CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Political Economy of Land and Livelihoods in Contemporary India

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1 Introduction

Economic development is generally assumed to be a process of gradual decline in the dependence of populations on land and land-based livelihoods. However, the question of land, in its multiple dimensions, continues to be among the most controversial issues in the Global South. Land, which is a key natural resource for addressing global hunger and malnutrition, accelerating agricultural productivity, eradicating poverty, achieving sustainable development goals, mitigating climate change impacts, managing and assisting urbanisation and industrialisation, is also considered to be an essential marker of political and social power and identities of

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nations, communities and individuals.[1] Historically, increasing productivity of agriculture and mobilisation of the agrarian surplus for industrialisation and the associated infrastructure creation have been considered as a critical constraint in the path of economic development.

The global debates around land show remarkable continuity and change in recent years. While the issues of food and nutrition security in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), increasing environmental degradation, including soil degradation, deforestation, pollution and declining water availability in the backdrop of climate change, the implications of changing land-use practices and the relationship between access to land and poverty have been at the centre-stage of global discussions, it is the issue of control over and access to land that has emerged as flashpoint of discussions around the land question.

2 Land Questions Under Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism[2] broadly refers 'to the new political, economic, and social arrangements within society that emphasize market relations, re-tasking the role of the state, and individual responsibility' (Springer et al. 2016, p. 2). At a basic level, it involves a fundamental faith in free markets as 'the most moral and the most efficient means for producing and distributing goods and services' (Cahill 2012, p. 111) and its extension into all areas of life, including the economy, politics and society. Neoliberalism, understood as 'the restoration and reinforcement of class power' (Harvey 2005), is also an ideological project that promotes a market-led policy framework of economic development and identifies unregulated markets and the 'animal spirit' of private entrepreneurs, as essential for unleashing growth potentials. From the Marxist political economy perspective, it is primarily seen as a class project of the capitalist class. In the Indian context, the sweeping pro-market reforms since the early 1990s are seen as a phase of the dominance of neoliberalism (Chandrasekhar 2012; Das 2015). As the state is engaged in facilitating the accumulation projects of domestic and international capital, there is a geographical dimension to neoliberalism; it

[1] The diversity of the ways through which people relate to land—as a natural resource, as an economic asset, as a source of livelihood, security and as a basis of identity and belongingness—calls for a plural understanding of the significance of land in the contemporary world. Among the critical foundations of the neoliberal understanding of land is that it is merely an economic asset, which ideally should be allocated through the market mechanism.

[2] For a detailed discussion on the evolution and implications of neoliberalism as a project, see Harvey (2005, Mirowski (2013) and Springer et al. (2016).

involves 'massive restructuring of space relations, producing geographical unevenness at multiple scales' (Das 2015, p. 719). Among the several ways through which these spatial accumulation dynamics unfold are investments in built environments, the commodification of space and restructuring of property rights over natural resources—all of which involve changes in the 'land relations'.

Land grabbing, particularly by foreign countries and multinational corporations in many developing countries, which has been described as 'foreignisation of space' has generated a global debate on the control and management of land (Kaag and Zoomers 2014; Zoomers 2010; Zoomers and Otsuki 2017). Although the empirical basis, as well as the conceptual foundations of the land grabbing discourse, has been questioned (Edelman 2013; Oya 2013), the plurality of the contexts under which land is being acquired at various scales, by different actors and for multiple purposes, has 'both continuity and change' from the historical episodes of enclosures (Borras Jr and Franco 2012; White et al. 2012). Underemphasising the historical connections often 'leads researchers to ignore or underestimate the extent to which pre-existing social relations shape rural spaces in which contemporary land deals occur' (Edelman and León 2013, p. 1697; Mollett 2016), while the newness of contemporary land control is not only limited to 'land grabbing or ownership but also new crops with new labor processes and objectives for the growers, new actors and subjects, and new legal and practical instruments for possessing, expropriating, or challenging previous land controls' (Peluso and Lund 2011, p. 668).

With relentless expansion of the reach of capital across space and a rapid transformation of the economies of the developing countries, capitalist globalisation has brought back some of the well-known debates on the agrarian transition to the centre-stage with a contemporary salience (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2010; Editors Agrarian South 2012; Lerche et al. 2013; Mohanty 2016). Neoliberalism, with its overwhelming emphasis on the ability of ubiquitous, impersonal and efficient markets as a central institution for economic decisions, has encountered some of its most formidable political and academic challenges on the question of land. As part of its broader framework of agrarian restructuring, which 'seeks to liberalise international trade in food and agricultural products, deregulate the operation of domestic agricultural markets, privatise rural parastatals, and formalise the ownership and control of property that had been held in public, in common or, in some cases, privately but monopolistically' (Akram-Lodhi 2007, p. 1438), neoliberal enclosures through market-based land policies result in the deepening of capitalist property relations in the South (Akram-Lodhi 2007).

The on-going nature of dispossession has revived scholarly interest in the question of primitive accumulation in the writings of Marx (Adnan 2015; Byres 2005). Primitive accumulation, originally theorised as a precursor to the development of capitalism, had three distinct aspects to it: (a) the expulsion of independent producers from the ownership of means of production; (b) the appropriation of the resources for capitalist accumulation; and (c) the creation of free labour as a class whose survival depends on the sale of labour power (Chatterjee 2017). The use of force, often through the use of state power, was an essential feature of the early development of capitalism (Marx 1976). The continuing dispossession of peasants (and others) from their land has led some scholars to argue that primitive accumulation is a *continuing* feature of capitalism. Although capital attempts to replace human labour by machines, 'it also seeks to bring in new workers under its command as an exploitable human resource' and hence, 'capitalist accumulation must depend on the continuous separation of the labourer from the means of production' (Mitra et al. 2017, p. 3). Harvey (2003, pp. 137–182) has drawn attention to the relevance of such dispossessions to global capitalism, through the notion of *accumulation by dispossession* (ABD), which has generated a great deal of attention to the diverse forms of dispossessions across the world (Adnan 2015; Glassman 2006; Hall 2013; Levien 2013b). Sanyal (2014) and Chatterjee (2008), among others, argue that primitive accumulation does not constitute the pre-history of capitalism, but is one of the conditions of its existence. While the logic of capital is accumulation, that of the non-capital is need. An essential feature of post-colonial capitalist development is that all those who are dispossessed from land are not absorbed in the capitalist sector, a majority of them join the non-capitalist, 'informal sector', which interacts with the capital sector and is 'recreated and renewed by the developmental interventions' of the state (Sanyal 2014).[3]

[3] While arguing against the basic premises of capitalist transition, Sanyal (2014) makes a number of critical points on the nature and significance of primitive accumulation in the post-colonial context. Of particular relevance are the following. (i) Although the need economy, the 'wasteland' produced by primitive accumulation, to which the dispossessed are condemned, is embedded in market-mediated relations, 'capital and the need economy (the site of non-capital) are not locked in a relation in which economic surplus flows from the later to the former'. 'It is a relationship based on exclusion and formation rather than inclusion and extraction' (pp. 73). The need economy does not exist because capital needs it. (ii) It is not the result of 'any weakening of the transformative capacity of capital' (pp. 66). (iii) This formulation displaces the questions of capitalist transition, and post-colonial capitalism is

By locating the genesis of the problem in the overaccumulation of capital under contemporary capitalism, and by linking it to the spatio-temporal fix that capitalism needs to tackle overaccumulation, Harvey frees the notion of dispossession from its historical specificity. However, by theorising ABD as part of market rather than non-market relations, and also by clubbing a variety of neoliberal attacks on the working classes and the ordinary people under the rubric of ABD, Harvey has made the distinction between ABD and expanded reproduction under capitalism blurred[4] (Levien 2017). Levien argues, that since 'Harvey does not provide a clear definition of accumulation by dispossession, and explicitly claims that it is "primarily economic rather than extra-economic" … it is not clear what these different processes share, or what separates accumulation by dispossession from other "fixes" to the other problems of over-accumulation or from the "normal" expanded reproduction of capital' (Levien 2017, p. 55). Levien (2013a) has pointed to the diversity of contexts under which contemporary dispossessions have taken place and has sought to distinguish between the *regimes of dispossession*. He suggests that rather than focusing on the 'transition *between* mode of production' the focus should shift to 'variations in regimes of dispossession *within* the capitalist mode of production' (Levien 2017, p. 53–4). However, it is the interconnectedness across the different regimes of dispossession that is central to the understanding of dispossessions under neoliberalism. In understanding the diverse patterns and outcomes of primitive accumulation, the significance of the ways through which various forms of dispossession interact with processes of exploitation of labour and capital within the overall system of capitalist class relation, as suggested by Das (2017), assumes importance, which means that coercive dispossession, separation from property based on class differentiation and exploitation of labour must be seen as

conceptualised as 'the structural articulation of capital and non-capital residing in the commodity space' (pp. 70). For a critique of Sanyal's formulations, on theoretical and empirical grounds, see Basu (2019). While these questions have important implications for understanding the questions of land and livelihoods in contemporary India, we do not engage with the agrarian transition debate here (for a recent discussion on the related issue see, Mohanty 2016).

[4] Mitra et al. (2017, p. 3) point out that 'We cannot take transition for granted, merely because history happened that way. The "extra-economic" factors are always present in the economic, and only in this way, an adequate understanding of capitalism becomes possible'. On the related question of the continuing evidence of 'unfreedom' and 'bondage' under contemporary globalisation, see Brass (2011).

three interconnected moments of capital (ibid). Thus, 'primitive accumulation can be regarded as a *generic capitalism-facilitating process*, which can assume particular forms such as ABD at specific sociohistorical conjunctures' (Adnan 2017, p. 92 emphases in original).

A relatively less discussed question in the context of dispossession is the differentiation of the peasant producers under expanded reproduction. Mishra (2011) points to the gradual but systematic displacement from sources of livelihoods, as dispossession-in-slow motion. While dispossession is generally associated with catastrophic and abrupt disruption of livelihoods, a combination of state and market power has also worked towards systematic undermining of the basis of survival, through diverse processes such as destruction of natural resources (land, water and forest), privatisation of commons and weakening of institutional safeguards against pauperisation and dispossession (Mishra 2018b). This is one of the ways through which the land and the livelihoods questions get intertwined (Mishra 2018a).

3 The Land and Livelihoods Questions in Neoliberal India: Major Debates

The 'unanticipated' turnaround of India's economic growth since the mid-1980s and particularly after the sweeping pro-market reforms since early 1990s has generated a lot of enthusiasm among economists, policymakers and others. The post-reform phase of growth has been spectacular not only in relation to economic growth in other middle- and high-income countries, but also in comparison to India's earlier phases of growth in the post-independence period. India's rise has been celebrated as a neoliberal growth story, emphasising the need for other less developed economies to follow a similar path. However, the initial euphoria over India's rise has given way to more sober understandings of the significant challenges in maintaining the initial spurts in growth. Among the many concerns that have been raised on the nature of this growth process are the distributive implications of this growth (Ghosh 2011). The uneven impacts of growth on various regions, social groups, classes and communities have generated concerns on some of the fundamental aspects of neoliberal growth (Ghosh 2012; Hirashima et al. 2011; Kar and Sakthivel 2007).

India, as a developing economy, has also confronted the land question in diverse forms and the policy response to these challenges has also been

varied and complex. Demographic pressure, massive and uncontrolled changes in land use, large-scale land acquisition drive by the Indian state for domestic and foreign capital, conversion of agricultural and irrigated land for non-agricultural purposes and related sustainability issues, vanishing common property resources, changing agrarian relations, marginalisation of landless agricultural labourers and tenants, growth of landlessness across all social categories, continuities and changes in tenancy, rise of the rich agrarian classes and newer forms of agrarian accumulation, gender issues in land, forest rights to tribals and other forest dwellers are some of the emerging issues related to land in India.[5] The agrarian question(s) in neoliberal India encompasses all these seemingly varied but interrelated questions. Politically, land rights and dispossession continue to be intensely contested with implications for electoral politics and beyond. The Indian state has virtually abandoned its redistributive agenda of land reform and instead is pursuing land titling regime through land records modernisation programme (Nayak 2015).

On the other hand, with a prolonged agrarian crisis and out-migration of labour from agriculture, in parts of rural India, a process of *depeasantisation* has already been noticed in parts of the green revolution states (Singh et al. 2009). There has been a spur of out-migration from the rural areas, and the share of cultivators is declining (Mishra 2016a). The miniaturisation of holdings has continued. Urbanisation and peri-urban growth, the rise of the so-called rurban phenomenon and urban villages, point towards diverse ways through which the urban land question is getting manifested under neoliberalism. The real estate boom, closely associated with the rise of the middle classes and their globalised lifestyle aspirations and the growth of the IT sector, has led to the rapid conversion of peri-urban agricultural land. Though the global connections of these new urban spaces are too conspicuous to miss, these 'fragmented landscapes' that create and sustain glaring inequalities across class, religion and caste[6] (Chaterjee 2017) are simultaneously anchored to local informal politics, often exercised through a system of 'calculated informality' (Roy 2009).

[5] We have selectively focused on some of the issues related to land in this chapter that helps contextualising the issues raised by the authors of different chapters in this volume and have not attempted to be comprehensive.

[6] In the long-term study of economic transformation of 'middle' India, based on multiple rounds of field surveys in Arni, Harriss-White (2016b, p. 20) points out the significance of 'social regulation such as caste, religion and gender that are able to support the process of accumulation'.

Neoliberal restructuring of the urban space, through the interlinked processes of commodification, valorisation and devalorisation, segregation and policing, has generated a process of exclusion that has affected the working and living conditions of the working classes, poor and other disadvantaged sections[7] (Banerjee-Guha 2009, 2013; Harvey 2010).

3.1 Land Reforms

In the post-colonial quest for development, the land question has emerged as a crucial aspect of state intervention in India. The ownership and control over land continue to be highly skewed in India (Sharma 1994). The colonial administration not only created a system of land administration that was aimed at maximising land revenue, but in the process also initiated a range of administrative reforms that sustained or created classes of intermediaries.[8] The plight of the hapless peasants was among the key economic issues that were articulated through the national movement, although its articulation showed a great deal of diversity across space and time (Joshi 1974). The leadership of the newly independent nation was well aware of the need for institutional reforms in agriculture, particularly concerning the ownership over and control of land, as a prerequisite for agricultural transformation. However, it is the class character of the political elite and the nature of the Indian state that prevented the possibilities of an elaborate restructuring of ownership rights over land[9] (Joshi 1974).

[7] The neo-liberal city is a manifestation of the central social contradiction of contemporary global capitalism, that is, 'increased return from global connectedness accompanied by hyper-commodification of land and new forms of social marginalisation, most notably the increasing informality of labour and life', a process by which the migrants, mostly coming from the rural areas, remain deeply affected (Samaddar 2016).

[8] The regionally differentiated nature of these interventions, mapped over agrarian regions by Thorner, had an enduring relevance for understanding the regional patterns of agricultural development in India (Bhalla and Singh 2009; Mishra and Harriss-White 2015; Thorner and Han-Seng 1996).

[9] Joshi (1974) draws a distinction between the *ideology* of land reform, which was generally anti-landlord, and claimed to represent the general interests of the peasantry and the *programme* of land reforms that was to serve the interests of the superior tenants and under proprietors rather than the interests of the rural poor.

Linking the outcomes of the land reforms policy to the form and the context of the post-colonial Indian state, Raju J. Das argues that '[i]ts democratic form and the class alignment in the society formed the context of the policy and set some limit within which it had to act when carrying out that policy' (Das 1999, p. 2120).

Nevertheless, land reforms remained on the agenda of policy reforms for decades. Some aspects of land reforms such as the abolition of the control of the rulers of the princely states over their subjects were relatively easily accomplished. However, there was a less spectacular success in other aspects such as land ceilings, redistribution and tenancy reforms, with a few notable exceptions. The Planning Commission's Task Force on Agrarian Relations (1973) summed up the outcome in the following words: 'The programmes of land reform adopted since Independence have failed to bring about the required changes in the agrarian structure' (Planning Commission 1973, p. 3). The report also blamed 'the lack of political will, absence of pressure from below, inadequacies of administrative machinery, judicial intervention, the absence of correct and up-to-date records and the lack of supporting facilities for the beneficiaries' for the failure of land reforms. In specific regional contexts, such as in West Bengal and Kerala, sustained land reforms were initiated by the left front governments with relatively more success (Ramachandran 1997; Sengupta and Gazdar 1996). Empirical evidence suggests that the success of land reforms was driven by political factors and that political power of peasants and presence of left-wing governments had a positive impact on land reforms (See, Ghatak 2007).

The inability of the state to carry out a thorough and effective land reform had long-term consequences for the political economy of development.[10] The green revolution strategy that dominated the agricultural development policy was an attempt to bring in a technological revolution without substantial institutional and agrarian reforms. The political costs of land reforms were considered to be too high for the ruling classes (Mohanty 2011), and thus, given the limitations imposed by the electoral process, other forms of welfarist interventions, viz. public distribution of

[10] Jayati Ghosh has summarised the impacts of the failure of (or the limited nature of) land reforms succinctly. 'The absence of any radical land redistribution across most of the country meant that the domestic market, especially for manufactured goods, remained socially narrowly based. It also meant that the growth of agricultural output in the aggregate, though far greater than in the colonial period, remained well below its potential. Such growth as did occur was largely confined to a relatively narrow stratum of landlords-turned-capitalists and sections of rich peasants who had improved their economic status. And the large mass of peasantry, faced with insecure conditions of tenure and often obtaining a small share in the outputs they produced, had neither the means nor the incentive to invest. The prospect of increasing productivity and incomes in rural India (which was home to the majority of its population) in order to stimulate domestic demand was therefore restricted' (Ghosh 2004, p. 295).

food, employment creation and subsidisation of credit, were preferred even when the state explicitly favoured developmentalist interventions.[11] This has been conceptualised as a passive revolution in India. It is important to note here that the uneven access to land is not simply a manifestation of economic inequality. Ownership and control over land overlap with the caste-based inequality, and denial of access to land has been among the major constituting factors of discrimination and social exclusion of Dalits and Adivasis in India (Harriss-White 2004; Thorat and Neuman 2012).

As neoliberal economic reforms started to occupy the centre-stage of economic policy, the issue of land reform came to be thought of from a different perspective, often termed as 'market-based land reform'.[12] Land regulations, particularly tenancy reform laws, are seen as an impediment to agricultural growth. A new set of institutional reforms, concerning the removal of restrictions over sale and lease of land, was advocated as essential for ushering an era of entrepreneurship in agriculture. The Niti Aayog[13] (2016) had constituted a committee to develop a model land leasing act.

However, the questions of the rights of various marginalised categories to land were not altogether absent from the policy discourse. An expert group constituted by the Planning Commission, Government of India, to look into development challenges in extremist-affected areas, for example, did emphasise the role of landlessness, dispossession and rising inequality in land ownership in the conflict zones. And its recommendations were unambiguous: 'the right to livelihood, the right to life and a dignified and honourable existence' should be brought back to the agenda (Planning Commission 2008). Similarly, the government took a major step towards recognising the land rights of the forest dwellers and other forest-dependent communities in India through the Forest Rights Act, although the implementation has been rather unimpressive, and

[11] The substantial price support for farm products, and provision of subsidised inputs and institutional credit under the green revolution strategy, was largely ensured state support for the rich peasants (Bardhan 1994, p. 46)

[12] As pointed out by V K Ramachandran (2011, p. 670), 'land reform is by its very nature a *non*-market intervention, undertaken by governments and people because markets cannot deliver that redistribution of land and assets that is essential for progressive social change. "Market-based land reform" is thus a contradiction in terms, and a cover-up for the abandonment of genuine land reform'.

[13] In 2014, India's Planning Commission was scrapped and was replaced by NITI (National Institute for Transforming India) Aayog, a think tank.

attempts have been made to dilute some of its provisions (Kumar and Kerr 2012; Kumar et al. 2017; Sarap et al. 2013).

3.2 Land Acquisition and Dispossession

The question of land acquisition has, of course, become one of the most contentious issues in neoliberal India. In the post-independence period, development-induced displacement has been carried out by invoking the colonial era land acquisition act. Development projects, particularly large dams, industries, mining and infrastructure development, were the primary reason behind such involuntary displacement. In the absence of credible official data on the exact number of people displaced, scholars have attempted to estimate the total number of people affected by such projects (Fernandes 2008).[14] Scholars and social activists have identified a number of glaring injustices that were built into the act or were very much part of its implementation. For example, the definition of displaced and project-affected people who deserve any compensation was too narrow and it excluded those who did not have legal claims over the land, but whose livelihoods were adversely affected because of the project. Claims over common property rights were simply ignored, as these lands were classified as the property of the government. The amount of compensation was too low (Chakravorty 2016). Economically weaker and socially marginalised groups—such as women, children, landless labourers, pastoralists, nomads and scheduled tribes—became the worst victims of such development. The scheduled tribes population, in particular, were displaced disproportionately as their habitats were selected for mining, industrialisation and conservation projects. Their marginalised position within the structures of power further accentuated their vulnerability. Gradually, the localised protests against involuntary displacement started becoming visible both at the international and national level politics.

Under neoliberalism, the question of control over and access to land has acquired a new salience in India. Amit Bhaduri puts the implications of forced displacement under neoliberalism unambiguously. 'A ruthless drive towards land acquisition on grounds of efficiency in the multiparty

[14] Fernandes (2004) estimated that during 1947–2000, the total number of persons directly displaced by land acquisition Displaced Persons (DPs) and persons who lost their livelihoods without moving away from their habitat Project Affected Persons (PAPs) was probably around 50 million. The tribal communities were disproportionately affected by land acquisitions.

competitive democracy of a predominantly agrarian economy with massive poverty can sustain itself only through a dangerous mutualism between corporation and political parties. If this mutualism crystallizes over land acquisition, an oligarchic democracy would emerge, oligarchic in content but democratic in form' (Bhaduri 2017, p. 31). Neoliberal development required rapid conversion of agricultural land for non-agricultural uses, and it intensified the conflicts over land. However, the mechanisms and processes through which various actors responded to these conflicts varied a lot. Sud (2014), for example, draws attention to the diversity of the politics of land at the sub-national level. As states (and cities) competed to attract domestic and foreign capital (a process that has been termed as 'provincial Darwinism'), one of the major ways through which the business-friendliness of governments was projected was through their willingness and ability to provide land to capital. Many of the conflicts, such as Nandigram and Singur in West Bengal, Kashipur, Posco and Niyamgiri in Odisha, led to prolonged protests that had implications for provincial as well as national politics. In central India, Maoist insurgents were active in opposing displacement of tribal communities, and it led to violent conflict. Amidst these conflicts, the colonial era land acquisition law was replaced by the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (LARR). Among the key provisions of the act are (a) higher compensation for the farmers; (b) expansion of the coverage of compensation by including people whose livelihoods (not necessarily land) are affected; (c) compulsory rehabilitation and resettlement of people evicted from their land; (d) mandatory and informed consent of people losing their land in the case of land acquisition by private sector; and (e) social impact assessment to judge livelihoods impacts and to identify all affected persons (Chakravorty 2016). However, with changes in the government, the act was modified through an ordinance, diluting the provisions for which prior consent was needed. Also, various state governments enacted their specific laws that diluted the provisions of the act (Sonak 2018).

Even when there is a growing influence of the market fundamentalism in the mainstream economic policymaking, social movements, civil society institutions and some political parties have relentlessly questioned the justifications of dispossessions of various kinds. Persistent conflicts over land-related questions have forced the governments at various levels to come up with policies, programmes and counter-strategies to contain and address the issues of land. Needless to add, given the diversity in the nature of these conflicts and the responses to such conflict, it is erroneous to

discuss *the land question* in India, rather, as emphasised above, there are multiple questions centring around the ownership, control and management of land.

3.3 Gender and Land Rights

The intra-family distribution of resources and power is both a cause and a consequence of unequal access to land and other assets. Land is among the most valued assets in rural India. It is not just a source of financial security; it is also the marker of one's position within and outside the households. Studies have shown that denial of inheritance rights to women leads to significant bottlenecks for them to survive and grow as individuals. It has been identified as one of the factors sustaining patriarchal control and denial of equal rights to women. Also, it hinders their other capabilities and makes them perpetually dependent upon the male members for their survival. The implications of the marginalised position of women within the household also influence their self-perceived and socially perceived status in the public sphere. It is only recently, after years of painstaking research and political movement, that women are being seen and recognised as a distinct group by the state. The uncritical acceptance of the patriarchal idea of the household or family as a single unit and the disregard for intra-family differences, exclusion and exploitation by the state have resulted in the systematic denial of rights to women (Kabeer 1994). Agarwal (1994, pp. 27–45) has argued in favour of independent rights in arable land on four interrelated grounds: welfare, efficiency, equality and empowerment.

This persistent denial of land rights to women gets further aggravated during massive scale eviction from the land. As such, the history of compensation to the displaced and project-affected persons is replete with negligence and denial, but women within the group have been found to be a specially vulnerable group. As such they are not seen as legitimate claimants on the basis of their not having the land rights on the records, and further, even when the household receives some compensation—monetary or otherwise—it is mostly under the control of the male members of the households. In the packages for resettlement and rehabilitation, often the specific needs of women are ignored. It is important to note that while women participate in different types of household production, their subjugated position results in intra-family exploitation of household labour.

3.4 Agrarian Crisis

The post-reform period in India, particularly the decade of 1990s, has been associated with a drastic slowing down of agricultural growth and increasing rural distress (Deshpande and Arora 2010; Reddy and Mishra 2009a).[15] While high levels of suicides by farmers pointed to the extent of desperation among the farmers, the frequency and regional dispersion of suicides point to the systematic nature of the crisis[16] (Assadi 2006; Mishra 2014; Mohanakumar and Sharma 2006; Mohanty and Lenka 2019). Patnaik (2012, pp. 39–40) argues that:

> since the growth of peasant agriculture—even when we have the development of capitalism *from within the sector itself*—requires support of the state, [neoliberal] regimes are typically characterised by agricultural stagnation. And since out of such stagnant agriculture, 'exports' of a variety of non-food crops have to be squeezed for the capitalist segment (including of land for use by those who live off the economic surplus of the capitalist segment), per capita food grain output tends to decline, which has the effect of reducing per capita food grain absorption by the working population of the economy.

Lerche (2013), following Bernstein (2006), has argued that as agrarian accumulation is no longer a binding constraint for capital, there has been less interest in productive investment in it. On the other hand, notwithstanding the recent talks about a revival in agriculture, farm households in vast areas of rural India increasingly find it difficult to survive within agriculture. Non-agricultural livelihoods are increasingly central to both accumulative and survival strategies of rural households. Based on estimates from the National Sample Survey (NSS) data, Basole and Basu (2011) have pointed out that out of the monthly income of a farmer household in India, only 46 per cent of income is generated from cultivation; while

[15] An analytical distinction has been made in the literature between crisis of the agriculture sector, which most visibly manifests itself through decelerations in the growth of productivity, and a larger agrarian and rural crisis that creates conditions of distress for a large section of the rural population (Radhakrishna 2007; Reddy and Mishra 2009a).

[16] However, farmer suicides are an extreme manifestation of the agrarian crisis. Even in the absence of farmer suicides, there are other signs of rural distress, such as mass out-migration of labour households under various forms of unfreedom. Ranjana Padhi, in her study on the women survivors, draws attention to the gender implications of suicides and also to the multiple forms of the exclusion and deprivation that the survivors face (Padhi 2012).

around 50 per cent of income is earned from wages and non-farm business together; and also that agricultural households, other than those with holdings of 10 acres and more, cannot generate enough income from agricultural production to cover their consumption expenditure.

While the agrarian crisis has been partly caused by long-term factors responsible for the failure to foster productivity growth in Indian agriculture and could have different drivers in a specific regional context, most scholars attribute it to the neoliberal reforms since the 1990s (Patnaik 2003). The withdrawal of input subsidies (on electricity, water, fertilisers and seeds), declining public investment in agriculture, particularly in irrigation, and the decline in credit flow to agriculture have increased the private costs of agricultural production. Further, interlocking transactions involving input dealers, commission agents and traders have aggravated the crisis for farmers (Mishra 2008). The increasing control of the private sector on the input and output markets and dependence on informal credit have increased risks for the farmers (Mishra 2008). On the other hand, with the dismantling of state support, cost of education, health care, transport and other essential expenditures have increased for the rural households. Locating the agrarian crisis in the global context as a crisis of petty commodity production, Das (2013) argues that agrarian crisis, to a large extent, is a crisis of small owners, including small-scale capitalists, within the capitalist system driven by the law of value. However, the agrarian crisis, seen from that standpoint, is not only about small-scale farmers alone; as labour also faces a crisis of livelihood, 'super-exploitation of rural labour' is also part of the agrarian crisis.

Agricultural surplus is increasingly invested outside agriculture, and the non-agrarian characteristics of rural elites are being noted in diverse contexts (Vijay 2012; Harriss-White et al. 2009). Wherever some dynamism has been noted within agriculture, these are less labour absorbing and are often marked by seasonal labour or piece-rate labour contracts. Thus, the scope for survival within agriculture, either as self-employment or petty commodity production or as casual labour, seems limited. Harriss-White (2016a, p. 494) notes, 'in agricultural production, a small capitalist class is diversifying its portfolios, straddling agriculture and non-agriculture; a large, growing but unorganized barely landed class of rural labour moves in and out of agriculture … most land-based PCP fails to accumulate, few being free of oppressive debt while many are now failing to meet their reproduction costs from agriculture alone and fulfilling the conditions for disguised wage-labour'. It is in this context of declining earnings from

agricultural land, increasing soil and environmental degradation, water shortage and climate-induced vulnerability, as well as the precariousness of labour, that the land and livelihoods questions in neoliberal India need to be located and understood.

3.5 Land and Livelihoods Diversification

We argue that understanding the interrelationship between the land and livelihoods questions in neoliberal India holds the key to understand the emerging dynamics of structural transformation in rural India. The ongoing structural transformation of the Indian economy shows a drastic decline in the contribution of agriculture to the national income, but a slower shift of workers from agriculture to non-agricultural occupations. Moreover, the shift of workers from agriculture to non-agriculture is not only varied across the regions but also across gender, communities and social groups. In this uneven transition to a predominantly *non-farm rural economy*, the inequality among cultivators as well as among rural households has been increasing. The prolonged agrarian crisis in rural India, discussed above, has led to an exodus of farmers from cultivation, although scholars have attributed the rural out-migration to a host of other factors, including the rise in labour demand in the construction sector following a post-reform infrastructure and real estate sector boom, as well as the rising aspirations. However, as Jodhka points out even though 'the diversification of the rural economy is positively entrepreneurial, a lot of it is also born out of desperation of poverty and sometimes out of aspirations for mobility for the younger generations' (Jodhka 2018, p. 7).

An essential aspect of this rural out-migration is its spatial dimension. Recent evidence not only suggests that there has been a spur in migration, but also that inter-state migration for work has increased. Language barriers, considered to be a significant deterrent in the past, are no longer able to stop people from migrating to other states in search of employment and better earnings (Government of India 2017). A substantial portion of this migration is from the demographically and economically backward states in the north and east India to the relatively developed southern states. Typically, upper caste, rich and middle peasants, and those already in non-farm occupations, and living in relatively developed regions are more likely to be long-term migrants, those belonging to landless, land poor categories, the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe households, and living in less

developed regions are more likely to be short-term, circular migrants (Keshri and Bhagat 2012; Mishra 2016b; Sharma 2005).

An important unfolding dimension of this rural transformation is the interrelationship between out-migration of labour and the crisis of petty commodity production in agriculture. There are indications that the circular migration of labour from the rural area has led to a greater reliance on family labour for crop cultivation and allied agricultural activities, particularly through a shift of responsibility to female labour. While it is reasonable to assume that such temporary, seasonal migration of labour will gradually weaken their ties to agricultural livelihoods, studies also suggest that remittances are being used for purchase of land (or release of land from mortgage) and also towards working capital required for agricultural operations. It is important to note here that the demand for land from the poor and the semi-proletariats has intensified, along with that of the state and capital, and, in that sense, the land question remains relevant (Editors Agrarian South 2012).

4 The Organisation of the Book

Neoliberalism has brought significant changes in the way the land question was addressed in a developing economy. This book seeks to bring out important developments emerging around the land questions in India in the context of India's neoliberal economic development and its changing political economy. The contributors in this volume have sought to cover many issues that have been impinging the political economy in land and livelihoods in India since the 1990s.

The contributions, despite the diversity of approaches and methodologies, have in their findings brought out new and hitherto unexplored and/or less researched issues on the emerging land question in India, apart from addressing some widely discussed questions. The range of issues addressed in the volume encompasses the contemporary developments in the political economy of land, land dispossession, Special Economic Zone (SEZs), agrarian changes, urbanisation and the drive for the commodification of land across India. The role of the state in promoting the capitalist transformation in India and continuities and changes emerging in the context of land liberalisation and market-friendly economic reforms have also been examined by the authors. By bringing out in a clear manner the emerging land–agrarian relations like the decline of peasantry, the growth of informality of the state in land matters, processes

of exclusion, adverse inclusion and marginalisation, the working of the new land acquisitions and rehabilitation law, as well as the changing nature of land administration, the contributors to this volume have explored the emerging linkages between land and livelihoods in India.

Neoliberal land policies, typically based on the allocative efficiency of market, argue that state sanctioned private property rights or land titles and 'efficient' land markets, preferably without any restrictions imposed on transactions in land and land-lease markets, increase productivity and aggregate welfare (Deinlnger and Binswanger 1999; Feder and Nishio 1998; Gould et al. 2006). Apart from the primary benefits of transferring property rights to the most efficient users, such market-based solutions, it is argued, are likely to facilitate transaction in credit and insurance markets as well (Feder and Feeny 1991). Thus, the focus is on modernisation and digitisation of land records and reduction in transaction costs for efficient land administration. While it is assumed that the principles are universally true, local historical and geographical factors have also been found to be influencing the outcomes (see, Gould et al. 2006). There is evidence that suggests that such land titling could be biased against women (Deere and Leon 2001), facilitates the privatisation of the commons, might create new forms of insecurities for the poor (Jansen and Roquas 1998; Wolford 2007) and even lead to increasing land concentration. Also, the evidence on the benefits of such land titling is at best mixed (Ballantyne et al. 2000; Holden and Ghebru 2016; Payne et al. 2009).

As market fundamentalism has started making deeper inroads, the framework of engagement of the Indian state on the question of land rights has changed, notwithstanding the ambiguities and contradictions among different policies. Pradeep Nayak (Chap. 2) argues that the land policies of the Indian state have been undergoing a paradigmatic change under neoliberalism. The abandonment of the redistributive agenda of land reform programme and right-ward shift of the land policy of the Indian state is evident in the implementation of the centrally sponsored schemes like the National Land Records Modernisation Programme (NLRMP), in which it is clearly envisaged that the state would promote secure property rights in land regime by guaranteeing title to land and replace the existing presumptive nature of ownership of land. Such policy shifts certainly mark a historic reorientation of the land policy of the state. The chapter brings out two dominant but seemingly contradictory land questions arising before the Indian state. On the one hand, there is a scope for revisiting the land reform programme through promoting rights-based agenda like addressing gender inequality, insecurity and exclusion of

tenants and protecting the land rights of tribal communities. The political compulsions of electoral democracy have provided the context for a right-based approach, although the durability of the same should not be taken as guaranteed. On the other hand, there is an emphasis on promoting the policy of land titling and land market by liberalising land regimes in states. Such a shift is being justified through the arguments of market efficiency.

As noted above, the prolonged agrarian crisis has resulted in changes in the intra-household allocation of labour within and outside agriculture. Given the preponderance of small and marginal farmers in the agrarian structure and the high participation of such farmers in the land-lease market, it has been argued that liberalising the land-lease market is likely to benefit the small farmers while increasing productivity in agriculture and facilitating rural livelihoods diversification (Niti Aayog 2016). Taking a nuanced view of land leasing in rural India, Sukhpal Singh (Chap. 3) points to the increasing clout of the new agrarian capitalists in the green revolution belt in north-west India as well as the need for credit and other institutional supports to the small tenants. While favouring the restrictions on leasing of land by corporate houses, he argues for a decentralised and regional policy framework that supports land leasing by small farmers and puts a ceiling on the amount of land leased-in by individuals to limit the scope for land concentration. Although contract farming has been advanced as a viable alternative to corporate farming, he also takes note of the possibilities of exclusion as well as adverse inclusion of marginalised social groups and poor farmers in such contracts.

The literature on agrarian crisis in India suggests that (a) large sections of peasantry are not able to earn a sustainable livelihood from crop farming alone and (b), inter alia, have been forced to supplement their earnings either from the local non-farm economy or in the urban informal sector (Lerche 2011; Rupakula 2016). At the same time, relatively better-off, more affluent rural classes have started investing the agricultural surplus in the non-farm businesses. Both these processes imply a restructuring of rural livelihoods that involves a reduced dependence on farming and land-based livelihoods. Such a process is not merely about the processes of economic restructuring of property relations; it is equally about the social processes of differentiation, exclusion, marginalisation and contestations around that. The diverse aspects of such rural transformation have been examined by the authors in specific regional contexts, viz. Uttar Pradesh (J. Singh in Chap. 4), Karnataka (Purusothaman and Patil in Chap. 5), Rajasthan (Gupta in Chap. 6), West Bengal (Roy in Chap. 7) and Maharashtra (Rao in Chap. 8).

Jagpal Singh (Chap. 4) in his field-survey-based exploration of the rural transformation in western Uttar Pradesh notes the post-green revolution rise of social identities. With the rise of new and decline of old social classes, fragmentation of landholdings, aversion to traditional occupations which includes farming, and search for vocation alternative to agriculture, and deagrarianisation, not only of the livelihoods but also of aspirations, emerge as vital aspects of the changing rural landscape. Locating the land acquisition in the regional politics of Uttar Pradesh, he draws attention to the fact that the politics of land acquisition has shifted to a level where farmers, despite being organised and resourceful, become marginal players. From the perspective of the farmers, the rapid changes in the social and the economic processes have resulted in the weakening of their emotional and economic attachment to land.

Purusothaman and Patil (Chap. 5) examine the implications of the out-migration of labour from rural areas of Karnataka. Their study reveals that both the persistence of the agrarian crisis and the lure of urban opportunities have induced small farm holders to join non-farm occupations in manufacturing and construction sectors in nearby urban centres. They also find that although better infrastructure, muted caste hierarchy and employment options for the whole family do provide a pull to the city, small farmers are more often pushed to migration by ecological changes, indebtedness, land acquisition or social conflicts. The authors argue, such migration may be a 'corrective measure' to escape from mounting debt and unreliable rains, which must be seen in the context of the crisis in petty commodity production accentuated by neoliberal reforms (Das 2013; Reddy and Mishra 2009b).

Anish Gupta (Chap. 6) in his study on agrarian changes in post-reform period in a village in Rajasthan, based on field surveys in 2007 and 2013, has found that the increasing number of uneconomic farm plots is due to the continuous division of land and lack of alternative job opportunities in rural areas. Livelihoods have diversified, and tenancy has declined. The study notes that it is the marginal farmers who are leasing-out land as cultivation has become unviable due to high fragmentation and uneconomic size of farm plots. The study also shows that these changes have had an adverse impact on the livelihood of marginal and landless tenant farmers mainly belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes who were dependent on leasing-in land for cultivation. This category of farmers has gradually been pushed into agriculture labour.

The regional specificities of the on-going rural transformation have been brought to the forefront by Dayabati Roy (Chap. 7), where she examines the caste and class interface in rural West Bengal. She argues that the issues of land are shaped through a complex process of dynamic interaction between class, caste and capital, with different implications for different social groups. An examination of the ways through which the state and its policies intervene to shape the issues of land in rural areas shows the privileging of capital as well as of the landed class belonging to higher castes at the expense of the labouring class belonging to subordinate caste groups. The study also notes the significance of out-migration of the labouring classes in changing the power relations in rural areas. The commercialisation of the agrarian economy creates unequal opportunities; and the state interventions on the ground, mediated through the local power structures, fail to support those at the bottom of the class-caste hierarchy.

Land prices in India have been rising in the past decades. C.S. Rao (Chap. 8) investigates the rising land prices in rural Maharashtra, a phenomenon that the author argues has no relationship with the productivity of the land. The study finds sharp rise in the prices of land in a land sale market that has become more active in the recent period. It is primarily non-agricultural surplus that is being used to buy agricultural land, and also the non-cultivating landholders are becoming a dominant player in the countryside. Also, it is essential to underline that mostly it is the small farmers who are selling land, while the medium farmers are buying the land.

The implications of land acquisition and the legal framework for acquiring land have been among the widely debated questions concerning land. Four chapters specifically address the issue from different vantage points and relate their findings to the larger questions on land acquisitions. Animesh Roy (Chap. 9) examines the case of dispossessions in Rajarhat area of Kolkata; Shah, Patil and Nandani (Chap. 10) present a study of displacement due to SEZ in Gujarat; Prashant K. Trivedi (Chap. 12) studies the land acquisition process for highway development in Uttar Pradesh; and Dhanmanjari Sathe examines the LARR, in the context of land acquisition in Maharashtra (Chap. 13). All these contributions taken together point to the diversity of the outcomes of land acquisition that does not necessarily fit into a single narrative of dispossession, and, hence, calls for a nuanced understanding of the local conditions, including the power dynamics on the ground, might affect the outcomes of land acquisition.

Based on the household surveys conducted at two points of time (2009 and 2016) in Rajarhat adjoining Kolkata, where the land was acquired for building an urban centre and an IT hub, Roy (Chap. 9) explores the changes in livelihoods of people affected by an urban township project. His study reports that the dispossessed farmers do not enter the labour market as wage earners, rather most of them start working in the urban informal economy as self-employed in petty trading and businesses, often relying on multiple sources of livelihoods. While the earnings of such households have increased more than the farmers in the nearby areas who were not displaced, income inequality has also gone up in the case of the former group.

Shah et al. (Chap. 10), in their case study on land acquisition in Gujarat, a state that has been at the forefront of neoliberal development policy,[17] bring out the diversity in the outcomes of SEZs for different classes of people. Through a two-period field study of those affected by an SEZ at Jamnagar, the authors find that post-dispossession, there has been an increase in landlessness, and an increase in the share of both marginal and large landholders, implying a process of restructuring of the agrarian structure, that includes both depeasantisation and increasing concentration of land. While a few have been able to purchase land by utilising the money that they got as compensation, many have tried to gain a foothold in the non-farm economy. There has been an increase in the shares of self-employed and salaried workers, along with an increase in the proportion of casual workers. While an increase in income is reported by nearly 55 per cent of the households and an increase in employment opportunities for migrant labour is noted, the findings also suggest a rise in conflicts, growth of consumerist culture and environmental degradation.

Trivedi (Chap. 12) studies the case of land acquisition for two road infrastructure projects in Uttar Pradesh, one that was built by a private corporation, before the LARR 2013 was enacted, and another for which land acquisition was done by the government after the enactment of the LARR. In the second case, land was purchased by the government directly from the individual landowners, under which, the author reports, a higher price was paid to the landowners and it did not face the kind of resistance that the earlier project encountered. The move to shift to the 'purchase' mode appears to be partly motivated by the pro-landowners' provisions of

[17] For a detailed analysis of the implications of the 'Gujarat Model of Development', see Sood (2012).

the LARR, 2013. The nature of transactions in the deal, argues the author, reveals vast inequality between the financial power of corporates and state institutions vis-a-vis the farmers.

Dhamanajri Sathe (Chap. 13) examines the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013, both through its different provisions and the manner of its enactment. She cites the cases where land acquisition did not lead to violent protests and attempts to examine the efficacy of the LARR for 'sustainable land acquisition'. She argues that the LARR, 2013, was passed in a hurry and without the kind of consensus-building that would be necessary for making a contentious legislation work on the ground. On the other hand, she points to the cases where governments with the required will and ability to negotiate with varied interests could reduce conflicts around the land acquisition.

Mathur and Mittal (Chap. 11) provide an account of two infrastructure projects in Gujarat to illustrate the ideological strategies of neoliberal transformation of space. New imaginaries that seek to transform cities according to global visions have a distinctive set of impacts on its people and spaces. Cities in India have only been a by-product of urban planning and mostly made through the everyday practices of survival of long-term inhabitants and migrants. Through an unravelling of the underlying strategies of the Smart Cities initiatives, in particular, they argue that neoliberal approaches to urban spaces altogether abstract away the reality of Indian cities and articulate the urban through technological fantasy. The unfolding trajectory of urban development shows that dispossession of the marginalised goes 'hand in hand with production of a fantasy materialized in real-estate development and environmentally "friendly" uses of land such as jogging tracks and (gated) leisure parks replacing "lower value" uses such as open informal markets or informal homesteads'. The chapter draws attention to the myriad ways through which a consensus is manufactured, and 'participation' is narrowly defined to make the ideological project of neoliberalism hegemonic under a democratic order.

Often the regional specificities of the land question are overlooked in discussions focusing on the national scenario, particularly in the case of large countries like India. Two chapters, Fernandes (Chap. 14) focusing on the broad contours of the land issues in north-east India and Upadhyaya (Chap. 15) focusing on the transformation in land relations and livelihoods in Arunachal Pradesh, through the gender lens, bring out the salience of the local, regional dynamics in understanding the land question. Charting a broad canvas, Fernandes addresses the historical

evolution as well as the recent changes in rights over land (and, by implication, other natural resources), in India's diverse north-eastern region. The framework for economic development for the region has undergone significant changes under neoliberalism (Mishra and Upadhyay 2017), and the 'big ticket' development projects, such as hydro-power, mining and road construction, require huge land acquisition in the backdrop of incredible institutional diversity. Locating the land question in relation to immigration, collective identity and ethnic assertion, Fernandes draws attention to the role of community in the land question. The contradictions between community rights over land, and its relationship with the collective identities of communities, and the institutional priorities of the neoliberal development strategy that prioritises individual property rights are going to determine the unfolding of the land question in the region.

Even in the presence of strong community institutions which manage use-rights over land, unless the state commits itself to the protection of collective ownership, a combination of dispossession from outside (through which corporates acquire land with support of the state) and dispossession from within (through which elite capture of state and community institutions leads to informal and formal privatisation of community land in favour of powerful groups within the community) might facilitate a weakening of collective control of land (Mishra 2018b). Upadhyay (Chap. 15) links the changing land rights in Arunachal Pradesh to the gendered transformation of the employment structure and the emerging patterns of livelihoods diversification. While there has been a decline in jhum or shifting cultivation, a number of demographic, social and economic factors have led to the individualisation of land rights, whereby land is generally transferred in the name of the male heads of the households. Women, who still are very much part of the agricultural workforce, have been reduced to the status of 'disinherited peasants'. A two-period time-use survey reveals the increasing feminisation of agricultural operations, in the backdrop of male-selective livelihoods diversification and out-migration.

5 Conclusion

Given the wide diversity of issues related to land and livelihoods in contemporary India, it is difficult for a single book to provide comprehensive coverage of all the relevant questions. However, by weaving a narrative that encompasses both the theoretical concerns and the empirical evidence

on land and livelihoods in neoliberal India, the contributions to this study bring out the general as well as specific issues that attempt to explain the land-livelihoods nexus in contemporary India. The authors of the chapters do not necessarily follow a similar frame to pose and probe the land question, nor do they come to similar conclusions regarding the outcomes of the on-going processes of land acquisition and agrarian change. However, these contributions, hopefully, enrich the on-going discussion on the question of land, by bringing land and livelihoods questions within the same frame and also by locating the outcomes at the local, regional levels. The relevance of the questions raised in this volume goes beyond the specific contexts in which those have been examined by the authors. The interconnected themes of capitalist accumulation and its implications for the livelihoods of people directly or indirectly dependent upon land have global ramifications.

As neoliberalism has established itself at the centre-stage of development thinking, the issues that raised the volume are likely to have broader relevance to understanding the questions related to control, use and management of land in the Global South. While the state has been forced to acknowledge the widespread land conflicts and has attempted to carve out spaces for compromise, through legislations like the LARR, 2013, and the Forest Rights Act in India, the ultimate outcomes of these interventions rest on the responses of the land losers and those who tend to gain out of the land acquisition process. The contributions to this volume point to a wider range of issues, relating to rural livelihoods transformation and spatial relocation of labour and the persistence of the informal sector as a destination of displaced labour, within which the land questions need to be placed.

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