**Rural Transition in Haryana: An Update**

Rural India is in the midst of significant mutations in the wake of pressures unleashed by economic liberalization, the media explosion and measures like the 73rd Constitutional amendment. S.S. Jodhka’s ‘Emergent Ruralities’ (EPW, June 28, 2014), is a timely report on two villages in Haryana studied by the author in 1988-89 and again in 2008-09 to track changes in the demographic, technological, occupational and caste and community profiles of the said communities. While the author rightly stresses growing diversification in local economic and political structures based on the rise of businesses, government employment and new “political entrepreneurs” who have eroded the monopoly of large landowners or dominant Jat and Gujjar *chaudhries*, the exact change in the position of dalits in the studied villages (named 1 and 2) remains unclear in the absence of data on changing income and consumption patterns as also the distribution of the landless poor between farm and non-farm occupations in the otherwise well charted account. The fact that Jats are not only well entrenched in land but also in the state politics and bureaucracy of Haryana definitely called for more attention to dalits’ lives in the restudy of the communities from the vicinity of Panipat.

The author’s point about the number of surveyed households reporting cultivation as their principal livelihood declining to 30% in 2009 and the diversion of surpluses drawn from green revolution by most families to urban properties and commerce rather than large scale capitalist agriculture are noteworthy as is the fact that 15% of the respondents in the second round of the study report a second [secondary] occupation too.[[1]](#footnote-2) However, information on the secondary sector in the village and the decline and fall of crafts and different types of services (like gadget repair in place of tool making) remains scant. Another intriguing issue left unquantified in the essay is that of the position of the water table in this heartland of tubewell irrigation. The author states that “the water table has not fallen much” in the region despite two third of the irrigation coming from wells/ submersibles. In my own study of a village with similar agricultural practices since 1989, in western Uttar Pradesh, I have noted a fall in the water table by about one foot every successive year; driving it to the depth of at least 50 feet now (post monsoon). Similar alarming decline in water levels has also been reported in other studies from the region.[[2]](#footnote-3) In this light, an indication of the present level of underground water in the studied locations would be highly relevant.

Another puzzling trend left underexplored, in the essay, is the tenfold rise in the price of land in 20 [10] years between 1981 and 2001 (from about 30 lakh per acre to 3 crores). Since the paper also mentions, that only 8% of respondents wish to keep their children in agriculture and that practically all the youngsters want to leave farming across castes, it needs to be explored further as to where the demand for agricultural land is springing from that has pushed the land price so high across the country.

An interesting trend reported by the author is the increasing number of households sending both sons and daughters to cities to pursue higher education or receive coaching for careers in government or organized private sector. Since a large number of our youths are spending decades in this frustrating exercise, more detail on the expenses and years and final outcomes specially for girls now beginning to enter higher education on a large scale would be highly desirable in a follow up perhaps.

Professor Jodhka has concluded his essay by pointing to “increased vulnerabilities” of households despite some improvements in terms of amenities, occupational diversification, commuting and transportation etc. This section, however, remains thin as references to the loss of the common grazing land leading to a decline in cattle wealth for nutrition as well as liquid asset or the waning of village solidarity on account of increasing individuation and traditional ties remains low on data as well as argument. For instance,

Comment on S.S. Jodhka (2014), Emergent Ruralities, Economic and Politcal Weekly, Volume

1. The figures in rectangular brackets denote the original possibly misprint . [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Bhalla, Priya (2007), ‘Impact of Declining Groundwater Levels on Acreage Allocation in Haryana’, Economic and Political Weekly, Volume XLII, No.26, June 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)