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### Agrarian Transformation and the trajectory of Farmers' Movements

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# Agrarian Transformation and the trajectory of Farmers' Movements

*Siddharth K Joshi*

## 1 Introduction

The period of 1980s saw the emergence of massive farmers' movements on the horizon of Indian politics (Brass, 1995). In 1988, Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) made a late albeit spectacular entry on to this scene with a sit-in at the Boat Club Delhi where the India Prime Minister was slated to address a rally in a weeks time. Lakhs of farmers, led by their rustic leader Mahendra Singh Tikait, blockaded roads for days with their bullock carts and trolleys. Unable to get the farmers to budge, the PM decided to shift the venue of his rally instead. From those heady days of movement politics in 1988, things were starkly different in Sept 2014, when I made my first (of three) field trips in Sept 2014 to Muzaffarnagar district in western Uttar Pradesh. Muzaffarnagar was where it all began for Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) in 1987 when firing on a peaceful demonstration (*gherao*) which killed two farmers, snowballed into a region-wide movement which saw several demonstrations attended by lakhs of farmers for over 30-40 days on some occasions. At the time of the field visit, BKU was agitating for payment of pending dues from sugar mills. In Muzaffarnagar district itself over 40% of the total payment for cane bought by the mills was due. For the 2013-14 crushing season, this amounted to over Rs 803 crores.<sup>1</sup> The 2014-15 crushing season was about to commence and farmers hadn't been paid for cane sold last year.

This had had its effect down to the village economy, which had come to depend heavily on sugarcane payments for cash needs. Not only was the farmer cash-strapped but even the local village

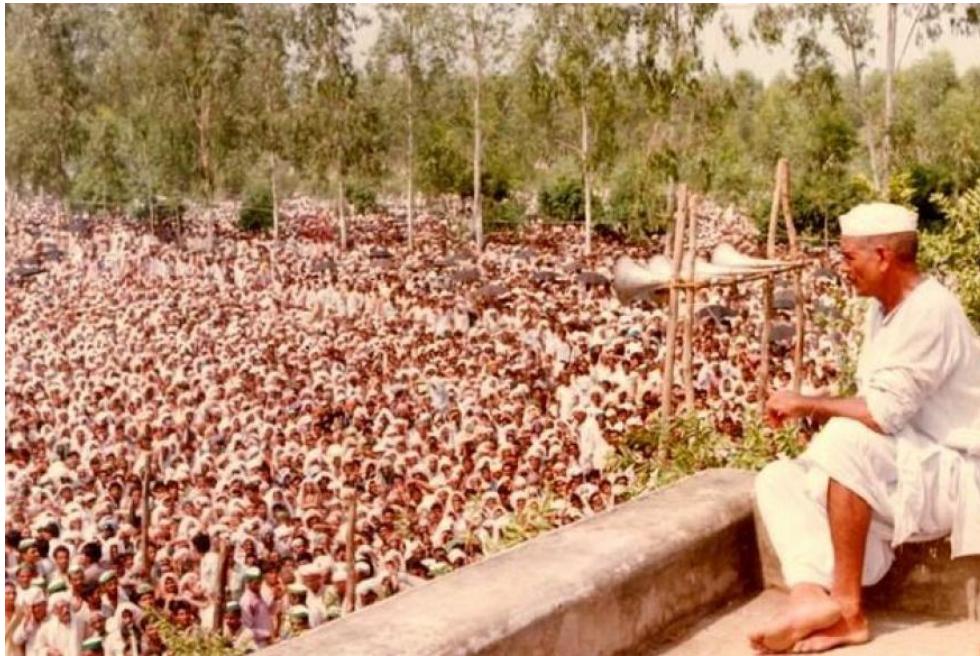


Figure 1: A picture of Boat Club Rally in Delhi (1988)

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<sup>1</sup> Data provided by Cane Development Officer, Muzaffarnagar district on 5 Sept 2014.

trade had been affected because purchasing power of the farmers had been limited to the credit that they could avail. Most farmers had borrowed heavily on their Kisan Credit Cards (KCC)<sup>2</sup> largely for consumption purposes and even that option was drawing to a close as explained one farmer:

We have been crushed by the behaviour of the sugar mills. I am a 15-20 bigha (2.3-3 acre) farmer. Since the sugarcane field was not cleared on time (due to late crushing by the mills), I could only sow 1 bigha of wheat. I have 12 members in my family. Tell me how I am supposed to survive with this. Mills haven't paid me, I haven't been able to return by previous loan on the Kisan Credit Card to be able to borrow anew. Money has become scarce even for health and educational needs of the children. Money lending has reappeared in villages. They are charging interest as high as Rs 5 per 100 lent (monthly). The conditions of all farmers is the same. Those who live in cities have no idea about the distress in the villages.<sup>3</sup>

BKU held several meetings across Muzaffarnagar and Meerut districts in September 2014 to mobilize farmers for its agitations against the non-payment by sugar mills. On 14 Sept, Rahul (32) a sugarcane farmer owning 6 acres of land, from Dhikana village, Baraut *tehsil*, Baghpat district shot himself in an act of suicide. At the time of his death, the Malakpur sugar mill owed him 3 lakh rupees. Meanwhile, in a meeting of mill representatives and farmers called by district administration, several cane farmers, angry at non-payment of dues and delay in start of the crushing season at the mills and on top of that, the casual attitude of the mill representatives, burst out in spontaneous anger, threatening to abduct the mill representatives till the payment was made. On several occasions in the last one year, protesting farmers organized under no recognizable manner had clashed with mill managements. It was clear that farmers needed an organized voice to put pressure on the government to take action against the defaulting mills but none of the organizations seemed in a position to channelize the anger of the farmers into constructive political action. While BKU was still the most effective farmer organization in the region, it was far from being the force that it was in the 1980s behind which farmers used to rally as one united force. By March 2015, during our second field visit, Rs 350 crores of cane payment was yet to be made.<sup>4</sup>

This was a big change from the 1980s. Had the issues faced by farmers changed since then? The farmers organizations asserted that the biggest issue faced by farmers today was that farming had been rendered unviable by government's economic policies. They principally blamed the price policy of the government, which they argued, had deliberately kept prices down.<sup>5</sup> Even the farmers we interviewed during our first visit to Muzaffarnagar confirmed the same - '*faslon ke daam nahin hai*' (prices for crops is not remunerative). Then what explains the diminished appeal of these farmer organizations for the farmers who were clearly unhappy with the policies of the government?

The answer lies, to anticipate the argument of the paper, in the fragmentation of peasantry as a social category. For a large segment of the agrarian population of the region, the future now lies beyond agriculture and possibly beyond the village, leading to diminished viability of peasantry as a social category available for mobilization as a class for itself. The evidence in support for the argument made in this paper was gathered by conducting field work in two villages in Muzaffarnagar district to understand the nature of changes and processes which had been underway in the last 3 decades which might help explain the decline of support for farmer organizations in general. The two villages were selected based on following criteria. The influence of BKU declines from west to east in the district. Thus, Village 1 was selected from villages in Jansath *tehsil* of Muzaffarnagar district which lies in the eastern most region of the district close to Ganga river and Village 2 was selected from villages in

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<sup>2</sup> KCC is a credit card issued by Government of India for farmers using which they can avail subsidized credit from banks.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with the 70-year old former *pradhan* of Dhanauri Tikari village during a protest in front of Muzaffarnagar Collectorate on 11 Sept 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Data provided by Cane Development Officer, Muzaffarnagar district on 15 March 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Rakesh Tikait, National Spokesperson, BKU (06/06/15) and Naresh Tikait (14/06/15) and V M Singh, President, RKMS (03/07/15).

Shamli *tehsil* on the western edge of the district close to Yamuna river. Of all the villages in the two *tehsils*, the frame was narrowed down to villages which were roughly representative of the *tehsils* in terms of the percentage of working population classified as 'Cultivator' and 'Agricultural Labour' in the Census 2011 data. This list was further narrowed down for both *tehsils* by excluding all villages with more than 600 households so as to make it practicable for a single investigator to survey reasonable number of households in the villages. From this shortlist for each of the two *tehsils*, one village was randomly selected. Keeping with ethnographic traditions, we will refer to the two villages as Gangapur (Village 1 in Jansath *tehsil*) and Yamunapur (Village 2 in Shamli *tehsil*) in the discussion that follows.

During the first few days of my stay in the two villages, I collected data on number of households, their caste-wise and landholding-size-wise distribution from the local village functionaries. Based on these provisional figures we conducted a rough census of households identifying the caste-wise spatial distribution of houses in the village. Based on the sampling frame constructed in this manner, in each village, twenty percent households were sampled. The sample households for each village were selected so as to be representative of the caste and land size distribution across the households within the village (see Table 1 and Table 2). From caste-groups with less than 10 households in the village, a minimum of 2 households were selected in the sample. Following this sampling process, total 191 households were selected for the sample with Ganagpur contributing 82 and Yamunapur contributing 109 households to the total. For all the 191 households in the sample, socio-economic data was collected using a structured questionnaire in addition to unstructured in-depth interviews on various aspects of economic, social and political relations in the village and history of involvement with BKU politics. Of the 191 households, 127 households were cultivating households, 40 were agricultural labour households and rest were engaged in non-agricultural occupations. The field work in Gangapur was conducted during Feb-March 2015 and in Yamunapur during May-July 2015. We began the interviews with the houses of agricultural labourers first and ended with houses of dominant landholding families. Usually, the interviews would be conducted starting morning 8 AM till 4 PM in the evening. After 4 PM, most farmers would gather at a regular place in the village to discuss various issues related to the village, farming, politics, operation of sugar mills etc. In Gangapur, the period of field work coincided with the cane crushing season in the sugar mill in whose command area the village fell. The crushing had been delayed because of which half of the cane in the village was still standing in the field. Most farmers would drop by in the house of the delegate from the village to the cane society to inquire if the mill has issued a slip in their name on which cane could be supplied to the mill. After 4 PM onward, till electricity arrived, I would join the gathering at the delegate's house. The observations made during these discussions gave us crucial insights into the various factions in the village, their history and changing dynamic of their rivalry, the politics of elections to the cane society which took place during the field work period. In Yamunapur, the house of a retired school teacher, which was located in the main street of the village was the place (*adda*) where the farmers gathered for smoking *hukka* and sundry discussions. Because this village was a Jat-dominated village, the observations made during discussions in Yamunapur provided critical insights into the changing role of *khaps*<sup>6</sup> in the socio-political lives of Jats in the region.

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<sup>6</sup> Khaps are lineage-based socio-juridical institutions in the region followed by several caste-groups.

Table 1: Caste-wise distribution of the households in Gangapur and no. of households in the sample from each caste group

Caste Group	Population		No. Of HH in sample
	No.	%age	
<i>Hindus</i> Brahmin	4	1.24	2
Jats	45	13.98	11
Badhai	25	7.76	6
Pal	40	12.42	10
Baddi (Banjara)	9	2.80	2
Dalit	180	55.90	45
<i>Muslims</i> Syed			
	8	2.48	2
Meo	6	1.86	2
<i>Others</i>			
	5	1.55	2
Total	322	100.00	82

Source: Calculated based on figures provided by various Govt. functionaries (ASHA, ANM, PDS dealer and *Patwari*) and quick census conducted by the author during field work.

Gangapur village was under zamindari system of land tenure till independence with Syeds being the zamindars and other castes like Jats and Pals as tenants. After Zamindari abolition in 1952, Syeds lost a major part of their landholdings to their tenants and over a period of time had become minority landowners. Major beneficiaries of the land reform in the village were the Jats, Pals and Badhais (Vishwakarma), who form the dominant land owning caste group in Gangapur.

Jats are not the numerically dominant caste group in the village though. *Dalits*, mostly belonging to Jatav caste, are numerically the largest of all the caste groups. Table 1 shows the caste-wise distribution of households in Gangapur and the number of households that were selected from each caste-group for the survey sample. The average landholding among the Jats was 10.3 acres, that among the Badhais was 5.8 acres and among the Pals was 2.1 acres. Among the Jats, 25% had landholdings less than 2.5 acres, 25% had landholdings between 2.5 and 5 acres and 50% had holdings greater than 5 acres. Among the *dalits*, 41.67 percent households were landless, 33.33% had landholdings less than 2.5 acres, 22 percent had landholdings between 2.5 acres and 5 acres and 3% had landholdings over 5 acres.

Table 2: Caste-wise distribution of households in Yamunapur and No. of Households in the sample from each caste group

Caste Group	Population		No. Of HH in sample
	No	%age	
<i>Hindus</i> Brahmin	12	2.88	3
Jats	225	54.09	57
Kashyap (Jhimer)	52	12.50	13
Jogi	3	0.72	2
Nai	4	0.96	2
Gusai	3	0.72	2
Dalits	112	26.92	28
Jatav	103	24.76	26
Pasi	9	2.16	2
<i>Muslims</i>			
Meo	5	1.20	2
Total	416	100.00	109

Source: Calculated based on figures provided by various Govt. functionaries (ASHA, ANM, PDS dealer and *Patwari*) and quick census conducted by the author during field work.

Village Yamunapur had *bhaichara* system of land tenure before independence with most of the land owned by Jat lineages although the bania moneylenders had usurped some of the lands. After Zamindari abolition most of these were transferred to the Jat tenants making the village a Jat-dominated one, where the Jats dominate both numerically and economically. Table 2 shows the caste-wise distribution of households in Yamunapur and the number of households that were selected from each caste-group for the survey sample. The average landholdings among the Jats was 4.17 acres. 32.3 percent landholdings among Jat households were less than 2.5 acres, 31.6 percent were between 2.5 and 5 acres and rest 36.1 percent were over 5 acres in size. 83 percent households amongst *dalits* were landless and rest have landholdings less than 2.5 acres, the average size being 0.93 acres.

Both the villages were almost fully irrigated receiving water from the Ganaga Canal system. Supply from canals is erratic and irregular though and on account of lack of maintenance, several canals, especially the last-mile supply channels which deliver water to the fields, have fallen into disrepair. Hence most farmers relied on the canal water only as supplements to ground water use through private tubewells. The land use pattern for both the villages are shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Land Use Classification for Gangapur and Yamunapur (2015)

Land use type	Gangapur	Yamunapur
	hectares	hectares
Total Geographical Area	453.43	582
Forest area	0	0
Land under non-agricultural use	66.3	56
Barren and uncultivable land	0	56
Permanent pastures and other graze lands	0	0
Land Under miscellaneous trees, crops, grooves etc. not included in net area sown	11.38	0
Cultivable waste	1.22	0
Fallow land other than current fallow	4.95	0
Current Fallow	12.69	0
Net sown area	356.86	470
Irrigated area	356.86	470
<i>By: Canal</i>	86	193
<i>By: Tubewell</i>	270.86	277

Source: Data based on the village records provided by the patwari.

In both the villages, sugarcane had become the main cash crop in terms of the area sown after wheat and rice (*basmati*). The increase in the area under sugarcane is a region-wide phenomenon which has picked up in the last three decades as shown in the figures for Muzaffarnagar district in Table 4. In 1981-82 area under sugarcane as a percentage of gross sown area was 35 percent but by 2011-12, this figure had gone up to 47 percent of the gross sown area. Even, this figure does not provide the full picture of the ascendancy of sugarcane vis-a-vis other crops since area under first planting of sugarcane remains occupied by it for an year and hence that area cannot be multicropped. If we look at the figures for area under sugarcane as percentage of net sown area (see Fig 2), the increase is thus even more dramatic. Over the three decades since 1980's the area under sugarcane has gone up from 50% to over 70%. This increase has been achieved at the expense of wheat, fodder and pulses. In terms of paddy cultivation, in the last one decade, the coarser varieties have been replaced by



cultivation of *basmati* rice which, because of its export potential, generally fetches better price than the minimum support price provided by the government for the coarser varieties.

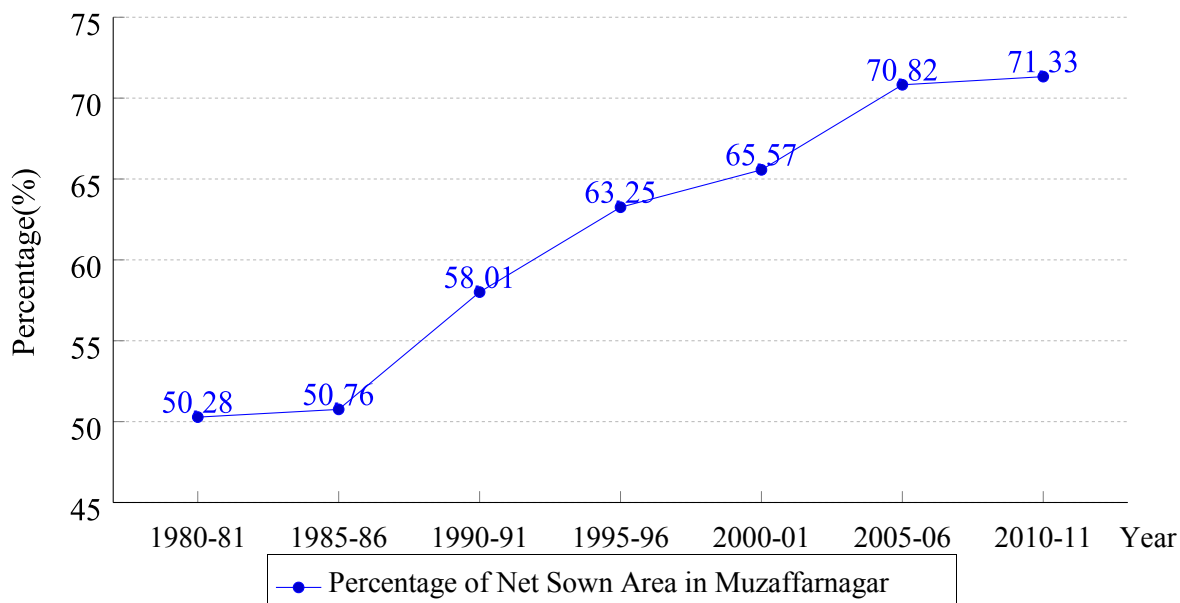


Figure 2: Percentage of Net Sown Area under Sugarcane in Muzaffarnagar (1980-2011)

Sugarcane was the dominating component of the cropping pattern for not just the rich and middle cultivators but for the small and marginal farmers as well. The dominance of sugarcane over other crops is not limited to just the quantitative jump in area under the crop but has also entailed a qualitative change in the organization of the crop production cycle in the district. Sugarcane follows a two-year cycle. It is usually sown in March-April and the first crop from this sowing referred to as plant (*paudh*) takes about 10-12 months for maturity depending on the seed variety sown.

This plant after maturity is harvested in such a manner so as to leave the stubble intact in the soil. This stubble then grows back to give a second harvest referred to as ratoon (*peddy*). This second cycle is early maturing requiring about 8-months and is ready for harvest by Oct. Usually, after harvesting the ratoon crop, wheat is sown as a *rabi* crop which is harvested by May and after that cane or paddy is sown. This pattern creates a dependency on the sugarcane harvest. Only when ratoon crop is cut, wheat can be sown. If sugarcane cutting gets delayed because of delay in crushing by the mill then farmers end up sowing wheat late (which leads to low yield) or selling cane to crushers (*kollu*) which usually pay lower rates in comparison to that paid by the mills for the cane bought. Additionally, if the cane harvest gets delayed late into the wheat sowing season, then it becomes difficult to find labour since wages are higher during wheat harvest time. Thus the mill process (marketing system) drives the crop cycle (production system).

Table 4: Changes in Percentage of Gross Sown Area under Different Crops in Muzaffarnagar (1981-2012)

Crop	1981-82	2011-12
Paddy	7.29	7.14
Wheat	30.84	27.10
Barley	0.06	0.05
Jowar	0.03	0.00
Bajra	0.11	0.00
Maize	3.06	0.03
Gram	0.68	0.00
Potatoes	0.41	0.35
Pulses	2.26	0.68
Fruits and Vegetables	1.97	2.42
Sugarcane	35.03	46.94
Cotton	0.82	0.01
Jute	0.03	-
Oil Seeds	0.45	0.78
Fodder	17.18	2.27
Tobacco	0.01	0.00
Total	100.00	100.00

Source: Department of Agricultural Statistics, Government of Uttar Pradesh.

If putting a larger area under cane can tie farmers to the vagaries of the crushing operations of the sugar mills, what explains the steady upward trend in area under sugarcane? The answer to this question offers insights into the changing nature of agrarian economy. The reason behind this shift in cropping pattern towards sugarcane is explained by the farmers on account of following reasons. Firstly, while any commodity sold in market faces price risk, the price risk faced by agriculture commodities is much higher and of a different nature in that a big-chunk of the marketed output arrives in the market at the same time and the price discovery happens after production i.e. agricultural commodity prices are not cost-plus prices like industrial goods (Bhaduri, 2003). In case of sugarcane, the price risk has decreased in the last few decades because of expansion of sugar mills

which provide a ready marketing outlet for sugarcane at prices which are government determined. Thus sugar mills have come to dominate as the preferred choice of cane farmers for selling their cane over other channels like crusher or *khandsari* units. This wasn't the case even two decades earlier when the prices offered by the mills and crushers/*khandsari* units were competitive enough and thus any delay by mills in starting crushing operations would have meant diversion of the best quality cane towards the crushers (Tyagi, 1995). In the last two decades, the shifting consumption patterns towards sugar at the expense of jaggery (*gur*) and the ability of mills to sell by-products like ethanol and electricity have made prices offered by mills command a premium over what crushers and *khandsari* units can offer. Consequently, farmers prefer to sell their cane to the mills while the crushers depend on marginal farmers (< 1 ha) for their supply. The marginal farmers are forced to sell to the crushers because a minimum production is required for one to be able to sell to the mill. Hence generally, the prices received by the marginal farmers are lesser than those received by farmers sowing a larger area under sugarcane. By mid-1980s, there were 4 sugar mills in Muzaffarnagar district but by 2015 the number of mills had increased to 11.

Secondly, with improving varieties of seeds, the yield of sugarcane have improved as fast as the other competing crops as shown in Table 5. Additionally, because of ratooning, with one sowing two harvests can be taken, which not only saves cost on preparatory tillage and seed material but also provides the benefit of residual manure and moisture to it and thus the second harvest takes lesser time to mature. With the rising labour costs, the savings in initial preparations and sowing for the second harvest can be substantial.

Thirdly, sugarcane is a relatively sturdier crop i.e it minimizes the climatic risk associated Table 5:

Table 5: Yields (Qtls/hectare) of major crops in Muzaffarnagar

Period	Yields (Qtls/hectare)		
	Sugarcane	Wheat	Rice (kharif)
1980-81	538.44	23.06	14.01
1985-86	568.76	28.30	26.03
1990-91	653.04	29.21	23.83
1995-96	686.76	30.38	24.12
2000-01	628.00	34.91	22.36
2005-06	687.91	33.74	24.61
2010-11	639.53	33.66	23.95
2013-14	703.35	37.63	23.93
Percentage change	30.63	63.17	70.78

Note: The yields figures are averages for triennium ending in year shown in column (1).

Source: Department of Agricultural Statistics, Government of Uttar Pradesh.

with cultivation.<sup>7</sup> Fourthly, the expansion of private tubewell irrigation has facilitated also the expansion of sugarcane which is a water-intensive crop and requires assured irrigation at specific stages in its growth for optimum yield. In 1980-81 there were 11,620 tubewells in the district as compared to 2570 in 1972 and 637 in 1961. By 2012, the number of tubewells in the district had gone up to 38,772 an increase of 233% over 30 years. Lastly, the payment made to the farmer for sugarcane is in a lump-sum and not in instalments which is preferred by the farmers since it suits the annual cash flow cycle of the farmers in which most expenditures cluster around March-May period including repayment of bank loans, marriages, *khariif* crop inputs, school/college fees etc. and thus lump-sum payment around that time for the cane supplied to the mill helps in meeting these cash outflow requirements. If the same money is paid in small instalments it gets spent on various miscellaneous expenditures and the money rarely accumulates.

## 2 Urbanization and its Correlates

In the decades since 1991, the twin process of urbanization and occupational diversification of the rural population had proceeded at a rapid pace. Table 6 shows the percentage of population specifically and western UP districts in general, the urbanization process has proceeded further than the rest of the state.

Table 6: Percentage of Population classified as Rural and Urban in UP and Muzaffarnagar, 1961-2011

Year	UP		Muzaffarnagar	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
1961	87.15	12.85	86.77	13.23
1971	85.98	14.02	86.14	13.86
1981	82.05	17.95	78.28	21.72
1991	80.16	19.84	75.40	24.60
2001	79.22	20.78	74.49	25.51
2011	77.73	22.27	71.25	28.75

Source: Primary Census

Abstract, various years.

Table 7 shows the growth rates of rural and urban population for both UP and Muzaffarnagar. It is evident that the rates of growth of urban population for Muzaffarnagar has been consistently higher than that for the State of UP. The faster pace of urbanization experienced by Muzaffarnagar district can be attributed to the proximity to the Nation Capital Region (NCR), an industrial cluster.

Because of the proximity of the district to NCR, the development of secondary and tertiary sectors in the latter has had deep influence over the former both in terms of economic diversification and cultural change. The extent of occupational diversification out of agriculture and into non-farm employment can be traced using the census data presented in Table 8. For Muzaffarnagar district, the percentage of main workers in rural areas classified as cultivators has hovered around 45% from 1961-2001 changing from previous year in absolute terms being 1-5 percent but in the 2001-11 decade, the percentage of main workers in rural areas classified as cultivators declined by 8%. The trend is sketched in Fig 3. The percentage of main workers classified as agricultural workers in rural areas dropped drastically by 11% during 1991-2001 while rose by 5% during 2001-11. Overall the

<sup>7</sup> Climatic risk is the risk of loss of productivity and output because of deviations from ideal weather conditions.

percentage of main workers in rural areas engaged in agriculture either as cultivators or agricultural labourers declined consistently in the two decades 1991-2011 while remaining more or less constant during 1971-1991.

Table 7: Growth rate of rural and urban population over the previous census year in UP and Muzaffarnagar, 1971-2011

Year	UP		Muzaffarnagar	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
1961	-	-	-	-
1971	18.18	30.68	23.82	30.70
1981	19.76	60.62	14.69	97.74
1991	22.58	38.73	20.38	41.55
2001	18.07	25.12	23.15	29.27
2011	17.97	28.82	11.85	31.80

*Source:* Primary Census Abstract, various years.

This pattern of change suggests that the period from 1991-2001 saw mild urbanization coupled with little occupational diversification among the cultivators while the percentage of main workers working in agriculture decreased drastically. On the other hand, the decade from 2001-11 was characterized by greater urbanization as well as economic diversification among the cultivators while the percentage of agricultural workers went up in the same period.

Tightly coupled with the process of urbanization and rural economic diversification has been the process of continuously widening gap between agricultural and non-agricultural incomes both within the rural sector and between the rural and urban sector. As Table 9 shows in the 3-year period centered around 2000-01, the ratio of average income per worker in agriculture to nonagriculture sector was 1.64. A decade later, this ration had climbed to 1.94. What this tells us is that when we compare the incomes of two similarly placed individuals in the agriculture and non-agriculture sectors i.e. say within the lowest 10 percent of the income distribution within the respective sectors, the individual in the non-agriculture sector would be earning twice as much as the individual in the agriculture sector. Of course, each sector will exhibit fairly unequal withinsector distribution of incomes, and percentile-wise ratio for the two sectors may be higher or lower than the average ratio for the sectors taken as a whole but the averages are still indicative of the increasing divergence between the two sectors in terms of incomes earned. In the last decade urban unskilled wages have specially outpaced rural agricultural wages which in turn have been floating above wages offered under the MNREGA<sup>8</sup> programme.

<sup>8</sup> MNREGA stands for Mahatama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act which is a government programme which guarantees one member of each household in rural areas 100 days employment at government determined wages.

Table 8: Percentage of Working Population Engaged in Agriculture over various Census Years

Year	Occupation	Muzaffarnagar				Uttar Pradesh			
		M	F	R	T	M	F	R	T
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1961	Cultivators (C)	44.90	20.51	47.86	43.11	63.62	64.78	70.67	63.88
	Ag Labor (AL)	11.93	5.14	12.69	11.43	9.05	19.24	12.48	11.30
	C + AL	56.83	25.65	60.56	54.54	72.68	84.02	83.14	75.18
1971	Cultivators (C)	43.87	19.52	47.86	43.22	59.10	42.64	64.99	57.43
	Ag Labour (AL)	27.73	36.70	30.69	27.97	17.18	44.49	22.25	19.95
	C + AL	71.60	56.22	78.55	71.20	76.28	87.13	87.24	77.38
1981	Cultivators (C)	42.83	18.16	49.76	42.11	59.53	47.83	68.41	58.52
	Ag Labour (AL)	27.98	31.98	30.94	28.09	14.15	35.23	17.91	15.98
	C + AL	70.80	50.14	80.70	70.20	73.69	83.06	86.32	74.50
1991	Cultivators (C)	38.02	27.71	44.40	37.16	53.94	48.18	63.01	53.27
	Ag Labour (AL)	29.35	46.51	34.44	30.78	16.70	35.82	21.47	18.94
	C + AL	67.37	74.22	78.84	67.94	70.64	83.99	84.48	72.20
2001	Cultivators (C)	36.67	32.09	45.00	36.21	47.55	43.07	57.95	46.98
	Ag Labour (AL)	19.92	21.88	23.64	20.12	14.03	22.81	18.14	15.14
	C + AL	56.60	53.96	68.64	56.33	61.57	65.87	76.09	62.12
2011	Cultivators (C)	29.89	17.09	37.19	28.44	36.68	25.63	45.03	34.90
	Ag Labour (AL)	22.93	24.33	28.56	23.08	20.78	27.34	27.12	21.84
	C + AL	52.82	41.42	65.75	51.52	57.47	52.96	72.15	56.74

Note: (1)= Male workers in the category/Total (main) male workers (2)=Female workers in the category/Total (main) female workers (3)=Rural workers in the category/Total (main)) rural workers (4)=Total workers in the category/Total (main) workers

From Census 1971 onwards, the workers were divided into Main and Marginal workers. Hence from 1971 onwards, the figures correspond to Main workers, while for 1961 Census the figure corresponds to Total workers.

Source: Primary Census Abstract, various years.

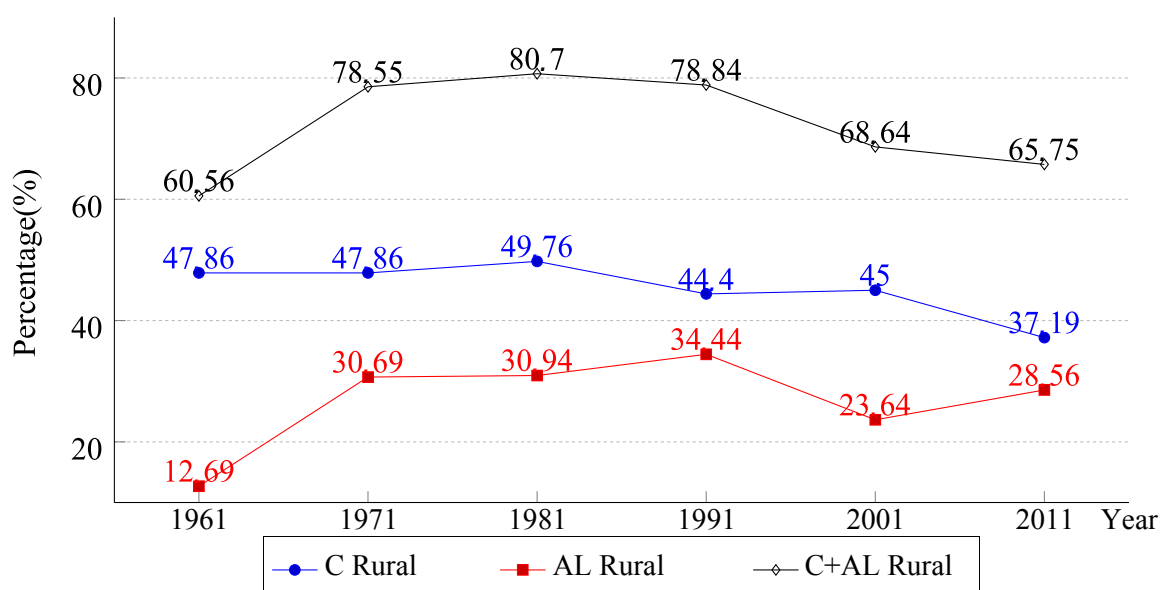


Figure 3: Changes in Occupational Distribution in Muzaffarnagar (1961-2011)

The process of relatively slower growth of agricultural incomes can be understood in the context of changing size-class structure of landholdings in Muzaffarnagar district. Table 10 shows the figures on distribution of operational holdings across various size-classes for years 1990-91, 2000-01 and 2010-11 collected as part of Agricultural Census which in UP is compiled based on land records maintained by the revenue administration. To the extent that several families have transferred parcels of land in the name of various family members to evade land ceiling laws, the village records underestimate operational holding sizes. More than one holdings listed in the village records separately may actually belong to members of same family and may be cultivated as a single holding. For our purposes, we can safely ignore this bias, since what we are concerned with here is not so much the magnitude of percentages land operated in each category, but trends in how this distribution has evolved over the period of the censuses. Thus, the table shows that the process of divisions of operational holdings into smaller holdings on account of inheritance, was much more rapid during 1991-2001 than during 2001-11. The proportion of total number of holdings classified as marginal (< 1 ha) jumped from 57.34% in 1991 to 66.87% in 2001, an increase of over 9% in the decade. In the next decade however this figure increased by less than 3% only to 69.63% in 2011.

Table 9: Increase gap between Incomes per worker employed in Agriculture and Non Agriculture Sector, Muzaffarnagar, 2001-2011

Period	Agriculture			Non-Agriculture			Ratio
	GDDP	Workers	Income/worker	GDDP	Workers	Income/worker	
2000-01	234150.7	5,06,721	46,209	298363.3	3,92,815	75,955	1.64:1
2010-11	780740	5,59,272	1,39,600	1400559	5,26,219	2,66,155	1.91:1

Notes: (1) GDDP: Gross District Domestic Product in Current Prices (Lakh Rs).

(2) Agricultural GDDP includes forestry and fishing as well. Non-Agricultural GDDP is calculated by deducting Ag GDDP from Total GDDP.

(3) The periods are trienniums centered around the years mentioned.

(4) Number of workers in agriculture includes main workers classified as cultivators and agricultural workers in respective Census. No. of workers in non-agricultural sector is arrived at by deducting ag main workers as defined earlier from total main workers.

(5) Income per worker is in Rs per worker.

*Income/workerag*

(6) The ratio refers to the  $R = \frac{\text{Income}}{\text{workernonag}}$ .

*Source:* Data on GDDP provided by Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Uttar Pradesh. Data on workers in various sector from PCA, Census, Various years.

Similarly, the percentage of total operated area under small category (> 1 and < 2 ha) increased by about 5% between 1991-2001 while in the next decade the increase was only just over 2%. The increases in the relative proportion of number and area operated in the marginal and small landholding size-classes was at the expense of drop in the proportion of number and area of holdings in medium and large size-classes.

Table 10: Changing Structure of Landholdings in Muzaffarnagar, 1990-91 to 2010-11

Size of Holding (in ha.)	1990-91		2000-01		2010-11	
	No (%)	Area (%)	No (%)	Area (%)	No (%)	Area (%)
< 1.0	57.34	18.20	66.87	22.77	69.63	26.97
1.0 – 2.0	21.42	19.91	17.63	24.48	17.54	25.66
2.0 – 4.0	13.69	30.94	11.13	29.58	9.54	27.49
4.0 – 10.0	6.25	25.86	4.198	20.76	3.16	17.94
> 10.0	1.29	5.10	0.16	2.40	0.11	1.92
All Classes	100	100	100	100	100	100

*Source:* Agriculture Census, Board of Revenue, Govt of UP, various years.

The faster pace of increase in marginal and small holdings and the area operated by them at the cost of medium and large holdings during 1991-2001 hints at greater incidence of fragmentation of landholdings on account of sub-division by operation of the law of inheritance. The process continued into the next decade but at a much slower pace. When we combine this observation on the trend in the changes in the size-class structure of operational holdings with the trend in changes in occupational classification reported in Table 8 we can draw our first sets of insights about the process of urbanization and its correlates in the agrarian sector. As we noted earlier, during 1991-2001, the percentage of main workers classified as cultivators remained same and during the same period the fragmentation of holdings proceeded at a rapid pace. From this, we can infer that the decade of 1991-2001 was a period when the process of moving out of agriculture was less pronounced. If a family had two sons, it was more likely that both of them stayed in agriculture, inheriting parts of family landholding and operated them as separate holdings. Thus average size of holdings dropped at a rapid pace in 1991-2001 as shown in Table 11. The sharp drop in percentage of main workers in rural areas classified as cultivator between 2001-11 accompanied by slowing down of fragmentation of operational holdings indicates that during this period working members in cultivating households were more likely to diversify into non-agricultural occupations instead of continuing in agriculture by operating small parcels of land. Thus, during this period, the sub-division of land holdings and drop in average size of holdings was much slower than in the previous decade as shown in Table 11. Between 1991-2001, the average operational landholding size dropped from 1.95 ha to 1.11 ha, a decrease of 43%. In the next decade, the average fell to 0.95, a drop of 14% only.



Table 11: Average Size of Land Holdings by Size Group, Muzaffarnagar, 1991-2011

Size of Holding(in ha.)	1990-91	2000-01	2010-11
< 1.0	0.50	0.38	0.37
1.0 – 2.0	2.08	1.54	1.39
2.0 – 4.0	3.12	2.95	2.74
4.0 – 10.0	6.53	5.49	5.39
> 10.0	18.64	16.37	16.75
All Classes	1.95	1.11	0.95

*Source:* Agriculture Census, Board of Revenue, Govt of UP, various years.

### 3 Changes in the Social Framework of Agriculture: 1985-2015

We now turn to the impact of the macro processes outlined above on the social framework within which agriculture is organized in the region. In this section, we use data collected through the survey instrument and in-depth interviews with the sample households in the two villages in which fieldwork was conducted to flesh out the changes in the agrarian processes and structures at the village level which have occurred in the last three decades and have explanatory significance for understanding the decline of agrarian mobilizations are concerned.

The districts of the region including Muzaffarnagar were known for the strong peasant-proprietor base, especially among Jats and this pattern of labour utilization had continued into the mid-1980s. Jats who are the dominant land-owning caste in the region, were mainly owner cultivators, not shying away from manual labour. Men and women, both participated in farm operations (Pradhan, 1966). The peasantry was concentrated in small and middle peasant classes (between 2 and 10 hectares) and largely depended on family labour for cultivation. In fact, the data from Farm Management Studies (see Table 12) shows that for families with land between 2 and 10 hectares, roughly 80 percent of the labour was contributed by family itself. From the data collected by us in the two villages, this pattern seems to have undergone drastic change as shown in Table 13. The labour input was measured in man-days and doesn't include time spent on supervisory work.<sup>9</sup> For the marginal farmers (< 2 acres) the pattern of largely family labour utilization has continued for obvious reasons. But for small and marginal farmers (> 2 and < 10 acres) which comprise over 50 percent of operated area in Muzaffarnagar (see Table 10) now hires in about half of the labour utilized from outside the family. In size-class between 5-10 acres (i.e 2-4 ha), only 22% of total labour input was contributed by the family while earlier within this size-class over 80% of labour input came from within the family (see Table 12).

<sup>9</sup> The schedule of tasks for the major crop was drawn and average labour needed for each task per acre was estimated based on inputs from the farmers. When interviewing farmers on the use of family and hired-in labour, reference period was the last agricultural year and labour utilized for each task for the crop grown and its classification into family and hired-in was recorded.

Table 12: Percentage Share of Labour Utilization (1966-69)

Size Groups (hectares)	Family Labour	Hired Labour
Below 2.87	92.49	7.51
2.88-4.71	86.01	13.99
4.72-6.96	71.03	28.97
6.97-10.65	68.11	31.89
10.66 & above	50.33	49.67
All farms	71.91	28.09

Source: Table 3.55 in Roshan and Singh (1975, pp. 49).

Any explanation for this change needs to be placed in the context of the mechanization of agriculture in the last few decades. Several agricultural operations for the major crops in Muzaffarnagar like wheat and sugarcane have undergone mechanization. Land-levelling, tilling and seed bed preparation is completely mechanized due to the use of tractor-tillers. Draught power has been almost fully replaced by mechanized power. In Gangapur, in the whole village there were only 3 pair of ox, which were being hired out to all farmers for weeding operations as part of sugarcane cultivation. In Yamunapur, there was only 1 pair of ox in the whole village. The mechanization of increasing array of farm operations has meant that every thing else remaining same, the labour requirement for the farm operations has come down (Singh et al., 2011). The process seems to have picked up in the 1980s. The first tractor in Gangapur came in 1974 and the second one in 1978.

Table 13: Family Labour and Hired Labour as percentage of Total Labour Utilized by Size Group

Size-Group (acres)	Family Labour	Hired-In	N
< 1	85.81	14.18	18
> 1 and < 2	80.71	19.30	18
> 2 and < 5	51.84	48.16	55
> 5 and < 10	22.69	77.31	25
> 10	13.88	86.11	11
All Classes	35.91	64.10	127

Source: Calculated from household survey conducted as part of our field work.

Till mid-1980s these were the only two tractors in the village. Since then number of tractors in the village increased sharply thanks to the easy credit provided through state instrumentalities. This increasing trend towards of mechanization points to the fact that overall labour requirements per acre

cultivated for both cane and wheat has come down over time. Then what explains the increasing reliance on hired labour by the cultivators in Muzaffarnagar?

The traditional understanding of the phenomenon of withdrawal from agricultural operations by members of cultivating households is that manual labour is considered a mark of low social status and thus increasing agricultural prosperity is usually accompanied by withdrawal of, to begin with, women and then men of the household from manual operations (Béteille, 1974). During our fieldwork, we did observe that Jat women were involved to a lesser extent in the field operations than the men. Their involvement was most regular in harvesting operations but for other operations, hired labour was the preferred choice. Among the Jats though, traditionally status was determined by hardiness of the farmer as demonstrated through dexterity in farm operations (Pradhan, 1966). Is that changing now? We would contend that a different process is at work. Central to this process is the decline in prevalence of joint family as a basic unit around which agricultural production was organized. Out of the 127 cultivating households in our sample across the two villages only 25 households could be classified as joint families. Out of the 102 households which were nuclear families, 87 households reported being in a joint family in the previous generation, while rest were joint families in generations earlier than the previous one. Thus, this change largely occurred during the last generation i.e. in the period of last 20-30 years. This change is understood by the farmers themselves in following terms:

Sugarcane earlier used to demand much more labour than now. But within one family there would be lot of people contributing labour. The owner of the land would work with the labour in the field side by side. Then people started going to city for work. Land also was becoming smaller than before. As people starting leaving for city, the family started becoming smaller. Those who were left behind in village, cultivated the holdings of the brother who is in city. The brother in city became some kind of an absentee landlord. The family will either pay a fixed amount per acre to the family in city or send some wheat every year after harvest

In fact, one of the strategies used by the Jats to deal with the sub-division and fragmentation of land holdings due to inheritance, was to delay the division of operation holdings as much as possible (Jeffrey, 1997). While several brothers would have equal shares in the profit of the operations, the family land would be operated as a single holding. But off late, this practice is on its way out. The division of land and transfer in the name of brothers goes hand in hand with or precedes the separation of hearth. If one or more of the brothers is based out of village, then the plot remains in his name, while operated by those who stay back in the village. A typical unit of small or a medium farming household has 2-3 working members staying in the village, as shown in Table 14. Several tasks which would have been shared within a joint family, are now duplicated when the family exists as nuclear family, with separate land titles, separate Kisan Credit Cards, separate bank and loan accounts, separate implements, separate schedules for tilling, field preparation, hiring labour, hiring implements etc. The economies of scale are not achieved in the sense that overhead costs of maintaining and operating a tractor or a tubewell is incurred on two plots now instead of one. While earlier two brother jointly cultivating cane on a 10 acre plot would have sold cane to the mill on a single account, now the same cane is sold on two accounts, hence each one has to make a separate trip to the mill to off-load the cane.

More importantly, each household has much less labour to contribute to the production process and has to necessarily depend on hired labour for field operations which were earlier largely managed within the family. For example, seed bed preparation and sowing of cane usually requires 4-5 people per acre for a day. One person is required to operate the tractor for making furrows, while 3-4 people prepare the cane seeds for sowing. Once furrows are made, the seed is placed in the furrows and then the furrows are closed with tractors after applying fertilizer to the seeds. A joint family with 4 working members can sow cane in a 10 acre field in 10 days, but with only 1 working member, the operation would have to be carried out for a month, unless labour is hired from outside. A month of delay in planting cane would in turn mean delay in wheat sowing in the winter which implies a loss in yield of wheat.

Table 14: Average Number of working adults per household by size class

Size Class	Average No. of working member per household	N
Marginal	3.63	36
Small	2.81	55
Medium	2.11	25
Large	3.33	11
All Classes	2.42	127

Source: Calculated from household survey conducted as part of our field work.

At 1.5 Qtl/acre for a week's delay, a 3-week delay translates into yield loss of 4.5 Qtl/acre. Thus, the shift from joint family farming to nuclear family farming, necessitates larger reliance on hired labour even when overall labour requirements have decreased because of mechanization. Some operations like irrigation can be managed by a single individual with electricity-powered tubewells but other operations, for completion within the optimal duration given the cropping pattern, necessitate hiring of non-family labour. A correlate of this process is that now female labour is confined to tasks related to maintaining the livestock. The nature of work is no less intense than that in the field, but between the household tasks and tending to the livestock, not much time is left with the female members of the households for contributing towards field operations.

Because of requirement of labour input increasingly being met from outside the family, new forms of farm management and labour relations have emerged giving rise to a new phenomenon which can be termed as *managerialization of agriculture*. The process of *managerialization* allows for various forms and extent of alienation from the production process. One form that this could take was that of absentee landlordism where land could be given out on a fixed-rate contract basis. We came across several such cases during our fieldwork. The standard rate for these kinds of contract was Rs 5000/*bigha* i.e Rs 30,000 per acre for renting out land. Several families which had moved out of village for several years had taken to these type of contracts to keep land ownership with them and simultaneously derive income out of it. Second form this could take were where the farmer, usually a retired school teacher or government functionary had not cultivated the land themselves for years but now stayed in the village and exercised minimal supervision while contracting out either the whole operations or parts of it. In the former case, for a fixed sum, the contract is given out to an individual while in the latter case, for each operation, labour or implements were hired in on per acre basis. In both cases, the owner did no manual labour and exercised varying degree of supervision. Next, were instances where the owners performed some operations themselves like preparation of fields, tilling, buying fertilizers etc. and contracted out other operations like harvesting. The contractor in-turn hired in labour to complete the operations.

What does this process culminate into? In the words of an old farmer: when a farmer contracts out his land, first his will for labour breaks, then slowly and slowly the body become incapable of hard work, then when one doesn't need spade and other implements, they get sold and then when one needs money, the land is sold off.

Tenancy was not very prevalent in the region, usually coming upto 5% of the total cultivated area till late 1980s (Singh, 1992). In fact, out of total 322701 hectares operated in Muzaffarnagar, the Agriculture Census in 2010-11 records only 1234 hectares (0.38%) under tenancy. But by the time of our fieldwork, these instances of partial or complete contracting out of bulk of the farming operations comprised 15 percent of the cultivating households surveyed in the two villages. Our informants told us that this phenomenon was not older than last 10-15 years. Even among the households which were non-tenancy households, the general belief was that a holding of upto 2 hectares i.e 30 bigha can be 'managed' by one male member of the family. This scenario involves to a great extent hiring of external labour, hiring in of tiller and other implements at per acre basis for preparation of fields and even hiring in of people who off-load harvested cane to the mill on contract at per trolley basis. But labour has become scarce in the villages because of availability of non-farm employment as well as out-migration to cities. Both sectors pay better than agriculture does. Average daily wage in the brick kilns running in both Gangapur and Yamunapur were 300/day as compared to 250/day for farm labour. Those who had migrated to Muzaffarnagar or Haridwar, working in rolling factories were earning 350/day. In fact, the decade of 1991-2001 saw the first phase of labour scarcity in the region as the figures in Table 8 testify. This drove the first move towards mechanization. Due to labour scarcity, farm wages increased and there was large in migration from other states (Bihar and Bengal). The migrant labour was severely exploited because of which the in-migration has considerably reduced now. Rich farmers use the instrument of debt to guarantee supply of labour for their farms. While usual monthly salary for a farm servant was Rs 6,500, several workers largely from dalit castes, were working for much less to pay back the loan they had taken from the landlord. Second method used by farmers to keep down wages is pure coercion. In Yamunapur, the agricultural workers had come together to demand a wage rate of 40kg/*bigha* of wheat harvested and refuse work if anything less was paid. A meeting was called in the village and the workers, mainly *dalits* were forced to accept a lower wage, 30kg/*bigha*, by the Jat farmers. In Gangapur, because of the numerical preponderance of *dalits*, the wages are market influenced to a greater extent.

With the replacement of joint family system with the nuclear one, another development crucial to the social framework is the decline of *dangwara* system among the Jats. *Dangwara* literally means pooling in. The system operated in both economic and social domains. There was pooling in of labour for harvest, for cane crushing, for sowing and of money for marriage/dowry. The system was built on mutual co-operation and reciprocity. Usually when the labour of one household was insufficient, farmers would help each other out in the process of sowing by working on each others' field. If by Oct, wheat was not sown in someone's fields, all farmers would get together and help out in the process. Similarly, there were *dangwaras* for cane harvesting also, where 3-4 families would work as teams and help out in harvesting cane in each others' fields. The system extended to social intercourse also. Since under the khap system, girls were married outside one's village, when a farmer married a girl of his household, everyone will contribute money and the expectation was that when there was marriage in someone else's house, others will contribute.

Before the near monopoly in cane procurement by mills, farmers used to process the cane grown in the village themselves using bullock-operated crushers (*kollu*). Cane production and in village processing was more profitable than supplying to mills directly (Pradhan, 1966, pp. 15). The very nature of the crushing technology necessitated co-operation. No one farmer had the required number of bullocks to run the crusher long enough to crush the cane produced on one's field. So farmers would pool-in draught power to keep the crusher going from morning to evening, taking turn to replace bullocks one after the other, till everyone's cane had been crushed. Usually, one crusher would be rented and installed by 4-5 farmers.

All these systems are no longer to be found. The crusher system for crushing cane was slowly replaced with power driven crushers, first diesel than electricity, before being in turn replaced by sugar mills. The more sophisticated the technology became, the more expensive it became for farmers to own them. By 1990s, mills could generally out-pay electric crushers and village-based processing units while competing to procure cane (Tyagi, 1995). Thus, not only did the control of the process went out of the hands of farmers, but the pooling in system also went with it as did the culture of co-

operation that it sustained. The culture of sharing household labour became a casualty of decreasing household sizes. Farmers remembered the system being in operation till even mid-1990s but slowly, with shortage of labour and influx of migrant labour in the 1990s, the system died down. A culture based on codes of reciprocal co-operation, was with time replaced by one with competition. The process was explained in following words by one farmer:

Earlier among Jats, apart from agriculture, there was either police or army. Beyond that there was no other profession. Earlier, everyone in the family used to eat the same kind of food and wear same kind of clothes. But when people migrated to city for other occupations, the family in village started feeling the psychological pressure to keep up with the family in the city. With time, this culture of competition within the family came to village also. The whole social set-up of the village collapsed. These days, two brothers won't share a tractor after a small tiff. If the older brother scolds the younger brother, next day the younger brother would want to buy a separate tractor on his KCC (Kisan Credit Card). With all these implements, the labour requirement went down and need for co-operation also went down.

These changes in the moral economy of the villages brought in its wake, changes in status markers of the society as well.

#### **4 Changing Sociology of Status and Power**

The basis of power and status in Muzaffarnagar has gone through a marked shift in the last three decades. We will illustrate this using the case of the factions in Gangapur village. Gangapur is a *panchayat* village and the *pradhani* (presidentship) of the village has stayed in one family in the last 30 years except for those years when the position was reserved for *dalits*. Even during that period, the candidate backed by the dominant family had won the *pradhani*. The head of the family was Tejpal Singh who had passed away in 2013 after which his brother Rajbir Singh had become the *pradhan*. The family exercises total control over the panchayat. But this was not always so. Till the 1980s, the *pradhani* was in the family of (late) Baljor Singh. Baljor Singh is remembered as the most skilled farmer in the village. Baljor Singh controlled upwards of 300 acres of land and was the leader of the dominant faction in the village. The competing faction was controlled by Tejpal Singh, who was then not a very big farmer. Both of them were Jats but since Jats were not the numerically dominant caste in the village, the factions had integrated notables of other castes within their factions through alliances. The first tractor in the village came in 1974 bought by Baljor Singh and later Tejpal Singh got the second tractor in 1978. Till mid-1980s these were the only two tractors in the village after which the number of tractors in the village increased sharply. Through the 1970s and 1980s, both the factions in the village backed Charan Singh's Lok Dal/Bhartiya Kranti Dal although both the factions were linked to different leaders in the party. Tejpal Singh's faction identified itself with a *dalit* leader within BKD, Qabool Singh. Qabool Singh became the *Harijan* Welfare Minister during the Janata Party rule in UP (1977-80). The rise of Qabool Singh within BKD brought about the rise of Tejpal Singh faction in the village Gangapur as well. Tejpal Singh became the *pradhan* for the first time in 1985 and since then the *pradhani* has remained within his family. Presently, Baljor Singh's family controls about 150 acres of land in the village while Tejpal Singh's family controls upwards of 300 acres between four brothers. Two of the brothers have mango orchards whose maintenance is contracted out. One brother is a senior official at DRDO and usually stays in Pune but occasionally visits the village where he has a bungalow. Rest of the three brothers stay in the village and own brick kilns. The land under cultivation in the family is operated with the help of permanent farm servants. The permanent workers take care of the livestock as well as the farm operations. Most of the workers are heavily indebted to the family and thus are compelled to work for it.

The recent increase in the land controlled by the Tejpal Singh family has been from the investible surplus generated from the brick kiln business. The mango farm bought by one of the brother in 2005, was established by a trader based in nearby town in 1985. The trader used to operate several crushers in the area but because of the shortage of labour and adverse tax policies towards them, several crushers closed down and to pay off debt, the trader sold the farm off. The brick kiln business was

itself begun in 1995 (by Tejpal Singh) and 1998 (by Ranbir Singh, the second brother) with initial investment of 20 lakhs. Based on the information provided by one of the brothers, Ranbir Singh, we could infer that the income from brick kiln business was about three times of that from agricultural operations. In fact the agricultural operation have been more or less left to the permanent farm workers. The surplus so generated is then used for investment in land and non-land resourced and for mainlining political control through advancing short term credit to the deficit households in the village. In the last *panchayat* elections, the younger brother of Tejpal Singh, Ranbir Singh was opposed by Jharia Singh, a middle farmer from Pal (shepherd) caste. The latter lost badly, even though he was backed by the faction led by Bhishampal Singh s/o Baljor Singh. Most informants when asked about the reason for easy victory of Ranbir over the second candidate, cited indebtedness to the Tejpal family as a major reason. A Meo Muslim tenant farmer, explained the reasons for the victory of Ranbir Singh in following words:

*Pradhani has stayed in one family for 30 years, how? They buy people's vulnerability with money. Everybody is indebted to them. When elections come, they start throwing around money.*

The brick kilns operated by the three brother within the Tejpal family, hire close to 500 workers, of which about 40% are from the villages with in the panchayat. Apart from the employment at the kiln itself, several household derive a major part of their incomes through various works done in connection to the kiln operations. The ascendancy of Tejpal Singh faction relative to the political fortunes of Baljor Singh faction in the last three decades point towards the shift in the basis of political power at the village level. Over the period of last three decades, while land has not been completely supplanted as the basis of social and economic power but its importance has declined even as non-farm business investments have become increasingly important source of economic and thereby political power.

This phenomenon of off-farm business investment is common among rich farmers. The surplus generated from non-farm business forms a greater part of the total surplus generated by the rich farmers. While some have invested in brick kilns, others have started schools or shops in nearby towns. The credit available as part of priority sector lending, at rates as low as 7% is, in most cases, utilized for business investment or used for loaning out to marginal farmers and agricultural workers at rates as high as 36% p.a. The initial investment in business was derived out of agricultural surplus but now in most cases, the non-farm business generates surplus much higher than agriculture does. Thus amongst the rural elite, there is a clear shift in basis of dominance away for that solely based on control of land. While a large farmer is still considered to be part of rural elite, those whose material wealth is based solely on land and farming, are falling behind, taken over by those whose source of wealth lie outside agriculture. Usually, attention given to farming is limited to supervision and management decisions like which seeds to plant in how much area, pesticides to be bought, etc. while the day to day operations are left to permanent workers or contractors. Out of total 15 cases of land purchases in the last ten years, that we came across during our field work in Gangapur and Yamunpur, in 13 of those cases surplus from non-farm businesses were being ploughed back into buying more land. One Jat family in Yamunapur, which had remained a joint family and had a printing business run by the two brothers, had bought 3 acres of land in the village to add to the 9 acres they inherited from their father. The printing business is in Muzaffarnagar and both brothers travel there everyday. Before starting the commute, they visit the land and instruct the permanent worker. During the days when one or both brothers do not make the trip to Muzaffarnagar, they spend sometime supervising work on the fields. The elder brother has completely given up manual labour in the fields. The money for buying the new piece of land (around 60 lakhs) came partly from the surplus from the printing business and partly from the money contributed by one of the sons of the elder brother, who is a software engineer in Gurgaon. One of the brothers explained the reasons behind investing in land in following terms:

For us land is an investment. And we will go wherever profit is the maximum and today their is no better investment than land. It is like a magic stone, which you can rub whenever you need potion and with time the value also keeps on increasing.

Similarly, in one instance, a businessman, had bought 2 acres of land to add to inherited 5 acres of land. The business man was a government contractor for laying optical fibre network and while residing in the village itself, used to travel across UP for business. The land was being managed by a Muslim tenant. The reasons for buying new land in this instance was not even deriving a minimal income from agriculture. The arrangement with the Muslim tenant had been continuing since the businessman's father's time and after the father's death it remained informal with the tenant providing milk and wheat and vegetables for the domestic consumption in the businessman's household. Thus the investment was in land as an asset to derive use-value .

This shift was not limited to rural rich only. Even among the small and middle farmers, those with a non-farm source of income, either with members employed in NCR or in government institutions or receiving pensions were better-off than their landed counterparts. This trend began at least 10-20 years back, informed one farmer:-

As people started observing that those families whose one member is working in the city are better off than the others, farmers also started investing in their children's education. 20-25 years ago, there wasn't so much focus on education. That time a 30 *bigha* (5 acre) Jat farmer used to prefer farming over a job in police or army. But now, if you are a SI in police, you get a Jeep in dowry while a 5 acre farmer now finds it hard to find a girl.

This move towards education was more pronounced among middle and small farmers. A Jat women, with 2 acre of land in the family, expressed her worries in following words:

Our elder son has done a Diploma course from Delhi but he has been unsuccessfully trying for a job since last one year. Lot of money was spent on his education. He just turned 28 1st month, we are worried about his marriage. When will he get a job and when will we find a girl for him. Its not like we have some 7-8 acres of land that people will marry their daughter to our house based on that consideration. Now this govt has snatched away Jat reservation from us. Without that won't our children fall behind?

A 65 year-old farmer, belonging to Jatav (SC) community, cultivating 6.5 acres of irrigated land most of which was under sugarcane, highlighted this change more clearly. His family owned some 20 acres of land which was divided between three brothers (including him). Now his youngest son looks after the farm while he also chips in when his son has to go out on account of the construction material business and bee-keeping business that he runs. We reproduce below a fragment of our conversation with him.

See I have two castes – one of a farmer and other of a Jatav. . . wherever there is talk of farmers' interests, I would go. So we joined the movement in the 80s but now...see, I will tell you one thing. . . today the primary thing is education. . . that is why I gave education to all my children. . . one of my son is a Professor at a government college in Etawah. . . second son is an engineer in Rajasthan Pollution Board and even my youngest son who looks after the farm has studied till BSc. But income from agriculture is not enough..so we have construction material business and my son also rears bees and supplied honey to companies. . . so there is no time to go for all these rallies.

Few important observations need to be made with respect to the above conversation. Firstly, it hints at the fact that an explanation of decline of movement solely in terms of caste categories is incomplete. While a *dalit* farmer because of being a *dalit* may have antagonistic relations with Jats who are leading the movement, as a farmer overlapping interests may still make non-Jat landed castes extend support to the movement. Secondly, it emphasizes the point that the sociological basis of status are slowly shifting away from land to non-land resources.



## 5 The viability of *kisan* identity

When we pull together all the strands described in the previous sections, the broader picture that emerges is that the peasantry is no longer a distinct social category which a movement can appeal to. The process of urbanization and occupational diversification in the manner that they have played out in the region has meant that most agricultural household now have non-agrarian interests some of them deeply intertwined with the city. The city can no longer be constructed as a distant entity sucking the marrow out of villages because it has conceptually and culturally entered the village. This process of transformation has created both winners and losers. For the rural elite, the predominant material interest now lies outside agriculture. Steady agricultural incomes are desired and contracting out some or all farm operations provides mechanisms suited to this form of surplus extraction. The losers in the process are the small farmers who are still largely dependent on agricultural incomes and when those incomes drop or stagnate they resort to debt for providing education to their children.

What is the implication of this shift for farmers mobilization? The *kisan* (farmer) identity which played a crucial role in mobilizations during the 1980s is in a state of flux. Take the question of land acquisition for example. During our fieldwork in 2015, the amendments to the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 brought by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government was being opposed by an array of political actors including BKU and several other farmer organizations. In the BKU rallies on these issues that I attended, the participation from Muzaffarnagar was relatively thin. Back in the villages where we conducted our field work, when we asked several groups of farmers about why they didn't attend the rallies, the most frequent answer was: "If someone offers four times the market value of land to us today, several of us might actually take it, choice or no choice". It has become increasingly difficult to construct a set of shared interests which will appeal to a wide set of farmers. Thus the ineffectiveness of various outfits to mobilize farmers on a large scale is because farmers' interests can no longer be easily constructed around a narrow set of economic demands like terms of trade as was possible earlier. As one farmer exclaimed:

**BKU and the farmer no longer compliment each other.**

There is a lot that concerns a peasant, which falls outside BKU's agenda and there is a lot in BKU's agenda that no longer concerns a peasant. And therein lies one of the reasons of why not only BKU but any organization in the region has been ineffective in organizing farmers as a social category even during the moments of crisis for the peasantry.

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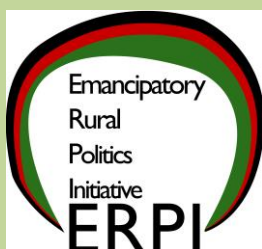
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**The Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI)** is a new initiative focused on understanding the contemporary moment and building alternatives. New exclusionary politics are generating deepening inequalities, jobless 'growth', climate chaos, and social division. The ERPI is focused on the social and political processes in rural spaces that are generating alternatives to regressive, authoritarian politics. We aim to provoke debate and action among scholars, activists, practitioners and policymakers from across the world that are concerned about the current situation, and hopeful about alternatives.

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