

**DESIGN AND IMPACTS:
A REVIEW OF THE CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH ON
HOUSEHOLD MOBILITY IN INDIA'S RURAL AGRARIAN
ECONOMY**

by

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ABSTRACT

Study of social and economic mobility at the household level is a vital area of research. Relatively little has been done in this realm as it relates to India's agrarian economy. This paper seeks to examine those studies of household social mobility that have been carried out since the time of the first introduction of green revolution technologies in India. The merits and limitations of the design and methodology of these studies are considered. The insights their findings impart are synthesized in the context of the agricultural and rural development history of India, and ultimately, taken up in a discussion of dynamics of agrarian change. The final conclusions of this research are that large-scale inequalities in India's economy persist; although India's particular development trajectory is ultimately uncertain, our understanding of it can be strongly augmented by comprehensive research at the village level.

Keywords: household mobility, India, agrarian studies, peasant studies, agrarian question, agrarian change, class analysis, village-level research, capitalist transition

DEDICATION

To India's Foundation for Agrarian Studies (FAS). Thank you.

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1: Why Social Mobility Matters

1.1 Introduction

India has experienced tremendous change through the past several decades over the course of its rapid modernization. This is an experience that has largely been considered and measured on the basis of macroeconomic indicators, and against the contemporary mainstream development model, and as such been highly praised. Arguably, this sort of depiction and the use of these types of indicators conceal important underlying features of India's socioeconomic landscape. It stands as the motivating basis of this paper that the endeavour to identify and analyse the direction and extent of social and economic mobility at the household level is a vitally important theme for research. For whom have social and economic opportunities expanded; who are those falling behind; and, what are the factors that have motivated or provoked these outcomes? The endeavour to probe these questions leads to a more complete understanding of a society's development experience. When qualified even very generally in these terms, it is plain that India's spectacular economic development is riddled with gross socioeconomic inequalities and imbalances that warrant much deeper social analysis than macroeconomic analysis alone can provide. These sorts of questions, which are the basis of all studies of social mobility, can only be explored in rural society with longitudinal data on landholding patterns and occupational change. In spite of the recognized importance of this type of analysis however, and despite a long history of scholarly interest in India's agrarian economy over

the course of its modernization, this type of complex examination of mobility at the household or individual level has been relatively neglected.

Trends in social research have generally been tied to political orientation, and subject to fashion. Interest in the agrarian economy peaked in the 1970s when 'rural development' programmes, alongside the introduction of new high-yielding varieties of the major food grains, were introduced as the means of improving rural livelihoods. Scholars of the social sciences avidly debated the impact that the introduction of this type of development strategy would have on the socioeconomic dynamics of the rural population. As crop yields began to stagnate by the 1980s, the bulk of the research seemed to suggest that underlying socioeconomic inequalities, although reorganized, had persisted. Meanwhile, India's central government increasingly gravitated away from many of the socialist planning and policy-making conventions of its foundation toward embrace of the mainstream neoliberal development agenda. This shift was cemented with the introduction of economic reform policies in 1991, which embodied the familiar neoliberal policy package of liberalization, privatization, and deregulation, coupled with what amounted to a 'reversal of land reform'. With these political orientation and policy changes, so too did the longitudinal village study increasingly fall out of favour as a research method. Although there has been some softening of neoliberal policies over recent years, with a series of redistributive measures to improve social welfare, and although there has been somewhat of a revival of interest in village research, general neglect of the dynamics of the rural economy, both in policy and in research, to a large extent persists; the development agenda remains principally focused on economic growth. This is significant, given that over two-thirds of India's population remain rural, and

largely dependent upon agriculture, and that by all accounts it appears that large-scale inequalities in the rural economy persist.

Taking the view that study of social and economic mobility at the household level is a vital area of research, and in the recognition of the fact that relatively little has been done in this realm, the major objective of this paper is to examine those studies that do take up the subject of household mobility in India's rural economy, as they have been carried out since the time of the first introduction of green revolution technologies. Specifically there are two aims in this focus: first, to consider the merits and limitations of the design and methodology of these studies; second, to synthesise what has been learned substantively from them. The findings are examined both in the context of the agricultural and rural development history of India, and ultimately, taken up in a discussion of dynamics of agrarian change: what can these studies of social mobility in rural India tell us about the classic debate on agrarian change?

1.2 Studies of Social Mobility: Concept and Significance

Social mobility theory is an attempt to explain the movements of individuals, households, and groups between social positions, both in terms of frequency and the way in which people become distributed into a range of social positions (social selection) (Matras 1960; Pais 1955; Horan 1974). The formal theory was first outlined by sociologist S. Pais, who applied the mathematical theory of Markov chains, which describe how current structural configurations condition future outcomes, to the social dynamics of a population. Pais' suggestion was that the theorem could be applied to the

comparisons of patterns of occupational or social mobility, given that “if the recruitment proportions are constant, the distribution of the population among social classes tends towards an equilibrium distribution such that the number in each class becomes a stable proportion which is maintained through time” (Pais 1955:76-77). Because there is an equilibrium distribution corresponding to each observed mobility pattern, the patterns may be compared in terms of their individual associated equilibriums, in terms of the extent of the total population mobile in equilibrium, or the proportion of individuals in each social class. These types of comparisons are analogous to comparisons of observed sets of fertility and mortality rates according to their associated stable age-sex distributions or true rates of stable population growth (Matras 1960).

Studies of household mobility have typically been based on a matrix form of presentation and analysis consistent with this conceptual model (Horan 1974; Swaminathan 1991). Social classes are defined and movement for an individual or household upward or downward within the class hierarchy is measured, commonly in terms of landholdings or other productive assets, or on the basis of occupation. Matrices of these shifts are collected from census or village-level data and are compared in terms of proportions, for example, in farming and non-farming populations, and between certain socioeconomic groups from one generation to the next. Questions can be answered about a particular mobility condition: how much actual movement, or mobility, is there; how many individuals change occupation over a given time period of interest? Questions can also be asked about its direction: is movement between some pairs of occupations more frequent than between others; do systematic movement patterns exist, and if so, what do they expose about the structure of mobility? Broadly speaking, the

rigidity of the social structure suggests important insights about the distribution of power and wealth, and the level of inequality that persists in a society. Total immobility, for example, would be indicative of a society where all occupations are hereditary (Swaminathan 1991). Moreover, as a functional term, it is important to clarify the demarcation between “structural mobility” and “exchange mobility”. The former signifies an absolute level of change in social position, or the process of development. In nearly all societies it can be said that the population as a whole is experiencing general upward mobility in comparison with previous generations — the ‘pie’ is growing in absolute terms. The latter term is an expression of relative social change, as a zero-sum experience; it describes relative places in a social distribution — how that ‘pie’ is divided. For purely analytical purposes, the impact of structural changes are extraneous to the analysis of exchange mobility: a society can simultaneously experience a high rate of upward structural mobility and highly unequal relative mobility probabilities. It is clearly the latter that has utility as an explanatory value when our primary focus is to analyze persistent and changing inequalities, and the distribution of poverty and power (Horan 1974; Swaminathan 1991).

There has been significant debate about the best classification criteria with which to measure mobility. As a consequence, scholars have employed a wide range of indicators, or classification schemes. This has compromised, to some extent, the ability to make direct comparisons of the results between studies. For analysis of rural societies, the more common approach has been to organize village households on the basis of the extent of their landholdings. The rationale for this is that “land is the primary prerequisite for the production in agriculture and distribution of land an important indicator of

someone's position in the system of agrarian production" (Ramachandran 1990:47; see also Bakshi 2008). Other scholars reason that "occupation is the most approximate signifier of an individual's differential economic status, power, and prestige" on the basis that it is the most straightforward of indicators (Singh 1976:15). While there is no standard framework for categorizing socio-economic divisions at the village level, the limitations and the difficulties inherent in each system of classification must be recognized. For example, there can be limitations to taking landholding size as a defining variable, if significant variation in the quality of the land is concealed. It is on the basis of these types of complexities that there is good reason to suppose that a collection of closely related indicators of status differentiation, such as landholdings, other economic assets, occupation, and the degree of which a household earns livelihood through physical labour, can impart the most accurate proxies for class position in the classification of rural households.

These types of contemporary classification reflections are very much rooted in the traditional, theoretical models of class, which seek to explain how class relationships come into being, and why particular class relationships exist across broadly similar societies. In the well-known Marxist model, class is conceived as a group of individuals who share similar economic and social relations. Social class is understood to necessarily exist because of the fundamental economic structure of work and property. The broad groups of people that make up each class, according to Lenin's definition, differ from each other "by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour, and consequently, by the

dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it” (Lenin 1965:421).

After observing the rural economy of late 19th Century Russia, Lenin concluded that a process of ‘differentiation of the peasantry’ was taking place, whereby two extreme groups, a large group of wage-workers at the bottom and a much smaller bourgeoisie at the top of the social hierarchy, were formed at the expense of a middle peasantry. He defined differentiation, as the sum of all the “contradictions inherent in the commodity economy and every order of capitalism,” which are present with every economic phenomenon among the peasantry; each one necessarily entailing “advantage for some and disadvantage for others” (Lenin in Nelson-Richards 1988:13). According to this interpretation, these contradictions are manifested as “competition, the struggle for economic independence, the grabbing of land (purchasable and rentable), the concentration of production in the hands of a minority, the forcing of the majority into the ranks of the proletariat, their exploitation by a minority through the medium of merchant’s capital and the hiring of farm labourers” (Lenin in Cliffe 1977:197). It is suggested this process “signifies the utter dissolution of the old patriarchal peasantry and the creation of *new types* of rural inhabitants” (197).

According to Lenin’s interpretation, beginning with the emergence of property demarcation, two extreme groups are formed, the rural bourgeoisie, or well-to-do peasantry, at one end, and the rural proletariat, the class of *allotment-holding wage-workers*, at the other. Both of these new groups are defined by the commodity basis of the economy, and both created to the detriment of the middle peasantry, who are self-sustaining through independent agricultural labour. With the process of development, the

“middle members are swept away and the extremes are reinforced” (Lenin 1965:422). This differentiation process creates “a home market for capitalism” (422). All the while, an important role in this process is played by merchants’ and usurer’s capital, which necessarily precedes the formation of industrial capital. This process of polarization is suggested to occur to the collective detriment of society: the conflicting interests of the growing proletarian majority (who seek to maximise wages and benefits), and the increasing accumulation of wealth and resources of the bourgeoisie minority (who seek to maximise profit at the expense of the proletarian majority), ultimately leads to conflict and to the demise of the capitalist system. To the classic Marxist theorist then, this is the natural path of development, a transition that all pre-capitalist, agrarian societies must necessarily go through. Each society embarks on this path, with more or less violence and grief, on the basis of its distinct historical and social situation (Bernstein 2004; Lenin 1965; Nelson-Richards 1988).

Neo-classical theories of development on the other hand, stand in opposition to the Marxist interpretation of a dynamic peasantry as an inevitable source of future conflict. Instead, ‘the peasantry’ is interpreted as a homogeneous group. In this interpretation, ‘owner and ‘tenant’ become the only truly valid units of analysis, to the exclusion of the recognition of a process of class differentiation and class formation within the peasantry. The individual is thought to act rationally according to the values associated with a range of outcomes; he will always act to maximise his utility on the basis of being presented with the full and relevant information. As such, questions that focus on owner versus tenant efficiency can be posed, while the bearing that tenurial

relations may have on each household's decision-making are of little significance (Patnaik 1979; 1990).

The neo-classical concept goes back to Chayanov's well-known main work which can be read as a critique of Marxian concepts of looking at the historically evolved and existing inequality in the distribution of landed property and capital. This, on the basis that differentiation can be, to a large extent, explained by 'demographic' drivers, whereby a household's agricultural activities expand and contract through the oscillating phases of a family life cycle. Chayanov suggested that the family farm's objective is to satisfy consumption requirements out of farm income. Over a family's lifecycle consumption needs and productive capacity vary. As such, a family will meet those requirements by accordingly adjusting its command over land and other resources. The questions of class differentiation and class formation therefore are of little weight or consequence in this model (Bernstein 2009; Patnaik 1979; 1990).

The central tenets of the mainstream contemporary neo-classical theory have been developed on the basis of this interpretation, while incorporating some changes, such as conceiving of the market wage rate as the opportunity cost of peasant labour. Although there many different and evolving branches of mainstream economics, this neo-classical framework can be used "to answer questions about resource-allocation, the 'efficiency' of owner versus tenant farming, or implicitly in the formulation of statistical exercises, bearing on the same questions" (Patnaik 1979:377). The notion of the "individual, guided by subjective utility in decision-making under assumed competitive market conditions" is a central theme in this approach (377).

The neo-populist viewpoint, of which Chayanov is the intellectual forbear, has been somewhat revived and applied, though tailored, in India today. The basic theoretical approach is the concept of a an economically undifferentiated, nearly homogeneous peasantry which is the most efficient means of production, and which shows extreme stability and viability in relation to competition of capitalist production; small farmers are thought to be the most conducive to efficiency and growth due to their use of family labour and factor endowments. These arguments are combined with ones for equity – the superior employment and income distribution effects of small-scale farming. Neo-populists thus view land reform positively. Neo-populists hold the belief that land should be distributed to small farmers of the rural poor, including large commercial farms divided up, on the basis of their case for ‘efficiency and equity’ (Bernstein 2009; Patnaik 1979; 1990).

In turn, neo-populists look down upon what they see as ‘urban bias’: the view that policies in the South in the period of statist developmentalism of the 1950s -1970s, preferentially chose cheap food policies in the interests of strong urban constituencies and what they see as an erroneous emphasis on industrial development, at the expense of small farmers. This concept was a contributing factor in the World Bank’s 1980s’s critique of the state-led development strategies (Patnaik 1990; also see Lipton 2004).

Most recently the neo-populist standpoint has been adapted to encompass a new concept of market-led land reform, closely associated with the World Bank’s influence on the mainstream development discourse. In this contemporary trajectory of neo-populism, Chayanov’s vision has been abridged to “a set of arguments from neo-classical economics that can be accommodated to the dominant neo-liberal paradigm” (Bernstein

2009:70). As suggested above, and in an adaptation that is quite far from Chayanov's original theorem, the most significant feature of the family farm under the neo-liberal perspective is that they ought to be "constituted on the basis of individualized property rights and production in properly competitive markets for land, as well as other factor and product markets" (Bernstein 2009:70). The Indian adaptation of neo-populism thus employs an explicitly empiricist approach to the problem of rural 'poverty'; poverty is read as an 'affliction' that affects an unfortunate segment of the population. In all of the models of neo-classical tradition, the ways by which 'poverty' and 'wealth' might be linked is a subject rarely taken up. Moreover, those models that bring in the concept of peasant differentiation do so in the Chayanovian tradition of disregarding the concentration of land (Patnaik 1990).

1.3 Setting the Context: India's Social and Political Orientation at the Green Revolution's Onset

These fundamental theoretical debates have long influenced the type of social research that has been carried out in India, as it has been by the social and political context. In particular, the later 1960s and 1970s, marked a peak in scholarly concern with the agrarian economy, and with the political and social theory that could best be applied to explain the changes perceived. It was during this period that new high-yield major crop varieties were first introduced as a way of improving the quality of life of rural inhabitants. The tradition of social enquiry in India's rural agrarian economy can best be followed by tracing the social and political context of this period.

By the 1960s there had become some disenchantment with India's modernization strategy, as embodied by the First (1951), and Second (1956-61) Five Year Plans, which

had been unsuccessful in some of their social and economic objectives. In large parts the failures were attributed to the overemphasis of urban-industrial expansion, and corresponding inability to effectively develop agriculture (Cain 1983; Harriss-White and Janakarajan 1997). It was also clear that rural inequalities had persisted; the power and influence of large landholders had checked the successful implementation of redistributive land reforms. There was a widespread re-examination both of the meaning of 'development' and of the means of achieving it, with a shift in focus from 'growth' to 'growth with equity', and from the urban-industrial to the rural-agricultural sector. Alternative approaches to development planning were put forward at this time, such as the basic needs approach, "which emphasizes direct concern with the lot of disadvantaged segments of developing country populations" (Cain 1983:149).

Attention increasingly turned to the idea of improving both agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods through the introduction and continued development of 'high-yielding varieties' (HYVs) of staple crops, coupled with price incentives to push farmers to invest significantly in newly developed inputs, such as chemical fertilizers, and through technological modifications, such as the extension of irrigation. The eventual adoption and implementation of this design was in large part influenced by those foreign political and corporate actors who had an interest in obstructing the possibility of a 'red revolution', as was embodied in policies of redistributive land reform. Thus, under the influence of a report from the Ford Foundation that pushed for these objectives, a brief period of experimentation, and then a major general drought which made the scheme seem that much more enticing, the first wave of the New Agricultural Strategy was employed (Harriss-White and Janakarajan 1997). Endowments for the research and

development of new plant varieties were quickly assembled, and by the 1970s a rapid spread of HYVs had generated impressive yields, giving rise to the concept that a ‘green revolution’ was taking place, rather than a ‘red’ one (Cain 1983; Harriss-White and Janakarajan 1997).

All told, the green revolution constituted the well-known combination of “market-incentives, heavily regulated market provisions and non-market distribution” (Harriss-White and Janakarajan 1997:1469). The adoption of new high yielding varieties from elsewhere in world called for “pre-existing assured irrigation and consolidated plots of a size to take machinery, and the extension of government infrastructure and amenities, production credit, subsidized input prices, the development of accommodating markets, research and development” (1469). Long-term government commitment to financing and planning, and major project involvement was imperative.

The profound effect that agricultural intensification had in terms of absolute productivity for the half a million or so villages that comprise the agrarian heart of India’s economy, has been well-documented (Griffin 1979; Lipton and Longhurst 1989; Hazell and Ramsamy 1991). Although the degree to which new practices were applied in different regions varied – wet regions were targeted most intensively – few rural areas were impervious to the innovations (Jayaraman and Lanjouw 1999). The most significant of output gains were in the northern states of Haryana, Punjab, and western Uttar Pradesh, while even the semi-arid regions of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra experienced increased productivity (Jayaraman and Lanjouw 1999). The total cropped area in India “grew by 8% between 1960 and 1987, yield increased by 51% and production nearly doubled (by 81%)” (Harriss-White and Janakarajan 1997:1472). These

achievements, taken in the context of parallel growth in the industrial and service sectors of the Indian economy, increasingly seemed to endorse the view that India was making substantive progress.

However, unsurprisingly, from its very onset the green revolution incited heated debate over its impact on the poor and on existing rural inequalities. The debate centred not on whether the green revolution had increased productivity – clearly it had – but rather about its distributional impact. Proponents cited the significant absolute gains in terms of rural incomes and standards of living. They were confident that the benefits were scale-neutral; that they would raise yields and incomes across the board. They suggested that growth in the agricultural sector would in turn create avenues of opportunity in the non-farm economy and thus kick off the modernization process. Harriss-White and Janakarajan neatly summarize the premise behind this outlook:

Historically, agriculture declines in relative importance to the economy over time, containing, as it does, the components of its own decline: capital, labour, wage goods and raw materials. All of these need to be shed in order for the non-agricultural sectors of the economy to grow. It has been an important planning objective since Indian Independence to hasten this process along. Rural economies are expected to diversify as agriculture grows in absolute terms and as it declines in relative terms. Increased real agricultural incomes (consequent to the green revolution) will in turn create increased demand for income elastic goods and services. Such incremental demand will be met by small-scale, local labour-intensive non-agricultural production, which will mop up surplus labour virtuously.

(Harriss-White and Janakarajan 1997:1474)

In contrast, critics argued that the New Agricultural Strategy had and would do little to offset rural inequalities or to reduce levels of absolute poverty. They suggested that benefits would continue to be distorted in the favour of large farmers who had the ability to disproportionately access credit, to invest in, and to adopt the new technologies, and

who experienced lower risk aversion. Greater economies of scale in farming methods, whereby output per hectare is related to farm size, would also work in their favour. Correspondingly, the critics argued that declining product prices adversely impacted small farmers. Large landholders would be more likely to expel tenants through rent increases, and to buy up the land of small peasant farmers and force them into landlessness, while mechanization would reduce employment for the growing pool of agricultural labourers. In effect, agricultural modernization was seen to be buoying the existing polarization in the distribution of land and constraining the opportunities for occupational change of the small peasants and landless labourers, and neither ameliorating the problems of poverty or hunger in any substantial way— see Griffin 1979; Harriss 1982; Pearse 1980; Patnaik 1990; Harriss-White and Janakarajan 1997; Harriss-White and Harriss 2007.

The most radical opponents to the New Agricultural Strategy argued that, not only had the introduction of HYVs done little to ease poverty and hunger, but it had actually augmented them. This was because the vast majority of small farmers were simply not able to make the significant monetary investments that the new agricultural technology required. Those who did, it was felt, were only able to do so by taking private loans on terms so adverse that they often led to complete financial demise of the borrower. Meanwhile, they suggested that landless agricultural labourers would suffer from displacement and loss of income by the new technologies. In brief, polarization in income and in standards of living would be intensified by the new technologies— see Griffin 1979; Pearse 1980; Harriss-White and Harriss 2007.

The current state of the study of household mobility in India's rural agrarian economy is well rooted, and can be best understood, in the context of these debates.

2: Studies of Social Mobility in Rural India: A Methodological Progression

2.1 Contemporary Studies of Mobility in India

There is a strong tradition of debate surrounding the impact of modernization and growth on India's socioeconomic composition, largely in the pages of the *Economic and Political Weekly* and *Social Scientist* over the past forty years. In particular the study and evaluation of changes in the countryside, agrarian change, is considered an area in which "scholars can and must make a contribution", given the essential role it plays to support and enable true social movements (Ramachandran and Swaminathan 2004:28). As of late, this type of analysis has been insufficient to keep pace with the rapid changes that are occurring. The study of household mobility in the rural agrarian population reflects this.

As Swaminathan has emphasized:

Because of the paucity of panel data in developing countries, [India included,] research on the complex characteristics of individual and household mobility in the context of the overall process of change remains relatively neglected. For those concerned with the long-term well-being of individuals and households, attempting to identify the degree of household economic mobility and the flexibility of socioeconomic structures is an important area for study.

(Swaminathan, 1991:261)

Imperative to this process is the attempt to review and extrapolate meaning from the findings of those social enquiries that have been undertaken over the period of India's modernization. This section constitutes the first step of that process. Specifically, nine major studies have been examined, divided on the basis of three periods: *Period 1*, referring to those studies conducted between the 1960s to mid 1980s; *Period 2*, referring to studies carried out between the early 1990s to 2000; and *Period 3*, referring to studies carried out most recently, 2004 to 2009. Particular care has been taken to examine those studies in which exceptional effort has been made to place the observations in the context of wider and intricately linked processes that have affected change in the social composition of India's agrarian economy, and on those studies that draw a new dimension into the discussion. The studies examined also exhibit an observable methodological progression in terms of the proxies that they use to measure mobility and other general tools of analysis employed. For their obvious role in shaping the research model and methods employed in subsequent research, those studies that were conducted during the major first period of research, 1960s-mid 1980s, are the ones that have been examined here in most detail. This review is followed by a related critique of the methodologies that have been used in these studies. A subsequent synthesis of the substantive learning's of these major studies and periods of study, in the context of India's history of agriculture and rural development, and, importantly, of their implications for the classic debate on agrarian change, has been left to the later sections of this paper.

2.2 PERIOD 1: Studies Conducted 1960s-1980s

Arguably, the first major flurry of village-level social enquiry into the changing patterns of household mobility corresponded with the period in which the effects of the Green Revolution were being evaluated with interest by a wide range of scholars in the social sciences (Harriss-White and Janakarajan 1997). Class analysis was still very much an important focus of research; the design preference was for longitudinal village study and comprehensive analysis of the intricate social and economic relationships at the household level. One of the earlier of such attempts to measure some of the social and class relational changes during this period was a study carried out by Attwood, who examined household mobility, as defined by the extent of a household's landholdings in a village of Maharashtra over the fifty-year period leading up to the Green Revolution, 1920-1970 (see Attwood 1979). It provides a particularly good footing from which to examine the study of household mobility, and how it has been taken up. This is not necessarily because of the merits of its design and analysis – Attwood's colleagues in the field have since pointed to a number of serious weaknesses in both Attwood's methodology and his interpretation of the results – rather, it is a suitable entry point because of the intensity of the discussion it sparked. It provides a base from which to synthesise the scholarly discourse surrounding the concept of social mobility and to assess the contribution and utility of subsequent enquiries.

Attwood gathered and analyzed the distribution of land between households in the village at two points in time. Taking both a 1970 landed sample population, further stratified according to caste and size of holding, and a landless sample pop, stratified on the basis of caste and occupation, he compared both sample populations to their immediate ancestors in 1920. Attwood suggested his analysis as an attempt to “test the

predictions derived from the...Marxist perspectives – which he defined as “the suggestion that increasing commercialization of agricultural production leads to increasing concentration in the control of essential resources”, leading to “mass impoverishment due to expropriation and exploitation by the rich” (Attwood 1979:495) – against data collected from a sample of residents of a village in Western India (495).

Attwood’s findings indicated that the landless proletariat had increased over the time period of study, and he noted that this was due in major part to the process of immigration, rather than through the accumulation of land by the rich, as he suggests may have otherwise been expected on the basis of the Marxist interpretation. Furthermore, he drew attention to the observation that “there ha[d] been a considerable amount of mobility, *upward* as well as downward, among families with all sizes of landholdings and even among families with no land at all” (Attwood 1970:505). He writes:

There is one aspect of the data which is entirely unexplained by the [Marxist hypothesis] we have examined and which, indeed, lies at the root of many of the conflicts between data and hypotheses. This, of course, is the tendency of some of the poor to get richer instead of getting poorer as they ought. Why did they not get poorer?

(506)

Attwood suggested that “part of the answer” to this is explained by the fact that the great depression was particularly hard on some of the rich, and by the growing importance of cooperative credit, marketing, and manufacturing institutions, which helped to protect both small and large producers from market system fluctuations (Attwood 1979:507). He extended these findings to remark on agrarian change in general by noting that “lands do not necessarily flow from the poor to the rich as India’s villages become more commercialized...even the landless are capable of acquiring land,” and, on this basis,

suggested that the bulk of evidence in his study provides solid grounds for at least questioning the full utility of the Marxist perspective (507).

Although commended for his effort to record changing patterns of landholdings – it had been convincingly demonstrated that big landowners have not always grown richer and that some of the poor have managed to achieve upward mobility – and although his interpretation was representative of the views of many of those scholars in the field who have questioned the utility of the Marxist perspective – see for example, Mahadev 1979; Baviskar 1979; Eames 1980; Ferreira 1979 – on the whole, Attwood’s colleagues in the field were quite critical of his conclusions. They were quick to pick out a series of weaknesses in both his methodology and analysis.

Most significantly, there was criticism of Attwood’s inability to “clearly demonstrate, or to endeavour to demonstrate, the process through which some of the poor had become richer” (Hale 1979:510). A great deal of information that might have better explained the processes that had accounted for, and contributed to, his findings were not included in Attwood’s analysis. For example, missing was a description of what had occurred to make the large landowners sell their land: were they ridding themselves of marginal landholdings; did they wish to circumvent the penalty of policy restrictions; were they generating the revenues to diversify themselves into other sectors of the economy? And if so, had the rich in fact become poorer, given that patterns of landholding would have little explanatory value over such avenues of diversification? Moreover, for what reason had the immigrant landless labourers migrated to the area: had they gone through some process of land loss? By leaving out such important questions

from his analysis, Attwood's study lacked the depth of some of the subsequent research (Standing 1979).

In turn, Attwood's methodology and design has been the subject of some critical scrutiny. First, the unit of analysis used by Attwood was that of the multi-generational family, which involves some drawbacks because of the impact of memory-loss over such an extended period of time on the accuracy of the data. Likewise, the time span he used blurs the utility of the data. Because "'1920' is shorthand for the years that refer to the situation of the fathers or grandfathers or households interviewed in 1970 [...] data on landholdings in different years are pressed into service to represent a distribution of land for a single year, in this case 1920" (Swaminathan 1991:264). Not being based on a fixed time period, his findings do not truly represent a panel data set, which make it impossible to construct a distribution of landholdings for the year 1920, or to put together a mobility matrix. These factors make it difficult to directly contrast with the results of other like studies (264).

Moreover, Attwood's choice to define wealth and mobility in terms of landholding size opens a topic of particular contention. By confining his measure as such, Attwood limited himself in his analysis, for example, in the recognition that "there [were] other resources in a village economy besides land' but being unable to explore them with the proxy for mobility and wealth that he had equipped himself. His examination of landholding trends appeared to be "rather abstracted from examination of the determinants of development and change in the economy"(Harriss 1979:510), and the claim that his findings cast doubt on the Marxist perspective, not necessarily substantiated (Krishnaji 1979). As Krishnaji has emphasized:

There is no logically consistent way of discounting Marxian hypotheses by looking at the size of landholdings as a proxy for the class status of the landowner. Class status cannot be determined from the size of landholdings alone, [despite] the latter [being] often one of the important determinants. By the same token, the categories of 'rich' and 'poor' are not Marxian, especially when they are defined in terms of landholdings...What is "upward mobility" in this, Marxian, context? It is certainly not the movement of households from one size-class of landholdings to the next higher. Indeed, the Marxian model not only does not rule out such mobility, but explicitly allows for it, for as the middle peasantry disintegrates some peasants accumulate assets and land and become capitalists. The process relevant in this context is the gradual subordination of land to capital, not the concentration of land in the hands of a few "rich," although the two processes may coincide when capitalism becomes the dominant mode...It is impossible to study the processes at work in transitional societies in terms of changes in the distribution of land alone.

(1979:511)

Krishnaji suggested that, Attwood's study amounts in the end to a set of empirical observation about "landlosers" and "landgainers" that indicate commercialization has not always historically led to the concentration of landownership among large landholders (Krishnaji 1979:511; see also Mandelbaum 1979; Mencher 1979; Rorabacher 1979; Standing 1979).

Taken as a whole then, Attwood's inquiry was illustrative on many levels. It both traced the pattern of experiences in one area of rural India, presenting some very interesting observations, and demonstrates some of the important issues of design in this type of enquiry. It also reflected and shed light on the strong ideological positions from which many of these types of enquiry were designed and interpreted. While not accepted as a direct refutation of some of the more radical objections and concerns about the process of modernization, or major ideological theories of development, neither did it provide support for these views. Beyond all, it demonstrates that the effects that India's

modernization process was having on class relations in the rural agrarian economy was a network of complex inter-related experiences; there were no simple observations to be made. For future studies to yield meaningful results, they would have to employ both methodological rigour, and a much more comprehensive and protracted examination of the contributing variables and environment.

In a far less overtly ideologically-focused paper, Cain produced a study designed to analyze environmental risk and the mechanisms available to village populations in adjusting to these risks before and into the green revolution (see Cain 1983). Cain employed a similar technique than the one that had been used by Attwood. He collected survey data from three villages in a semi-arid region of India: two in Maharashtra, and a third in Andhra Pradesh. The data collected spanned the period between the time of survey (1975-1980), and the time 'at inheritance' for each household, with a median date of 1957. Specifically, he focused on the recent history of land transactions among samples of villagers, patterns of household mobility measured as gains or losses in land assets, and put considerable effort into attempting to explain the observed trends (Cain 1983).

The 119 household samples collected were stratified on the basis of operational holdings, arable land owned adjusted for land taken in under lease or share tenancy or land given out, and a series of land holding categories were created. Each household was asked to complete a record of gain and loss of land owned between the date of household inheritance, and the present. Only land that fit the definition of arable land, suitable for cultivation, was used in the survey – homestead land was excluded. Mobility matrices,

simple cross tabulations of households according to land holdings at inheritance and at present, were derived for each of the samples (Cain 1983).

Cain's findings indicated that there had been a strengthening of the middle peasantry, modest gains by the relatively poor, and a substantial decline in extent of landholdings among those in the upper reaches of the distribution, indicating that overall there had been a modest decrease in inequality of landed wealth in each of the villages. Lorenz curves of the distributional change of ownership holdings between inheritance and the date of interview "registered a contraction of the curve between inheritance and the present, indicating a substantial decrease in the inequality of landed wealth, [a] uniformity trend...mirrored in declines for all three villages in the Gini ratio" (Cain 1983:154).

Although Cain concluded "that the restructuring of land distributions within the...samples [was] far from radical, and little [could] be deduced about levels of and trends in poverty," he found "something obviously encouraging in the reductions in inequality that have been experienced" (Cain 1983:154). He correspondingly noted that there had been a "surprising infrequency of [distress land sales] in all three villages," sales across the board instead having been made out of the desire to finance investment, as for the purchase of more desirable land or for digging of a well for irrigation (155).

By examining the background context, Cain made a considerable attempt to explain some of the driving forces to which these findings might be attributable. He suggested that in part the impact of land reform legislation of the 1950s and 1960s had had a significant, though indirect, effect on distribution in the villages. In particular, land ceiling legislation provided for government acquisition and redistribution of holdings that

were in excess of certain established limits, while tenancy reform facilitated the transfer of ownership rights from landlord to tenant after a minimum period of continuous cultivation by the tenant (Cain 1983). Although there was a relatively insignificant amount of land transferred under such provisions, Cain suggested “the combined indirect effects of such legislation seem to have been substantial” (160). Large landowners were discouraged from the further accumulation of land under the threat of loss if land ceilings were exceeded. They were encouraged to sell land to former tenants under the threat of uncompensated loss and by the increased costs of management and supervision of land, after the prohibition of long-term lease. Other government initiatives, including direct land grants that had benefited a number of scheduled caste and former landless households, further contributed to the upward of mobility of the landless in the study (Cain 1983).

Overall, however, Cain suggested that the patterns of mobility and change in the distribution of land could best be understood by considering the region’s distinct environment of risk and sources of risk insurance. In particular, he suggested that institutional credit and public relief employment had cushioned the effects of recent natural disasters and averted distress sales of land. He cited the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme, the most ambitious and comprehensive public employment scheme in the subcontinent for its time, as the most significant in this respect. These observations, he proposed, highlighted the merits of public employment schemes as an instrument of population policy (Cain 1983).

Upon analyzing the robustness of these conclusions, Cain suggested that, although his own observations were not dissimilar from the findings of several other studies in

Western India, it was unlikely that were very representative of India as a whole, citing the varied, and in most cases much higher, environment of risk and limits on general sources of insurance. Although noting that little was known “about the nature of distributional change or economic mobility for most parts of India,” he pointed to evidence of widespread distress sales in many other regions of the country (Cain 1983:160).

The scholarly response to Cain’s analysis was far less animated than it had been for the Attwood study. This was likely in large part because Cain took more care to examine the contributing factors and explanations for the observed patterns, and because it was not presented as a strongly ideological piece. Still, Cain’s study was very much subject to some of the same limitations that the Attwood inquiry had been. In particular, both studies highlight the difficulties that arise from using landholdings as a single determinant of household mobility. Like Attwood, Cain considered extent of landholdings the most logical choice on the basis that “in the rural countryside, land remains the dominant repository of wealth, the dominant means of production, and the principle determinant of status” (Cain 1983:156). Although he was careful only to include land that could be considered a productive asset in his definition (arable land suitable for cultivation as opposed to homestead land or other types of landholdings), the earlier criticism, that landholdings are too ambiguous a definition can be applied also to Cain’s work, given that one tract of irrigated land might be many times as productive as another dry one of comparable size. Cain brought to light some of the difficulties inherent in using landholdings as a base measure himself. In particular, he described the difficulty of how to account for tenancy:

Tenancy is certainly a form of access to productive assets, but under present circumstances in South Asia, it is highly transitory form of access

that does not, in general, connote control. With the disappearance of long-term 'secure' tenancy contracts in the region, the concept of 'operational holding' has become increasingly ambiguous, mixing land owned and operated with land taken in under short-term lease, and omitting land owned (and controlled) but given out under lease, in unspecified proportions and area.

(Cain 1983:159)

The point here is both in the problem of comparability, and also of omission: important trends will be over-looked and lost in the broad designation. Thus despite landholding patterns being an important indicator of social and economic mobility, the problem of clearly defining 'landholding' in a way in which it can be measured, yet also account for these important variations, renders it unsuitable (Cain 1983).

Beyond this, some other key methodological issues can be noted in Cain's investigation. Among these are the obvious impacts of relying on the recall ability of survey participants to document landholding patterns over half a century before. More importantly, because Cain defined his base period as the time of inheritance, which will necessarily constitute a different time frame for each participant household rather than a fixed unit of time, his findings do not in principle constitute a panel data set. Therefore, the data "cannot be used construct a distribution of landholdings 'at inheritance' or to construct a mobility matrix, as both exercises involve an aggregation of households (which is not feasible when the time period is not unique)" (Swaminathan 1991:264). His results thus constitute a statement of absolute changes in status rather than relative changes. These drawbacks limit the applicability of his results for direct comparisons with other studies (Swaminathan 1991).

Cain was aware of many of the limitations in methodology, such as the difficulty in defining mobility in terms of landholdings. It was for these reasons, he suggested, that

he chose to focus his analysis on “insights to the process and direction of change rather than estimates of it.”(Cain 1983:161). His analysis does, in this way, add a valuable catalogue of some the patterns of change in the rural agrarian landscape in a region of western India that were occurring in the period leading up to the green revolution. Specifically, the observation that redistributive land reform policies had been indirectly effective, at the very least, was significant. As Cain suggested: “the importance of conducting research in this area is underscored by the promise it holds for a deeper understanding of reproductive behaviour and ultimately, for more enlightened and effective policy”(Cain 1983:162).

Subsequent studies of mobility reflected the more general trend of concentrated interest in what was happening in the rural agrarian economy as a consequence of the introduction of green revolution technologies and agricultural techniques. Thus they were focused more specifically on the period in which the green revolution had been introduced. In general too, they improved appreciably in terms the design and methodological limitations of the Cain and Attwood studies, among other substantive improvements, by being based on the data collected between two distinctive points in time at which survey data was collected.

One of the major studies after the Atwood and Cain analyses was a longitudinal study of economic change in five south Indian villages (Tamil Nadu) conducted by Harriss and his colleagues in 1985, and that was published as part of a book edited by Peter Hazell and C Ramasamy, *The Green Revolution Reconsidered*. The study was set up to follow an earlier village study in the same villages in 1973-4, on which Harriss had written extensively. Taken together, the 1973-4 and the 1985 study constituted a

comprehensive examination of rural agrarian change, the purpose of which he suggested was to “address the important question of whether the green revolution has tended to polarize class and political alliances, particularly between the rich and poor, that might lead to the kind of political unrest anticipated by some of the more radical critics of the green revolution” (Harriss 1982:160).

The 1973/74 data had suggested that large landholders had both higher average *yields* per acre, and higher *outputs* per acre, indicating that the larger landholders have been better able to make effective use of the new technologies and to use HYVs, in large part facilitated by their greater command over resources (such as water supply). Correspondingly, there was evidence of a small class of capitalist landholders, “appropriating surplus through the exploitation of wage labour, and reproducing and accumulating capital on their farms” (Harriss 1982:163). As a result, Harriss and his colleagues concluded that the introduction of HYVs had both augmented the exploitation of labour and increased economic differentiation amongst the farmers of the study village (Harriss 1982).

Following the basic design that had been employed by Cain, Harriss examined the trends in household mobility in terms of landholding patterns, and examined the background socioeconomic and political environment. Specifically, a village census was carried out in 1973/74 and again in 1983/84, and the distribution of data between 1984 and the period denoted as ‘at inheritance’ was compared in each of the villages. In addition, Harriss was able to extend a more comprehensive analysis of the mobility patterns for one of the villages over the period that corresponded with the major application of green revolution technologies (between 1973 and 1984). Data for all of the

villages was collected on the history of landholding and land transaction in each household; on employment; on the costs of production and labour use; and on credit transactions and investment (Harriss 1985).

Harriss' findings indicated that on whole, there had been little change in the incidence of landlessness in the period leading up to the green revolution in the five villages. Moreover, except for in the case of one village, Harriss found no evidence for increased concentration of landholdings or loss of land by the smallest landholders, but rather the reverse. In the one village that did show signs of having become more unequal (after looking back to the distribution of landownership from the time of inheritance), Harriss attribute this observation to the slow process whereby villagers had been buying back land from creditors who had come to own much of the village land during the depression of the 1930s; he did not find it to be due to the transfer from small to large landholders (Harriss 1985).

Correspondingly, Harriss' analysis of household mobility from the time of inheritance to 1984, suggested a remarkable trend of stability. In four of the five villages (including the one in which the greatest number of households experienced mobility), there was modest net upward mobility. It was only in the last village (and the one which experienced the least mobility), that there was net downward mobility recorded. Additional analysis of land sales and purchases provided evidence to suggest that there had been few distress land sales (accounting for less than 20% of all sales), and that these distress sales had been made at least in equal part by large landholders (Harriss 1985).

Harriss extended a more detailed analysis of the mobility patterns specifically for the period of increased intensity of green revolution technologies as it had occurred

between the two periods of survey, in one of the villages for which more comprehensive data had been collected. He constructed a mobility matrix between agrarian classes for this set of data, after classifying the villagers into eight groups. The classification scheme was based on Lenin's definition of class: on the basis of the observed patterns of distribution of land in relation to the livelihood needs of farm families, as defined by their relation to the means of production, and "on which the social organization of work is also different and related in a consistent way to the pattern of land ownership" (Harriss 1982).

The matrices suggested an overall stability of the numbers in each class category over this later time period, apart from the expected increase in the category made up of those households moving in to primary occupations outside of the agricultural sector (Harriss 1985). This, "in spite of a good deal of movement, rather more of it downward than upward among the classes of cultivators" (Harriss 1985:73). Of these downward changes, his analysis suggested that few could be attributed to the effects of the green revolution, but rather were more attributable to 'substantive changes' associated with the demographic make-up of households and to household partitions, the net effect of which had been a "levelling down" (75). Like Cain, Harriss noted the impact of policy on these observations, noting in particular that expansion of the availability of formal-sector credit had contributed in large part to the weakening of usury (Harriss 1985).

The contrast between these findings and those of the 1973/74 study period caused Harriss to go against his earlier interpretation of the implications of green revolution technologies. He argued that the more recent set of observations "[did] not appear to support the thesis that new technology accelerates and intensifies the differentiation of the peasantry," there being "very little evidence for the existence of a process of

differentiation involving increased concentration of landownership and the ownership of agricultural capital more generally, and losses of land by smaller landholders” (Harriss 1985:71). Although he suggested that the new technology had augmented the risks involved in HYV cultivations despite the expansion of formal credit, overwhelmingly, he emphasized that that the “more or less conventional radical wisdom about the effects of the new technology, which was that intra-rural class antagonisms would be intensified has not been borne out by the experience of the past 10 years” (80). In his final conclusion Harriss stressed that:

The point is not simply that eastern North Arcot doesn’t seem to fit into the interpretation offered, but also that this longitudinal case study shows up processes that are likely to be of more general occurrence and that have been neglected. Most important is the point that the tendencies that exert a push toward polarization also give rise to increased income-earning activities, which have the effect of stabilizing smallholding property.

(84)

By the same token, Harriss cast doubt on the claims of proponents of the green revolution who emphasized its dynamic benefits. Although his later analysis had indicated that the role of mercantile credit had been greatly diminished, there were still obvious signs of continued usurious money lending. In this, there was certainly still potential for the neutral effects on class polarization to be offset, that is, for general models of agrarian semi-feudalism to play out, exacerbating class polarization. Taken together then, Harriss cautioned that:

The burden of these last remarks is that if we recognize the limitations of our models we must be wary of allowing them to drive particular historical analysis. Yet in the case of the green revolution, both radicals and liberals seem to me to have done precisely this.

(84)

The methodological drawbacks and attributes of Harriss' study can be summarised quite simply in the context of the aforementioned methodological critiques. By following largely the same methodology that had been employed by Cain, Harriss' study is of course subject to many of same previously discussed methodological strengths and weaknesses that Cain's enquiry has been. Beyond this, it has been suggested that Harriss' use of class categories to differentiate village households on the basis of his own classification, limit its direct comparability with some of the subsequent studies. One improvement in the North Arcot enquiry over the Cain and Attwood studies, was Harriss' comparison of data collected at two finite points in time (1973/74 and 1983/84), for one of the villages which lent greater insight, as such enhancing its comparative utility (Swaminathan 1991).

Ramachandran conducted a village study that was published as a book with the title, *Wage Labour and Unfreedom in Agriculture: An Indian Case Study* (1990), in which he specifically examined and compared mobility patterns in terms of occupational change. The study was based on the data collected through village survey in one village of Tamil Nadu over a nine-year period. It entailed an analysis of the socioeconomic structure and property inequality with aspects of change in the characteristics of the classes involved in production, specifically examining overall access of individuals from different castes to a range of occupations. In addition he also observed and commented on some on the general patterns of land ownership Although similar to some the other studies examined here (Cain and Harriss), for its breadth and the meticulous detail with which the data was analyzed, by focusing on household mobility using the proxy of occupational change in addition to landholding patterns, and by focusing particularly on

the landless agricultural labourer population, and on caste-class relationships, Ramachandran's work adds both a new angle and a new layer of depth to their collective insight.

Overwhelmingly, the results of the analysis implied a story of continuity; continued inequalities, reorganized to some extent, but none-the-less persistent. In particular, it was found that the freedom of landless labourers to sell their labour on the market had been significantly restricted by institutions, or 'extraeconomic factors'. Meanwhile, it was found that "while there [was] no congruence or one-to-one relationship between occupational structure and caste structure, and while caste barriers to entry into occupations [were found to be] breaking down, particularly among manual workers, certain class-caste associations persist[ed] in the village" (Ramachandran 1990:71).

Ramachandran's analysis suggested that the more general shifts in the traditional landlord economy were distinctly perceptible in the study village. Here, one major landlord group had been pushed out of the village by another dominant landlord group, and paralleling this, the traditional organization of large landholdings leased out in diminutive plots to small-scale farmers had given way to a village characterised by direct owner-operated cultivation with hired help. In this, the changes did not translate into a "loosing of the grip of landlordism" but rather a reorganization, the major impacts of which were that landlords had become the major employers of hired labour, keeping their place at the top of the social hierarchy, while the pool of landless agricultural, labourers that had been "shaped by the development of the market for hired labour," was significantly expanded (Ramachandran 1990:71). The caste-profile of these labourers,

although heterogeneous, was universally of low socioeconomic standing. Thus were the signs of a continued social inequality: scheduled castes that were most concentrated among the hard-labouring sections of the population, while at the other end of the scale the landlord class was exclusively and consistently drawn from two upper caste pools (Ramachandran 1990).

The major observed trend of continued caste-class associations is significant. Ramachandran remarked that “while inequality of land and wealth in the village [had] taken new and more complex forms in the present period, [with the added dimension of income diversification, and related changes] wide disparity remain[ed] the predominant feature of land and asset distribution” (Ramachandran 1990:89). Land continued to be concentrated in the hands of a small minority of wealthy landlord households, while the vast majority of the rural population, the middle and poor peasants and the agricultural labouring class, remained in a state of significant comparative deprivation. Ramachandran concluded this part of the analysis by suggesting that “unless the present system of ownership and production is broken, the sources of future accumulation of wealth lie primarily in the hands of those among whom wealth is already concentrated today”(89).

In the later part of that study, expanding on the implications of an increasing landless labourer class, Ramachandran conducted what constituted a more detailed study of the characteristics of agricultural labourers and the relationship between labour as a class in comparison with that of its employers, in order to comment on the “source of expansion of the labour force in the village, using [both] material on land holdings and

occupational histories of households that [were] in agricultural labour” (Ramachandran 1990:92).

The findings showed a major process of differentiation occurring over a generation, whereby, with economic growth and technological changes in agriculture, physical labour became the “only alternative occupation open to the property-less and to the uprooted in the village, to those who [had lost] their land, and to those for whose traditional trade, craft, or service, the demand [was] dead or dying” (Ramachandran 1990:90). The total expansion of the labour force in the village then, reflected the convergence of a series of variables including: the dispossession of the peasantry and the associated eviction of tenants; the erosion of demand for traditional services and corresponding loss of traditional rural non-agricultural occupations; the existence of a large bloc of traditionally landless agricultural labourers; the opening up of new agricultural areas and opportunities for labour migration; and the persistent increase in the pressure of population on land and on existing sources of employment (land hunger). Collectively, Ramachandran suggested, these factors added “a particularly painful twist to the process of expansion of labour force and the differentiation of the peasantry in general” (90).

Overwhelmingly, Ramachandran’s analysis pointed to the failure of green revolution technologies to overcome rural inequalities. Disparities had been reorganized to some extent, but nevertheless remained. The new level of productivity that had been achieved as a result of high yield seed varieties, farming inputs, and technology, had pushed the price of land out of the reach of the poor. Distress sales of surface-irrigated land were necessitated by the new costs of failure, relieved only in part by the effect that

the new price of land may have had in helping small peasants avoid depeasantization through sale (Ramachandran 1990).

Based on the same village study, and on the same observations that were recounted in great detail in Ramachandran's book, Swaminathan undertook a quantitative examination of mobility incorporating both the land and occupational dimensions (see Swaminathan 1991). Her study has been followed carefully in this review, particularly because the strength of its design and methodology make it of particular value in the design of future research in this area (Swaminathan 1991).

Swaminathan compared the households between the survey periods of 1977 and 1985. Included in the 1985 period of study were those households in which the head of household was the same person who had been the head of household in the 1977 base survey period, or laterally the spouse of, or direct descendant of, the head of household at that time. Swaminathan specifically excluded immigrant households, or those that had partitioned. She employed the matrix approach – a mathematical analytical tool for defining social space and social movement comprised of a table of transition probabilities. In this format it is possible to map the probability of a household or individual belonging to a certain class in the latter period, having come from a certain class in the earlier period. Moreover, the distance from the diagonal can be used as a synopsis of the overall level of mobility. Swaminathan examined probabilities described by occupational status, and in turn, by the extent of land holdings, in order to construct a comprehensive representation of mobility (Swaminathan 1991).

The occupation-based matrices revealed on the whole, a significant pattern of stability: 73% of the households had remained in the same occupational category. There

was also a significant decrease in the size of the class of landholding peasantry, however, because of the high rate of tenant eviction that forced members of the peasantry to join the class of manual labourers. The class of manual labourers in the study grew significantly over the study period not only from evicted peasants, but also with entrants from those in small business activities (Swaminathan 1991).

Mobility was found to be “lowest among agricultural labourers, (82% remained in same occupation between the periods of study), followed by households engaged in trades, artisans and cultivators (Swaminathan 1991:262). The higher mobility among cultivators in comparison with the agricultural labourers was in large part attributable to changes in the size of their cultivated holdings which shifted their position on a ranking by the size of land holding. Swaminathan emphasized that “the stability among occupations...was largely because the majority of agricultural labour households (who comprised approximately half the village population) did not experience any change in occupational status” (Swaminathan 1991:263). In contrast, landlords experienced the least change. While 12% of those identified as rich peasants in 1977 had become landlords in 1985, the remainder of the landlord category had all been landlords in 1977 (Swaminathan 1991).

Those findings that fell outside the general observed patterns also imparted important information. For example, the role of diversification, as illustrated by the explanation for one landless labourer family who was able to purchase land, was noted. The case of a landlord household that had become a peasant household also emphasized the impact that the age composition of a household can have on mobility. Overall,

however, despite some occupational shifts over time, it was the high level of immobility that remained the dominant feature of the data (Swaminathan 1991).

In terms of land holdings, mobility matrices defined on this basis indicated a remarkable level of immobility among the landless. Swaminathan emphasized that “once a household [became] landless, landlessness tend[ed] to persist” (Swaminathan 1991:271). Correspondingly, the near-landless were also very likely to remain in the same category, as were the large-landowners (of 10 acres or more). The share of land in the possession of this category of large landholders, however, did increase quite significantly (from 59% to 68% of total village land); while, on average, the number of households that lost land was greater than the number that had acquired land between the two periods of survey (Swaminathan 1991).

The one group that did exhibit significant movement was the category of small landowners. However, this movement consisted of both upward and downward movement. Moreover, the overall proportion of mobile households was small, as was the total distance of that movement (Swaminathan 1991). Swaminathan thus summarized the aggregate findings of the analysis of land holdings based mobility as a pattern of “relative stability or immobility at the two extremes of the land distribution and a state of flux in the small land-owner categories”, indicating overall the continuation of longstanding polarization in land-ownership and in spite of signs of an active land market (Swaminathan 1991:273).

Together the patterns of change in occupational positions and in terms of landholding patterns, supported the view that “agricultural modernization within the existing structural framework [of that period had] provided restricted opportunities for

occupational change and [had] not mitigated the extreme polarization in the distribution of land” (Swaminathan 1991:261) These conclusions lead her to further speculate that, “without major structural changes, the existing growth mechanisms would be unlikely to generate a more egalitarian distribution of resources or wider opportunities for household mobility” (Swaminathan 1991:274). Swaminathan’s analysis was well designed, improving upon many of the methodological drawbacks of earlier studies. Two other studies, that reflect quite closely both the methodological methods employed in those early studies that have thus far been analysed, but the major findings of which it is important to note, have been included only in summary for these reasons. The first was a 1985 study carried out by Shah and colleagues in Gujarat (see Shah et al. 1985). The enquiry was set up as a panel study in which the pattern of mobility in terms of occupation was observed over the early period of green revolution (between 1964/5 and 1974/5). Sample data were collected for 28 villages in a southern region of the state. Specifically, Shah and his colleagues examined the pattern of mobility by comparing the occupation between the head of household in 1974/5 and the former (father) head of household. The results suggested that there had been a significantly low level of occupational mobility over this period. A striking majority (82%) of agricultural labourers were found to be in the same occupation as their fathers. This group constituted the least mobile class of occupations. Trades people and artisans were slightly more mobile, while those involved primarily in cultivation were found to be the most mobile, this mostly recorded as movement between landholding sizes (both upward and downward). However, the overwhelming pattern for all of these groups was one of very

limited movement; the occupational structure had transformed very little over this period (Shah et al. 1985).

The second study carried out by Rodgers (1983), was a much smaller study of the experience of 50 households in a small village of northeast Bihar. Using occupational change as the major proxy for mobility, Rodgers observed the patterns of mobility over the period of more intensive application of green revolution technologies and policies (between 1971 and 1981). The findings of this study reflected the conclusion that although there had been some upward and downward movement, particularly among the small landholders, in addition to some level of rearrangement in the upper classes, the dominant pattern over the period had been one of stability; existing inequalities continued to persist (Rodgers 1983).

2.3 PERIOD 2: Studies Conducted Early 1990s-2000

The adoption of neoliberal policy priorities in the 1990s, and accompanying shift in policy priority away from the agricultural sector, in turn saw significant shifts in the design and focus of scholarly research over that period. These changes were marked by major declines in the focus on class analysis, which had once been a central theme of South Asian studies; and of comprehensive analyses of agrarian change. With the demise of the inspirational Nehruian project of a “socialistic pattern of society,” much of the appetite for research with a social objective of “redressing class dominance” was abandoned, as was the interest in aggregating and disaggregating class differences at all (Herring and Agarwala 2008).

Both the positivist, and the more recently emerging, constructivist, lenses obscured the concept of class: positivism encompasses an emphasis on the measurable over the real, while constructivism rejects class analysis as an unsophisticated, empirical science. With these changes, research was increasingly focused at the macro level, rather than the “precise specification of class actors and the problematic of collective action.” wholes were placed above parts, and easily quantifiable proxies above social relations (Herring and Agarwala 2008:22). Unsurprisingly, the concepts of “poverty” and “identities” became hot topics, separated as they were from their relational context. Studies were increasingly focused on individual identity groups, the membership of which spanned class divides, such as Dalits, women, and Muslims, or which depended on the singular concept of being poor, rather than on systematic inequities. Correspondingly, the utility of, and interest in, village-level study diminished. The popular opinion was that methods of research focused on village and household analysis were time-consuming, garrulous, and overly subjected to the biases of their designers and respondents. Studies of mobility became fewer, and were increasingly designed in a way that reflected the new emphases, particularly in their focus on macroeconomic data (Herring and Agarwala 2008).

The Census of India 2001 was the 14th such census, dating back to the colonial period and conducted at regular ten year intervals. The Census provides information on the size, distribution and socioeconomic characteristics of the country's population and is used both administratively, and for research purposes. At the household level, it consists of information about household amenities and assets, and depends on a detailed profile of each individual (Bakshi 2008). This type of macro-level data sources, in addition to

India's National Sample Survey (NSS) database, and National Election Survey (NES) database, was the type of data that scholars increasingly favoured. The point is that studies based on these sources increasingly replaced, rather than augmented, comprehensive enquiry at the village level (Herring and Agarwala 2008).

One of the first major studies of social mobility in India during this period, and which received significant praise in the subsequent literature for its design and technique, was a study carried out by Kumar, Heath and Heath in 2002 (see Kumar et al. 2002). Based on macro level data, they used information from the 1996 and 1979 National Election Studies to make inferences about changing patterns of mobility over this time period. This particular study marks and reflects the shifting focus of this type of enquiry: from micro to macro; from qualitative to quantitative; from a focus on the complex dynamics of rural agrarian change, to general patterns (Kumar et al. 2002).

The survey data that was used in the Kumar et al. study had been conducted in 80 and 108 parliamentary constituencies, respectively, with total sample sizes of 3,800 and 9,614 respondents –and only male-headed households were included in the survey. A fourfold class scheme was used for the purpose of categorizing and analysing the changes: salariat; business; manual labourer; and agriculturalist. To analyze the influence of caste and community, a sixfold classification was used, that combined respondents' self-described religion and 'reservation status'. Caste categories were: Hindu upper caste; Hindu other backward classes; Dalit; Adivasi; Muslim; and 'Other'. The specific queries that were taken up in the analysis of this data described which sectors had grown and which sectors had contracted; how these changes had impacted the internal social composition of each social class (had they become more heterogeneous?); the chances of

individuals from each class category attaining access to particular occupations, and how those chances had changed over time. Ultimately, they were used to make inferences about India's overall level of socioeconomic fluidity and to enquire as to what degree changing patterns of mobility mirrored changes in the correlation between caste and class (Kumar et al. 2002).

Predictably, the results of this analysis suggested a major contraction of the number of people involved in cultivation – which had fallen steadily in each census – and paralleling this, an increase in the pool of agricultural labourers. Together these trends made for a fairly constant agricultural sector between independence and the 1981 census: between 64% and 67% of the total workforce was in agriculture during both the 1947 and 1981 periods, a number which had declined to 61% of the total workforce in 1991. The decrease in total numbers of people engaged in agricultural activities was matched by a modest increase in the manual, business, and salariat classes. Kumar and his colleagues reasoned that, in accordance with the mainstream modernization theories, the contraction in the agricultural sector would lead to “an overall increase in the upward mobility of the labour force” (Kumar et al. 2002:4093).

Rather than directly measuring the total amount and direction of social mobility, Kumar and his colleagues used the mathematical technique of loglinear modelling to “check whether the changes in patterns of mobility over time could be wholly explained by the expansion and contraction of the various classes” (Kumar et al 2002:4094). They designed a series of loglinear models to their tables of inflow and outflow mobility – tables of the destinations and origins of respondents in different classes. The first postulated that the variables ‘father’s class’, ‘respondent’s class, and ‘year’, were

independent of each other, a weak fit; the second that there was an association between ‘father’s class’ and ‘respondent’s class’, a much stronger fit; by the ‘year’ variable, they tested the change in class distribution between father and sons between 1971 and 1996. Although the fit in the third model was strongest, there were some notable deviations in the distribution, which suggest there were some changes in mobility that could not be explained exclusively by the changing shape of the class structure. There was evidence that there was some “change in the openness of Indian society over and above that generated by the contraction of agriculture and the expansion of the other classes,” though only by a very small margin - the change in fluidity had “not been very dramatic” (Kumar et al. 2002:4095). They concluded that “most of the changes in patterns of mobility between 1971 and 1996 [could] be explained by the changing shape of the class structure and there was no general tendency for the class system to become more fluid between 1971 and 1996” (Kumar et al. 2002:4095). Upper occupational opportunities on the whole were limited to upper class (and caste) households. Although the effect of reservation policy was noted in the fact that Dalits had improved their chances of entering the salariat to a greater extent than would have been expected of universal gains, this was not also the case for other identity groups of the same lower class (tribals, and Muslims) (Kumar et al. 2002).

Kumar and his colleagues concluded that “social mobility in India is neither particularly fluid, as evidenced by the large class inequalities, nor showing great signs of becoming more so” (Kumar et al. 2002:4096). Their work suggests that there have been significant structural changes in class composition, marked by a contraction of agriculture and the development of a new class of occupations associated with modernization at the

top of the class hierarchy – an unquestionable expansion of social opportunity on the whole. However, after accounting for the structural changes, they found that there had been “no systematic additional weakening of the links between father’s and son’s class positions, or between caste and class” (Kumar et al. 2002:4096). The jobs at the top had “remained relatively closed” (4096). Although there were some signs that the opportunity of the sons of manual workers and Dalits to gain access to the salariat had improved at a greater rate than for other groups, the improvements were balanced by declines in the chances of men from agricultural labourer backgrounds and of Muslims. Moreover, the changes themselves had been quite small. Overall, Kumar and his colleagues concluded, “both with father/son class mobility and caste/class mobility, the dominant picture is one of continuity rather than change” (4095). They summarised the implications of their findings as such:

This overview of class mobility in India has shown that the data can be looked at from several different perspectives- on the one hand, there has been a surplus of upward over downward movement, a surplus that has been generated by the occupational changes that India has witnessed over the last generation; and there has also been a considerable amount of social movement, in both directions, over and above that required by structural change. There have been great opportunities or economic advancement in contemporary India.

On the other hand, substantial class inequalities persist. A man from upper salariat origins has far superior chances to a man from unskilled manual background of achieving a higher salariat position for himself. In fact, in the period covered by the 1996 NES, his chances were 20 times those of the man from the unskilled background. These class inequalities cannot, however, be explained by the current operation of caste in Indian society. To be sure, the historical legacy of caste should not be ignored, but we suspect that similar class inequalities could probably be found in other countries that lack the caste system but are at similar stages of economic development. This is a large question that warrants further investigation, but our suspicion is that the class inequalities described in this paper are to be explained primarily by the resources – financial, educational, and social

– and that members of different classes possess and should not be ascribed to caste.

(4096)

Subsequent studies were based on similar design – see Sheth 1999; Shah 2004; Deshpande and Palshikar 2008. Decidedly, the number of studies carried out over this period were few: of those studies that were conducted, the vast majority focused almost exclusively on urban mobility, or on mobility at the national level, rather than on mobility amongst rural populations. Moreover, reflecting the broader disciplinary shifts the methodology they employed was increasingly focused on macro-level statistical data and on individual identity groups whose membership spanned class divides. The cumulative result was that was not a lot of detailed information about what was happening to the rural agrarian population was collected over this period.

2.4 PERIOD 3: Most Recent Studies 2004-2009

By the early 2000's it was widely recognized that the development policies of the early 1990s had sacrificed social objectives in favour of singular focus on economic growth, and in doing so had in many instances accentuated socioeconomic inequalities (Rawal 2009; Ramachandran and Swaminathan 2004). This was true in India, as it was in most other regions of the world. For the social sciences, this meant that there was somewhat of a reaction against the exclusive dependence on macroeconomic research. Mirroring the shifting political agenda, whereby the concept of social welfare was once more an emerging as somewhat of a political imperative under the influence of middle class activism, scholars of the social sciences increasingly recognized the value of village

study and class analysis as an important research approach. Although the disciplinary focus was still very much dominated by the neoliberal ideologies of the decade before and with it the tradition of empirical rigour, there was somewhat of a revival of the interest in comprehensive qualitative social analysis, so that the result was an amalgamation of the two – a somewhat more pluralistic approach to social research. The renewed appreciation for the value of research at the village and household level, however, has not necessarily translated into action. The number of such studies being undertaken remains few. Only a small number of researchers are able and willing to commit the extraordinary time, dedication, and investment in human and other resources that this type of research necessitates (Ramachandran and Swaminathan 2004).

One significant example of village study over the most recent period has been the work being done by India's Foundation for Agrarian Studies. Since 2006, under its Project on Agrarian Relations in India Initiative (PARI), and in consultation with mass agrarian organizations and a network of scholars, the Foundation has been carrying out a major series of village studies over a six-year period. Two or three villages from a different State and agro-climatic region are surveyed every year. The census-type surveys are extended to every household in each village in order to construct, in combination with secondary data, a comprehensive village profile. The stated objectives of the Foundation's PARI project are: "to analyze village-level production, production systems and livelihoods and the socio-economic characteristics of different strata of the rural population; to conduct specific studies of sectional deprivation in rural India, particularly with regard to the Dalit and Scheduled Tribe populations, women, specific minorities and

the income-poor; and to report on the state of basic village amenities and the access of the rural people to the facilities of modern life” (FAS 2009).

Thus far, the team has collected data in six States: Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka, with data from West Bengal, surveyed in 2010, soon to be added. The census-type questionnaires conducted in each village cover detailed demographic data on education levels; occupation and work status; operational land holdings of assets; tenurial status; farming patterns and patterns of production; asset ownership; access to social programs and amenities; and levels of indebtedness. The data collected by the Foundation’s core research team is used by academics whose research interests concern agrarian relations and agricultural change. The data provide a wealth of information for theoretical and empirical enquiry in the field of agrarian studies, for a multitude of very specific analyses (FAS 2009).

Outside of the work being done by the FAS, there have been very few major longitudinal village studies that are focused specifically on social mobility at the household and individual levels. One of the small number of studies to do so – to specifically take up social mobility as its central research question – was a study conducted by Athreya and colleagues in Tamil Nadu (see Athreya et al. 2008). The team sought to examine social mobility over a 25-year period in six villages of Tamil Nadu. They drew the data for the panel study from 213 households for the six villages, with the aim to represent dry, rain-fed, and wet (irrigated) areas, typical of “not only Tamil Nadu, but of much of south and central India” (52). Recognizing that “outcomes are conditionalized by contextualized factors of an economic, political and even ideological

nature,” Athreya and his colleagues, made the explicit attempt “to try to understand not only mobility trends but the various drivers of mobility” (57).

As would be expected, their findings confirmed that the village economies under study had gone through significant structural change over the last generation, whereby over the 25 years all of the growth that had occurred had done so outside the agrarian sector; the agrarian sector was contracting. They write: “Tamil Nadu has seen the beginning of a democratic transition and industrial and urban growth enough, not only to dampen but more or less halt the growth of the agrarian population” (Athreya et al. 2008:59).

Their findings suggested that the expanding non-agrarian sector had had “differential consequences for the top, middle, and bottom of the agrarian society” (Athreya et al. 2008:53). It was the ‘traditional underdogs’, the landless agricultural labourers and small peasant farmers (many of them Dalits), who were found the most likely to leave the agricultural sector altogether, in pursuit of improved chances in non-farm economic activities. However, Athreya and colleagues noted that this pattern of change was in large part motivated by push factors, whereby as the agrarian economy contracted these classes “were denied decent living and human dignity”, as much as they were pulled by the prospects of a better life in urban centres (59). They suggested that this may have been especially true in the late 1990s, a period of sharp increases in input prices, declining output prices, and cuts in the availability of institutional credit, which made it very difficult for labourers who had leased in land with significant rent payments, to survive as very small peasants. Thus, for those traditionally at the bottom of the social

hierarchy in the agrarian economy who stayed on in the village, and with a lack of opportunities outside of it, the old hierarchy was liable to endure (Athreya et al. 2008).

Large landholders were the next most likely class to exist the agricultural sector altogether, though not necessary leaving the village. This was in part due to the constraints on profitability and the scarcity and ‘high cost’ of labour – high only in the sense that before they could exploit labour at their will, which they could no longer do – and the increasing difficulties of extracting rent. At the same time, they were attracted to the growing opportunities in the non-agricultural sector. Interestingly, a distinctly changing pattern of inheritance was noted, whereby parents increasingly avoided dividing their farms in the traditional sense, and instead preferred to start their sons out in non-farm careers. These processes seem to have left room for the middle peasant farmers to strengthen their position, so that “the overall effect seems to be central tendency in agrarian structure, with a movement towards a strengthened position for family farming and for the underdogs in the old agrarian society to leave agriculture altogether, seeking improved life chances in the non-agrarian economy, both inside the villages and in the wider economy” (Athreya et al. 2008:50).

The study findings thus indicated a pattern of decreasing inequality within the agrarian sector, both in terms of operational holdings and in income. Paralleling this they found an increase in real incomes. Importantly, however, Athreya and his colleagues noted that these levelling effects had been much less so for the landless agricultural labourers and small landholders at the very bottom of the class hierarchy, for whom the reorganization at the top and middle classes, had little positive effect on their opportunity

for advancement. Looking specifically at the regression analysis of mobility across operational holdings, they write that:

Agricultural and poor peasants faced the lowest relative chances of upward mobility and the highest relative risks of losing position during the periods 1979 to 2004. The higher classes faced lower relative risks. We spot no difference between family farmers and others in this regard. This makes intuitive sense in that households with better assets positions, other things being equal, tend to fare better over time...For those remaining inside the sector, mobility chances are still in favour of the big farmers and against the agricultural labourers, poor peasants and the Scheduled Castes...for the old underdogs in agrarian society who remain inside the village economy and with few opportunities outside of it, the old hierarchies tend to persist.

(Athreya et al. 2008:58)

Relating back to the classic theories of agrarian change then, taken on the whole Athreya's findings on the observed mobility patterns, neither entirely supported polarization theories nor those supporting the thesis that modernization drives centripetal movement in class structure. They pointed toward a reduction of inequality, both in terms of operated area and of income among the agrarian population, where real farm incomes have risen, housing standards had improved for all, and rates of poverty declined, specifically emphasizing the impact that social policy interventions of the state had had in these positive trends. However, they note that the least favoured groups in these respects had been the agricultural labourers and very small peasant households, for whom dire conditions and old exploitations have endured (Athreya et al. 2008).

Other studies conducted over this period, while few, were designed to specifically measure mobility or were organized on the basis of comprehensive class analysis, and have seemed to echo the observations that large-scale structural changes are occurring, but that the results and the impact on the rural population are extremely varied. There are

big differences between their findings, reflecting not only the differential effects that globalized capital has on the rural landscape, but also the impact of regional variation in Indian agricultural policy on localized rural agrarian class dynamics, further adding complexity and difficulties for cross comparisons.

A notable example of one such study that highlighted the impacts of intrastate policy on class dynamics was a 2008 study carried out by Bakshi in rural West Bengal (see Bakshi 2008). Bakshi examined social inequality in land ownership in India, by analysing the data from West Bengal in comparison with the averages from other states. Specifically, Bakshi examined the extent to which Dalit (Scheduled Caste) and Adivasi (Scheduled Tribe) households – traditionally marginalized lower caste members – had been excluded from the ownership and operational holdings of productive land. She focused on the impact of land reform in rural West Bengal: not having enacted the reform policies associated with the central government’s embracement of neoliberal policy agenda of the early 1990s, West Bengal has instead stood by a policy of redistributive land reform and state intervention to ensure access to productive resources (Bakshi 2008).

The study was based on secondary data on land holdings in India, as provided in the National Sample Survey (NSS), Land and Livestock Holdings (L&LH) surveys, NSS Employment and Unemployment (E&U) surveys, and the World Agricultural Census. Bakshi compared the sale and purchase of land of all types between 1990 and 2005, with particular focus on the Dalit populations. The findings suggested that the Dalit populations were actually the net buyers of land, while caste Hindus, who typically make up the large landowning classes, were net sellers. These observations directly conflicted with the results from comparable studies in other states. These observations of the

increased purchasing power among the poor in West Bengal were attributed the effects of land distribution, tenancy reform, higher wage rates, and access to credit in comparison with state averages (Bakshi 2008).

Bakshi's findings were supported by other studies. For example, Ghosh and Chakrabarty, 2000, using similar techniques demonstrated that in most States of India the proportion of land owned by SC households was much lower than their share in total population (Ghosh and Chakrabarty 2000; also see Rawal 2009). Moreover, in 2001, Rawal had found that the net buyers of cultivable land the in parts of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab were large landowners while the net sellers were small landowners, and that the opposite was true in West Bengal (see Rawal 2001). These studies touch on a central issue of debate among political and social theorists, and one, which is examined more closely in the analysis section of this paper. The emphasis of the studies here having been that Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim, or lower class, households have been major beneficiaries of redistributive land reforms; that the policy of land reform implemented by the Government of West Bengal has contributed in a limited way to lowering inequalities across social groups in the State (Bakshi 2008; Rawal 2001; 2009).

Taken as a whole, there have been very few studies over this period that focus specifically on social mobility, and their findings are extremely varied.

3: Methodological Problems Explored

There have been two major objectives in the review of those studies of social and economic mobility that have been examined: to consider the merits and limitations of

their design and methodology; and to synthesis what has been learned from these studies by examining them, in the historical context of India's recent development, and as they reflect on the classic debate on agrarian change. The following section addresses the first of these aims: to draw out key methodological problems and points of importance in the studies reviewed. The key methodological issues are in turn very much an extension of traditional class theories and debates. They concern among other things, classification schemes, and the proxies that are used to demarcate and measure class breaks, and questions about how individual studies have been designed. The attempt to delineate and build a solid schema for class divides, in a conceptually and statistically meaningful way, is a first and important challenge on any study of social mobility. Both the classes themselves need to be defined, and some proxy to gauge shifting patterns of social and economic movement between these classes or within them. Beyond this there are many methodological considerations of importance, including the basic unit of analysis employed by the researcher, whether the household or individual, the statistical tools of analysis engaged, how demographic changes are accounted for, and researcher and participant bias. Many of these problems have been explored here, as they have been incorporated in the methodological progression of the periods of study examined, and reflecting back on the theoretical context.

3.1 Classification Scheme

Any study of household mobility, must first start with some sort of a basis of definition of class categories, as originating in and influenced by traditional social and

political theory. As was taken up briefly in the introduction to this paper, the Marxist position is that economic classes are to be looked at in terms of two related criteria: possession of the means of production, and the exploitation of labour (Lenin 1965). These poles constitute the opposing and competing interest groups that are the logical consequence of the development of capitalism in this interpretation of development. In India's agrarian social landscape, these two broad groups are readily identifiable: the landlords and capitalists at one end and the near landless peasants at the other. Landlords and capitalists are defined by their having amassed ample means of production so as no longer to be reliant on their own labour, and thus able to profit by employing the work of others. Meanwhile, the landless and near landless small peasants, by definition possess little to no means of production, and are thus chiefly dependent on contracting out their labour to others. The middle group, known as middle peasants or petty producers, are those who hold sufficient means of production to not necessitate contracting out their own labour, nor employing others; they are self-sustained by the product of their own labour. The middle peasantry is neither exploiting, nor exploited, which, according to Marx, is an inherently precarious position within the development of capitalism. Most will fall over time into the class of landless and near landless labourers, while a lucky few will infiltrate the ranks of landlords and capitalist farmers (Lenin 1965; Nelson-Richards 1988).

Although seemingly conceptually simple enough, the classification of agrarian society for the purpose of comprehensive social research in reality poses significant challenges; and the idea of a 'peasant economy', so defined because the bulk of the rural population is made up by the ideal-type of independent, self-sustaining middle peasant

farmers, does little to define the true characteristics of the contemporary agrarian economy of India. In reality, the majority of peasant owned and operated land is so small that it is necessary for them to hire out their labour, and hire in land, in order to sustain themselves; the peasantry itself is highly differentiated (Patnaik 1976; Ramachandran 1990; Swaminathan 1991).

Many studies of mobility, including most of the earlier studies reviewed in this paper, have used a single index, size of landholding, as an estimate of class status. This was true for Attwood and Cain, who used landholdings and/or paddy farming as the basis for the classification for households. They did so on the basis that land is a necessary condition for the production in agriculture, and as such, for an agrarian-based society, is a fundamental gauge of a household's position in the overall organization of agrarian production (Attwood 1979; Cain 1983).

Harriss also used landholdings as the primary, though not singular, class index. Acknowledging the level of ambiguity associated with this type of categorization, Harriss suggested that the categories he employed were intended to be "first approximations" of class, rather than comprehensive, definitive groups (Harriss 1985:73). To fully understand class divides, would require they "make the economy move" (73). In this, his suggestion was that the attempt to build a more comprehensive definition of class for the purpose of study, would not only likely be falsely representative because of the difficulty and intricacies in doing so, but would also overlook the concept of class as "something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships," rather than as a 'category' or 'structure' (Harriss 1985).

Even for the purpose of broad approximates of class movement, however, there are some drawbacks to the use of landholding alone as a class proxy that were increasingly recognized in the progression of design in this type of research. Although Harriss took account of the differences between characteristics of the land – such as between irrigated and dryland – considerations of difference between parcels of land in terms of productivity and value are commonly neglected in landholding-based classifications. Moreover, even if these differences are incorporated, for example, by using land productivity or economic value to normalize land, the fact that the same plot of standardized land can be cultivated on varied organisational bases is disregarded: a capitalist base might incorporate advanced technologies and mostly hired labour, while another plot might be based on household labour of the family farm and employ low productivity techniques (Patnaik 1976).

Other studies have employed a variety of classification techniques such as: dividing households into groups of water sellers and water buyers; those based on tenurial status, which can also lead to the problem of lumping together drastically different types, as in the case of reverse tenancy arrangements; income and asset wealth differentiated on the basis of their type –productive or non-productive; relations of labour in production, which takes a tremendous amount of background information; modes of appropriation of surplus and market dependence, although often contested for its arbitrariness; or classifications of peasant households on the basis of their demographic composition, in terms of both size and ratios of active workers to dependants, and allowing for the possibility of demographic differentiation (Harriss-White and Janakarajan 2004).

Over the course of the transition to a capitalist economy, the expansion of formal sector employment has made the process of classification and measuring change increasingly complicated. With diversification a significant aspect of the modernizing rural economy, there has been a corresponding search for a method of classification that formalizes the identification of relatively homogenous and socially meaningful groups (Harriss-White and Janakarajan 2004). It can be argued that methods that incorporate some type of occupational measure of mobility, and class distinctions, are increasingly relevant in analysing the rural economy of India.

Many of the later studies reviewed here have employed some combination of methods of classification, and monitoring of social and economic movement, by using some measure of occupation. The more detailed of these incorporate some reference to a household's ownership of the means of production; the extent to which it earns livelihood through physical labour; whether it is hired labour or of its own; and the occupations pursued by it. Although, it is recognised that this type of categorization is not above certain complications, such as the difficulty of using variables that make statistical comparison between studies possible, categorization on the basis of occupation has proven increasingly relevant (Swaminathan 1991).

Perhaps, unsurprisingly, the most effective classification schemes of all are those that incorporate both rural occupations classified on the basis of patterns of landownership, but also in terms of the growing range of non-farm occupations, implicitly hierarchical on the basis of the status they imply. That is, in terms of the opportunity they provide for generating wealth, and their required level of knowledge and technical skill, or the extent of physical labour they require (Deshpande and Palshikar

2008; Ramachandran 1990). By incorporating some combination of occupational, economic assets, and landholding indicators, the most accurate estimates of class divisions can be achieved. The balance, especially in terms of measuring socioeconomic movement, must be struck between using a proxy for socioeconomic movement that is both broad enough to be easily replicable, and detailed enough to give an accurate picture of the changing social and economic landscape. Describing the background influences, setting observed patterns of mobility in the context of the range of localized conditions and factors that may have influenced the observed changes, is important to these ends (Ramachandran 1990).

3.2 Unit of Analysis

Beyond the categorization of class, and the proxies for social and economic movement, there are a number of additional methodological and organizational considerations. First, the unit of analysis is important to this type of study. All of the studies that have been reviewed have used the household, as the basic unit of analysis where the extent of landholdings is used as the proxy for mobility, and the male head of household, in the instances that occupation has been used as the proxy for mobility. Increasingly, on the basis that households vary in size and composition, it has been argued that the household may be an inappropriate unit of analysis in general, although to date a household remains a viable unit of analysis for the study of landownership in the rural economy. In the case of occupational mobility, a study at the individual level can of course identify the patterns of movement in much greater detail than would be the case by analyzing the household unit. With diversification into the non-farm sector an increasingly common feature of both large and small peasant households in the transition

to a capitalist economy, it is increasingly important to differentiate between the occupational statuses of individual household members. For example, by becoming involved in a new economic activity, an agricultural labourer household may have expanded its income-base, while all the while remaining primarily a labour household. Recognizing and recording the occupation of each household member, would generate a far more illustrative observation of mobility trends (Swaminathan 1991; Ramachandran 1990).

3.3 Statistical Tools of Analysis Employed

The importance of identifying an appropriate unit of analysis is reflected in, a second and corresponding consideration: the statistical tool of analysis. Because class-based definitions for the social space into and out of which households move are always discrete and usually hierarchically ordered, ordinal and cross-tabular data is produced for analysis. These types of discrete and ordinal conceptions of social space are most commonly captured in mobility matrices, where the x-axis denotes the place of original and the y-axis denotes the new socioeconomic position of the household or group (Swaminathan 1991). While this matrix approach is quite useful in explaining the patterns of mobility at the household level, because they are based as such, matrices do not describe intra-household diversification. In methodological terms, “classes are always discrete and usually hierarchically ordered, which is why statistically we end up with ordinal scales and cross-tabular data, which lead to mobility matrices” (264). The matrix approach is set up to provide a thorough description of the pattern of mobility in a matrix

of transition probabilities, where m_{ij} denotes the probability of a household or individual arriving from i th class in period I , coming in period $I-1$ from class j th. The distance from the diagonal can be used as a synopsis of the overall level of mobility, given that an identity matrix with all diagonal elements equal to one and no horizontal elements would signify complete immobility (Swaminathan 1991; Athreya et al. 2008). More recently, studies have augmented analysis using the matrix approach, with a linear regression (loglinear or logistic model), whereby the logarithm of the odds of moving from one ‘class’ to another is regressed to a number of independent variables (Athreya et al. 2008).

3.4 Demographic Considerations

Where intergenerational mobility over a given time period has been examined, rather than mobility over a single generation, there are special considerations to appreciate. It is customary for a rural household to partition the land and assets in its possession between descendant families at the time of marriage of the descendants or when the former head of household is no longer able to manage family activities or contribute productively. Because different households occupy different stages of the demographic cycle, for example, before or after partition, it becomes extremely difficult to make direct comparisons of the mobility between households. To do so accurately, the researcher must statistically control for those households that have and have not gone through this type of generational transfer. Many studies fail adequately to account for this potentially problematic feature of the data. Moreover, if intergenerational mobility is instead examined through participant accounts of landholding patterns or occupational

status of a former head of household at a given stage of the family lifecycle, such as the period denoted as ‘at inheritance’, then the problem arises that the data can no longer be made to constitute a panel data set, and therefore diminishes its statistical viability, and utility for comparison. This has been a common limitation in many of the studies that have been reviewed (Swaminathan 1991; Athreya et al. 2008).

3.5 Researcher and Participant Bias

Perhaps the most obvious and most criticised drawback of village-level study is because of the inherent potential for bias. Village-level study is extremely challenging to carry out, and necessitates a tremendous investment in both time and energy. For this reason, they are rarely designed and carried out without some sort of ideological, political, or otherwise motivated interest on the part of the research team; “funding is politically embedded and conditions of relevance are attached to this resourcing” (Harriss-White and Harris 2007). The North Arcot studies, are a good example of this, whereby each of the three studies were carried out by a different chief investigator, the second of which embodied a different ideological perspective than did the first and third, which was apparent in the publications of their findings – see Harriss 1982; Hazell and Ramasamy 1991; Harriss-White and Harriss 2007. Moreover, to build an understanding of the background history and socioeconomic influences acting in the region, often requires that the researcher spend significant lengths of time ‘taking part’ in the village life, which undoubtedly has value-based impacts both on the researcher and those researched (Swaminathan 1991; Harriss-White and Harriss 2007).

An additional consideration is the propensity for household respondents to either misconstrue or hold back information because they may be wary about the purposes of the research, because of their social and political predispositions, or, as is often the case for large landowners or landlords, because they have a vested interest in preserving the local status quo. Simple inadequacies too, such as in the recall ability of village participants, introduce some level of error into village level data. Moreover, error is sometimes introduced as a result of methodological difficulties, given the range and complexity of variables that influence observed processes or events (Harriss-White and Harris 2007). The FAS's PARI project is an excellent example of the measures involved in compensating for such sources of potential error. The Foundation's surveys are designed to enquire on similar aspects from different angles, and are distributed to and completed by every household in a given village, so as to verify respondent information within and between surveys. Moreover, a team of researchers pores over every detail of the survey responses, going over every discrepancy or ambiguity (FAS 2009).

3.6 Section Summary

All told, the methodological difficulties of village-level social mobility studies are significant. Along with the ideological influences in political and research trends, the tremendous investment in time and detail that this type of research requires, and the fact that the data is easily obscured by the research tools and methods employed; and the difficulty in making them directly comparable to other studies, are factors that have

contributed to the unpopularity of village-level study in the field of development over the past two decades; to date there have been few long-term village studies on India's rural economy, despite recently renewed appreciation of their value. Longitudinal village-level research can impart a tremendous amount of information about the effects of change on the rural agrarian socioeconomic dynamics. A summary and analysis of the findings of those studies that have been carried out over the course of India's development experience constitute the remaining sections of this paper.

4: Study Findings: A Review

4.1 Contextualising the Reviewed Studies in the History of Indian Development

What is the collective contribution of these early studies of change in India's agrarian economy leading up to and during the first wave of green revolution (from the mid 1960s to the late 1980s)? How do these findings compare with other observations of India's rural economy over this first wave of the green revolution? Interestingly, relatively few attempts have been made to bring together the findings of the wealth of village surveys and census data as they pertain to the effect that this period of modernization had on rural inequalities – see Lipton and Longhurst 1989; Harriss-White 1992; Bardhan 1989; Harriss 1992; Harriss-White 1996; Jayaraman and Lanjouw 1999; Harriss-White and Harriss 2007. Invariably, to some extent the collection of reviews that have been carried out reflected the ideological partiality of their designers. For example,

Jayaraman and Lanjouw's 1999 review of the village and census data that covered this period of adoption and subsequent intensification of green revolution technologies, "The Evolution of Poverty and Inequality in Indian Villages", and published in *The World Bank Research Observer*, came up with somewhat more positive conclusions about the impact of these policies on rural inequalities, than did a subsequent review by Harriss-White in which she had examined the same period and collection of studies. In general, however, they trace a fairly discernible path of persistent inequalities. Taken together, these broader observations are compatible with the observations of those studies of household mobility that have been examined here. The following constitutes an attempt to synthesize those observed patterns of agrarian change described in the analyses of the studies carried out over this period.

4.2 PERIOD 1: Studies Conducted 1960s-1980s

For the period of early implementation of green revolution technologies and policies, in the later half of the 1960s, studies were on the whole extremely varied. This was due in large part to the different rates of adoption in different states of the India which differed significantly in terms of their policies and range of state interventions, and in different agro-ecological climatic zones. The bulk of these studies, however, seemed to support the concerns of at least the more moderate opponents of the green revolution. The benefits of this development agenda seemed to have had disproportionately benefitted the large landowners, who were able to adopt the new technologies more quickly than smaller farmers. This was due to their ability to better access formal credit, among other

advantages, while small peasant farmers in contrast, were heavily reliant on usurious credit, which limited their ability to adopt the new technologies.

By the beginning of 1970s, “new attempts to measure poverty showed how poorly India was doing” (Harriss, Unpublished). Despite rhetoric on the part of Indira Gandhi, and later her son Rajiv, to the contrary, as head of the Congress Party, neither was able to tackle poverty, much less reverse the trends of escalating inequality, with much success. In the research, this factor was well linked “to the continu[ed] significance of local power, grounded in the inequality of land ownership” that effectively ensured “the trickle *up* from poverty reduction programmes.” (Harriss, Unpublished). This, coupled with the fact that India continued to devote few public resources to basic education and health care — a tradition that has been continued over the past two decades — seemed to have all but entrenched a course of continued inequalities and restricted opportunities for the rural majority (Harriss, Unpublished; Dreze and Sen 1995).

Interestingly, over the course of the 1980s, a period of relative uncertainty ensued in the scholarly discourse. This was largely the result of observations that some of the serious disparities in farmers’ ability to apply the new technologies had begun to ‘even out’. There was widespread adoption of HYVs and technologies among small and large landholders alike, as the discrepancy in price between the new varieties and the older ones decreased. Real wage improvements in the agricultural sector seemed to suggest that the process of development had been kick-started according to plan: that the associated increase in demand for income elastic goods and services would create a myriad of avenues of employment across classes for those exiting the agricultural sector. Many of those scholars who had earlier endorsed the more pessimistic views of the effects the

green revolution would have on existing inequalities, retracted their objections to it. The interest of policy-makers and research objectives were increasingly turned to focus on growth linkages between the agricultural and non-farm economy, whereby the productivity benefits in agriculture appeared to be spreading to the non-farm sector, and augmenting in particular the incomes of the diversifying rural poor (Harriss-White and Harris 2007).

These observations were contradicted however, by the findings of more detailed village-level research over that same period. The results of these types of studies seemed to suggest in contrast, that in many instances the tightening of rural labour markets and consequent real wage increases had less to do with the advent of HYVs, than with changes in the non-agricultural sector. These changes, moreover, were found to be strongly linked to external factors such as government interventions, including agrarian reform policies, public employment programmes, and the supply of subsidized credit, which varied significantly between states (Harriss-White and Harriss 2007)

Thus overwhelmingly, despite the considerable variation and confusion between studies, especially between those of different regions or agro-climatic conditions, the collective conclusion of the studies seemed to reflect the common understanding that, although the Green Revolution probably initially had a considerable beneficial impact on rural agrarian populations, and certainly led to productivity increases across farm size classes and to significant absolute poverty declines associated with increased employment, there were serious inequalities that played out in the ability of farmers of different social castes and classes to gain access to those benefits; the green revolution had not been successful in compensating for the disappointment of mid-Century land

reform, nor had it transformed the conditions of poverty and insecurity that affected the agrarian economy. The benefits had remained constrained within the confinements of the existing structural framework. Small-scale producers remained chiefly dependent on merchant capital, and existing polarizations continued to block the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities for household mobility, so that the long and short of it was, that not much had really changed.

4.3 PERIOD 2: Studies Conducted Early 1990s-2000

In the early 1990s there was a significant change in the development policy of India that reflected the broader global enchantment with neoliberal ideologies. While, in the global context, the development agenda as set by the chief international financial institutions had shifted somewhat from the more abrasive, market-principled development model of the era of structural adjustment, to the ‘inclusive neoliberal’ model of the 1990s with its focus on poverty reduction, good governance, and decentralization, it was clear that the changes constituted little more than a softer face of the central neoliberal tenets that had informed the 1980s era of structural adjustment (Harriss, Unpublished; Rawal 2008; Ellis 2000; others).

When India’s Congress government made the move to embrace neoliberal ideologies, on the back of loans from the IMF, and through the initiation of a series of reforms in the 1990s, they cemented the break from the established socialist conventions of Indian planning and policy-making that had begun to take place over the course of the 1980s. These reform policies embodied the familiar neoliberal tenets of economic

liberalization and stabilization: deregulation; a reduction of government controls; greater autonomy of private investment; a de-emphasis of the public sector; free trade; and the removal of restrictions on the convertibility of the rupee and other inflation-controlling measures. Associated with the general trend in economics, there was a significant de-emphasis in sectoral and regional links, in favour of an emphasis on the conditions for overall growth (Dreze and Sen 1999; Ramachandran and Rawal 2009; many others).

Embodied in the idiom of reform, as associated with the de-emphasis on sectoral growth, was reactionary agrarian politics and support for ‘anti-agricultural’ policy that has since become deeply ingrained. This amounted to the ‘reversal of land reform’, whereby legislation was passed that raised ceiling levels; a steep reduction in the public investment in agriculture, both in terms of research and development, and also supportive subsidies; a reversal of the expansion of social and development banking and deregulation; and the full exposure to the volatile global market in regard to input prices and produce, and most importantly, in terms of buying of foodstuff – given that small peasants and landless labourers are net buyers of food grain and other basic commodities. Finally, and significantly, the national programmes of food distribution, including the major national public distribution system (PDS), that had long been “one of the pillars of food policy in India,” was cut back with the introduction of a new Targeted PDS in 1996-7. Productivity increases in agriculture largely stagnated, and outputs became increasingly unstable (Ramachandran and Rawal 2009).

In effect, the new policy agenda constituted an about turn, whereby the tradition of supportive government policy intended to mitigate the dominance by the traditional top dogs in the agricultural sector, however weakly it had been implemented in the past,

were cast aside in favour of the emphasis on private accumulation of wealth, and trust in the intrinsic guiding capacity of free market forces (Harriss-White and Janakarajan 2004). The Nehruvian notion that economic growth was needed in order that every Indian should have the “opportunity to develop himself according to his capacity,” or that incentives for growth be coupled with the systematic apparatus to reasonably allot the wealth that was generated, had been replaced with the perception that growth “be valued for its own sake” (Harriss, Unpublished). Because Indian states are independently responsible for internal agricultural policy, these changes played out differently between states of different political orientation; without a common blanket of social-oriented policy, there were drastic differences in living conditions and opportunities available to lower classes between states (Dreze and Sen 1996; Harriss-White 2004; others).

Taken collectively, those studies of social mobility that reviewed the period leading up to and during the paradigm shifts of the 1990s supported the general notion that inequalities had in fact been accentuated over this period. Despite the variation in their findings, and the limited number of directly comparable studies, there was far less ambiguity in their conclusions. All major studies seem to echo the same conclusions. On the whole, there was net upward structural mobility in India’s economy as socioeconomic opportunities at the top of the class hierarchy. The creation of these new social and economic opportunities, were filled and experienced predominately by those situated at the top of the existing socioeconomic hierarchy; for the rest of society, the experience was one of remarkable stability. Within the rural agrarian economy there had been some reshuffling with the rapid onset of modernization but overwhelmingly existing social inequalities had persisted, and had even been augmented. Five major outcomes of the

new policies of the early 1990s, that together acted to perpetuate the existence of rural socioeconomic inequalities, can be summarized.

First, the neoliberal agenda of the early 1990s embodied a well-cited ‘reversal of land reform’ whereby legislation was passed that raised ceiling levels. The ceiling level legislation seems to have augmented the levels of absentee landlordism and reduced the extent of land available for redistribution to the most vulnerable rural households, thereby directly accentuating inequality in the distribution of land. It has been estimated that the existing ceiling-surplus land at present is more than three times the extent of land that has ever been redistributed under land reform (Rawal 2009). Second, with fiscal contraction at the heart of the new policy agenda, the decline in public investment in agriculture, which had begun in the 1980s, was significantly intensified. Cuts to public funds, in turn impacted all of the social programmes including employment schemes, agricultural subsidies, and infrastructure programs, mostly as they had been directed to augment poor farmers’ ability to reach the same level of productivity as their wealthy counterparts. Third, there was an unequivocal reversal of the expansion of social and development banking that had been put in place to mitigate the tremendous burden of indebtedness of the rural poor brought on by traditionally exploitive systems of usurious money-lending (Ramachandran and Rawal 2009). Fourth, as a result of the fiscal reform policies, small peasant farmers, who generally have been net buyers of food grain, were gravely affected by the removal of government fiscal protection, both in terms of their new exposure to market volatility that affected food prices, and the rising cost of unsubsidized cultivation. Correspondingly, the extension of deflationary policies on the rural economy had a significant depressor effect on rural manual labour (Ramachandran and Rawal 2009).

Finally, and significantly, the advent of neoliberal reform policies, impacted programmes of food distribution including the major national public distribution system (PDS), that had long been the mainstay of Indian rural policy (Ramachandran and Rawal 2009). The new, Targeted PDS, system which was introduced in 1996-7, through both flaws in design and implementation, led to many detrimental social impacts, not least of which was the exclusion of legitimately destitute segments of the rural population (Ramachandran and Rawal 2009). To a large extent the combined effect of these policies have persisted, despite a more recent softening of policy toward redistributive social objectives.

India's adoption of neoliberal policies in the early 1990s did stimulate growth. However, in the Indian debate, most scholars support the interpretation that it was in a way that augmented socioeconomic inequality; the pattern of growth laid out in the 1990s was one that has privileged urban India to the detriment of the rural majority (Harriss-White and Janakarajan 2004; Harriss, Unpublished; Rawal and Ramachandran 2009; many others). Although real income had risen significantly between 1973 and 1994, there were gross inequalities associated with this growth. It was estimated that those at the top of the social hierarchy had experienced six times greater income increases proportionally than had their lower class counterparts. This was true for the economy as a whole, but also augmented by regional variations. The associated withdrawal of state support for the agrarian sector accentuated these realities (Walker 2004). For "structural adjustment to accelerate diversification by reducing barriers to mobility and replacing regulations which previously inhibited rural non-farm productivity activity," markets must be capable of wrenching capital from its social moorings (Ellis 1995). Observations suggest that this

was far from what was taking place. Market exchange, while being increasingly dominant in the Indian economy, was heavily embedded in, and constitutive of, class inequities. Particularly alarming, was the observation that by all accounts the proportion of the work force relying on agriculture declined over this period far less than was expected. While “agriculture’s share in the national income has dropped from over 50% in the 1950s to less than 25% in 1999, the share of labour-force engagement in agriculture, which was about 70% in 1950, still remained around 60% in 1999 (Dreze and Sen 1999).

Despite some of the observations that were made, surprisingly there were still many major unknowns about the very specific effects that the drastic policy changes of the 1990s had had on the rural socioeconomic composition. Village-level research was scarce and unfashionable, yet the macroeconomic imperative in research, and the convention of classifying the rural agrarian society in broad sweeping categories, appeared to have concealed important changes in the underlying social composition that were not directly observed (Herring and Agarwala 2008).

Based on secondary sources, and in retrospect, Abhijit Sen has suggested several overarching trends in rural India over this period. First, there was a recognized deceleration in agricultural growth and the growth of rural non-agricultural employment, and in poverty reduction. Second, there was tremendous variation between the performances of States in this regard; from the time of the 1991 economic reforms, per capita income differentials across states had risen, along with inequality within states. Those States that fared the best were those that had been less inclined to adopt policies of reform. These included West Bengal and Kerala, and also Karnataka and Assam. The trailers, which had more readily adopted the reform agenda, were Andhra Pradesh and

Gujarat, and States like Orissa and Bihar (which had not), both in terms of agricultural growth and rural non-farming employment. Third, there are few signs of a spillover of rapid growth to rural areas, either in terms of spatial relation between the two, or through migration. Finally, because of these observations, all indicators suggested it would be unlikely that rural growth could be sustained or restored without an active state able to trounce fiscal constraints. These trends have moderated the effects of economic growth on poverty reduction and have augmented the propensity for armed conflict and crisis in India's agrarian sector in the form of Naxalism (Dreze and Sen 1999).

Thus for the rural population, social differentiation persisted, augmented by environmental factors, including the overuse of water. Small-scale producers by and large persist in their dependence on traders' credit for agricultural and non-agricultural production. The livelihoods provided by the rural expansion of household forms of production dependent on commercial finance and informal investment capital were heavily screened by class, caste and gender. Moreover, the technological backwardness that this type of expansion encompassed, and its heavy dependence on child labour, suggested that this type of rural industrialisation would not be a foundation from which a classic industrial capitalist labour process could come about (Harriss-White and Janakarajan) 2004.

4.4 PERIOD 3: Most Recent Studies 2004-2009

Largely as a result of the 2004 national election, in which it "was politically useful for the Congress Party to appear more caring than its rivals," and under pressure

from the middle-class activists, the government “has become more responsive to popular welfare” in recent years (Harriss, Unpublished). This has resulted in the enactment of laws that raise the concept of social welfare to the status of a universal right, and the initiation of a series of redistributive measures targeted to improve social welfare. These policies have included the National Employment Guarantee Act, of 2008, which guarantees up to 100 days of standard wage employment to rural households per annum, and which was the product of the ‘Right to Food’ campaign for government warehouse food stocks to be used to confront food insecurity in the rural population (Harriss, Unpublished).

However, rather than from true popular action, most of these socially aimed campaigns have been driven forward by the efforts of middle-class intellectuals, with the support of international NGOs and of the leftist political parties on whom the central coalition government currently depends for support. However genuine their intentions, these middle-class activists invariably hold underlying preconceptions and values associated with their own social status, and in effect hamper the achievement of true public action from among the disadvantaged social classes, known to be the crucial underpinning social and political force for effective redistribution in favour of the disadvantaged majority (Dreze and Sen 2004; Harris, Unpublished).

The major international development agenda continues to exert its influence on the development priorities and policies of India, as it does throughout the developing world. The focus on “poverty reduction” appropriates the fixation with the poor, via the “civil society revolution” (McMichael 2006). Development objectives are focused on the stated objectives of “inclusion and participation, bringing together civil society, local

competition, NGOs, the private sector and the poor themselves... to foster trust and sustainability” (Wolfensohn 2000). In the rural areas this means that “private property rights”, under a “new wave” of decentralized, market-friendly, land reform, has replaced the popularity of redistributive land reform. Where development and social objectives were once the responsibility of the state, since the time of the 1990 reform era, it has been the view that states should restrict their interference in market conditions, and instead facilitate the transfer of market disciplines and possibilities to the poor through market-led reform (McMichael 2006).

India’s development objectives then, are still by and large aimed at achieving economic growth, through its focus on the non-agricultural sectors, and reform-based policies. Over recent years, this has translated into dramatic growth acceleration. By 2008, India had become the world’s second-fastest growing major economy after China. Despite a significant brake in 2009 as a result of the global recession and large deficit spending, India’s economy is now growing at close to 7%, and is projected to increase (Economist 2009). An OECD report states that the average growth rate 7.5% will double the average income in a decade (OECD 2009). Currently little of India’s growth is attributed to government stimulus, the economy is spurred in large part by domestic demand, and levels of capital and infrastructure investment compare favourably with China’s. It has been suggested that measures to further free India’s economy would allow it to grow at a rate of 10% per annum, matching China’s growth rate. Support among the new urban business class –who applaud the reform agenda for having incited this kind of growth – is strong for using additional reforms to try to speed up the process. Moreover, to the outside world, this type of growth is interpreted in large part as a spectacular

triumph of development, a sign of India's imminent emergence as a global economic powerhouse, whose long-run growth will likely outshine even China's (Economist 2009).

It remains unclear, however, how these rapid changes have impacted India's agrarian society, and what they mean for the future of this population. Certainly, the general stagnation in agriculture following the policy shifts of the early 1990s has largely persisted into the early 21st Century. In particular, in the period between 1999 and the late 2000s, there has been virtual stagnation in area, output and yield of all major foodgrains, and a negative growth rate of output in the case of non-foodgrain crops (Ghosh 2005). By all accounts, there is a deep and painful disparity between the rapid growth and development of India's urban commercial landscape, and the forgotten rural agrarian landscape, home to the country's majority.

Although the results of the few studies of social mobility that have been conducted over the past decade have been varied, both regionally and based on the data and the methodology they encompass, there are several major observations that seem to have been central. By all accounts, they point to the major conclusion that the exclusion faced by Dalits and other identity groups that comprise the low class social positions remain a defining feature of contemporary India; class inequalities have persisted over this period despite the rapid development of capitalism in India. In particular, this class of the population continue to face barriers in their right to productive resources, and the opportunities available to them in a diversifying economy. With the turbulence of the global economic crisis, it remains unclear how the most recent turn of the central government under popular pressure, to enact policies aimed at improving social welfare, have impacted these trends.

Certainly diversification, which is thought to be of course the trademark of the expansion of rural capitalism, has had a differential impact on the top, middle, and bottom classes of agrarian society. Households with larger landholdings and hired labour forces are favoured in this process. It is this segment of the rural population that has been able to diversify and grasp new opportunities, not only within the agricultural sector, in terms of water-sparing and income-elastic agricultural products, but also into the non-agricultural economy, as a result of both the upper limit to the absorptive capacity of agriculture and higher rates of return. In addition this group continues to experience preferential access to employment opportunities that are being created at the top of the expanding non-agricultural sector employment, augmenting and further concentrating this group's capacity for capital accumulation. Thus although there many studies that point to the overall upward mobility of all social classes, there is much evidence that this is occurring amidst continued agrarian differentiation, rather than its having exerting a levelling effect as had been anticipated in the neo-liberal perspective (Harriss-White and Harriss 2007).

Another major observation over this period has been the pronounced regional variation in social opportunities open to the peasant and landless labourer classes. The difference between the social and agricultural policies enacted by State governments has had a significant impact on the conditions of, and opportunities available to the rural population. Put very generally, the social and economic opportunities of those at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy have been substantially improved in proportion to their counterparts at the top in states that follow an agenda of state intervention in agriculture. This includes supportive subsidies for small peasant farmers, food and

employment schemes, and access to formal credit. This also appears to be true for those states in which the tradition of redistributive land reform has continued, West Bengal being the primary example – the role and place of redistributive land reform of course, a major and unsurprising major point of contention in the context of the classic debate on agrarian change, and one which is further examined in the proceeding section (Bakshi 2008).

In emphasis, although there has been a growing recognition of the value of longitudinal village analysis, and there is still much work to be done in reviving these techniques; many of the impacts on the socioeconomic dynamics of the rural agrarian over the course of India's recent development are uncertain. By all accounts, it appears that India has thus far been unsuccessful in resolving the agrarian question – putting an end to the severe concentration of land ownership and use, and mitigating the political disincentives in investment and technology adoption, kept workers fixed into a social system with pre-modern features, and compressed purchasing power. The exclusion faced by those poor peasants and landless labourers in the rural economy of contemporary India persists. These groups continue to face barriers in their right to productive resources, and the opportunities available to them in a diversifying economy. With the more recent changes associated with the turbulence of the global economic crisis and the global recovery, and some policies aimed at improving social welfare, it remains unclear how the dynamics of the rural society have been affected; the tremendous pace of development and associated change to the socioeconomic landscape has not been matched by the depth and breath of social research.

5: Household Mobility and the Dynamics of Agrarian Change: What do Studies of Social Mobility in Rural India Tell us About the Classic Debate on Agrarian Change?

5.1 The Agrarian Question: Components and Concept

Ultimately, the analysis of those studies of social and household mobility examined throughout the body of this paper, provide an important basis from which to consider and reflect back upon the classic debate on agrarian change. Who and where are the peasants in the age of modernization and globalization; what are the circumstances that affect their livelihoods, their living conditions, and their opportunities; what does their continued existence in the age of globalization and global development signify; and how will these dynamics change over time? The agrarian question, the question of progress toward an ultimate transformation of socioeconomic circumstances and production relations in the rural economy, must be addressed. The three major component parts of the agrarian question can be conceived as follows. First, it consists of the scope and character of the development of capitalism in the countryside – the tremendous diversity in the capitalist relations of production and exchange that are developed, each unique to a given society. Second, it entails the characteristics of the classes that arise through the development of capitalism in agriculture. Third, and ultimately, it takes up the question of “how and by means of what alliances are the classes that have been identified been mobilized for a resolution of [this] agrarian question – toward a progressive transformation of production relations in agriculture and the socioeconomic conditions in the countryside” (Ramachandran and Swaminathan 2004:13).

It has often been suggested that the “death of the peasantry” is imminent, meaning that those major world regions still characterized by agrarian economies –including sub-Saharan Africa, South and continental South-east Asia, and China – are soon to transform into full industrial capitalist societies under the impact of global economic development (Bernstein 2004). This interpretation falls back to the classic theories of development. According to the classic interpretation, pre-capitalism is primarily defined by the social relation between the landed property and peasant labour: the landed property holder appropriates the surplus of peasant labour through rent. The development of capitalism, or capitalist transition, requires a process of primary accumulation that creates a platform for market dependence –signifying the necessity of commodity production for social reproduction. Over time, this process establishes the basic formation of social classes that embody a new social property relation of capital landed property, agrarian capital and proletarian agrarian labour. It is this basic relation that drives the growing productivity of both labour and of agriculture, through technical innovation, and through new technical and social divisions of labour (Bernstein 2004).

The surplus of agricultural product generated can be used to fuel industrial growth, but is contingent on the involvement of the state. Labour is freed through the dual processes of the dispossession of the peasantry from the land and increasing agricultural productivity, and applied instead to the developing industrial sector. The expanded productivity in agriculture of food crops, contributes to accumulation by lowering the reproduction costs of an increasing industrial and urban workforce (proletariat). The capital produced through agricultural surplus, and the class of capitalist landed property, can come about by diverse routes in different circumstances: either the transformation of

pre-capitalist landed property (landlords), known as ‘capitalism from above’, or the class differentiation of the peasantry, in which class struggle is waged by peasants against landlords, or some combination of these two routes. Redistributive land reform becomes a necessary condition of transition along the path of class differentiation at times when the landed property is not willing or able to make the transition out of the agricultural sector to become the new capitalist landed property (Bernstein 2004; Byres 1996; others).

The ‘classic’ agrarian question, based on this design, is one of general logic: all societies of pre-capitalist social arrangement are destined to encounter and follow through a sequence of social outcomes that Marx interpreted to be the natural consequences of the predestined course of capitalist development – each society embarking on this course with more or less upheaval, turmoil, and violence than another, as dictated by its unique historical and social circumstances. The unevenness of development on a global scale, it is theorized, will bring about different trajectories and forms of transition among pre-capitalist societies, and also impact the prospects of completing that course (Bernstein 2004; Ramachandran and Swaminathan 2004).

5.2 Two Major Theses of Change in the Contemporary Globalized World

Globalization, by all accounts, has had a big impact, albeit poorly understood, on the contemporary development experience. Through policies of liberalization, structural adjustment, and stabilization, as they have been employed since the early 1990s, transnational capital has penetrated the rural and urban economies. This relationship

between domestic capital and global capital is significant, having changed much of what was understood and encompassed by the classic theories of transition.

Here then two distinct and major theses can be reflected upon to bring insight to the analysis. Bernstein, in his extensive examination of the current circumstances facing the contemporary global peasantry, has introduced the thesis that the agrarian question, as it has traditionally been perceived, may no longer be relevant. He makes three points to frame this argument. First, the individual experiences of capitalist industrialization, as they have progressed, must each be explained in regards to their unique “internal and international conditions, class dynamics and mechanisms of accumulation” (Bernstein 2004). Second, it is clear that pre-capitalist countries today face much greater hurdles to industrialization and development than did the advanced capitalist countries at their time of industrialization – fuelled as they often were by the surplus generated through cheap outside foodstuffs and labour rather than from their own agricultural sectors. Third, the fundamental inconsistency and contradiction of a world capitalist system that encourages the emergence and growth of a global proletariat, but cannot establish a generalized living wage, has become increasingly acute. The flipside to the theory that globalization represents a new chapter in the concentration and the mobility of capital, is that it also intensifies “the fragmentation of labour” (Bernstein 2004). The growing proletariat pursues its reproduction in increasingly insecure and oppressive conditions, and is increasingly swept up in insecure informal sector participation – with its own fashion of differentiation and oppression. On this basis, Bernstein suggests that there is “a crisis of labour as a crisis of employment – certainly not unique to capitalism today but undoubtedly intensified by its globalizing tendencies” (Bernstein 2004).

Thus, Bernstein's major thesis is that, with the arrival of globalization as a feature of capitalism, the agrarian question of capital on a world scale is no longer relevant; capitalist development as traditionally perceived is no longer possible. Instead, the propensity of globalization to fragment labour, derived from the crisis of employment, and visible in the fight over land to secure reproductive needs, might constitute "a new agrarian question". He writes:

With contemporary globalization and the massive development of the productive forces in (advanced) capitalist agriculture, the centrality of the 'classic' agrarian question to industrialization is no longer significant for *international* capital. In this sense then, there is no longer an agrarian question of capital on a world scale, even when the agrarian question – as a basis of *national* accumulation and industrialization has not been resolved in many countries of the South. If there is no longer an agrarian question of (global) capital or of 'national' capitals (and 'developmental' states) in poorer countries today – because they lack the intent or the means, or both – might there be a (new) agrarian question of labour, separated from its historic connection (and subordination) to that of capital and manifested in struggles for land against 'actually existing' forms of capitalist landed property?

(Bernstein 2007:33)

Byres, has strongly rejected this thesis on the basis, among other points, that there is a "danger in focusing exclusively on globalization: of seeing causality that runs simply and exclusively from global capital to domestic capitals; of denying agency of such capitalisms; and of obliterating, in this respect, the specificities and the substantive diversity of contemporary poor countries" (Byres 2004:65). His point is not to deny the impact of globalization, but to illustrate the risk of seeing it "as a one-way street" (65).

Byres argues that there have been clear cases, and there continue to be, of less developed countries that have gone through a process of internal transformation of their rural societies – or peasant differentiation – since the 1945 post-colonial period. These

transformations – including the illustrious and well-known examples of South Korea and Taiwan – have happened irrespective of the countryside’s contribution to capitalist industrialization. Moreover, Byres suggests that the impact of global capital in pursuit of its interests –most often in the form of corporate agribusiness - will not be impacted in a consistent way, nor separated from the action of local capitals. Instead, he suggests that “the interaction of global capital and local capitals, will be shaped by the outcomes of local class struggles and will be variously mediated by the operation of differently constituted states” (Byres 2001:89).

For Byres, agrarian societies will be transformed, ‘from below’ –the outcome of class struggle by peasants against landlords in the form of revolt or revolution – or ‘from above’ – in which the landlord class independently transitions into the class of capitalist landed property. Either of these paths is thought to be dependent on a strong and effective state, and will be mediated by the impact of the external forces (Byres 2004).

There is merit to the position embodied by both Bernstein’s and Byres central perspectives, although a thorough assessment of their arguments would take more space than the confines of this paper allow. Taken on the whole, it seems reasonable to view the contemporary process of development from the perspective that globalization has changed the circumstances of development fundamentally – the consequential crisis of labour alters the variables that inform this process and may well constitute a new agrarian question of labour. However, internal drivers of change must not be ignored and are still relevant. Local capitalist social relations continue to exert their influence on the course of change, as is evident in the regional diversities of India’s rural agrarian landscape.

Regardless of the likelihood that an industrial transition will not be fuelled by the surplus

extracted from agriculture alone or at all, a country's development trajectory is bound ultimately to be the outcome of the cumulating impact of these external and internal forces. This can be reflected in the Indian experience.

5.3 How Does this Reflect Back on the Potential for a Capitalist Transition in India?

India, by any account, is far from realizing any kind of a capitalist agrarian transition. When weighed against the rough gauge of the arrangement of the labour-force, it is clear there is some way to go if it is to complete this type of evolution – the vast majority of the population remains rural and agrarian. Moreover, this process has been attended by widespread rural poverty and the industrialization in urban areas has not yet absorbed the rural reservoirs of labour. These are all factors that continue to prolong the process of agrarian transformation (Byres 2001). This is not, however, to say that there are no signs of this type of transformation at all. There are clear indications that it is underway, including the presence of a highly differentiated peasantry. However, it is impossible to speculate exactly how internal dynamics and external forces will mediate India's development trajectory beyond certain basic facts: that it is likely to develop via the peasantry and require a long series of peasant struggles – the particular peasant class who pilot the struggle dependent on the local degree of differentiation; that it is likely to depend on the active role of the government; and, that these internal dynamics are likely to be strongly influenced by the outcomes of external forces, namely the effects of globalization. All that is certain is that there are no predestined ends: history does not unveil all possible routes, nor does globalization close all possible routes.

Amidst all of the unknowns, it seems that the prospects for capitalist agrarian transition will most effectively be sought by investigating the dynamics of the landlord-peasant relations that persist, the levels of, and influences on, peasant differentiation, and also the impact of state-level economic and social policy, and outside influences – all as they are experienced at the village-level. In the interest of understanding India's development experience; making inference about its future course; and ultimately, of building a more just future, there is tremendous potential for further social and economic research at the village level. The continued importance of analysing the dynamics of peasants in a changing global capitalist world should not be de-emphasized: questions about who and what the peasantry is, and what it will become, are as elusive, complicated, litigious, and important, as ever before.

6: Conclusion

The reality is that the agrarian economy is still very much the backbone of India's socioeconomic landscape. Although India's growing service sector now accounts for approximately 54% of GDP, the industrial and agricultural sectors accounting for 29% and 17% respectively, agriculture remains by far the principle occupation in India, accounting for upwards of 60% of employment (OECD 2009). The significance of this is made clear when we recognize that the Indian labour force consists of close to half a billion of the world's people. This figure, in and of itself, is evidence of the misconceptions inherent in the preoccupation with examining India's growth in service

and industrial sectors, without regard for its impact on the rural agrarian majority. The process of capitalist development and industrialization in India, has clearly affected the rural agrarian socioeconomic conditions in many and varied ways:

There are regions where capitalism in agriculture has advanced and where commercial agriculture and the cash nexus dominate the rural economy; there are regions where old forms of landlordism and tenancy and archaic forms of labour service, servitude and bondage still play an important part in agrarian relations. The development of the 'modern' does not preclude the continued existence of the archaic: India is a vast and living example of the rule that capitalism penetrates agriculture and rural society in a myriad of ways.

(Ramachandran and Swaminathan 2004:13)

There are good reasons to try to understand not only mobility trends and their diverse economic, political and even ideological drivers. The valuable information that has been imparted by the small relative number of detailed village-level studies that have been conducted in the contemporary era need to be augmented by further enquiry of this kind, and analysed in reference to the ideological discourses on the development of society. The specific information imparted by this type of research contributes in no small part to our understanding of how local, regional and national circumstances, class relations, and the impact of globalization, collectively inform the trajectory of India's development.

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