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வந்தலாறு

Question For the Needs of Agrarian in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Tamil Nadu emergence as a developmental model rests on its ability to combine economic growth with poverty reduction and high levels of human development. Scholars attribute such outcomes to a set of social policies implemented in response to a long history of “democratic action.” It is, however, not clear whether such intervention through social policies can also enable a more inclusive trajectory of economic development. This paper uses the analytical lens of the “agrarian question” to examine this aspect of the state’s development. While economic diversification by capitalist farmers in India is a commonly accepted fact, it is rarely analysed through the lens of agrarian questions of capital. This paper argues that questions about the movement and transformation of agrarian capital continue to be significant in understanding contemporary processes of agrarian change and rural development. However, these needs to be studied by looking beyond the agrarian transition debate in contexts where agrarian capitalism has consolidated itself and non-agricultural capitalist development is not fuelled by agrarian capital

Keywords: Agrarian, Agricultural, landownership, grain mandi

Introduction

Agrarian transition is the key for the transformation of a backward country like India into a modern developed society. This historical process remains as yet incomplete and is proceeding rather slowly in all its complexity. Basic structural transformation including reforms in landownership, land tenure and land management figured as the foremost agenda for agrarian transition before the nation builders in the immediate decades after independence. However, given the political dispensation at both the central and state levels, these reforms remained half measures. Though different states undertook various reform measures with

varying degrees of success, they never exhausted their full limits and still much remains to be done along these lines.

In the latter decades, structural reforms gradually took a back seat and the planners and policymakers pinned all their hopes on various institutional measures taken by the state, like infrastructural development, introduction of new technology, input subsidies, remunerative and support prices, institutional credit, etc., to promote agricultural growth and productivity. Despite some impressive gains over the years, of late there are indications enough that mere quantitative and incremental addition in terms of all these parameters is not enough to sustain a higher growth in production and productivity. Moreover, the impacts of all these policy measures have not been uniform in all the regions because of a combination of physical features like the fertility of the soil, rainfall. shall see in detail, to prove that in the absence of a powerful impulse for capitalist development imparted, among other factors, by the elimination of inequalities in landownership, the land reforms-irrespective of whether they are shallow or have relatively more depth from the point of view of redistribution of the land within the well-to-do landowning classes would not make any substantial difference.

First, let us look into the outcome of the land reforms in concrete terms. The 1961 Act set 30 standard acres as the ceiling for an household-which may be up to 60 acres if there are more than five members in the household and there were numerous other exemptions and loopholes. That by the time the Act came into effect; the landlords had affected massive land transfers, through sales and benami transfers. is a well known story. And there were innumerable litigations in the aid of those who missed out. The 1961 Act was patently a failure. The DMK government that came into office in 1967 brought in the 1970 Act which said the ceiling would be 15 acres but didn't do much to plug the loopholes. The farce begins with the estimation of surplus itself. An area of 71,000 acres is a mere piffle when compared to the acreage owned by the landowners in the size-class having more than 10 hectares each which comes to around 3,700,000 acres even in 1982, that is much after the land reforms. Anyway, more important than the number of acres redistributed is the overall impact on the structure of landownership. The only data available in this regard is the NSS Report (37th Round) on Lind Holdings, 1982, Let us make a review of the data available.

In recent years, it appears that the sutures that held the Tamil Nadu model together are being undone. Over 200 farm- ers have committed suicide in the state since the second half of 2016, reflecting a long-term crisis in the state's agriculture and agroecology. While the state's welfare

net is believed to have offset the negative fallout of agrarian distress to an extent, its limits are now evident. Affirmative action in employment policies have also become less effective due to reduced employment Data on the distribution of Land ownership among households in different size class bears out the following skewed landownership, which has only marginally changed between 1961-62 and 1982, the period, which witnessed all the land reform measures. In 1961-62, 78.42 per cent of households having less than 1.01 hectares each owned 19.99 per cent of the area while 3.28 per cent of the households having more than 4.04 hectares each owned 31.3 per cent of the area. In 1961-62, 17.30 per cent of the households having between 1.01 per cent hectares to 4.04 hectares each owned 48.71 per cent of the land while, in 1982, 15.84 per cent of the households in the same size-class owned 50.77 per cent of the land. The net sown area in the state was 5,997,000 hectares in 1960-61, 6,169,000 hectares in 1970-71, 5,846,000 hectares in 1983-84; 1 per cent of this would be about 145,000 acres. This would perhaps give a more concrete quantitative picture of what these tiny percentage shifts actually signify.

Predominance of Small-Scale Farming

The average area owned per cultivating household in 1982 in Tamil Nadu was 0.70 hectare while the all-India average was 1.40 hectares. In terms of the small size of the average holdings, Tamil Nadu comes third, next only to Kerala and West Bengal. While it may be argued that a small farm also can take to capitalist farming and size of the holding need not be a constraint for that, there is no denying the fact that over a period of time there ought to be a differentiation and new land concentration with a significant reduction in the number of small farms. This is totally absent in Tamil Nadu.

Lack of Size-Class Differentiation

Whatever may be the degree of differentiation occurring in terms of other parameters, the differentiation among the intermediate size-class category is virtually absent in Tamil Nadu. And this category accounts for almost half the land and a good 15 per cent of the holdings and this situation has not changed over two decades. In 1961-62, 17.30 per cent of the households owned 48.71 per cent of the land in the 1.01 hectares to 4.04 hectares category. And in 1982 15.84 per cent of the households owned 50.77 per cent of the land in the same category. The picture is more or less the same in terms of the operational holdings also. This remarkable stability of the small-scale farming speaks for the stagnation in capitalist transition This is by no means to deny any development of capitalist relations in Tamil Nadu agriculture, However,

the top-down character of this development, while benefiting the upper crust with all their feudal trappings in the countryside, has made its broad-based development impossible. Even going by the Indian experience with its immense regional variation, the capitalist development on a relatively Tessa mupaitous peasam proprietor base in Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh and part of Karnataka has been relatively more impressive than even in West Bengal where the reforms have been an half measure and the tenants have not been made owner cultivators but are held militically bottage by a garment in which they have become dependent for the security of their tenure and where again the capitalist development has to depend on a thin layer of newly-emerging kulaks. In this sense, the kulak-based capitalist transition in Tamil Nadu is still worse off.

Agrarian Transformations

Agricultural production has changed dramatically in the last hundred years, prompted by changes in the structure of markets and commodity chains, the industrialization of agricultural processing and the uses of agricultural products. Intertwined with transformations in structures of agrarian activity and relations among agrarian classes, these changes have been reflected, inter alia, in the terminology used to describe them. Plantation owners have become (or been replaced by) capitalist farmers, peasants by smallholder farmers; slaves and serfs by "free" workers wage earners, labor tenants, out growers and farm managers, many of whom are obliged to work, but by circumstance rather than direct coercion. Transhumant pastoralism still exists-notably in the African savanna and Sahelian regions but is increasingly replaced or marginalized, in many areas, by ranches or by smallholder farms that keep a few livestock on the side.

Each of these agrarian classes may be further subdivided, according to size, ownership, terms of employment, mobility and so forth. Older forms of enterprise and relations of production continue to exist, especially in poorer economies, alongside more commercialized or technologically complex enterprises, and many agrarian societies remain (or have become) deeply divided between prosperous farm owners, including corporations, and low-paid skilled and unskilled workers, many of them seasonal migrants, who earn little and often live in poor conditions.

Changes in the social character of agrarian classes have resulted from, or accompanied, transformations in the structure and dynamics of agrarian economies and societies. The following paragraphs discuss several of the principal forces of agrarian change in the twentieth

and early twenty-first centuries-commercialization, technological change, diversification and dependencies asking how far class relations help account for the realities of contemporary agrarian life, and shifts in the roles of agricultural goods and agrarian societies in national and international political economics.

Limitation of Sponsored-From-Above Capitalism

The share of agriculture (including crop, livestock, fisheries and forestry) to the Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) was 52 per cent in 1960-61. It came down to 39 per cent in 1970-71 and further to 29 per cent in 1981-82 (at 1970-71 prices) and to 23 per cent (at 1980-81 prices). This has further come down to 22.32 per cent in 1994-95. This decline is sharper than the all-India average during the same period, the corresponding figures for which are 47 per cent to 34 per cent. On the face of it, this looks impressive. It would seem that in hardly a few years. Tamil Nadu would be able to catch up with some of the less developed countries in the west. On the contrary, these figures are highly misleading. Far from being an indicator of rapid industrialization in the state, this is a sad commentary on the stagnation and lack of sustained growth in agriculture.

While the agricultural growth between 1969-70 and 1990-91 in Punjab is of the order of more than 6 per cent per annum, in Tamil Nadu it is about 3 per cent. Compared to the decline in the share of agriculture in the NSDP, the occupational structure of the working population dependent on agriculture, comprising cultivators and agricultural laborers, has only marginally declined from 63.3 per cent in 1961 to 61.8 per cent in 1971 and to 60.9 per cent in 1981. This has marginally declined to 59.1 per cent during 1991. This is a testimony to the dead slow pace of capitalist transition and the semi-feudal characteristic of the agrarian economy. The declining share of agriculture in NSDP and the concurrent constancy in the percentage of working population in agricultural sector only means relative decline in the income per head in the agricultural sector and their relative impoverishment.

Land and Pre-Capitalist Agriculture

The pre-capitalist social institutions that organized land use practices in both subsistence-oriented communities and pre-capitalist states reflected a key characteristic of agriculture. This is the capacity of agriculture to supply a surplus: production neither by peasant farmers of food and non-food crops that they themselves neither needed to eat nor to store as seed for the following growing season. The production of surplus meant that, for the first time in human history, people could eat when their own production was inadequate or without being

directly involved in hunting, gathering or producing food. In order to do this, the terms and conditions governing the distribution of surplus had to be such as to allow those in need of surplus to be able to secure the food they needed from a food producer. Thus, surplus opened up two distinct possibilities: first, the possibility of sustaining life even when a farmer's own food production was inadequate and second, the possibility of sustaining non-food producers' soldiers, servants and artisans, as well as an elite class of lords, bureaucrats and priests.

With regard to the first possibility, early agriculturalists developed what James C. Scott (1976) has called a 'subsistence ethic', a social relationship that is a marker of some peasant and Indigenous societies up to the present day. The subsistence ethic resulted in extended kinship groups and early agricultural villages developing technical arrangements around farm production processes and social arrangements around food distribution mechanisms that ensured that all within a community were able to obtain their basic food needs regardless of the success or failure of their food production processes or their social status within their communities. For example, communities developed work-sharing arrangements at important stages of the farm production cycle, such as harvesting; such reciprocal labor exchanges would entitle members of communities, if necessary, to make claims on the farm production of those for whom they had worked. Similarly, the celebration of communal feasts at different times of the calendar were social arrangements that could serve as a means of collective redistribution from those producing surplus to those that had under produced, allowing them to maintain a minimum standard of living when production was less than that which was necessary. Thus, the subsistence ethic produced reciprocal dependence within and between households in villages, ensuring a socially constructed right to adequate food within a community. In subsistence-oriented societies, which were organized around kinship relations, it was the surplus, the subsistence ethic and reciprocal dependence that allowed the emergence of divisions of labor, and particularly artisans, religious figures and warriors

Agriculture-Based Businesses

Agriculture-based businesses include off-farm businesses that are linked to agricultural production and require substantial investment. The most common is the commission agent business. Arhtias are licensed mediators of sale of farmers' produce to any public or private purchaser in the regulated wholesale market or *mandi*. They are also the chief source of informal credit for the farmers and are seen as highly exploitative due to their control of interlocked product and credit markets

Historically, the arhtia business was dominated by the mercantile castes or Maharanis across Punjab, but Jat farmers have been known to be diversifying into this field since the 1980s. In 2005, 105 out of 290 arhtias in the Khanna grain mandi were Jats. In my survey sample, there were three households that had diversified into this, in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, respectively. In 2014–2015, the head of the Arhtia Association of Khanna was also Jat. Mahajans deeply resented the breach of their monopoly. Jat arhtias, however, argued that, as farmers who had to sell their produce in these mandis regularly, it was only natural that they would establish themselves in this business. They claimed that Mahajans resented them since they could tap into their kinship and community networks to attract clients. Moreover, by channeling agricultural loans to the business, Jat farmers were also able to generate a corpus to lend money to farmers.

While farmers have become arhtias in the grain mandi, this has not happened to the same extent in the fruit and vegetable mandi. This was because, firstly, fruit and vegetable trade had no state support or guaranteed wholesale prices as in the case of paddy and wheat, making it a riskier business to invest in. More significantly, due to the absence of state support, this business relied much more on business networks in larger mandis in other parts of the country. Only one Jat arhtia had newly ventured into the fruit business in Khanna mandi at the time of this study. The handful of Jat arhtias here were those who also grew vegetables and, therefore, had some links with traders. Outside mandis, a few extremely well-off potato-growing Jat households also invested in potato trade by leveraging these links (one in my household survey sample started this in 2011). They worked on a commission of 1% to gather potato supplies from villages for traders in larger cities like Delhi and Agra.

Labor and the Reproduction of Social Life

The more visible forms of labor that take place in the production process (the moment of exploitation) obscure reproductive labour and the fact that capitalism is reproduced through social life as a whole (the process of exploitation). Social reproduction is the set of private and public activities, institutions and unpaid and paid forms of work that are largely carried out by women in the home and in social institutions like schools and hospitals, which prepare and repair laborers physically and emotionally. Without it there can be no labour-power, no production process and no accumulation.. In late medieval and early modern Europe, widespread violence in the form of witch hunts sought to erode women's control over their bodies and intensify the biological aspects of reproductive labour to compensate for post-

plague labour shortfalls. In Victorian Britain, women were increasingly pressed into highly exploitative wage labour, without reducing their reproductive labour burdens, producing 'a crisis of social reproduction as working-class 'capacities for sustenance and replenishment were stretched to breaking point (Fraser 2017, 26). Capitalism sought to reset its appropriation of reproductive labour through discourses of house wife inaction 1986. The sharpened differentiation of home place and workplace has also served to divide male and female laborers, and justify a systematic underpayment of women for equivalent work. Throughout, capital and the state have used social welfare practices and ideological signifiers to champion the 'privatized household' as the primary foundation of social reproduction all part of the 'ways in which a capitalist totality inflects our institutions, interactions and relations (Ferguson 2016, 50-51). More recently, neoliberal's erosion of state support for social reproduction (which was only ever threadbare in many countries) has led to better-off households buying in care work from lower-income households in often radicalized

Conclusion

Whether it is caste-clashes or movement for separate reservation- all these are the manifestations of unresolved agrarian issues related to the land question. To speak in structural terms, the unresolved nature of the land question and the stagnation in capitalist development are organically related. Unresolved agrarian issues in the state and a prolonged stagnation in the agricultural sector call for radical change in the basic agrarian structure thorough going land reforms with a greater political will.

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