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LAND TRANSACTIONS AND CHANGING NATURE OF CLASS, STATUS AND POWER IN RURAL LUCKNOW

It is a commonplace observation that agricultural land has been fast getting transformed into non-agricultural uses in the neighborhood of all types of cities in contemporary India. This trend has led to increase in the price of land which is, in turn, motivating peasants to sell their agricultural land at high prices. It was reported long back by Srinivas with regard to many villages including Rampura and Manhalli, while analyzing the impact of urbanization and industrialization on rural areas (Srinivas 1962). The phenomenon of land transaction has unleashed the processes of economic mobility, social alterations, cultural changes, and political dynamics in rural society. Furthermore, it has also opened up fresh vistas for socio-economic interface between country and town. In many trend reports of researches on rural studies, it has been suggested that the impact of urban on rural and rural-urban interconnections significant areas for further studies (Chauhan1974, Oommen 2000; Jodhka 2009). Considering the social as well as sociological significance of the phenomenon, the present paper is an attempt to know the change and dynamics in rural areas brought about by land transactions and as to how this change has been influencing the social stratification at the village level. Particularly, the paper examines the changing nature of class, status and power as an outcome of land transactions in a village near Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Social stratification has been explained conceptually and theoretically in the functional, the Marxian and the Weberian frameworks. There has also developed a tendency to analyze social stratification from a pluralistic conceptual frame by treating both conflict and consensus as two dimensions of the same reality (Singh 1974). Weber's definition of class in terms of life chances/property relations was heavily informed by Marx's concept of class (Misra 2010), but at the same time his treatment of status and power as autonomous dimensions of social stratification has the functional implications. In fact, the conceptual categories such as status, wealth and power are used in both the perspectives to analyze social stratification. The important structural units that sociologists have used for the analysis of social

stratification in India are caste, class, elite and professional occupational categories, by and large; these correspond roughly with a trilogy of status, wealth and power as an interdependent system of stratification (Singh 1974). The study at hand is an empirical attempt to explain the contours of social mobility and concomitant social changes as a result of land transactions near a burgeoning metropolis using Weber's conceptual categories of social stratification and the Marxian insights about the social implications of capitalistic penetration and development in rural India.

Caste has been the main focus as well as primary conceptual category in stratification and mobility studies in India. It is both logical and experiential. However, there are a few attempts to employ the concepts of class in understanding the structure and dynamics of rural society. Mukherjee (1957) has not only identified classes in West Bengal villages but has also indicated the mobility in class structure which was induced by the British. Desai's (2005) study was a kind of side attempt in this regard. He tried to explain the changes in socio-economic bases of rural India due to the British rule. Attempting a macro level analysis of agrarian class structure Thorner (1962) has classified the entire agrarian population into Maliks (Landlords), Kisan (Cultivators) and Mazdoors (Wages labours); he further subdivides each of the categories into subcategories. On the other hand, B eteille [2012 (1965)] examining the bases of social stratifications at a micro level identifies mobility in three aspects – caste (social), class (economic), and power (political). He reveals that an interwoven relationship among them in a south Indian village gradually develops into an independent set of economic and political and social forms of stratification. Three of the above studies follow Marxian approach while the last one pursues the Weberian model.

It seems that Weber's model is more equipped to deal with the multidimensional social stratification prevailing in Indian society. This can be noticed in B eteille's study [2012 (1965)]. Appraising the dynamics of interrelations of principal dimensions of social stratification – caste, class and power B eteille (2012) has applied the Weberian model to reveal the changing patterns social inequality in a south Indian village. Four decades back the study provided a fresh insight to explain facets of change/mobility in rural India; even now the perspective can further contribute to unfold the up-and-coming aspects and processes of mobility as a consequence of land transactions and concomitant affluence. Thus, the present study may be considered as an extension of B eteille's model to a north Indian situation in a changed context.

Unlike the nature of transition during 1960s villages particularly those adjacent to cities are experiencing many processes such as urbanization, industrialization, and land acquisition as also their impact on the rural social structure. The geographical expansion of the city and increasing importance of land for urban development have contributed in indiscriminate rise of land

prices which in turn has induced the desire among peasants to sell their lands in high rates so that they can improve upon their economic conditions. Often land transactions result into affluence which initiates multidimensional mobility. Socio-economic mobility attains significance particularly in the aftermath of increasing penetration of capital and market in rural economy and villages get integrated into national / global economy. Consequently the broad politico-economic forces and processes cut a cross rural life making it highly mobile. Thus, rural life is to be considered as a part of the wider society rather than as a whole in itself. In this context it would be interesting to examine emerging dimensions of rural social stratification from a blend of Marx's and Weber's frameworks. Not only for the reasons that Weber's conceptual frame and theoretic logic of social stratification have Marxian streaks (Misra 2010), but also both consider dimensions of social stratification at a broader level and relate it to wider socio-economic processes.

Objectives of the Paper

It is well known that land transactions in rural areas have generated a good deal of money for land owning peasants particularly in villages near big cities. This has resulted in new found affluence among peasants and has increased their life chances. The impact of affluence has been studied and explained by sociologists (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1967) with regard to industrial workers using Marx's conceptual categories like proletarianization and Weber's foci of class analysis on aspects variations and social mobility rather than on change. Extending the issue to a different but comparable context this paper analyses the effects of the new found affluence among villagers of contemporary India on their class, status and power locations. Going little farther than earlier studies on the impact of affluence the focus of study is on exploring the pathways of social mobility; (affluence) emanating from land transactions to life chances, to life style, to social status and to power position. Thus, three objectives have been set forth in this study:

1. To describe the nature and dimensions of increased life chances due to land transactions.
2. To identify aspects of change in social status after increased life chances and changed life style.
3. To examine the changing nature of power positions as a consequence of alteration in life chances and life style.

A Note on Methodology

This paper studies a village in BKT block of Lucknow district in U.P. The main reasons for the selection of Lucknow were two. Lucknow has been undergoing process of urbanization like other metropolitan cities (Census 2011, taken from website, en.wikipedia.org), consequently a good deal of land of

nearby villages is being acquisitioned as also several suburban settlements/colonies and industries, commercial and educational organizations are being set up resulting into the expansion of the city on the one hand, and on the other the incredible price rise of land. It is to be noted that the process is not sudden but taking its own time. Therefore, Lucknow can be considered more appropriate for studying the impact of increased prices of land and subsequent consequences of affluence among peasants because villages adjoining Lucknow are being assimilated into the city over a period of time, not unpredictably, which provides enough scope to study the ongoing process of change in social structure.

A few villages in the neighborhood of Lucknow where land transactions have taken place in good number were surveyed initially. Out of these eight villages a multi-caste and where villagers belonging to every caste have been selling land and because of it have attained affluence, was selected for the study. In the purposive selection of the respondents proper care was taken to make the sample representative. Thus, a sample of 40 consists of all major castes in the village. Descriptive research design has been used to describe the changing dimensions of rural society due to socio-economic processes. Intensive interviews were conducted using an interview guide. Moreover, data has also been corroborated by observation in the village and conversation with the villagers. Both primary and secondary sources of data collection have been used; nevertheless, most of the data have been collected through primary sources by observation and interview guide. Secondary data have been collected from the Block office, the Statistical Diary of U. P. (2008), the village school and the Aanganbadi center.

Study Area

Located 18 km away from Lucknow on Sitapur road, Nandna is a multi-caste village having a population of 1,367. The Thakurs of this area are Manpuri Chauhan, who settled in these villages after defeating the Mughal Governor of Oudh. Bachh Raj Singh, the second son of Chauhan Thakurs of Chaurai village, got 12 villages from his father out of 52 villages (Majumdar 1955). The village got its name from of Nandna Singh who was the son of Bachhraj Singh. Its economy is mainly dependent on the multiple things as agriculture, transport, business and various jobs. Like other villages of India most of the people have been associated with agriculture. Of late agricultural land is being sold for nonagricultural activities. An occupational shift can be observed in Navikot Nandana Gram Panchayat. Out of the total sown area of the village 173 hectare is used for Rabi crops and 135 for Kharif. Main crops grown in the village are wheat, barley and maize along with seasonal vegetables. People are mainly dependent on tube wells for irrigating their lands.

The Village Nandana at a Glance

	Upper Castes	Middle Castes	Lower Castes	Total
Total family in the village	118	76	27	221
Total population.	677	534	156	1367
Male	352	280	82	714
Female	325	254	74	653
Total educated people.	557	308	71	936
Total illiterate	120	226	85	431
Married people	306	230	72	608
Total unmarried	371	304	84	759
Ha Handicap	7	2	1	10
Teenage Girls (10-18 Years)	61	36	23	120
No. of children between the age group 6-14 going To school				
Boys	68	73	25	167
Girls	61	61	22	145

Source: Bal Vikas Seva Avam Pushtahar Nideshalay, U.P. Mahila Avam Bal Vikas Vibhag

Changes in the Nature of Class, Status and Power due to Selling of Land

The geographical expansion of the city has its sway on nearby villages, which has unleashed forces and processes of change in closeby villages. One of the important influences has been the land becoming precious commodity and is being exchanged fervently. This has initiated a multidimensional process of mobility in the village. The propensity of selling of land has led a change, whether it is in the village economy, in villagers' quality of life, life chances and life style. Land selling is somehow showing a new dimension of rural transition linked with urban expansion. It is not only bringing change in economy but it is also visible in the social structure of the village and its social consequences can be seen in various aspects of rural life. Djurfeldt et al (2008: 51) in their study of Tamil Nadu indicate similar tendency that "Local industrialization, structural transformation of the rural and agrarian economy and social policy interventions over the last three decades thus have resulted in improved levels of living in terms of food security, decreasing poverty, improved housing standards, levels of education etc".

Mehta (2011) considers that one of the basic prerequisites for the revitalization of agriculture is the effective resolution of the problems of marginal farmers in rural India. The vast bulk of these farmers are deficit cultivators as the farming has ceased to be a gainful occupation for them. The

market mechanism within the framework of underdeveloped economy intensifies the process of impoverishment of the marginal farmers. Although the selling of land is leading towards depeasantization, yet some marginalized farmers, for whom farming has become an unproductive occupation and who are suffering from underutilization of available recourses, have purchased more land at other places by selling their small plot of land. In this way, they are able to maintain farming as their occupation on a larger plot of land which helps them to sustain their livelihood in better way.

Except agriculture some new occupations have also emerged in the village. Many people have started working as broker or middleman in the business land exchange and few have opened shops which provide timber for house construction on hire, one person has opened his own ice cream parlor, and supplies ice cream not only in the village but even to the city. Some of them are earning by hiring their homes to some agency workers and other outsiders who need accommodation in the village. Hiring and driving taxi and cars for commercial purposes are on increase in the village. Drivers are also hired from outside the village for operating taxi services. This tendency shows that besides agriculture other new occupations are being adopted by the villagers and agriculture as occupation is increasingly becoming one of the occupations. People are selling their lands in large number and others who have land are least interested in engaging themselves in it. The structural occupational mobility can manifestly be observed in the village, indicating a change in the homogeneous character of the occupational structure of the village and thereby in the nature of its social structure.

Weber discusses class in the context of social stratification. Class is one of the dimensions of the social structure. Social status or social honour is another. Both are significant contributors to social inequality. The possession of property defines the main class difference, according to Weber. The owners of property have a definite advantage, and in some case a monopoly on, action in the market of commodities and, especially, labour. They have privileged access to the sources of wealth creation, by virtue of ownership and control of the markets. In the village land as a property has contributed to the emergence of newly rich farmers who after selling their land and converting this property into money have greater access to the market forces. They are now capable of investing in market and enhancing their social status because wealth is a key determinant of the life style differences on which status depends.

Land Transactions and Changes in Life Chances

Beteille [2012 (1965)] mentions that the movement between the different agricultural classes in Sripuram has been taking place speedily. Earlier the only way of acquiring land was by inheritance, occasionally by gift from feudal classes or the state. Nowadays, exchange of land by buying and selling of land is a prevalent mode. One of the consequences of this is that a

significant section of people tend to become disengaged from the agrarian relations in the village. The village under study is also witnessing a similar kind of shift in agrarian class structure. After selling their whole land several landowners are engaged in other occupations. Some low and middle caste people, who were having very small plots of land after selling it in high rates, have purchased more land at other places and they are now owner of big portions of land. Out of 20 lower and middle caste people who were interviewed 12 have bought more land in other places than they were having earlier in the village. On this account the low and middle castes villagers have ownership of more land in comparison to the former landowning upper castes. Consequently, the ownership of land is no longer a monopoly of the upper castes. This has also been changing the agrarian relations in the village. Now the upper classes are not necessarily recruited from the upper castes of the village. There are many upper caste families in the village who either do not have land or have a tiny part of land. Because of this both the upper and the middle castes are now forced to adopt other menial occupations to sustain their livelihood, which was in the past mainly the *fait accompli* of the lower castes.

The huge influx of money through selling of land has enhanced economic position of many. The role and importance of money is increasing in the village life. The above instances reveal that in the village class system seems to be detaching itself from caste to some extent. After getting huge amount of money from selling their land peasants have not only improved economically but have raised their social status and honour by investing heavily in prestige giving goods and services. It has repercussion on their class situation as there can be mobility in two directions, few have moved from peasant class situation to bourgeois, they have enough money to have all essential things and are capable to influence the power structure of the village along with their high social status, therefore, at present they cannot be considered as having peasant class situation. It is also leading to proletarianization of some peasants as they have lost all their land and are left with nothing. Out of 40 respondents who were interviewed 8 have become landless and 15 are left with no agricultural land in the village though they are having small portions of land at far off places but in the village they are left only with their houses and are forced to adopt other occupations or work as a daily wage labor.

At another place Weber [1946 (1922)] emphasizes that every technological effect and concomitant economic transformation threatens stratification by status and pushes the class situation into the foreground. Epochs and countries in which the bare class situation is of predominant significance are regularly the periods of technical and economic transformation. In the village the role and importance of class is increasing in comparison to caste as with increased economic situation some middle and lower castes claim a higher position in the village community. Due to land transactions the economy has transcended the boundary of the village and it has linked village

with the economic processes working at the wider level. This indicates that new economic transformation has provided people enough space to move upward in the traditional social structure. Economic processes working at the village level have made economy the focal point of all positions.

Land Transactions and Change in Life Style

The concept of style of life is not precise and it may include a whole range of phenomena from work activity to the use of leisure. The more important material components of it would be habitation, dress and food while the non-material ones would include speech and manners in general [Béteille 2012 (2007)]. Land transactions have induced mobility in the life style of the village people, as they have almost every modern facility in their homes as refrigerator, fan, cooler, color T.V., gas stove and water tank, etc. Out of 40, 38 people constructed new houses after getting money from their sold land. Moreover, the structures of their houses are similar to the city houses. Many of them constructed their houses after consulting the architect and even some of them engage contractors from the city to make it more up-to-date. Even the way of welcoming guests is increasingly becoming urbane as also adopting the modern/western life style, e.g. some of them use the European style bathrooms. One can find marble floors and designer doors spending hefty amount on these things. They now visit Lucknow frequently for shopping, etc.

A major portion of this money is spent on such items as house, ritual occasions, color T.V., C.D. player, fridge, washing machine, etc. They buy more televisions and quite a lot of money goes into drinking. Villagers compete with each other in buying luxury vehicles. Cars are quite common. One can find latest models and brands, for example Ford Icon, Tata Indigo CS, Hyundai I-10, Mahindra Zyllo, and Toyota Innova, parked in front of multistoried houses models. This is an instance of conspicuous consumption to exhibit affluence and status. Village people, including some low caste families have started sending their children to English medium schools paying high expanses of fees and school vans. After selling their land, 15 people out of 40 changed the school of their children and started sending them in English medium schools outside village, in order to provide better education to them. The number of girls pursuing higher education has increased. People are now willing to send their girls outside for higher education.

The new affluence has brought some changes in the community life of the village people. Now the daily interactions among villagers are decreasing and they are more limited within their homes. Women spend their leisure time watching T.V. rather than gossiping with their neighbours on different issues. These kinds of changes are also visible in some low caste families, Women in their families do not visit fields frequently and some have stopped it totally. The pattern of dressing has undergone many changes. Modern cloths are getting more popular among girls. A shift from traditional towards modern

pattern of dressing among women can be observed. The frequent visits to market have increased for getting the cloths of their choice and fashion. Those who could not sell their land because of some reasons, are willing to sell it as early as possible so that they could have a big house with all modern facilities like their neighbors. The upward mobility of their cohorts is leading towards their downward mobility and this relative deprivation works as a motivational factor for others to sell their land at high prices and have similar living standard as of their neighbor.

The newly constructed houses of the village are like city houses with channel gates and boundary walls contrary to the earlier which were open enough for free entry of neighbours. This in turn has lessened interaction and communication among neighbors. Now their frequent visits to each other are limited. This is a different finding in comparison to the study of the affluent workers of Britain. Goldthorpe *et al.* (1967) in their study of affluence among workers of Britain found that contrary to the thesis of embourgeoisement of working class affluent workers do not emulate the middle class norms and lifestyle; they are only concerned with material benefits rather than improvement in their prestige and hierarchy. The middle class norms had, only a very limited influence on the patterns of sociability. There is a little indication that the affluent workers are in the process of being incorporated into the middle class society. Even they do not seem to be imitating middle class life style.

The selling of land by villagers has also resulted in affluence among them but this affluence has not come by doing any work rather in has been induced by selling their lands at high prices. There can be seen embourgeoisement among peasants and they are trying to identify themselves as middle class. Though middle class norms are not very clear in them but there can be seen a mobility towards middle class values which has been induced by the new found affluence among peasants. The affluence among workers shows mobility within their occupation, but here the affluence among villagers can be seen leading towards structural mobility beyond occupational mobility. There can be seen a tendency of a shift towards middle class values. Even it has increased the individualistic values and rights. Now parents want to live independently and separate from their children. Out of 40, 28 people started living in nuclear families after selling their agricultural land. The land which had attached them together the selling of it has weakened the personal ties between parents and children resulting in nuclear families. Workers of Britain could not have preferred the middle class norms and culture but the affluent villagers in India are undergoing a process of embourgeoisement.

Weber says that material monopolies are the most effective motives for the exclusiveness of a status group. Social restrictions, such as marriage patterns, residents, and so forth, follow from the differences in wealth reflected

in prestige. Some low caste people in the village have started spending hefty amount on celebrations just to show off their wealthy position and elevate their social status in the direction of upper caste people. Such ostentatious spending in lower castes after getting huge amount of money from their sold land is to some extent rooted in the desire of lower castes to show their social mobility by following the life style of upper castes. In the village low castes had a much oppressed position and were denied from all facilities privileged by upper castes, but after selling their land they have much money to show off and spent it on luxury items to maintain their social status.

Land Transactions and Changing Power Structure

According to Sarap (1996) "Several explanations have been put forward as to why land sales are uncommon in less developed countries. One of the explanations is based on the belief that the possession of land enhances the power and prestige of the household". Further Sarap says that, farm household would like to hold on to their land and part with it only in conditions of extreme distress. But in the village under study land selling has added the power to many low caste families and has affected the power structure of the village as now the people of low caste, who have raised their social status after selling their land, wield some power in the village of which they were deprived earlier, now they have the ability to control material resources. Beteille[2012 (1965)] in his study of Sripuram has pointed out the dynamics of power in the village. He considers that "though in the traditional society power was largely subsumed by the caste structure but now it has detached itself from caste and one has now to consider the balance of power between different castes. Though its nature is unstable and factors other than caste play an important part in maintaining and changing it from day to day."

In the village under study traditionally only the upper castes used to wield power and people of low castes were subjugated. Though new laws have contributed in the advancement of the lower castes, the increased of land price provided a good opportunity to them. They are capable to buy more land in remote areas by selling their small plot of land. Earlier they were forced to work on the fields of upper castes to sustain their livelihood as their small plots were not sufficient to feed their family and they had to bear their oppression as they had no other option but now most of them prefer to sell off their land in high rates and invest that in building houses and purchasing new land at other places more than they were having earlier. Even some low castes have started giving their agricultural land for sharecropping to others which was not practiced by them earlier. Few are now in a position to challenge the traditional power structure of upper castes in the village as now after selling their land they have purchased more land elsewhere and they don't need to work on their fields for livelihood. As political power is often based on class and status these people have started holding some power positions in

the village, they have become independent enough in political behavior as deciding their voting candidates etc. of which they were deprived earlier.

Béteille [2012 (1965)] relates economic power with political power according to him "In order to acquire and retain political power it is necessary for a person to have some economic standing". He rejects land as a decisive factor in acquiring power. In the village under study it seems quite applicable because now having large holdings is no longer considered as a symbol of powerful person rather monetary position of a person decides his status as well as power. Many people in the village use their money to get the political favour of the local party men to settle their disputes. In a way it has increased the number of conflicts at village level because now people are able to afford the expanses of litigations. They have enough resources to approach powerful local political leaders to serve their interests. Those disputes which used to be settled with mutual consent are now dragged at higher level with the power of money. Some villagers who are in contact with city agents through mediation in land transactions wield enough power within village.

It is clear that all these three dimensions are changing due to land transactions. Change in the class system has been induced by cash economy and marketization of land which has its repercussion on caste as well as power structure of the village. In Weber's theory of stratification the society can be classified on the three bases of class, status and power. If we analyze the phenomenon of land selling in Weber's model of stratification it is bringing change in all these three social bases and if there is a change in these aspects it will naturally affect the social structure of the village. The phenomenon of land selling has brought about the changes in both life styles as well as in life chances. However, many cultural and social features are continuing. The contradiction of change and continuity has given rise to anomic conditions as well. The anomic conditions can be found in the disintegration of village as a community on the one hand and, deviance and conflicts on the other hand.

It can be concluded that in rural society, especially in those villages which are adjacent to the city, the process of social, economic, political and cultural transformation is going on. Not only capitalist market and other economic processes have entered in rural society significantly but along with urbanization they have been critically affecting rural society. Villages in modern India, particularly in the neighbourhood of cities, are no more homogeneous, simple and integrated communities, rather they have been changed into a mobile, heterogeneous and a complex society from where the processes of urbanization, globalization and corporate capitalism pass through affecting their social structure and character. The findings of the paper support Marxian logic that economic processes indicate alteration in the social structure and at the same time Weber's analysis of the possibility of incongruity of the dimensions of social stratification.

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