circles until the middle of 1960s were hopelessly negative and centered mostly on subjects like technological backwardness of Indian agriculture and the social conservativeness of the peasantry. It was this economic and social context that was held responsible for the prolonged stagnation of rural economy. The perpetual scarcity of food that produced frequent famines and social disparities were all consequences of this state of backwardness. Initiatives taken by the Government of India soon after independence to ameliorate the depressing scenario had not been very successful. The Land Reform legislations had by and large been thwarted by vested interests and the Community Development Programme had almost completely failed to achieve its professed objectives.

One of the representative conceptualizations of this mainstream discourse on Indian agriculture during the 1950s could be found in the early writings of Daniel Thorner. The backwardness of Indian agriculture, he argued, could be attributed to the historically evolved structure of social and power relations in the countryside which were unique to India. Conceptualizing the stagnating effects of the structural framework of Indian village, he argued:

> …. complex of legal, economic, and social relations uniquely typical of the Indian countryside served to produce an effect which I should like to call that of *build-in "depressor"*. Through the operation of this multi-faceted "depressor," Indian agriculture continued to be characterized by low capital intensity and antiquated methods. Few of the actual tillers were left with an efficacious interest in modernization …. The pattern of land-holding, cultivation, and product-sharing operated to hold down agricultural production (Thorner 1956:12 emphasis added).

Seen in this context Byres sounds quite right in saying that the success of Green Revolution brought the discourse on Indian agriculture out of the 'limbo of cow dung economics' and the 'dismissive contempt' with which development professionals saw it (Byres 1972: 100). As the agrarian economy began to show some dynamism, new types of questions began to be raised and debated. Scholars started collecting empirical data on various aspects of the changes taking place on the ground. Though everyone did not turn into its admirer, or become a "green revolutionary", the fact that something

hitherto unknown was happening in the pockets where the new agrarian technology had been introduced was widely recognized.

Growing use of high yielding varieties of seed, chemical fertilizers, pesticides and new machines raised productivity of land by several folds and nearly solved India's national problem of food scarcity in a rather short time. From the simple concerns of elementary economics, such as who benefited from the new technology and who did not, to the complex questions of social and cultural change in the Indian countryside, all were examined empirically and debated with passion in the pages of journals like the *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW) and the *Journal of Peasant Studies* (JPS). The famous 'mode of production debate' among economists and anthropologists of Marxist persuasion on the nature of emerging social relations of production in Indian agriculture, was a direct outcome of this growing new interest of social science scholars in the changing rural scenario in the wake of the Green Revolution.

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 landowners from the locally dominant caste groups who had traditionally been landowners and cultivators. The locally dominant castes consolidated their position in the regional power structure and acquired a new sense of confidence. The rise of dominant caste farmers in the 1970s also set in motion a phase of populist politics at the regional and national levels. The newly emerged agrarian elite did not speak only for "his" own caste or class. He spoke on behalf of the entire village. His identification with the village was not just political or that of a representative of a section of the village. He saw himself to be the natural spokesperson of the village.

However, this excitement about the Green Revolution and modernization of Indian agriculture did not last for too long. By the mid-1980s the Indian country-side began to show a new kind of restiveness. Interestingly, this restiveness was pronounced particularly in the pockets that had experienced the Green Revolution. The surplus producing farmers began to mobilize themselves into unions demanding subsidies on farm inputs and higher prices for their produce. Market economy, they argued, was inherently against the farm sector and favoured the urban industry and 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 mobilized themselves in different parts of India quite successfully for over a decade. Though the movements had a local character in terms of leadership and strategies of mobilization, they coordinated their activities across regions. In a sense they were quite successful in getting their agenda accepted at the level of the national politics. The farmers' movements of the 1980s also signaled the rise of a new social category of rural people who had prospered with Green Revolution and were connected closely to the market economy and saw their fate 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 (Upadhya 1988; Rutten 1995; Omvedt 1992). 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.

Twenty Years Back

It was around this time when agrarian issues had 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 the Karnal district of

Haryana. Karnal had been a successful IADP district and typically represented the prosperous agrarian terrain of northwest 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. First were the general questions relating to the nature of changes taking place in the structure of rural credit markets. My second set of questions related to the nature of indebtedness among the farmers, particularly their growing involvement with the market. How did their relations with the *arhtiyas* in the marketing centre structure their choices on farming? The third set of questions related to the role that credit played in institutionalizing 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 the sociologists and social anthropologists, they rarely looked at the kind of questions I had identified for my research. Most of the empirical work on agrarian change in India had been done by economists, mostly using the framework of political economy. While the economists researching on agrarian change worked with the category of 'class' for classifying and analyzing rural social structure, sociologists and social anthropologists were preoccupied with 'caste'. Even when caste seemed a relevant factor in the study of 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 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 over-determined 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.

This text-book conceptualization 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 sociologists and social anthropologists, economists in India had also been preoccupied much more with state policy and development related questions. Though mainstream economists did not focus too much on relational structures, questions of poverty and social disparities had been among the core concerns with them.

Most of my doctoral work was published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* (Jodhka 1994; 1995b; 1995c; 1995d). The first paper I published

was on the changing nature of debt dependencies in relation to the various forms of labour relations. My specific focus was on the changing patterns of attached labour. Social science literature had looked at the phenomenon of attached labour in post-Green Revolution agriculture from several different perspectives. First were those who believed that with the development of capitalism in agriculture and modernization all forms of traditional structures and dependency relations would disappear. Jan Breman had described this as a process of de-patronization where labourers were not only freed from traditional ties but they also lost the security of patronage they had earlier enjoyed (Breman 1974). Some others looked at it as a process of formalization or casualization of labour.

However, empirical research showed that attached labour not only did not disappear from Green Revolution pockets but in some cases it actually became more pronounced, albeit in different forms. Similarly the phenomenon was also interpreted differently. Terence Byres, for example, did not find anything wrong with it and argued that this form of labour only fulfilled the changing demands of the new agrarian economy, and could work as a means of differentiating labour. Attached labour, he speculated, will be required when greater mechanization will reduce the need for employing casual labour and instead the capitalist farmer would prefer 'one attached labourer, who is paid a regular and probably high wage and who is trained to look after the mechanical implement'. This "privileged class of attached labour", he expected would also get to participate in the prosperity of the "Green Revolution" (1972:105-09). Several years later Rudra made a similar argument when he compared the semi-attached labour employed by the capitalist farmers of West-Bengal with the regular employees of the organized sector (Rudra 1987).

Another set of scholars saw it as a form of unfreedom. Attached labour was for them a form of bondage and slavery. Amit Bhaduri, for example, saw in it an evidence of continuity of pre-capitalist relations of production even in the Green Revolution pockets of India. Some others, such as Brass, underlined the point that their presence in post-Green Revolution agriculture was simply an evidence of the fact that capitalism can be pretty comfortable with slave labour as long as it helps in accumulation. Brass had, for example argued that the employer farmers in post-Green Revolution Haryana actively worked towards decomposing labour through the mechanism of debt using short and

long term labour-tying arrangements, which amounted to a process of what he described as "deproletarianization" (Brass 1990).

Attached labour indeed existed in my study villages though the form and content of this relationship had changed substantially and had become quite formalized, a point that had also been made earlier by Sheila Bhalla (Bhalla 1976). The attached labourers rarely saw themselves as being a "privileged class" or as "permanent employees" of the organized sector. Elements of unfreedom were also present in their relationship with the farmers. However, I could not agree fully with Brass on his conceptualization of attached labour as a form of slavery, or that labour-tying was a growing phenomenon. The overall change in the social framework of agricultural production had opened-up several choices for the labouring classes.

There were many cases where after working as attached labourers for some time the labourers had been able to move out of the relationship. The growing integration of the village in the broader market economy and the increasing availability of alternative sources of employment outside agriculture along with the changing political and ideological environment had weakened the hold of the landowner over the labourers. Labourers intensely disliked working in an attached relationship and chose to work only when they had no other source of mobilizing credit. They also tried to come out of the relationship as soon as they could. There was also a general decline in the number of labourers willing to work on annual contracts in the three villages[1]. Recognizing the significance of these processes and their influence on relations on the ground I conceptualized contemporary forms of attached labour as a system of "labour mortgage", an unfree relationship, but internally fragmented and frequently contested in nature (Jodhka 1994).

The New Context and Research Questions

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 marginalized agriculture in the development discourse on India. Social science

[1] This paper also generated an interesting debate with Tom Brass (see Brass 1995; 1996; Jodhka 1995; 1996)

research on 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 twenty first century a new discourse on Indian agriculture began to take shape. The preoccupation this time was with "crisis". While Indian economy was growing at a much faster pace, the agricultural 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 NSSO. It was in this context that I decided to revisit two of my three study villages.

However, the questions I had in mind during my "revisit" to the Haryana villages were not quite similar to the ones with which I had gone to these villages 20 years back. Over the last 20 years the face of social science research had changed significantly in India and globally and so had my orientation to social science research. For example, I now look at the question of caste much more seriously than I did earlier. My questions were rather obvious: what exactly was happening to the village and agriculture? Has the village really been socially and economically stagnant over the last twenty years or has it continued 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 do the cultivating farmers of different categories relate to agriculture as an occupation? Who has moved out of agriculture over the last 20 odd years 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 do Dalit groups relate to agriculture? How has the rural power structure changed over the last two decades?

The Fieldwork

I began my fieldwork with open-ended interviews with some individuals and groups of villagers in different localities. After getting an idea of the villages I hired three local researchers. Two of them were school teachers and one taught in a local college. I had a few sessions with them on the objectives of the study and the kind of information I was looking for. I asked them to begin with a listing of the households while I worked on preparing a village schedule and a household schedule.

With the help of the household schedule we did a household census survey of the two villages. After completing the survey, I again did interviews with villagers from different social categories. Some of these interviews, such as with the attached labourers, were done individually and some others in groups settings.

A good proportion of my respondents recognized me and remembered the time I had spent in these villages 20 years back. I introduced myself as a university professor who is hoping to write a book on the social and economic changes taking place in the villages. However, the villagers have a particular understanding of researchers like me, who ask them development related questions. They do see some possibility of state policy emerging out of such researches and tend to fashion their responses accordingly. I could not speak to some of my core informants talking to whom had been very useful last time I was there. Some of them were not alive any longer and some had left the village.

The Two Villages

The idea of a typical Indian village, which represented the traditional social structure and cultural values of the Indian society in a microcosm, is a complete misnomer. It was a construction of colonial ethnography and served their political interests (Cohn 1987; Inden 1990). The project of village studies initiated by social anthropologists during the 1950s and 1960 further reinforced this idea (Jodhka 1998). Historically Indian villages varied significantly in size and in their social fabric. Their character is determined more by regional agrarian histories and local trajectories of social, economic and ecological processes. No single village, or a group of villages, can represent the entire 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 industrialization and technology. Though the two study villages are still sufficiently far 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 kilometers from the town of Panipat and other (village-II) around 17 kilometers. Both are multi-caste villages with diverse caste communities living within the villages and both experienced Green Revolution during the 1970s.

It was around the mid 1970s that 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 kilometres. 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 villagers.

Demographics and Changing Social Ecology

As I walked around the villages, the first thing that struck me was the growth in 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 out-migrations, the absolute population of the villages had grown quite a bit. Table 1 below gives us a fairly good idea about the extent of change in population of the two villages over the last twenty years.

Physical and demographic expansion of the villages also has several long term sociological implications. Though most of the *baras* (localities) were

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

Village	*No. of Households*	*% increase*	*Total Population*	*% increase*	*S.C. Population*	*% of SCs to total Population*	*% increase in SC population*
I	636	77.65	3,783	67.68	750	19.83	123.60
	(358)		(2,256)		(331)	(14.67)	
II	617	71.86	3536	39.32	584	16.52	62.22
	(359)		(2,538)		(360)	(14.18)	

Source: Census of India 2001 and 1981 (Figures in bracket are taken from Census of India 1981)

still around caste lines and most people lived in the *bara* of their own, the village had lost its 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, they were not all Dalits. In fact one of them was a Brahmin. Another one was Jhimmar (a local OBC caste) 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 have grown demographically but the growth of village-I has been more than village-II. While 20 years back village-II was slightly bigger than village-I, village-I is 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 population in Village I. This has happened because of the inclusion of an additional community of Badis, or Bajigars, into the list of Scheduled Castes.

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 is 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 have come to recognize 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 Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes that have become 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.

The Table 1 above provides us with a figure for the households as it was calculated during 2001 Census enumerations. However, our experience of ascertaining this number has been 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 1000 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 households. Given their local context they too were sure that the figure will 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 respectively from the two villages.

Why does 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" entitles them for certain benefits and the amount of benefits would obviously go up if the

units are reported more. Interestingly, the operational category used by the local administration for poverty survey was "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

Twenty years back when I worked in these villages, I presumed land ownership and non-ownership was 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 much of the literature I read on agrarian social structure had been produced by economists.

However, over the years, social sciences in India have become much more sensitive to several other social variables and indicators of development. While 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 manners in which people construct their own notions of "well-being".

As I began to speak to different people in my villages I realized that my respondents, though quite knowledgeable about the larger processes of change and economic realities, looked at the experience of the last twenty 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 communities 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 twenty years back.

Village-I has 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 partition related violence. The term "locals" was thus coined by the Punjabi settlers 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 twenty years back. However, over the years the term refugee had been replaced by Punjabi. Only some older respondents still used the term refugee for the Punjabis.

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

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

The village also has a good number of Brahmin households (30). With the exception of one family, which came to the village from Western Punjab, they are all "locals". The Brahmins of the village do 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 is rarely seen as a dignified identity (see Tandon 1961; Saberwal 1972; 1973; Jodhka 2002). Most of them are small landowners and tend to see themselves as such, closer to the *chhote log* (poor and the marginals) of the village than to the *bade log* (rich and powerful).

The largest chunk of the population is in the category of "backward castes" (nearly 125), which are now listed amongst the OBCs. While "OBC"

has not yet become a popular category of description in these villages, the word "backwards" has been in usage for a long time. The state government has had a quota of jobs for the designated "backward caste" 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 as Kashyap Rajputs) are the largest caste group in the category of OBCs in village-I. In fact with 99 respondent households they are the single largest caste group in the village. Since a large majority of them are landless, they work as casual labourers in the village or outside in the neighboring towns and industries. Some of them are also employed in regular jobs outside the village. They are among the poorest of the communities in the two villages.

The second major community in this category is that of Kumhar. They now call themselves Prajapats. Traditionally, they were potters. They also kept donkeys for carriage work. Their traditional occupations have over the years become redundant and they too have mostly been landless. But unlike the Jhimmars they have been more enterprising. While some of them have been leasing-in land on share basis from the local farmers, others have invested in carts and trucks. However, the success stories are not too many and a majority of them continue to be struggling on the border-lines of poverty.

The village has several Scheduled Caste (SC) communities. The most prominent of them are the two traditional communities of the scavengers (the Balmikis) (48 households) and the Chamars (36 households). Quite like the "lower" OBCs, the Dalits too have changed their names. The Balmikis were earlier known as Chuhras. Though non-Dalit villagers still used their old caste names in conversations with me, they are mostly addressed as Balmikis. Similarly, the Chamars are increasingly called Harijans by the villagers. They too prefer the title of Harijans over Chamar, though they have increasingly begun to call themselves as Ravidasis. Many of the villagers are familiar with the category Dalit, but very few of them use it in everyday conversation. Apart from these two major groups, there are also some other SCs. Most prominent of them are the Badis or Bajigars. Unlike the other SC communities, Badis have

never been an untouchable caste. They have been living in a settlement away from the village but interact with all castes without hesitation.

The village also has several small groups listed as OBCs and SCs. They include the Dhobis, Jogis, Nais, Badhais and several other Dalits and non-Dalit servicing castes.

Village-II too has a similar caste profile. Quite like village-I it has two major landowning caste communities, the Jats (92 households) and the Rors (104). Much of the agricultural land in the village is owned by these two "dominant castes". Like the Punjabi Aroras of village-I, the bigger landowners of village-II too belong mostly to one community, the Jats. However, unlike the Punjabis, the Jats have 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 has a much larger number of Brahmins (60 households). Here also Brahmins are 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 is that of the Jhimars (43) though they are not the largest community in the village. Jogis (36) and Kumhars or Prajapats (25) are the other major OBC caste groups of the village. The social and economic profile of these communities in village-II is quite similar to their status in village-I. Same is the case with Dalit groups. Here too the two major communities are 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 includes the Brahmins, Banias, Aroras and Rajputs. I have clubbed Gujjars with the DCs because of their local status. Table 2 below gives us an idea about the caste composition of the village population as shown in our

Table 2
Village-wise Caste Composition of Respondent Households

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)

survey and as per our categories. The proportion of Dalits is more or less equal in both the villages. However, the proportion of BCs is significantly larger in village-I. The proportion of ritually upper castes is also larger in village-I, which is primarily because of the Punjabi Aroras in village, who can also be clubbed with the dominant caste because a good number of them are in fact cultivators.

Family, Gender and Some other Aspects of Social Life

Family continues to be an important institution in the two villages. Almost every one lives in a family. A few individuals live alone but that is rarely out of choice. As expected, most families and households are headed by men. Woman headed households are rare and in most cases it happens only when the male member dies or leaves home. Unlike some other parts of India, not many men have gone away from home to work. Even when they work outside, they get back home in the evening. Size of the households is also not very small. Nearly 75 percent households have five or more members living together and 28 percent households have 7 or more members living together. Incidence of joint household is also not insignificant. Nearly 35 percent of all the households are joint households. Their proportion is a little higher among the landowning dominant castes than for the BCs and SCs.

The two villages typically represent the patriarchal landscape of northwest India. According to the Census data of 2001 the sex ratio in the two villages was 894 and 890 respectively, well below the national average. At the first glance nothing much seemed to have changed in the family life. Women continue to be invisible from the public sphere. It was only after a month of interaction with the villagers that I came to know about the fact that a woman had actually won the seat for village sarpanch during the last elections in village-I and that it is currently a reserved seat for a 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 have changed. For example fewer women wore purdah and educating a girl child has become much more acceptable. Sending daughters to school is much more common across communities than it was 20 years back. In fact, there are several families who have sent their daughters out of the village for education. They live in hostels on their own and aspire for careers, and/or a more dignified middle class urban life.

Education is valued. Both villages have government schools up to class 12th. Village-I also has a separate school for girls up to class 8th. These villages also have private schools run by religious trusts. A good number of children also go to neighboring towns to study. As per the official data of 2001 the literacy rate for village-I was 66 percent (77 percent for men and 55 percent for women) and for village-II 67 percent (78 percent for men and 54 for women). Though nearly 30 percent of our respondents were still illiterate, there were only 4 percent households with no educated members and nearly 80 percent households had 3 or more educated members in the family.

Economic Life

Until some time 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 livelihood. 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 organized.

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 back the two villages still had a predominantly agrarian character. Agriculture was at the centre of 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 for 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 was more visible in village-I than it was in village-II but the pattern was similar. Less than 30 percent of all households identified cultivation as their primary occupation. This was even lesser in village-I (23 percent). As is evident from Table 3 the largest proportion of the households is in the category of labourers. However,

Table 3
Primary Occupation of the Respondent Households

Primary Occupation	*I*	*II*	*Total*
Cultivators	117 (23.26)	172 (35.03)	289 (29.07)
Labours	206 (40.9)	153 (31.16)	359 (36.11)
Shopkeepers/business	39 (07.75)	45 (09.16)	84 (08.45)
Regular service/govt. job	108 (21.4)	63 (12.8)	171 (17.20)
No clear arrangement	33 (06.55)	58 (11.8)	91 (09.15)
Total	503 (100)	491 (100)	994 (100)

they are not necessarily agricultural labourers. In fact, a large majority of them earn most of their livelihood from working outside agricultural sector and only occasionally work on land, a point I will return to later.

More important perhaps is the number of people who have employment outside the village (17.20 percent). This becomes particularly interesting when we see in relation to caste. Landownership and cultivation continues to be a prerogative of the dominant and upper castes in the two villages. Nearly 92 percent of all the cultivators were from these caste communities. In contrast more than 80 percent 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 below, a good proportion of households in each category listed primary occupation outside agriculture. Interestingly, proportionately the number of Dalits with regular jobs is the highest and that of the BCs the lowest. Though they have both been poor and lacking in social and cultural capital required for securing a regular job, Dalits have been able get these jobs partly because of their statutory quotas in education and employment being more effective than that for the BCs.

Apart from economic activity, the number of working members in a household also determines the social and economic well being of a household. Notably, nearly half of our respondent households have more than one full-time working member in their households and in some cases the number of working members in the household is as high as five. Further, the pattern across caste groups is almost the same. There are also some households where there is no full time working member in the household.

Table 4
Caste-wise Primary Occupation of the Respondent Households

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

An important aspect of this is the fact that households in rural Haryana are increasingly becoming pluri-active (Lindberg 2005; Jodhka 2006). Different members of the household pursue different occupations. Further, more than 15 percent (152) of the respondents also reported having a secondary occupation either within the village or outside. In most cases the secondary occupation is a small business, either some kind of shop within the village, or outside in the neighboring village.

A striking change in the two villages over the last two decades is 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 con-

Table 5
Number of Working Members in the Respondent Households

	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*None*	*Total*
Dalit	82	65	24	5	4	3	183
BC	144	109	37	10	6	3	309
DC	162	99	40	13	6	8	328
UC	95	46	15	4	2	12	174
Total	483	319	116	32	18	26	994

sumption. Most of these shops were owned and run by the local Banias or the Punjabi Aroras. This has changed significantly over the years. The number of shops in village-I is 78 and in village-II is 64. More significantly the local market has also witnessed diversity and differentiation of various kinds. They are being run by members of all castes and communities. Only 32 percent of all the shops are now owned and run by the upper castes that used to have a near complete monopoly over the local market in the past. Interestingly, even though none of our Dalit respondents reported shop-keeping as the main occupation of the household, there were a few shops being run by Dalits. However, caste element continues to be significant in the local market. Not only is the proportion of Dalit shopkeepers much lesser than their numbers, their shops are also either located in Dalit localities or they provide some specific kinds of manual services, such as cycle or shoe repair.

The villages now have all kinds of odd services available within, ranging from fertilizers and pesticides to jewelry and electrical goods and their repairs. This indeed reflects the growing consumer culture in the villages and the fact that villagers have much more disposable incomes in their hands. Growth of local market is 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 disintegrate twenty years back, the services traditionally provided by local caste groups had not become completely commodified as is the case today. Now there is a shop for almost every service and there are newer services and commodities for which there are specialized outlets. Some shops provide multiple services and keep different categories of goods under one roof. For example, one could buy shoes from the kirana shop, or fertilizer bags from a shop that also sells cement bags.

Table 6
Caste-wise Shop-ownership in Study Villages

Caste of shopkeepers	*Village-I*	*Village-II*	*Total*
UC	35	11	46 (32.39)
DC	17	19	36 (25.35)
BC	22	25	47 (33.09)
Dalit	4	9	13 (9.15)
Total	78	64	142 (100)

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	11
Cobbler shops	1	2	3
Ration shops	32	27	59
STDs	3	4	10
Cement/Brick Shops	2	1	3
Liquor shops	1	1	2
Tent Houses	1	0	1
Mechanical (cycle repair)	2	4	6
Electric shops	3	2	6
Vegetable shops	4	0	4
Jewelry 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	1
Cable networks	1	0	1
Sweet shops	4	1	2
Hardware shops	2	3	3
Flour mill	3	1	1
Furniture shop	0	1	1
Tea stall	0	1	1
Fertilizer store	1	1	1

Agriculture

Technologically speaking, there has not been much change over the last two decades in the manner in which agrarian economy is organized in the two villages. Despite the growing shadow of industry over the two villages, not

much land has been lost to "outsiders" so far. On the contrary, land under cultivation has grown in size as the banjar land is improved for cultivation. In village-I most of the panchayat land, which was lying fallow, has also been encroached by the local farmers and is being regularly cultivated.

As was the practice two decades back, the two main crops in the region are still wheat and paddy. Some villagers used to also grow sugarcane but not any longer. Some farmers also grow a third crop, peas or lentils. Use of fertilizers and pesticides has continued to grow. Farmers have almost completely stopped making their own seeds and depend entirely on the market for supply of hybrid seeds. Their irrigational needs are met by the canal water (around one-third) and the tube-wells (two-third). Though water table has not gone down much the farmers install tube-wells using a new technology, the submersible pumps. These are more expensive but they provide a better flow of water.

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

Use of combine harvesters had grown at the cost of threshers for the harvesting of wheat. Though initially there was some resistance to their use because combine harvesters only picked-up the seed and left the plant on the field, which is a useful source for cattle fodder. Threshing machines were preferred because they also processed the plant and converted it into hay (used for cattle fodder). However, the arrival of a new machine called reaper has to an extent solved this problem. The reaper plucks the plant left behind by the combine and processes it into hay. Mechanical harvesting machines are available for paddy as well, but they do not work for the longer 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 mechanization is a steady decline of demand for human labour for doing agriculture.

Landholdings and Agrarian Social Structure

Despite the declining significance of agriculture in national life, it continues to employ largest numbers of working Indians. Though this holds good for the two villages, there is clearly a declining trend in the number of people working on land. As mentioned above, less than 30 percent of the households in the two villages reported agriculture or farming as their primary occupation. Also there are significant disparities in land ownership patterns. As evident from Table 8 below 66 percent of the households in village-I and 48 percent 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 Land Ownership in the Two Study Villages

	No Land	*Less Than Two Acre*	*2-5 Acres*	*5-10 Acres*	*10-25 Acres*	*25-50 Acres*	*50+ Acres*	*No Response*	*Total*
Village-I	333	25	101	30	7	5	1	1	503
	(66.2)	(4.97)	(20.1)	(5.96)	(1.39)	(0.99)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(100)
Village-II	235	36	130	50	30	7	2	1	491
	(47.9)	(7.33)	(26.5)	(10.2)	(6.10)	(1.42)	(0.40)	(0.20)	(100)
Total	568	61	231	80	37	12	3	2	994
	(57.1)	(6.13)	(23.2)	(8.04)	(3.72)	(1.20)	(0.30)	(0.20)	(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 the Table 9 nearly 95 percent of the Dalits and BCs are completely landless. On the contrary only around 12 percent of the dominant caste (DC) households are landless.

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.

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	2	6	0	0	0	0	1	183
	(95.08)	(1.09)	(3.28)					(0.55)	(100)
BC	293	4	9	3	0	0	0	0	309
	(94.82)	(1.29)	(2.91)	(0.97)					(100)
DC	39	27	156	61	35	7	2	1	328
	(11.89)	(8.23)	(47.56)	(18.6)	(10.67)	(2.13)	(0.60)	(0.3)	(100)
UC	62	28	60	16	2	5	1	0	174
	(35.63)	(16.09)	(34.48)	(9.19)	(1.14)	(2.87)	(0.6)		(100)
Total	568	61	231	80	37	12	3	2	994
	(57.14)	(6.13)	(23.24)	(8.05)	(3.72)	(1.21)	(0.3)	(0.2)	(100)

Land, Labour and Caste

Twenty years back agrarian relations in these villages had already changed quite radically. Farmers no longer gave their land on lease to tenants on a long term basis. Relationship with attached labourers had also become completely formalized (Bhalla 1976; Jodhka 1994). Most of the labour needs of the farmers were fulfilled by casual and contractual labour, mostly on a fixed cash rate. Though a good amount of peak season work was done by migrant labour from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, local Dalits and other landless labourers also worked on farms. 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 up to 5 attached labourers. With exceptions of one or two, all attached labourers came from the village. Only the locals could be trusted with an advance wage.

Though mechanization 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 expanding 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 has changed considerably over the last twenty years. First and foremost there has been a clear decline in the demand for labour over the last twenty years and this has happened because of the second phase of mechanization (discussed above).

Decline has not only been on demand but also of supply. The local Dalits have nearly completely withdrawn from the local agrarian economy. Nearly all of the Dalits have been landless and they no longer like working as labourers in the farms. As I had earlier observed in Punjab villages, Dalits do not wish to work on land with cultivating farmers primarily for social and political reasons (Jodhka 2002). Working with farmers implies accepting their domination and power. By refusing to work on land Dalits express their dissent against the traditional structure of patron-client ties. Even if it means cycling to the town for casual labour and no higher wage or secure income, a Dalit does not like working on land. Some of them also told me that work on farm was much more demanding and number of working hours invariably exceeded 8 hours.

This distancing of the Dalit from the agrarian economy has of course been made possible by the availability of alternative sources of employment in the industries nearby and the vibrant urban centre of Panipat not being so far off.

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

The two villages still had attached labourers and they were 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 back there would have been nearly 70 such labourers. Village-I still has around 25 to 30 attached labourers. Most of them are employed by Punjabi farmers. Gujjar farmers no longer hired attached labourers. 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 has not changed much (see Jodhka 2012).

Tenancy Arrangements

Though the land market has been rather sluggish, not all landowners are cultivating farmers. Two sets of landowners have been moving out of direct cultivation; first are those who are left with small plots of land and where the main working members have either found a job outside or there is no one in the family with the capacity to work on land. Second is the category of relatively bigger farmers who have diversified into other occupations but continue to live in the village, or want to keep an active relationship with the land. Such landowners lease-out their lands, invariably to smaller enterprising landowners. In such cases land is mostly leased-out on annual cash rent, which has recently gone-up from around 13,000 or 14,000 to around 18,000 to 20,000 rupees. This phenomenon has come to be known as "reverse tenancy" (Brar and Gill: 2002) which is a misnomer because the land is leased-out not only by the big landowners to small landowners but also by small and marginalized land owners to enterprising farmers. Apart from being enterprising such farmers also require sufficient funds to pay cash to the landowner in advance for the year. They also have to have some risk bearing capacity. A bad crop due to weather or pest can mean a complete disaster. A rough estimate suggests that nearly 20 to 25 percent of all the land is being cultivated under such arrangements.

Another form of tenancy arrangement, which is preferred by relatively more active landowners, is what can be described as labour share-cropping. Many of the middle size farmers, and some big farmers, preferred leasing their lands out on share basis to the labouring households, which work on the farm with their family and get one-fourth share of the entire yield. Such arrangements are mostly for a single crop, paddy, which requires intensive input of labour. The labourer in this arrangement has to also share one-fourth of the expense, which is invariably paid by the farmer and deducted from the total yield at the end of the season. Some of these labourers are also indebted to the farmers whose lands they cultivate but they are not tied to the farmer like an attached labourer. The farmer, though continues to take interest in the farm, does not have to worry about the everyday work on the farm.

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 land and the rest are proletarianized (Lenin 1956). Also there was no move towards corporate agriculture or contract farming. Only occasionally some farmers are 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 is being sold or purchased, unless it is acquired by industry or the state. The smaller farmers, who find their holdings unviable, are getting out of agriculture but without selling-off their land. Land sales happen only when the entire family moves out and is unable to keep in touch with the village. Some of the middle and bigger landowners, who have found viable urban employment, also prefer leasing their land out to selling it.

Interestingly, though there is still a strong sense of attachment to land, agriculture is not seen as a desirable occupation. The younger generation across caste groups dislikes farming. When we asked our respondents about their preferences for practicing agriculture by their children and grandchildren, only around 8 percent of our respondents answered in the affirmative. Surprisingly, responses to the question were quite similar across caste and occupational categories. Dalits and UCs (5 to 6 percent) were least interested in their families staying in farming but even cultivating farmers of DCs (9 percent) did not want their children to practice agriculture. Only among BCs was there some desire to continue with agriculture (11 percent).

However, these villagers are less opposed to living in the village (see Table 10). Many of the households, or individual members of the households who have jobs outside, in the neighboring towns, continue to live in the village. Cities are invariably seen as polluted and expensive to live in.

Not only has social and economic organization of the village changed, but the meaning of village for its residents has also undergone a complete change. Choosing to live in the village does not imply any kind of commitment to, or identification with the village and its ethos. The social order of 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? The 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

Table 10
Perceptions on Preferred Place of Residence for Children and Grandchildren

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

1959; Dumont 1970). Introduction of democratic political process and adult franchise helped the landowning middle level agrarian caste groups to 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 mobilizations among Dalit castes (Jodhka 2006b).

Twenty years back, dominance in both villages was clearly located in caste and land. The 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 the local politics twenty years back.

However, on the ground 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 the introduction of a representative system of electing local leaders came into force the big landowners, 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 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 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 are the big landowners in village-II the sarpanch is from the caste of smaller landowners, Rors, who owns around 6 acres of land. Village-I has had even a more interesting trajectory. As mentioned above, the big landowners of the village are all Punjabi Aroras. A Punjabi landowning family commanded a lot of authority in the village. Mr. S. Ram, 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 Punjabi big landowners. If the post is not reserved for SCs, the sarpanch is likely to be a small landowner from a caste like Gujjar or Brahmin.

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 could 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 go out of the village for work, and many of them have regular employment (see table 4 above). Their dependence on local landowners for credit has also declined. They have also moved away or distanced from the agrarian economy

of the village and they rarely, if ever participate in the ritual life of the village, or the other caste groups on any occasion. In other words, they no longer see themselves as being a part of the social order of caste. This has also given them a sense of independence and political agency.

The other "poor" communities of the village, the so-called BCs, too have alternative sources of employment outside agriculture and many of them indeed go out of the village for work. However, a smaller number have 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 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 given a set of political resources 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 Jimmar 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 the bureaucratic structure 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, they are required to have skills of coordinating with the outside world of politics and development bureaucracy. But at the same they also have to link themselves organically with different caste communities and demonstrate to them their leadership abilities. Given their sense of pride and arrogance the old *chaudharies* find it difficult to do such a thing.

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 the month of April 2008, they do have to be much more accountable and performance oriented. Development programmes indeed have better chances of being implemented in the emerging atmosphere of competitive politics at the village level.

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 northwest India.

Over the last ten years or so land prices have escalated by more than 10 times. An acre of land which could be sold for around 3 lakhs sometime in the late 1990s now sells for 25 to 30 lakh rupees or even more. 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 sudden 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. After the Green Revolution big landowners generated enough surpluses from their lands. Even after they invested in the required agricultural machinery they had surplus. Where were these surpluses invested?

Their main target has been to diversify the household economy. The first and foremost priority for most of them has been to invest in the education of their wards. Over the years many of their children have been to schools, colleges and universities. Having studied outside they have also found employment outside the village. While most of them continue to own their agricultural lands, they do not have the time or the inclination to even be a part-time farmer. The third generation of "Green Revolutionaries" does not want to do anything with agriculture. Even when they have not done well in their school and college, they want 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 the comforts of consumer goods.

Table 11
Caste-wise Ownership of Luxury Goods

Caste Communities	*Car*	*Motor Cycle*	*Refrigerator*	*LPG*	*TV*	*Telephone*	*Mobile*	*Computer*
Dalit	0	24	25	44	86	9	53	1
BC	1	32	50	61	171	11	97	2
DC	26	215	214	238	283	52	255	11
UC	12	96	114	142	151	31	138	6
Total	39	367	403	485	691	103	543	20

Even while living in the village they have become urbanized. They own cars, television sets, refrigerators and mobile phone. Nearly four percent of the households owned cars for personal use. More than 35 percent of the households owned motorbikes. Nearly 40 percent had refrigerators and LPG connection. Television sets and mobile phones were even more popular. While more than 50 percent of the households had mobile phones, and nearly 70 percent had television sets.

However, there are significant variations across different caste groupings in the ownership of luxury goods. Interestingly, despite the disparities, ownership of these "middle class luxuries" is not completely absent among the Dalits and BCs. Even though proportionately much lesser than the DCs and UCs, a good number of Dalit and BC households also own motorbikes, refrigerators, LPG connections and mobile phones. Inequalities are 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 twenty 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* has been brought under cultivation. Nearly 1000 acres of land in village-I owned by the village *panchayat* has apparently been encroached by farmers and is being cultivated privately. As has been argued by Jodha, disappearance of commons makes the poor more vulnerable (Jodha 1988).

One of the evidences of this process could be seen in 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*). Twenty years back when I first did my fieldwork in these villages, keeping milk cattle was a norm in these villages. The bigger farmers kept a large number of cattle, ranging from 5 to 40. This was an important source of income for the rural households. 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 IRDP schemes to add to their incomes. Only around 10 percent 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 has completely changed. None of the households in any of the two villages keep sheep now. Cattle ownership has also come down significantly. As is evident from Table 15 below, nearly 42 percent of all the households did not keep any cattle. This figure is much larger for the Dalit and BC households. Another 35 percent of the households have only one animal. Twenty years back more than 70 percent households had more than two cattle and more than 40 percent of them had more than 5 cattle.

What has brought about this change? While there are several factors responsible for this change, the most critical is the disappearance of commons. 'Where do we take them for grazing? There are no grazing grounds left any more in 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 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. The scavengers do not come to clean the dung. The younger generation does not even come close to this kind of work'.

Implications of these changes are very important. Apart from providing nutrition and additional income to the household, milk 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 farmer also earned additional income from selling milk but equally important was the additional income they earned from selling a home-raised cow or buffalo. They were particularly useful in times of crisis. If a crop failed or the family needed

Table 12
Caste-wise Cattle Ownership Among Respondent Households

	Nil	*1*	*2-3*	*4-6*	*7-10*	*11-15*	*25+*	*Total*
Dalit	126	50	6	1	0	0	0	183
	(68.85)	(27.32)	(3.27)	(0.54)				(100)
BC	175	111	22	1	0	0	0	309
	(56.63)	(35.92)	(7.11)	(0.32)				(100)
DC	29	127	134	32	2	3	1	328
	(8.84)	(38.71)	(40.85)	(9.75)	(0.60)	(0.91)	(0.30)	(100)
UC	85	61	23	4	0	0	1	174
	(48.85)	(35.07)	(13.21)	(2.29)			(0.57)	(100)
Total	415	349	185	38	2	3	2	994
	(41.75)	(35.11)	(18.61)	(3.82)	(0.20)	(0.30)	(0.20)	(100)

money for a wedding, they sold a cow or buffalo and raised the additional money. The decline in cattle ownership expands 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 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 good. 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 of their power and privilege. Not surprisingly, they are the ones who complain the most about the change. But, as discussed above, they want to move out of the village and their younger generation is ready to move out to other occupations. Many of them have in fact 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 and ontological insecurity. One of the visible manifestations of this is 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* have in these villages. The two most popular religious sects in these villages are the D*era Sacha Sauda,* located in Sirsa town of Haryana, around 100 kilometers from the villages; and the *Radha Soami Dera* located in Bias in Punjab, around 350 kilometers from the village. However, these *deras* have local branches, in the working of which the villagers take a lot of interest. Dera Sacha Sauda has nearly 500 followers from different caste groups from village-I, most of them relatively poor.

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