

“New” rural-agrarian movements in India: Continuities and shifts

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Abstract. Political mobilization of farmers in India has always interested and puzzled scholars studying agrarian change. The major political phenomenon in India's agrarian history were farmers movements in the 1980s, which showed the strength of organization and mobilization of such leaders as Mahindra Singh Tikait and Sharad Joshi. This phenomenon gradually faded away by the 1990s. However, in recent decades India once again witnessed farmers protests with three major demands: waiving off agricultural loans; more rationalized Minimum Support Price covering more crops and input costs; implementation of the Swaminathan Committee report's recommendations¹. The national magazine's cover called these protests “farmers revolt”. In the interview, Yogendra Yadav, a political activist associated with Swaraj Abhiyan, called them a historical moment and a move towards “peasant rebellion”. The article considers the nature of farmers mobilization from 2014 to 2020, focusing on the initial phase of this movement and emphasizing that farmers protests should not be seen as sporadic, scattered and short-term unrest, as they appear *prima facie*. Instead, these protests reflect a major shift in the nature of social movements in India in general and agrarian movements in particular, being different from the 1980s farmers movements. Recent protests show that the new rural youth want to reimagine Indian rural society, develops new methods of protests and negotiations and new class distinctions, considering diverse ideological positions on the rural-agrarian question. This new rural social class is against the right-wing populism and neo-populism of the 1980s farmers movements, but it is also against the Indian left-wing idea of modernity and the definition of rural India in terms of class politics. The authors argue that recent protests should be characterized as rural-agrarian rather than farmers, since they suggest the rural-agrarian dominance in the Indian political economy and define the new rural and post-green revolution as agrarian. Given the growing sense of losing identity under urbanization and corporatization, the new rural-agrarian class faces a serious existential threat that leads to protests and their culmination in the form of movement. The authors make some conclusions about this movement, highlighting its recent trends. The article consists of four sections: foundations of this movement evolution; concept of rural-agrarian movements; features

1. URL: <https://ruralindiaonline.org/article/all-reports-by-the-swaminathan-commission>.

of new farmers unrest, different from movements in the 1970s and 1980s; critical analysis in the context of existing theories.

Key words: political mobilization of farmers; India; new rural-agrarian movement; rural youth; farmers' protests; political economy; new rural social class

Preconditions for movements

The recent rural-farmer mobilization started after the killing of six farmers in the police firing in Mandsaur, Madhya Pradesh. After this news, farmers organizations in different parts of the country decided to develop a nationwide strategy of organized protest. About 150 organizations united in the All-Indian Kisan Sangharsh Committee (AIKSC), which was a historical political moment in the history of Indian democracy. Never before in the history of India farmers organizations worked together on a policy agenda for the countryside². The major feature of this political unity was that these organizations distanced from political parties and their mobilization agenda. The AIKSC decided to work on a common minimum program with a focus on protests and within a wider policy agenda — on implementing recommendations of the Swaminathan Committee report. Although farmers movements of the 1980s also claimed to keep away from political parties, they joined right-wing forces in different states. The AIKSCC not only refused to be associated with any party, but also welcomed participation of all parties, organizations and individuals — from left, right and centrist political forces, who agreed with its common minimum program. In fact, left organizations are the major mobilizing forces. The All-Indian Kisan Sabha (AIKS) and All-Indian Kisan Mahasabha (AIKMS) not only supported the movement but, unlike in the 1980s, actively involved in its mobilization. The AIKSCC also had various factions of Kshetkari Sangathana and Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU).

The committee started its political activity by holding rallies in various parts of the country to mobilize farmers. Its major aim was to force the central government to adopt farmer friendly policies focusing on rural-agrarian development. The resistance had to be much stronger, since the government in Delhi lacked effective opposition. Rallies turned into the protest march to the national capital on November 20–21, in which thousands of farmers participated. The protest march was followed by the Kisan Sansad (farmers parliament) proposal of two major bills to waive off farmers loans.

What made these organizations come together and form this coalition? Many political leaders associated with the movement argued that Mandsaur was a trigger. Farmers unrest was the result of the

2. All Indian Kisan Sabha is an exception.

accumulated social-economic distress, on the one hand, and political negligence of this crucial issue, on the other hand. This rural unrest was against the state policies — state inability to ensure remunerative prices for farmers products and structural changes posing a threat to the rural-agrarian society.

One major point of this mobilization was the land question: the new government tried to make land acquisition easier to facilitate land grabbing for the corporate sector. In the times of economic crisis and unemployment accompanied by high inflation rates, land and agriculture are the only sources of survival and livelihood in the countryside. Increase in the number of farmers suicides, people’s protests against land acquisition (starting with West Bengal and then in Bhat-ta Parasaul), state unwillingness to even acknowledge the crisis led to rural-agrarian unrest in the last decade (Vasavi, 2012; Reddy, Mishra, 2009; Jodhka, 2006; 2014; Mohanty, 2005).

In the recent past, there have been movements to defend farmers right to land and livelihood and tribal communities right to forest and water³ (for instance, against land acquisition in the Niyam-giri and Kolapur districts of Orissa⁴, against giving Panna diamond mines to a private firm, small-scale resistance against the government’s attempts to use land near rural areas for urban waste dumps⁵). The final blow was when the central government made arbitrary modifications in the land acquisition act and tried to push it through a resolution. Many farmers from the south state of Tamil Nadu gathered at Jantar Mantar, Delhi, carrying human skulls and bones and holding dead rats in their mouth, which symbolized terrible economic conditions of Indian farmers. A month later farmers in the Sikar and Ganganagar districts of Rajasthan also protested against the government neglect of farmers issues. In the interview, Vijoo Krishnan, who works with the All-Indian Kisan Sabha, said: *“It is wrong to assume that these protests are sporadic and occurred suddenly. They are just a manifestation of farmers unrest against the way various governments have dealt with their concerns. In many states, the state had been proactively involved in giving land to corporations without taking farmers concerns into account”*.

Another major issue for rural economy is the killing of people involved in cattle trade in the name of *gauraksha*. People who depend on dairy business for their livelihood suffered the most. States like

3. Although the mainstream Hindi or English media did not report these movements, they mobilized many people against state’s interventions in the industrial corporate interests.
4. The movement in Niyamgiri was against land acquisition for the POSCO project, the movement in Kolapur — against the Vedanta project.
5. One such small movement has formed recently in the Ganganagar district of Rajasthan, where the government decided to use land for a waste dump. Villagers protested — organized sit ins and rallies in the district town in October 2017.

Rajasthan, with vast livestock population and developed dairy economy, faced serious challenges, which was a major cause of unrest and movement in Sikar. In the interview, Amra Ram, a leader of the movement in Sikar, explained: *“Economy of North and Central Rajasthan suffered major rural collapses due to violence against people involved in sale and purchase of cattle. When the government refuse to waive off loans and stopped providing jobs in the organized sector, on the one hand, and destroyed rural economy step by step, on the other hand, people were left with no choice but to fight back”*.

The third major shock for the rural-agrarian economy was demonetization (*notebandi*) which started on November 8, 2017, and was a huge blow to the already collapsing rural economy. India's rural-agrarian economy is largely cash-based with limited banking facilities and means of financial transactions. Government's decision to promote online transactions with mobile phones came as a shock to the rural economic transactions, blocking payments for seeds, labor and primarily for periodic purchase of food and other necessary goods for households⁶. In the interview, Mekhala Krishnamurthy mentioned the impact of demonetization on small traders of Harda mandi: *“Small-town agro-commercial capitalists in Madhya Pradesh witnessed their political currency undergoing a kind of demonetization in an ascendant economic regime favoring large-scale corporate capital”*⁷. Bhagirath Soni, a taxi-driver in a small town in the Hanu-mangarh district of Rajasthan (another major protest site) said: *“We don't know what happened but suddenly after notebandi everything stopped. People were afraid to withdraw money, even if they had it. It seemed as if money transactions stopped. Before I used to make enough money in this business for my family. Now it's impossible”*.

Government neglect of rural issues in general and farmers issues in particular led to mass unrest in the countryside, which was obvious during our visit to the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra in June 2017. In the interview, Santosh Lakshmanrao from the Yawatmal district of Vidarbha, mentioned this stress two months before rallies: *“Agriculture and rural society are in terrible condition. We don't know how to say it, but we know that the government doesn't take us seriously. The government works for big players and not for farmers and the poor. This will explode one day. When and how — I don't know”*. In the village Donoda, in which Lakshmanrao lives, there has been more than one suicide almost every year in the last decade. During our stay there, one of the younger villagers said: *“Take a picture of this person (pointing to the man standing next to him). He is going*

6. A collection of essays was published to critically analyze how demonetization had harmed rural-agrarian economy // URL: <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/1222-demonetization-critical-responses-to-india-s-cash-less-experiment>.

7. URL: <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/1209-trading-notes>.

to commit suicide soon... and one by one in the next few years we all will”. Another person standing next to him added: “We are all graduates. We didn’t get a job after graduation — there were no jobs. Even if there were, one has to pay a lot to buy a job position, for which the farmer has to sell his land. We didn’t want to sell our land due to our emotional attachment to it and our village. We decided to continue with agriculture and live in the village. Now we are in agriculture with 3–4 acres of land, which is not enough for good living today. Nobody wants their daughters to marry boys like us, because we live in the village and we have no wealth. We all are not married although we are almost 30 years old... Our life is a waste”. These words reflect deep anxiety, alienation and above all identity crisis of farmers in rural areas. When government decisions affect rural-agrarian economic structures, this leads to a social-cultural collapse — many people cannot cope with these structural changes.

Yashwant took part in the Kisan Sansad on November 21–22, organized by the AIKSCC. In the interview, Yashwant, a combine driver from the Sangrur district of Punjab, said: “We have no choice but to fight. Have you ever heard about a bank taking action against an industrial debtor? But when a farmer fails to repay a loan for few months after paying it in time for two–three or more years, bank representatives start knocking on his door and threatening him... Our boys have no jobs. I came here for them. I so not care about results, but I am satisfied that I did my duty”.

Many believe that the demand of some dominant castes for reservation in government positions is also a result of a growing sense of frustration and crisis of *pehchan* (a close English concept is identity). Villagers do not consider these protests as simple rallies or social movements. In the interview, Rajaram Singh from the All-Indian Kisan Mahasabha, an active partner of the AIKSCC, said: “It’s the fight of rural-agrarian India for survival and identity. We have no other way but to protest”.

Thus, exclusion, marginalization and neglect are essential to understand the evolution of recent movements. Their cumulative impact in the last decade in general and in the last three years in particular explains the ongoing rural-agrarian mobilization.

New gramīn kisan biradārī (rural-agrarian community)

The key analytical categories of the traditional approaches to rural-agrarian change are land, credit and resources (economic categories), caste, kinship and religion (sociological categories). Rural policies and farmers mobilization have also been explained within these theoretical frameworks. In the last two decades, “vanishing villages” (Gupta) and farmers gradually losing interest in agriculture have become major concerns in debates on agrarian change in India.

Many scholars, primarily sociologists, argue that the traditional category of “rural-agrarian” is not so useful for understanding social-political-economic change in the countryside. In contemporary neo-liberal India, the rural is not limited to the agrarian and vice-versa. According to Jodhka, “rural was largely seen as a homogenous entity without internal complexities, diversities and emerging changes in its internal structure both horizontally and vertically”. To show the nature of rural-agrarian change, Priyanshu Gupta and Manish Thakur argued that the classical political economy approach of rural-agrarian dominance is not so useful for understanding the “fundamental transformation of the village from the spatial habitat of the traditionally dominant to the waiting room for the aspiring and the despairing”.

However, in both global and Indian context, there is a reviving interest in the rural-agrarian. The crisis in Indian agriculture, attributed to the aftereffects of the green revolution (Shiva), growing role of global capital (Jha, Himanshu Kumar) and above all increasing rates of urbanization (Gupta), has determined concerns about the interpretation of the rural-agrarian, which many scholars consider a major reason for outmigration and increase in numbers of suicides in rural India. However, the new urban also faces challenges. Some of the major concerns about India’s uncontrolled urbanization are declining employment opportunities, air and water pollution, expansive and alienated individualized lifestyle. These challenges made some rural areas search for new ways to imagine the rural-agrarian instead of looking at urban spaces as the only destination for progress and better living.

Imagining the new rural is not about returning to the roots; it is also not confined to the agrarian rural. The new idea or the new rural is both economically and social-culturally diverse, it implies collective efforts to recreate the rural-agrarian with new social-cultural ethics and values. It is this desire of the new rural which brings people together to defend the rural-agrarian even though it is seen as a space of despair and non-profitable business. What attracts people in rural life is its social security, fresh air and vegetables, relatively less expensive lifestyle and a sense of community. Urban lifestyle and alienation, race for progress and money, high cost of living are some of the factors that discourage the rural youth from leaving rural spaces.

The existing category of farmers movements or peasant rebellion does not fully explain the changing character of the village society and contemporary movements. First, many protest participants were not farmers in a traditional sense: some did not own land (nor their families), many were not engaged in agriculture. Second, their clothes or dressing style was quite different from the traditional image of the farmer or peasant: most participants (especially in Mandsaaur and even Delhi) were wearing paint-shirt, most leaders were not wearing the traditional farmer dress (like *dhoti kurta*). In fact, many participants were English speaking young people without any

experience of rural life. V. M. Singh, a leader in the AIKSC, is a Delhi University graduate; Yogendra Yadav and Avik Saha also are urban dwellers.

The current farmers movement consists of two social-economic groups: first, those engaged in agriculture for their livelihood and rural in their lifestyle — middle and small farmers, large farmers who have gradually joined the group of small farmers after the family division of land (according to Beitte, large farmers and landless workers do not fall into this category); second, a new class in rural spaces, which considers the rural as the new future. The term “new rural-agrarian” indicates the revival of rural-agrarian society in the Indian political discourse. This new imagination is not based on classical cultural ideas or cultural revivalism. The political economy logic of the rural as the future with a social-technical regime constitute this new rural. New rural movements represent a new political elite in the Indian countryside, which defines rural as a spatial center, agrarian as a cultural expression but also accepts some urban values and amenities. This new elite understands the regressive nature of rurality which needs to be addressed to develop new imagination.

Participants of mass farmers protests in Delhi in July and then November 2017 defined *“themselves not as farmers but as related to rural economy as an integral part of farming. They have relatives and friends among farmers, therefore believing that it is their moral duty to stand with them in these times of crisis”* (from the interview with Yashwant Kumar from the Baman village, Tehsil Akkalkuwa, Maharashtra). Similarly, in Nagpur we met young people who wanted to go back to their villages provided they got some economic security. Although they were critical about village life, they were also aware of discrimination and alienation in urban spaces. Prakash, a participant of the movement from Tamil Nadu, who could not complete his engineering studies due to crop failure and inability to pay off his bank loan, said: *“People move to urban areas, seeking new opportunities, but all of them are dissatisfied. They got nothing. Even my family tried it. Many others did. Many families are at a loss. Our future is rural not urban. What should we do in cities? We cannot even rent a house. In our village, we had a house and respectable living. In city nobody knows you”*. Sudhakar, who graduated from university, opened a dairy farm and spent a month on the streets of Delhi, said: *“I am here for my sons. I want to give them a decent life which is possible only in village. They should go out, study, learn new things, but village gives you a natural life. My parents gave me that and I want to give this to my children. It’s not a fight for money; it’s a fight for prestige and rural survival”*.

Unlike the rural elite of the 1980s and 1990s, which also defended traditional rural customs and structures, this new rural class accepts the fact that village society needs to be changed. What connects this new elite with the rural is not the economic relationship

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with the agrarian sector but social-cultural ties, everyday practices and sense of belonging manifested in public spaces, rural communities and new forms of political mobilization as new connecting factors. Unlike other countries, India's new peasantry and idea of the rural are not developed in urban centers but by villagers that do not have job or have job in the nearby urban center, i.e., every day they travel to work and back to the village. The new movement also attracts people from the organized sector, who consider the countryside as their permanent settlement, and the rural youth associated with the rural-agrarian even if not engaged in agriculture. As V. M. Singh, the major political leader in the All-Indian Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee, said: *"In the oath after the Kisan Sansad we promised that we are one biradari (community), i.e., kisan biradari, and not any other caste or religion (as a community identity). We understand that to build a united movement it is necessary to have a common identity that does not cause disagreement. Moreover, a consensus is emerging among people on this issue. We cannot be the same as we were two or three decades ago"*.

Although capitalist development of Indian agriculture can be considered a factor of the new rural-agrarian, as Marxists scholars would argue, there are other crucial factors of this phenomenon. Indian rural-agrarian change has its own trajectory different from the western logic of capitalist agriculture as determining class consciousness. Diversification logic is not fully suitable for the Indian context (in some backward regions, the mode of production debate is still relevant, but in many other parts of India it is not a methodologically useful concept). Farmers in India learned to balance the self-sustaining agriculture and capitalist accumulation. Most farmers grow commercial crops for market needs but also produce food essential for their own consumption and strive to diversify their sources of income without giving up agriculture.

Thus, the two major determinants of this new rural-agrarian can be seen as independent analytical categories. First factor is the strong non-farm economy that has facilitated diversification of rural economy and paved the way for the village-city interaction in both economic and cultural terms, which provided rural population with access to urban services in rural areas and opened up rural culture to urban values. This process determined consumerist trends in rural society, but it also helped the rural youth overcome some traditional rural prejudices, especially the caste division. The use of technologies in various spheres of life including agriculture also affected agrarian relations. For instance, mobile phones changed the way of mobilizing agricultural labor, other technologies, including gadgets available for rent, changed the nature of inter-family relations in rural areas. The second major determinant of the new rural-agrarian is the gradual withdrawal of the state from organized rural employment, and what further complicates this process is the growing participation

of marginalized rural groups due to the policy of reservation. This has helped to change the social fabric of rural life: the marginalized groups previously associated with the reservation policy are now economically better off and started to demand reservations in government agencies (movements in Haryana, Gujarat and Maharashtra).

In Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Karnataka, there are efforts to revive villages in new ways. In Punjab, such efforts are made by villagers. In some states, the government has played a proactive part, for instance, in Kerala the government invested in projecting the rural as a popular cultural tourist destination (idea of a model village). Similarly, some Punjab villages are new destinations for week-end holidays and outings. The government of Rajasthan made similar efforts. These policies aim at both developing the rural as tourist or cultural destinations and reviving the rural-agrarian as a collective space.

Moreover, social-economic changes affected traditional rural elites by facilitating integration of weaker groups into the rural society and economy. The new rural elite recognize the role of marginalized groups in democratization of the country. Demographically, this is new rural youth (mainly men) associated with the capitalist mode of industrial production or service sector. They cannot be placed in the traditional upper-caste, bullock capitalists, rural-rich or *kulaks* (some scholars explained India's agrarian change in the 1960s–1970s with these categories that mainly describe the new elite in rural India, which was a major beneficiary of the green revolution). These new youth are not economically strong and work on farms but share the requests of farmers (including tenants or sharecroppers) and rural population⁸. The new rural imagination of the Indian youth does not necessarily come from the middle peasantry or intermediary classes, as Lenin claimed, — rather from various social-economic categories (primarily marginal farmers) of rural India and semi-urban centers that have developed in recent decades and manifest certain features of “new rurality” (Jodhka) as embedded in the agrarian sector and the rural as a social-cultural space.

The current farmers movements can be interpreted as a political expression of this new rural elite that uses different and new strategies of political mobilization. They wear jeans and t-shirts, use social media to spread their political agenda, are interested in innovations in agricultural production, are trained in management, rural development and technological advances in agriculture; moreover, they know legal provisions concerning the agricultural sector and social securi-

8. Surinder Jodhka (2014; 2016) proposed a new social methodology to address some of these complexities in the Indian society, economy and politics. See also the seminar presentation of Jodhka, highlighting the category of diversification in villages as not necessarily agrarian // URL: www.ruraagrarianstudie.org.

ty programs. One main reason why these progressive groups receive huge support is growing dissatisfaction with the right-wing populism (nationalism, issues of *gauraksha*, *notebandi*, the prime minister's election promises of waiving off farmers loans or doubling farmers incomes). Thus, the new political movement receives support not only of farmers but of different social-economic groups. Contrary to the ruling party's claim of representing the masses (as populist regimes globally claim), India's rural-agrarian population has questioned the cultural narrative of exclusion and marginalization of few religious and social groups.

Mass protests in the Sikar district of Rajasthan are an example of this kind of political mobilization. Protests in Sikar started with farmers who demanded to waive off loans; gradually people from all groups, including bus drivers, grain merchants, shopkeepers, auto rickshaw drivers and so on, joined farmers — both men and women. This movement was a remarkable example of an entire district peacefully defending its position. In the interview, Amra Ram, a leader of the All-Indian Kisan Sabha and a leader of this movement, said: *“Everyone realizes that the rural-agrarian is in a deep crisis. India is a rural society which is largely agrarian. The youth don't see any other future but fighting for the survival of rural India. They also understand the need to change if this fight is won. This understanding of the need for resistance led this movement to success”*.

Thus, the current rural-agrarian movement indicates a new politics for rural India and agriculture, which is based on the new idea of the rural. Similarly, today's notion of agriculture also differs from the green revolution's idea of profitable agriculture: new agriculture needs more state support and new ideas, on the one hand, and protection of natural resources and care for public health, on the other hand.

Old and new farmers movements and new rural-agrarian movements

One major development in the Indian politics in general and farmers politics in particular is the changed ideological understanding of agrarian change. The current movement is an amalgamation of existing conflicting perspectives based on serious intellectual rethinking on the part of left-wing and farmers organizations (but not right-wing circles).

Farmers and villagers resistance during the 1960s–1970s was largely based on the Marxist-Leninist understanding of class relations and agrarian change. In this understanding capitalist development of agriculture was to determine social transformations in society — capitalist agriculture would gradually replace feudal primordial identities with class identities (Mohanty), and such a change was to be led by the middle peasantry. This idea was questioned by other

Marxist scholars like Utsa Patnaik (Patnaik, Thorner) who argued, referring to Chayanov’s works, that Indian agriculture should not follow the European path. However, it was mainly Marxist ideology that made land redistribution its primary political demand. Such movements were largely led by the educated upper caste and urban-rich class, who could better explain the nature of rural change in India after independence (Lershee et al).

Agrarian politics changed in the late 1980s, when farmers movements took a populist turn demanding more benefits from the state. Compared to the left-wing movements of previous decades, these new movements were qualitatively different — as “new farmers movements” (united large and small farmers), but neither marginal farmers nor landless workers were a part of political agenda of these movements. Many scholars considered them populist with a Hindu right-wing cultural orientation in their mobilization strategies (Brass, 1995; Hasan, 1999; Assadi, 1985; Omvedt, 1999). They had no clear perspectives on the issues of labor and caste, and their everyday practices were close to the right-wing political ideology (Gupta, 1997).

The current forms of protests can be seen as an amalgamation of the previous types of movements. In the interview, Vijay Jawandia, a farmer leader of Maharashtra, who worked with the KSS, said: *“The left in India believe that a farmer is a farmer, regardless of land size and nature of production. Farmers from all castes and classes suffer from similar forms of discrimination and exclusion. Similarly, farmers movements realized that the left opposition to globalization and Indian agricultural integration into the global economy was not baseless. Today we see the impact of this integration. This understanding can change the face of farmers politics in India”*. Vijay Jawandia said this few months before the strengthening of farmers movements started. In one interview, Yogendra Yadav, a leader of the Jai Kisan Aandolan, said: *“This is for the first time in the history of India that red and green farmers organizations stand together”*.

In the 1980s, movements were largely based on farmers demands on the Indian state. Under economic reforms, leaders of these movements welcomed Indian agricultural integration into the global economy, failing to realize that this integration would threaten farmers by supporting corporate farming and state withdrawal from the rural-agrarian sector. In addition, movements in the 1980s ignored the tribal question and the role of women in India’s agricultural change. Today, what unites 184 farmers organizations of India is the plight of agriculture, rural communities and spaces. To begin and to avoid any conflict of interest between various social-economic groups of rural society, the AIKSC chose this name and a minimum agenda as policy demands. Various organizations abandoned their demands for labor reforms, tenancy rights and land reforms to strengthen the movement, just as did organizations ignoring the demands of landless workers and focusing on the demands of large and middle farmers. Thus, var-

ious groups could successfully develop a common minimum program to form a united movement, which is a politically positive step. Various traditional distinctions (regional, caste, language, etc.) were not allowed to break this unity (albeit only for few months).

The nature of current movements in India and their political character question the dominant traditional understanding of agrarian politics. Compared to transnational agrarian movements in South America and other parts of the world, India's movements are unique in many respects (Edelman). Unlike South America or Russia, where agriculture is not accompanied by large rural population, the Indian agrarian question is not merely economic but also social-cultural; unlike China, India develops liberal democracy. One of the major achievements of India's movements is their conceptual challenge to the idea of authoritarian populism which is defined as "politics of a struggle between 'the people' and some combination of malevolent, racialized and/or unfairly advantaged 'Other' at home or abroad or both; it justified interventions in the name of 'taking back control' in favor of 'the people'⁹, returning the nation to 'greatness' or 'health' after real or imagined degeneration attributed to those others"¹⁰.

The corporate-politician nexus threatens the development of any political alternative. In the times of political crisis, such a movement is a ray of hope. People from all social groups and regions came together, gathered in the national capital and made their presence visible, which nobody could have imagined a decade ago. The left-wing political groups in India have learnt much from their experience of the rural-agrarian politics. As Vijoo Krishnana said, *"the left demands of the 1960s and 1980s are not relevant anymore. We cannot demand the distribution of land we used to demand two decades ago. The nature of labor in the agrarian sector has also changed. Farmers of the 1970s and 1980s are now marginal. The social-economic context of our demands has changed. Today we need to speak about natural resources, tenant farmers, people belonging to different caste groups, and we have succeeded in doing so. Above all, we have been trying to highlight the increasing intervention of global capital and its impact on rural economy"*. Other political groups agreed with some ideas of the left-wing organizations.

The current movement seems to question the right-wing shift. When assessing the possibility of the movement falling into the hands of the right-wing forces, as happened with the BKU, V. M. Singh said: *"The right-wing shift in the 1980s–1990s was determined by certain factors affecting movements at that time. To form a political opposition to the Congress party, they aligned with the right-wing forces. However, unlike those movements, the current movement aims at exposing the lies of the ruling right-wing government and party. In*

9. From the Indian Prime Minister announcement of demonetization.

10. Indian debates on nationalism in the last two years are the best example.

other words, the contemporary farmers movement denies that kind of politics and tries to expose its lies to the people; therefore, we are in opposition to that kind of politics”.

In addition to differences in the political agenda, there are differences in the social character of both phases. In the 1990s, the movement supported the *kisan* identity as opposing the urban elite identity. One could see *kisan* leaders wearing *dhoti* and *topi* and speaking their local languages. Sharad Joshi, a popular farmer leader from Maharashtra, identified a fundamental contradiction — “Bharat (rural India) versus India (cities and urban lifestyle)”. This difference was clearly visible in all forms of farmers protests. However, the current movements are very different in nature: most of their leaders are very well educated and trained in the political language; their mobilization strategies are both different and innovative. The very idea of the Kisan Sansad was innovative” it was expected to begin on November 20–21 simultaneously with the parliament session: the Indian Parliament did not convene a meeting, but the farmers decided to implement their agenda, and 534 (equal to the members of the parliament) delegates gathered — women from various parts of the country, most of them had lost a family member due to suicide. Thereby, this ‘parliament’ was a symbolic recognition of women’s question as an essential part of the rural-agrarian question. The rejection of caste identity and demands against the government’s anti-poor cattle policies are also emblematic of an alternative political agenda.

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Some critical remarks

Despite the initial momentum and partial success of the AIKSCC, there are few critical issues to be addressed. First, the AIKSCC alone has not achieved anything for farmers in terms of the state policy (in Maharashtra it was led by Raju Shetty, in Rajasthan — by the AIKS). Individual movements have succeeded in forcing state governments to accept their demand for waiving off loans and for reworking their formula for deciding the MSP. However, the central government did not make any concessions to any of the AIKSCC’s demands.

Second, like farmers movements in the 1980s, the contemporary movements have shown their ability to negotiate with the state (Suthar, 2025). However, the major challenge of the era of neo-liberal economy is to negotiate with the state and to achieve the implementation of one’s program. Any rural-agrarian political movement cannot survive without formulating its position on two crucial issues: how to involve the state in the rural-agricultural economy and how to resist corporations and prevent their gradual seizure of resources. The present movement successfully resolved the first question but failed to resolve the second one — what role the market should play in the rural-agrarian sector and how to fight the corporate cap-

ital (only left-wing groups but not the AIKSCC works on resolving these questions). In the recent past, the left-wing organizations proposed some ways to counteract the growing role of corporate capital in land acquisition and even tried to rework their approach based on rural social structures by addressing various castes and classes and all groups of farmers.

What makes the current movement politically and socially special is its mobilization strategies. Unlike few effective movements (like anti-corruption movement or the right to information movement), this movement was not created by NGOs but by ordinary people like the people of Mandsaur. Although the AIKSCC did have some NGOs as their partner organizations; however, their number is too small compared to political organizations representing farmers. What reminds of the 1980s is the threat to the current movement: rural-agrarian movements tend to fall into the hands of populist forces mobilizing in the name of nationalism or cultural preservation. We will have to see if the 'new' rural elite can say no to such political forces.

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«Новые» сельско-аграрные движения в Индии: преемственность и изменения

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Аннотация. Политическая мобилизация фермеров в Индии всегда вызывала интерес и вопросы у исследователей аграрных изменений. Главным политическим феноменом в аграрной истории Индии стали фермерские движения 1980-х годов, продемонстрировавшие потенциал политической организации и мобилизации таких лидеров, как Махиндра Сингх Тикаит, Чоудхари Чаран Сингх и Шарад Джоши, но постепенно сошедшие с политической арены к 1990-м годам. В последние десятилетия в Индии вновь прошли протесты фермеров с тремя основными требованиями: списание сельскохозяйственных кредитов; обоснованные минимальные закупочные цены, покрывающие большее количество культур и производственных затрат; выполнение рекомендаций доклада Комитета Сваминатана. На обложке национального журнала эти протесты были названы «бунтом фермеров», а в своем интервью Йогендра Ядав, политический активист, связанный с движением «Сварадж Абхиян», назвал их историческим моментом и шагом к «крестьянскому восстанию». Статья описывает мобилизацию фермеров в период с 2014 по 2020 годы, фокусируясь на ее истоках и подчеркивая, что протесты фермеров не следует рассматривать как спорадические, разрозненные и краткосрочные беспорядки, какими они кажутся на первый взгляд. Напротив, эти протесты отражают существенный сдвиг в характере социальных движений в Индии в целом и аграрных движений в частности по сравнению с 1980-ми годами. Недавние протесты показывают, что новая сельская молодежь стремится

переосмыслить индийское сельское общество, разрабатывает новые методы протестов и переговоров и новые классовые критерии, учитывая разные идеологические позиции по сельско-аграрному вопросу. Новый сельский социальный класс выступает против правого популизма и неопопулизма 1980-х годов, но также и против индийской левой идеи современности и классовой модели сельского общества. Авторы считают, что недавние протесты следует характеризовать скорее как сельско-аграрные, а не фермерские, поскольку они доминируют в индийской политэкономии и определяют новую сельскую и пост-зеленую революцию как аграрную. Испытывая чувство утраты идентичности в условиях урбанизации и корпоратизации, новый сельско-аграрный класс сталкивается с серьезной экзистенциальной угрозой, которая приводит к протестам и их кульминации в форме нового сельско-аграрного движения. Авторы делают обобщенные выводы об этом движении, освещая некоторые тенденции его развития. Статья состоит из четырех разделов: основы эволюции движения; концепция сельско-аграрных движений; особенности новых фермерских волнений, отличающиеся от таковых в 1970–1980-е годы; критический анализ в контексте существующих теорий.

Ключевые слова: политическая мобилизация фермеров; Индия; новое сельско-аграрное движение; сельская молодежь; фермерские протесты; политэкономия; новый сельский социальный класс