

Policy, Politics and Chronic Poverty: The experience of Bankura District, West Bengal¹.

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This paper is an examination of the incidence and causes of chronic poverty in Bankura, a district in the Indian state of West Bengal. The examination is situated within an analysis of rural development policies undertaken during the tenure of the Left Front Government (hereafter Left Front), which has ruled the state continually since 1977. Although the Left Front has been instrumental in the considerable changes that have occurred in the agrarian structure in West Bengal, this process has not occurred evenly throughout the state. On the basis of on-going fieldwork in Gangajalghati Block in the western part of Bankura, it is argued that despite a number of highly vaunted pro-poor measures, there remains a substantial section of the population who could be considered chronically poor.

In the two villages examined in this paper, (called here by the pseudonyms of Lalgram and Malgram), the incidence of long-term, severe poverty was concentrated amongst the predominantly landless Bauri Scheduled Castes and was particularly pronounced amongst vulnerable groups such as female headed households. This chronic poverty is as a consequence of multiple, interrelated vulnerabilities, stemming not only from a paucity of income but also a susceptibility to seasonally induced external shocks, adverse agro-ecological conditions, a subordinate position in the social system and a lack of alternative livelihood options.

¹ I am indebted to Madan Ghosh for the considerable time that he has taken to discuss many of the issues relevant to this paper. Pradip Mondal has provided very effective research assistance throughout and his wealth of knowledge has considerably enriched my understanding of these issues. The initial reactions of Sam Hickey were useful in the overall orientation of this paper. Any errors within the paper remain my sole responsibility.

These factors are themselves conditioned by the structure of agrarian relations and its relationship to the rural development policies of the Left Front. It is argued that the chronically poor do not represent a core constituency for the Left Front and so have been largely bypassed in the rural transformation induced by its policies related to land and tenancy reform and participatory institutions of governance. Thus, for the landless and marginal landholders in this region, the Left Front's tenure can be characterized by a lacklustre approach to the distribution of essential commodities under the PDS, insufficient lean season employment programmes and inadequate access to institutional credit.

Investigating the perpetuation of poverty requires analysis at micro, meso and macro levels². Thus, the livelihood options of the chronically poor and the 'political space' in which they contest access to these options need to be examined in relation to broader factors such as the agrarian structure in which they are embedded and the nature of public policy priorities. Furthermore, in an age of neo-liberal globalisation, there is a need to situate these critiques within a broader political economy of uneven development, so that it is sensitive to both historical change and the way that macro-level changes affect micro-level relations. Thus, while not suggesting that the poor are passive agents, this perspective acknowledges the limits of agency for certain fractions in a way that foregrounds the discussion of political empowerment, participation and livelihood strategies and their relationship to broader forces.

The first part of the paper examines aspects of the burgeoning field of Chronic Poverty and suggests that as well as being sensitive to livelihood issues and agro-ecological constraints, a thorough understanding of the factors behind chronic poverty necessitates that it be situated in an explicitly political framework of development. The second part of the paper addresses these issues directly. While many states of India have politicised various activities related to poverty alleviation, the state of West Bengal is a particularly

² Colin Murray 'Livelihoods Research: some conceptual and methodological issues' *CPRC background paper No. 5*

significant example of the political nature of poverty alleviation. In this case, an activist government has been important in removing the most exploitative aspects of the agrarian structure and overseeing a modest redistribution of assets. Moreover, poverty reduction has undoubtedly benefited enormously from the substantial agricultural growth that has occurred since the mid-1980s.

However, the more arid parts of West Bengal, such as Purulia and the western parts of Bankura and Midnapore, have been largely by-passed in the transformation that has occurred. In these regions, poor soil quality, low agricultural productivity and low potential for irrigation has meant that a pronounced lean season remains. In this case, the numerous poverty alleviation plans that are available to the Left Front to be distributed via its renowned Panchayat system could potentially overcome some of these problems. Unfortunately, as the third part of the paper illustrates, programmes related to food, employment and credit have been insufficient in this regard. The paper argues that this is in part because of the compulsions of local level politics, in part because of broader regional forces and in part due to changes occurring in the political economy at the national and international levels.

Conceptualising Chronic Poverty, Politics and Livelihoods

Chronic poverty is primarily distinguishable from other forms of poverty by its longevity, with duration of five years being the minimum accepted definition³. Recent approaches are helpful in moving beyond the substantial conceptual and practical limitations of an income-only approach. These suggest the need to understand the extent that the causes and dimensions of poverty differ spatially (between regions, rural and urban areas, within villages and households), temporally (according to seasonality and short-term shocks) and according to social structures. The combination of ecological variability, class relations formed around the contestation of resources and social relations embodying gender and caste is particularly significant in the study of chronic poverty, since those who are chronically poor are likely to be in a subordinate position in relation to many of

³D. Hulme, Karen Moore, David Shepard *Chronic Poverty: meanings and framework* CRC Working Paper 2 (Manchester, Chronic Poverty Research Centre, November 2001)

these variables at once. Thus the kinds of social, political and economic conditions that may assist or constrain agency are likely to be quite different between the chronic and transitorily poor.

While the capabilities approach has acted as an important sensitising concept, this paper concurs with recent critiques that suggest that it needs refinement to adequately address issues of resistance, disempowerment and vulnerability⁴. Indeed, there is a need to move beyond the limitations of seeing poverty only in a conjunctural sense, which merely details how a particular series of events may have led to crisis⁵. Instead, analysis needs to be grounded in a detailed assessment of specific localised settings and how the historical constitution of particular rights and the broader political economy may affect their tendency towards particular crises or entitlement failures⁶.

To a certain extent, the multiple strategies employed by the poor and their relationship to broader social relations is well-recognised in the 'sustainable livelihoods' approach. This approach is conscious of the multi-faceted nature of poverty and emphasises that issues of sustainability, asset retention, income generation and empowerment interact to facilitate the livelihood options available. According to the Gilman and Singh:

Sustainable livelihoods are derived from people's capacities to exercise choice, and to access opportunities and resources, and use them for their to crises and shocks. This can be linked to sudden ecological or economic change as well as the long-term consequences of repeated exposure to crises, such as occurs in situations of endemic poverty⁷.

⁴ Gore, C. (1993) 'Entitlement Relations and "Unruly" Social Practices: A Comment on the Work of Amartya Sen'. *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp.429-60; G. Williams 'Assessing poverty and poverty alleviation: evidence from West Bengal' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* NS 24, 1999, pp. 193-212.

⁵ M.J. Watts and H.G. Bohle 'The space of vulnerability: the causal structure of hunger and famine' *Progress in Human Geography*, 17, 1, 1993, pp. 43-67.

⁶ Watts and Bohle p. 44. However, as Bracking has recently noted the task of tracing the effects of changes in the global political economy to micro-level poverty is a difficult one. See S. Bracken (2003) *The Political Economy of Chronic Poverty* IDPM working paper No. 23.

⁷ Naresh Singh and Jonathan Gilman *Employment and Natural Resources Management: A Livelihoods Approach to Poverty Reduction* SEPED Conference Paper Series # 5 (UNDP/SEPED contribution to the

However, Baumann and Sinha suggest that this approach has an under-theorised conception of power relations. Instead, they suggest that the notion of 'political capital' be utilized in order to understand the legitimate and illegitimate uses of power and the manner in which this creates the possibility for extending or defending political and economic positions⁸. This perspective is particularly significant because it attempts to view the negotiation of power from the perspective of the options available to agents concerned, rather than only focusing on official institutions⁹. However, others suggest that the notion of 'political capital' does not adequately account for how local level economic and political strategies may be influenced by broader changes in the global political economy.

An explicit focus on the politics and power relations involved in poverty is particularly significant given the recent turn in mainstream development analysis towards managerialism, good governance and participation. There is a danger that the associated conflation of neo-populism with neo-liberalism may actively discourage such a broader conceptualisations of poverty, policy and politics¹⁰. Instead, political transformation is uncritically equated with market access and the complex contestation of power within and without communities is reduced to aggregations of social capital¹¹. Furthermore, an undue emphasis on community may understate the extent to which those marginalised or 'adversely incorporated' may participate in a subordinate fashion in any community institutions.

five year review of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing) and the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen).

⁸ P. Baumann and S. Sinha 'Linking Development with democratic processes in India: Political Capital and sustainable livelihoods analysis' *ODI Natural Resource Perspectives*, No. 68.

⁹ Hickey S. and G. Mohan 'Relocating participation within a radical politics of development: citizenship and critical modernism' Draft working paper prepared for conference on 'Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring new approaches to participation in development' 27-28 February 2003, University of Manchester. 11.

¹⁰ Mohan, G. and Stokke, K. (2000) 'Participatory Development and Empowerment: The dangers of localism', *Third World Quarterly*, 21, 2, pp.247-268. My own reservations to the recent convergence around a combination of neo-liberalism and the 'local' can be found in D. Hill (2002) 'The Community in development discourse in an age of global capitalism' J. Scott (ed) *Undisciplined Thoughts* (Black Swan Press, Perth).

¹¹ B. Fine (1999) 'The Development State is Dead Long Live Social Capital?' *Development and Change* 30 pp. 1-19.

A number of recent works have argued that the exact political mechanisms for empowerment for those who are without assets or who are unskilled is not considered in recent discourse of globalisation¹². As such, the seemingly benign nature of managerial discourses tends to obscure the true nature of development, which inevitably involves political, social and economic contestation over the use of resources¹³.

The emphasis on the political dimensions of livelihoods and governance is particularly significant in the case of India, which allows an analysis of the way that state-level regimes privilege particular types of policies on the basis of the character of their political constituents¹⁴. Among these states, the case of West Bengal is significant to an examination of the politics of chronic poverty for at least two reasons. On the one hand, it has recently been acclaimed as an outstanding example of the potential of an activist government to enact pro-poor policies. On the other, it has been suggested that there remains large numbers of chronically poor within the state¹⁵. The next section assesses the validity of such claims in two villages in the western part of Bankura district.

¹² I have taken up this argument in greater detail elsewhere. See Hill D., (2001) 'Rural Developments: a case study from Bankura' *South Asia: Journal of South Asia Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 117-140.

¹³ There are at least two macro-level elements that are relevant in this regard. Firstly, the neo-liberal take on the 'miracle' East Asian economies, as an apolitical market driven process, understate the significance of the particular class configurations that enabled the state to play a decisive role in assisting and disciplining capital. This is something that Indian state, for example, was never able to adequately achieve. Moreover, it glosses over the particular historical events and geopolitical orientations that enabled export driven processes. Secondly, although states such as Kerala, Sri Lanka, Jamaica, Cost Rica and (occasionally) Cuba receive acclaim from mainstream development institutions for their capacity to extend high levels of human development capabilities through selective intervention, this is portrayed as a triumph of effective service delivery. This inadequately acknowledges the highly activist governments that were vital in undertaking these reforms. For a discussion of the first case see C.P. (2002) Chandrasekhar and Jayati Ghosh *The Market that Failed: A Decade of Neoliberal Economic Reforms in India* Leftword Books, New Delhi; A. Leftwich 'Governance, democracy and development in the Third World' *Third World Quarterly*, Vol 14, no. 3. 1993. For an influential discussion of low income, activist states see J.C. Caldwell 'Routes to Low Mortality in Developing Countries' *Population and Development Review* 1986 Vol. 12, No. 2, pp.171-220.

¹⁴ See J. Harriss (2000) 'How much difference does politics make? Regime differences across Indian states and rural poverty reduction', *LSE Development Studies Institute Working paper* No.00-01. I have also taken up these issues in some detail in D. Hill (forthcoming) 'Food Security, Governance and Rural Development in India under the BJP' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* (Special Issue: Governance in India: The Role of the BJP).

¹⁵ A.K. Mehta and A. Shah 'Chronic Poverty in India: Overview study' *CPRC Working paper*, No. 7.

Politics and Poverty in West Bengal

The election of the Left Front to office in 1977 was the culmination of a long process of regionally focused agitation, which had been going on in Bengal since at least the 1920s. Bengal was fundamentally altered by the colonial experience and as a consequence it retains a distinctive history of resistance. Permanent Settlement in 1793 introduced a system of parasitic landlordism that led to subinfeudation of the peasantry¹⁶. Most of the present-day district of Bankura was under the possession of the Raja of Bishnupur, but his estates were sold off around the turn of the nineteenth century and most of the district came to be owned by Raja of Burdwan. In Bankura subinfeudation was based on a series of zamindars and subordinates known as *patnidars*, who leased to *darpatnidars*, who in turn leased to *sepatnidars*¹⁷.

As the work of Adrienne Cooper has demonstrated, the agrarian structure of Bengal was previously characterised by a high prevalence of interlinking of transactions related to credit, cash and labour, resulting in extra-economic coercion for landless labourers and marginal farmers¹⁸. A great deal of this interlinkage came from the pronounced seasonality of cultivation, with a prolonged lean season meaning that other forms of livelihood need to be pursued.

With partition in 1947, the state of West Bengal was created out of the former undivided Bengal and became part of India. The biggest changes to the agrarian structure in the early part of the post Independence era, on an all India basis, was the abolishing of intermediaries, although this also left a substantial section of the peasantry without secure tenure. Despite the abolition of the zamindar class in 1953, the agrarian structure within West Bengal remained highly stratified, with a high number of landless, particularly in the districts of the south-west of the state. The exploitative nature of this agrarian structure, which was earlier the impetus for the Tebhaga movement, was not resolved in

¹⁶ Sugata Bose provides an extensive outline of the contours of the agrarian structure in Bengal in the pre-Independence period. See S.Bose (1986) *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure, and Politics*. Cambridge

¹⁷ O'Malley, L.S.S (1995) *Bengal District Gazetteer: Bankura* West Bengal District Gazetteers, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta, p 151-52

¹⁸ Cooper, A. *Sharecropping and Sharecroppers' Struggles in Bengal 1930-1950*. Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi & Company, 1988

the early part of the Independence period and tensions continued to mount in the form of conflicts and agitations.

A major turning point in the history of the state was the split within the Communist Party of India (CPI), in 1964. The newly formed Communist Party of India (Marxist) (hereafter (CPM) has subsequently far outstripped the CPI in popularity. The mass mobilisation of the peasantry reached its peak in West Bengal in the late 1960s, culminating in the famous Naxalite movement. A further split saw the CPM placing greater importance on parliamentary politics in contrast to the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) (hereafter CPI (ML)), the latter advocating a revolutionary path¹⁹. Both the CPI and CPM were involved in successive United Front governments, formed after the massive swing against the Congress in 1967, which, despite brief tenure managed to carry out successful land reform²⁰.

As Basu notes, there were clear political alignments of the major social groupings emerging from the turbulent agitations of the 1960s and 1970s. The Congress party represented the interests of the large landholders; the CPM, the middle peasantry; and the CPI (ML), the landless labourers and marginal farmers. The agitations, centred on the CPI (ML), were brutally put down throughout the 1970s and many of those involved were jailed or killed. The CPI (ML) effectively ceased to be a legitimate political force thereafter and the resentment of their previous constituency, the landless and marginalised, was channelled into the CPM, which after 1977 emerged with a large majority²¹.

¹⁹ It should be noted that most of the various branches of the CPI (ML) have subsequently reverted to a parliamentary path. The exceptions include the People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist CC. Although both of these latter groups have been active in Telengana, Bihar and Jharkhand, they have recently extended their activities into the tribal belt of south West Bengal, including Midnapore and Bankura. The paper does not deal with the activities of these groups in any detail because they are not, at this point, directly influencing the politics of poverty alleviation in Gangajalghati block.

²⁰ Ross Mallick has argued that most of the substantial land reform undertaken in West Bengal was carried out during this period, rather than during the tenure of the Left Front. See Mallick, R., (1993) *Development Policy of a Communist Government* (Cambridge University Press) A recent similar position can be found in Sen, Arindam (2002) 'Social Democratic Agrarian Programme in West Bengal and Trends in Agrarian Relations' *Liberation*, April.

²¹ D. Basu "Political Economy of 'Middleness' Behind Violence in Rural West Bengal' *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 21, 2001, pp.1333.

Left Front Government

The election of the Left Front can thus be viewed as the end point of a movement of agitations that began in earnest in the pre-Independence period²². Since assuming office, the Left Front coalition has overseen a remarkable transformation of political relations within the rural areas, which remains its core constituency of support. It is these areas that the main claims of the Left Front as a pro-poor, reformist government are directed. Certainly, there is considerable evidence that the Left Front has been able to ameliorate the most exploitative conditions within the agrarian structure. However, there have also been detailed critiques that argue that the reforms of the Left Front have been predominantly directed at gaining the political allegiance of small and marginal farmers²³. In Dwaipan Bhattacharya's critique, there has been a removal of radicalism from the Left Front's rhetoric and an increased emphasis on village harmony in an effort to appeal to a broader electoral base. As such, the numerical importance of these groups has meant that the interests of the so-called 'middles', have been prioritised at the expense of the landless.

The CPM, as the leading party within this coalition, has argued that the reduction in poverty that has occurred within the state is as a direct consequence of its policies, particularly in relation to land redistribution and tenancy reform. However, there has been considerable debate as to how this combination of factors has contributed to the high rates of agricultural growth that has occurred in the state since the mid-1980s and the effects that this has had on the relationships between different sections of the peasantry. The CPM takes a great deal of credit for this growth, making an explicit connection between agricultural growth, poverty alleviation and changes to the agrarian structure initiated under its regime. The Left Front is, in effect, claiming that it has fundamentally reconfigured the agrarian structure, with its 'imminent' interventions

²² P. Chatterjee (1997) *The Present History of West Bengal: essays in Political Criticism* (Delhi, OUP), p. 67.

²³ Basu, *ibid*; Bhattacharyya, D., (1999) 'Politics of Middleness: The Changing Character of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Rural West Bengal (1977-90)', in Ben Rogaly, Barbara Harriss-White and Sugata Bose (eds), *Sonar Bangla? Agricultural Growth and Agrarian Change in West Bengal and Bangladesh*, (New Delhi, Sage) pp. 279-300.

impacting upon the underlying 'immanent' structures of the agrarian economy. The next section examines these issues in greater detail in relation to Bankura district.

Agricultural growth and poverty

The major crop within the state has always been paddy (rice), with three different seasons, consisting of *aus* (May to September); *aman* (June to November) and *boro* (March to June). Traditionally the *aman* crop has been the most significant, with boro cultivation constrained by a lack of irrigation. Up until the 1980s, the eastern region of India remained relatively stagnant, with estimates suggesting that agricultural output in West Bengal in the period from 1949 to 1980 was far below the population growth rate. In 1983, the S.R. Sen Committee, argued that the major constraint on the use of new inputs was the lack of adequate and controlled supply of water as well as an inadequacy of supply in fertilisers, HYV seeds, electricity and credit and infrastructure for appropriate marketing²⁴. James Boyce agreed that the low usage of water was the major constraint on further agricultural growth, but added that the reason for this was to be found in the inequalities in wealth and power within the agrarian structure of West Bengal²⁵. According to Rawal and Swaminathan, there are two major impediments to productivity changes. Firstly, the exploitative relationships involved in the nature of the agrarian relations meant that there is insecurity of tenancy and disincentives to increase production. Secondly, the holdings are small and fragmented, so that cultivators lack capital and experience costs associated with attempting to control water usage²⁶.

However, since the mid 1980s agricultural output has grown significantly within West Bengal, with the spurt in growth due in large part to increased irrigation and the adoption of inputs of green revolution technology. This process was given initial impetus by infrastructure provided by the Left Front, such as canals and bunds. Much of the recent increase in irrigation within the state has come from the sinking of shallow and deep

²⁴ Rawal V. and M. Swaminthan (1998) 'Changing trajectories: agricultural growth in West Bengal, 1950 to 1996.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33:40, p. 2597.

²⁵ Boyce J. (1998) *Agrarian Impasse in Bengal : Institutional Constraints to Technological Change* (Oxford University Press Reprint)

²⁶ Rawal and Swaminthan *ibid*, p. 2598.

tubewells, with a lesser proportion coming from canal and bund irrigation.²⁷ The vast majority of the increase has come from privately owned, lower capacity, shallow tubewells, rather than the mostly government owned deep tubewells, which have approximately ten times the capacity. On the basis of this observation, John Harriss argues that the growth in agricultural output in West Bengal has been predominantly driven by private interests²⁸.

There has recently been a change in the relative agricultural performance of districts within the state, with those that had previously been relatively agriculturally underdeveloped achieving growth rates close to the advanced districts. Bankura district, traditionally a relatively backward agricultural region, has experienced the highest rates of agricultural growth in West Bengal throughout the 1990s²⁹. However, this growth has not occurred evenly throughout the district. The district has two distinct agro-ecological regions, with the alluvial, eastern parts of the district sharing many of the same soil and topographical features as more prosperous districts such as Hoogly and Burdwan. The spurt in *boro* season cultivation and the increased utilisation of HYV seeds in the *aman* season in this part of the district has been the major contributing factors behind this growth. In contrast, almost half of the district has relatively poor agro-ecological conditions, with red gravelly soil with undulating topography. The two villages concentrated on in this paper do not have *boro* season cultivation, since the irrigation potential is limited and investment in infrastructure remains minimal.

²⁷According to U.K. De the number of shallow tubewells within the district increased from 1, 632 in 1973 to 13,002 in 1988 see De, U.K. (1999) 'Nature and Cause of Inter-district variation in Yield of Rice in West Bengal, 1970/1 to 1994/5'. *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Oct-Dec), p. 563. By 1990-91, the net area irrigated by tubewells throughout West Bengal was about five times the area irrigated by tubewells in 1980-81. In comparison, deep tubewells and canals were relatively insignificant within the district until the 1990s. Rawal, V. (2001) 'Expansion of Irrigation in West Bengal: Mid-1970s to Mid-1990s' *Economic and Political Weekly* Oct. 20, p.4018.

²⁸ J. Harriss 'What is Happening in Rural West Bengal? Agrarian Reform, Growth and Distribution' *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 12, 1993, pp. 1237-1247.

²⁹ According to Saha and Swaminthan, Bankura had the highest rates of growth of any district, at 9.5 per annum, based on Government of West Bengal methodology Saha, A..and M. Swaminathan (1994): 'Agricultural Growth in West Bengal in the 1980s: A Diasaggregation by Districts and Crops', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 29, No. 13: A2-A11.

It seems doubtful that agriculture will grow within western Bankura in the foreseeable future to the extent necessary to alter these material conditions. Indeed, agricultural production, particularly rice, is undergoing something of a crisis in West Bengal, with reduction in export markets, increased competition from cheaper interstate competition and increased production costs³⁰. The latter relates not only to increased wage rates but increased charges for electricity and fertilizers as subsidies are gradually reduced as part of the liberalisation process. The lack of potential for further poverty reduction through agricultural growth brings into sharp focus the capacity of the Left Front to intervene to alter the material conditions and accompanying social relations associated with chronic poverty. The next section of the paper assesses its failings with regards to redistributive measures, followed by an assessment of interventions related to credit, labour and food security.

Assessing the Politics of the Left Front in a region of Chronic Poverty

The initial stage of the Left Front Government's reform strategy in West Bengal was land reform, based on delivering some land, however small, to the largest possible number of recipients. It was thought that even a small amount of land would provide greater security to these sections of the population. It's critics suggest that the parcels of land distributed have been so small that in many cases they are not functional in terms of ensuring self-reliance; rather the motivation behind the strategy has been to win electoral support. What is certainly without doubt is that this strategy has generated enormous goodwill towards the CPM and has been the cornerstone of their unparalleled electoral success.

In the case of Bankura, during the period 1970/1-1985/6, there was a significant increase in holdings for Small and Marginal Farmers, with an increase of 66.1 per cent and 18.4 per cent respectively largely at the expense of Medium and Large farmers³¹. However, in the two villages surveyed, there continued to be approximately one third of the population who were landless. In each case, there has only been a small amount of vested land distributed, much of it poor quality and fragmented holdings. Furthermore, some

³⁰ P.K. Ghosh and B. Harriss-White 'A Crisis in the Rice Economy' *Frontline* Vol 19, Sept. 14-27, 2002.

³¹ Ghosh, M., 'Agricultural Development Agrarian Structure and Rural Poverty in West Bengal' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Nov. 21, p. 2991.

vested land was distributed to politically influential households who were small or medium cultivators. The relatively small impact that land redistribution has had on these villages is evident from the fact that most of those who were landless have been so their entire lives, with some families losing land in their fathers time.

Operation Barga and Tenancy

The other major change attempted by the Left Front has been an alteration to the prevailing tenancy system. The Left Front is widely credited for enacting successful tenancy reform through Operation Barga, beginning in 1978. This was an attempt to increase shares in output for tenant up to a legally binding 75 per cent. Under this programme, at least 2.2 million tenants have been registered. Although its detractors suggest that not all have been registered, this represents at least 65-80 per cent of all possible candidates, a feat which is unrivalled anywhere else in Asia³².

However, whilst Operation Barga has undoubtedly been important in giving security of tenure, it is less important than the Left Front claims, since there has always been a large proportion of day labourers or other types of arrangements. Again, in both villages registered bargadars were far less common than unregistered bargadars. Indeed, in the CPM-controlled Lalgram, there were no official Barga registrations. Instead, tenancy operates on the basis of various input and output sharing agreements. These were far more exploitative conditions than those that should have been legally enforceable under Operation Barga.

In Lalgram the medium and large farmers are not interested in cultivating their land- citing low profitability- and prefer to lease it out at favourable rates. The largest landholder of this village (holding in excess of 30 bighas) had leased out all his land under the Saja system, where the owner of the land received 4.8 quintals of rice and does not have to contribute any inputs (such as seeds or fertiliser). Another system existing in this village is that those who lease out the land take fifty per cent of the produce without

32 S. Sengupta and H. Gazdar (1996) 'Agrarian Politics and Rural Development in West Bengal', in Dreze and Sen (eds) *India: Selected Regional Perspectives* (Delhi, Oxford University Press).

bearing any of the input costs. Small landholders had to contribute fifty per cent of input costs and supervise labour, receiving fifty per cent of the produce. An absentee landholder had a long-term arrangement where he contributed all inputs (except for labour) and received fifty per cent of the produce in return.

Those who leased in the land on these unrecorded barga systems do not have any security of tenure, as landowners change tenants every two years to avoid any threat of a permanent claim being made. There were accusations made that the CPM party members in Lalgram also leased out their land and actively discouraged Bargadars from seeking registration. The situation was somewhat better in Malgram, where there are several recorded Bargadars, although the majority are not recorded. In this case, the usual system was for the leasee to bear fifty per cent of the input cost (fertiliser, pesticides and seeds). In return the owner of the land received fifty per cent of the output.

Those such as Lieten have claimed that the most significant part about Operation Barga and land redistribution is not whether these actions have changed the structure of tenancy relations. Rather, these actions demonstrated the political will of the Left Front to support the interests of these classes. In this view, the political implications of land and tenancy reform are broad reaching, as they constitute the beginning of a transformation of agrarian relations, which in turn acts as a catalyst for other transformations³³. Equally, then, the non-enforcement of registered and regulated tenancy can be viewed as an indication of the inability of CPM to impose its ideology at the expense of village *realpolitik*.

A further issue not often highlighted in the extensive literature is the gender implications of the CPM's reforms. Bina Agarwal has criticised Operation Barga on account of its severe gender bias, arguing that members of the Left Front were consciously dismissive of the necessity of extending the registration process to widows and other female-headed households. She cites a study in Midnapore district where 98 per cent of Barga

33 Lieten, G.K. (1996) *Development, devolution and democracy: village discourse in West Bengal* (New Delhi and Thousand Oaks, Sage).

registrations were men³⁴. In the case of Lalgram and Malgram even widows were not granted registration, the titles either remaining in the name of the ir deceased husbands names or the title being transferred to their sons³⁵.

It is therefore evident that reforms to the asset base, through land transfers and tenancy reform, have not been sufficient to alleviate chronic poverty in this part of Bankura. Given that this is the case, the extent that the Left Front's policies have been pro-poor in any meaningful sense needs to be discerned by examining some of its other interventions that may be disproportionately important to the poorest sections. These include the panchayat system, credit relations, employment programmes and the Public Distribution System.

Panchayats

Of central importance to the transformation of rural West Bengal's politics and political economy was the creation of politicised three-tiered local government structures known as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). Perhaps most significantly, these reforms have contributed to the reconfiguration of social hierarchies within rural districts by separating traditional economic power, associated with large landholdings and high caste status, from political power, by giving fiscal power and legal legitimacy to local government institutions³⁶. By directing large amounts of government resources through the PRIs, the state government claims to offer a countervailing influence to the usual moneylenders and large landholders, which exercise power elsewhere in India. Consequently, the panchayats are seen as contributing to an alteration in the balance of social relations within districts such as Bankura.

The PRIs have been progressively empowered since 1985-6, when decentralised planning was introduced in West Bengal, and the 'third tier' was given control of fifty-one per cent

34 Agarwal, B. (2000) *The Family in Public Policy: Fallacious Assumptions and Gender Implications*. NCAER Golden Jubilee Seminar Series Ninth Lecture. New Delhi: National Council of Applied Economic Research, p. 14.

35 Many others, such as Amrita Basu, have also suggested that, whatever else the progressive merits of the CPM, it is not committed to altering the gender balance within the rural areas Basu, A. (1992) *Two faces of protests: contrasting modes of women's activism in India* (Berkeley, University of California Press).

36 A. Kohli (1987) *The State and Poverty in India*, Cambridge University Press.

of the funding for rural development, through District, Block and Village Planning and Coordination Committees. The Village (Gram Panchayat), Block (Panchayat Samiti) and District (Zilla Parishad) levels receive fifty per cent, twenty per cent and thirty per cent of this funding respectively. In addition, the state has been amongst the most vigorous in implementing the 73rd Amendment of 1992, which requires reservations within the Panchayats for women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their representation within the district.

The concept of local level government was further strengthened in the late 1990s by the introduction of twice-yearly Gram Sansad meetings. The Gram Sansad covers only a ward (usually only one or two villages) and meets to approve and discuss the planned developments for the coming year. This process is rightfully viewed by advocates of the West Bengal experiment as an indication of the sincerity of the Left Front in providing a forum where the least powerful within society could have their perspectives appreciated and their needs incorporated into future development interventions.

However, the response to the Gram Sabhas has been extremely mixed throughout the state. As the work of Harihar Bhattacharyya has shown, quite often these meetings fail to gain the legally stipulated ten per cent attendance needed for a quorum, most often registering only one to five per cent³⁷. Many within the landless and marginal classes interviewed in Malgram and Lalgram professed to not having any idea about the existence of the Gram Sabha. Others stated that although they had attended a single meeting several years ago, on the instruction of an important political figure within the village, they did not completely understand what was going on and were thus dismissive of its relevance to their lives. Furthermore, several said that if they did attempt to speak up about an issue they were silenced. Consequently, the meetings rarely achieved quorum and it is questionable whether the Gram Sansad contributes to any meaningful participatory, much less transformational, processes within these villages.

³⁷ H. Bhattacharyya (2002) *Making Local Democracy Work in India: Social Capital, Politics and Governance in West Bengal* (Vedams, New Delhi).

This is not to decry the potential significance of the Panchayats. Rather, it is assert that it is not axiomatic that the reforms of the Left Front will necessarily lead to a system of participatory governance. In the case of Malgram and Lalgram, it has led to the emergence of new, politically important actors who are able to use the leverage that the panchayats provide to mediate in disputes and ensure selective redistribution in return for continued political patronage from the vote banks. In both cases, particularly in Lalgram, there was a distrust of the opposition Trinamul Congress (TMC), with many seeing it as primarily the party of the landholders. Thus, political marginalised Bauris saw little opportunity to utilise the Panchayats as a means to empowerment and increased livelihoods.

The Panchayats continue to be associated with particular influential figures within each of the two major political parties operating in these villages. It is often the case that the politically important figures within village politics are not office bearers, a position filled by appropriately designated candidates with varying degrees of understanding of the process. Most suggested that they would go to local political figures rather than the Pradhan or Upa-Pradhan, for assistance with any problems. The State Committee of the CPM has admitted these failing quite openly, with a report in 2001 asserting that the Panchayats are often now run by individual leaders who bypass both the party and panchayat committees³⁸.

Sustainable Livelihoods and Chronic Poverty

The further claim by the Left Front, that these institutions, in addition to being sites of participatory political transformation, necessarily lead to increased livelihood options for all within a given area is also far from unproblematic. Certainly, the politics of the Panchayats are deeply embedded in the disbursal of resources that may provide increased livelihood options. Williams among others, links the continued political success of the Left Front with the dispersal of poverty alleviation plans, particularly wage employment

³⁸ Manash Ghosh (2001) ' Party Blames coteries for sluggish development' *The Statesman* November 6.

and subsidised credit programmes³⁹. Significantly, he emphasises this situation does not entail a truly participatory system of planning. Instead, significant political figures involved in the Panchayats are able to utilise funding to increase vote-banks.

There is no doubt that the establishment of the Panchayats and the large amount of funds available to those who control these institutions through poverty alleviation plans has resulted in the shifting of the political centre within these villages. However, in Lalgram and Malgram, this new political centre did not necessarily involve the marginal farmers and landless. As many other critiques have argued, the broad-based electoral compulsions involved in politics of the Panchayats may leave the chronically poor largely excluded, particularly if their interests are in conflict with other classes.

The constraints associated with the 'politics of middleliness' are clearly evident in the issue of wage rates, which represents a clash of interests between two of the Left Front's constituencies, the middle peasants and agricultural labourers. It is argued that the dominance of the 'middles', means that agricultural labourers do not receive strong support from the CPM. These critiques point out that, unlike other states ruled by the CPM, the Krishak Sabha (the state level unit of the All India Kisan Sabha), does not have a separate wing for agricultural labour. In reference to other parts of West Bengal, Rawal and Swaminathan assert that the CPM, through the Krishak Sabha, has agitated for higher minimum wages for agricultural wages throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. However, Bhattacharya argues that wage agitations serve the purpose of maintaining the appearance of radicalism, whilst the wage rates remain below what may have been independently arrived at through the forces of the market⁴⁰.

³⁹ G. Williams 'Panchayati Raj and the Changing Micro -Politics of West Bengal' in B. Rogaly, B. Harriss-White and S. Bose (eds) *Sonar Bangla? Agricultural Growth and Agrarian Change in West Bengal and Bangladesh* (New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London, Sage Publications), 1999, pp. 229-252.

⁴⁰ Bhattacharya *ibid*; see also Rogaly, B (1998) 'Containing Conflict and Reaping Votes; The Management of Rural Labour Relations in Communist West Bengal' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Nos 42 and 43, pp 2729-2740.

Low agricultural productivity and a lack of other employment options in Malgram and Lalgram have meant that the market-led wage rates are approximately half of legal minimum levels. Wages were either paid in paddy or cash, with informants suggesting that daily wage rates were Rs. 25-40, far below the legally stipulated Rs. 62 per day. Labourers worked for approximately 25 days in the sowing season and 25 days in the harvesting season. Non-agricultural employment was thus the major source of employment, including involvement in industries such as construction, quarrying and pond digging as well as diversification into petty trade such as sal-plate making. In the case of quarry work, villagers suggested that this was hazardous, exhausting and poorly paid at Rs.25-30 per day.

It is argued by cultivators that given the low productivity of agriculture they were not able to maintain profitability at higher wages rates, a claim accepted by the CPM cadres. There had been agitations three years before to raise the wage rate, although this was a minor adjustment rather than any attempt to restore wage levels to anywhere near legal minimums. To some extent this concurs with the assessment of Gazdar and Sengupta, who argue that any increase in wages was mostly as a consequence of growth in agricultural output, rather than CPM agitations. However, CPM cadres have been influential in making sure that the wage rates did not decline, although non-agricultural work in the lean season was paid at a rate of Rs.5-10 lower than during other times, with little interference from these cadres. To overcome the seasonal shortfalls in labour, many went to Burwan or Hoogli districts, gaining on average 15-30 days per year work, although it was suggested that the extent that this work is available has been declining.

Food security

The most obvious outcome of continuing high seasonality on perpetuating conditions associated with chronic poverty is the varying levels of consumption. The chronically poor in Lalgram estimated that on average they reduced their consumption by between 30-40 per cent during the lean season, with the comparable figure being 20-30 per cent in

Malgram. In many cases, this consisted only of rice soup, with dal and vegetables a rarity during this time.

The government intervention most clearly directed at solving these problems is the Public Distribution System (PDS), under which subsidised essential commodities are available via fair-price shops. As I have outlined elsewhere, despite its notable failures in many states, elsewhere the PDS has previously functioned as a highly effective supplement to smoothing consumption patterns⁴¹. This is particularly the case in the Southern states, where it has also been an important political platform for these states to display their pro-poor credentials. Indeed, in the food deficit state of Kerala, this system covers 97 per cent of the population and in the past been very important in maintaining consumption levels⁴².

The PDS made only a minimal contribution to food security in Lagram and Malgram, with the ration shop mostly only being used the village for purchases of kerosene or sugar. Most landless labours did not have the purchasing power in the lean season to take advantage of subsidised rice or wheat. They complained of poor quality rice, infrequency of availability and leakages to the open market by the ration dealer. Although in other parts of West Bengal the PDS system is a useful supplement to food security, this appears to be an area where the Left Front has not been effective, or perhaps interested, in mobilising support.

Indeed, recent evidence suggests that West Bengal has performed comparatively poorly in areas related to food security. A report by the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India (CAG) in 2001 was highly critical of the performance of West Bengal in its allocation of the PDS. The report stated that the allocation of rice and wheat in West Bengal was comparable to other poor performing states such as Bihar, Madhya Pradesh,

⁴¹ D. Hill (forthcoming) 'Food Security, Governance and Rural Development in India under the BJP' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* (Special Issue: Governance in India: The Role of the BJP)

⁴² R. Krishnakumar 'A successful system under threat' *Frontline* Vol. 14, No. 21, October 18-31, 1997. The most comprehensive work available on the PDS system and its treatment under the liberalization regime is Swaminathan, M. (2000) *Weakening Welfare The Public Distribution of Food in India* (Left World Books)

Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh⁴³. In the same year it was revealed that none of the Rs. 6.5 crore rupees of centrally allocated funds for the Antodaya scheme had been utilised by the West Bengal Government. This scheme is meant to provide 10 kg of rice and wheat every month, free of cost, to those who are old age pensioners⁴⁴.

Beyond the inattention that the PDS has received from the Left Front, part of the problems with the system in Bankura relate to broader changes in Union Government policy. The continuation of the PDS system has continually been under attack since 1997, when targeting was introduced, from those who see it as an inefficient usage of resources. In the past two years, in the name of reducing the fiscal deficit, the prices of commodities under the PDS have increased rapidly throughout India. The narrowing of the differential between subsidised and open market prices has meant that in these two villages, as in many other places, the scheme has been largely abandoned by both those Below the Poverty Line (BPL) and Above the Poverty Line (APL) segments of the population.

Credit

Access to timely credit at low rates of interest is important in over-coming cycles of debt and possible deterioration in standard of living that might occur in the event of external shock (such as drought) or a life stage expense (such as dowry for weddings).

Furthermore, given the significance of seasonality and a lack of collateral for many of those who are chronically poor in this part of West Bengal, this emerges as a perennial problem.

The most significant formal intervention in this regard has undoubtedly been the IRDP, which by 1980 had reached all blocks in India. The initial idea behind the IRDP was the dispersal of a bank loan and subsidy to acquire productive assets that could further self-employment. Macro-assessments of the programme are generally supportive, with Hulme and Mosley providing an apt summation of this position when they suggest that IRDP

⁴³ 'PDS benefits not reaching the poor' *Businessline*, 2, January 2001.

⁴⁴ Anindya Sengupta 'Food schemes remain non-starters' *The Statesman* 16th September, 2001.

‘might be inefficient but it is not ineffective’⁴⁵. Thus, despite the enormous outlays and indisputable failures with regards to large-scale leakages, the IRDP has helped finance a considerable amount of investment in income generating infrastructure in the past.

The ability to gain institutional credit is particularly difficult for the chronic poor. In a widely quoted study of the implementation of IRDP, Jean Dreze argued that the temporary poor were far more likely to be able to access institutional credit than the chronically poor.

“The temporary poor usually have more influence, are better educated, can more easily afford the costs of searching and bribing and generally ‘know the ropes’ better than the chronically poor”⁴⁶.

Some have suggested that such a program is less suitable for highly risk adverse groups, such as the chronically poor. If the acquisition of assets via the IRDP failed to generate income in the long term an institutional loan would involve the poor in high-risk activities that could lead to more, rather than less, debt.

The IRDP programme has generally been viewed favourably in West Bengal, with most commentators suggest that the Panchayats have been a key factor in its success⁴⁷. In the two villages in west Bankura, since 1990, 5-8 households received some money each year from the IRDP scheme, usually with the assistance of the Panchayats or political figures associated with the CPM⁴⁸. Many of these only took the subsidy, which is in effect merely a once-off cash payment. However, just as in recent surveys by Sudipta

⁴⁵ Hulme D. and P. Mosley *Finance against Poverty* V2 (London and New York, Routledge), 1996 p. 262.

⁴⁶ Dreze, J. (1990) 'Poverty in India and the IRDP delusion' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, Sept 29, pp. A95-104.

⁴⁷ Jean Dreze argues that the involvement of the panchayats in West Bengal has been to lessen leakages in distribution compared to other states. Similarly, Swaminathan's survey of Onda Block in Bankura argues that the IRDP functioned considerably better than the villages referred to earlier in Tamil Nadu. She explicitly highlights the role of the Panchayats as the reason for the good performance of the scheme. The recipients of the subsidised credit had very few initial costs, little trouble locating the assets to be purchased and had considerably higher retention of these assets. Swaminathan, M, 1990, 'The Village Level Implementation of IRDP: Comparison of West Bengal and Tamil Nadu', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 31st, pp A17-27

⁴⁸ Information based on Gram Panchayat records

Bhattacharyya, most of the landless in these two villages could not get regular access to formal credit. A little less than one third of landless households had given access to IRDP loans over various years, with half of these only taking the subsidy. For those who did obtain it, it remained a one-off and thus failed to provide the basis for a continuing formal line of credit, as was the stated aim of IRDP. However, again mirroring Bhattacharyya's research, access to institutional credit was highest amongst small farmers, which given that the process is facilitated by the Panchayats, suggests that the Left Front is indeed giving a pro-poor bias, although not necessarily to the landless⁴⁹.

As a consequence of the inability of the very poor to access formal credit, informal credit dominated in both Lalgram and Malgram. Large sums of money -for dowry, consumption or crisis- were generally borrowed from traders or employers, with rates typically 120 per cent per annum. Alternatively, loans were taken out in paddy during the lean seasons (during the Bengali months of Bhadra and Asuria) from their employers through a system known as Dere Bari, whereby they would repay one and a half times the value of the amount borrowed in paddy or cash⁵⁰.

The much-vaunted Self Help Groups (SHGs), that were supposed to see India replicate the micro-finance 'revolution' of the Grameen Bank, appears to be of little value to the chronically poor in these villages. In Malgram almost half of the households in the village had been involved in the initial stages of a SHG but this scheme had stopped several months ago due to a lack of motivation from participants. In Lalgram, a SHG of 8 women was operating but had yet to disburse any loans.

Wage Employment

⁴⁹ Sudipta Bhattacharyya's survey of 210 households across Bankura found that 62 per cent borrowing was supplied by non-institutional sources see Bhattacharyya, S. (2001) 'Capitalist development, peasant differentiation and the state: survey findings from West Bengal' *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 28:4, 2001, pp. 95-126.

⁵⁰ A recent survey by Bhaumik and Rahmin of 420 households in Bankura and Hoogly districts, found that sixty six per cent of informal credit contracts were also linked to other contracts. This percentage was much higher (ninety eight per cent) amongst the landless. However, the categories that had the greatest number of such contracts were the small and marginal farmers, suggesting that these loans were utilised for obtaining inputs for agricultural development. Bhaumik, S.K. and A. Rahmin (1999) 'Interlinked credit transactions in rural West Bengal'. *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics* 54 (2): 169-184.

The second avenue for increasing purchasing power through government interventions is in wage employment programmes, which up until last year, consisted of the JRY programme. From last year a combined food-for-work and wage employment schemes has been introduced called SGRY. Wage employment is now generally viewed more positively in India than self-employment, since it is self-selecting and thus has fewer associated leakages. Aside from targeting, the other obvious benefit, and one that is supposed to distinguish wage employment from self-employment, is its ability to provide consistent employment in lean seasons⁵¹. Given the high seasonality associated with employment in this part of West Bengal, an effective and timely wage employment programme could be extremely valuable. However, in both villages, the landless claimed that labour programs have been so infrequent that they contribute little to reducing lean season vulnerability, with those in both villages only receiving one day of work last year repairing a road.

Broader political economy and panchayats

These findings on the role of the Panchayats in the dispersal of poverty alleviation measures suggest that in addition to the compulsions of electoral politicking there are financial constraints to the effective operation of these institutions in Gangajalghati. Indeed, most districts of West Bengal are now facing huge difficulties in raising sufficient money to contribute to shared center/state poverty alleviation schemes⁵². The failings of the Left Front in these areas are further exacerbated by the liberalisation process, which has been undertaken in earnest throughout India since 1991. In particular, changes to Centre-State funding arrangements since the Eleventh Finance Commission have seen a declining allocation which threatens to undermine the basis of an already strain economic federalism⁵³. With the West Bengal State Government in financial tatters, the State has been unable to afford to finance its share of shared poverty

⁵¹ The most successful case in India is the Employment Guarantee Scheme in Maharashtra. For an evaluation see Osmani, S.R. (1991). "Social Security in South Asia", in: Ahmad, Etisham, Jean Drieze, John Hills, and Amartya Sen (eds.) (1991). *Social Security in Developing Countries*, Clarendon Press, Oxford. (eds.), pp. 305-55

⁵² For a recent analysis of this see Lahiry, R. (2003) 'Cloud over "best-spender" Burdwan' *The Telegraph*, 6 March.

⁵³ A. Ghosh 'Devolution Dilemma: A critique of the Eleventh Finance Commission's recommendations' *Frontline* Vol 17, Aug. 19- Sept. 01 2000. These issues are also discussed in Hill (forthcoming).

alleviation programmes. The solution advanced by many for the renewal of the Panchayats is an increase in revenue raised from local sources. However, in both cases reviewed here the Gram Panchayats failed to raise more than three per cent of their total expenditure, suggesting that this solution is unfeasible at the present time.

Conclusion

Despite its many successes elsewhere in the state, it is apparent that the Left Front has not been able to transform the underlying conditions that perpetuate chronic poverty in the more arid regions of West Bengal. Further, the many programs available to alleviate some of this poverty, via food security programmes, wage employment or formal credit have been wholly insufficient. The Panchayat system, which elsewhere in the state has enabled a degree of open and accountable, even transformational, politics is less successful in Lalgram and Malgram. Indeed, local level political interests have captured these institutions to the extent that the landless view the politics of poverty alleviation as dependent upon personalised loyalties.

Certainly, as the Left Front itself has continually maintained, part of the states continuing failings with regard to poverty alleviation are due to a lack of funds. This is itself related to, among other things, the adverse structure of economic federalism now unfolding as part of the liberalisation process. Indeed, in addition to reducing the funds available for poverty alleviation this process is also likely to see a reduction in formal credit through commercial banks for small and marginal farmers and an increase in production costs through the reduction in subsidies. All of these processes are likely to decrease the profitability of agriculture in the state in the near future, suggesting that there are definite limits on the extent that poverty can continue to be reduced.

The failings of the Left Front in including the more marginal classes in its development processes is evident from its declining share of votes in successive Panchayat elections- a trend that is likely to continue when the next round of elections are held in May, 2003. In addition, in West Midnapore and the tribal belt of Bankura there has been an increase in the activity of Maoist groups (PWG and MCC) since 2001. This has lead to the killing of

local bureaucrats and politically influential CPM cadres, as well as PWG activists, particularly in the West Midnapore blocks around Garbeta and Salboni⁵⁴. The Left Front has attempted to prioritise these areas development by providing a great deal of money to try to upgrade irrigation infrastructure and provide lean season employment. Such investment and prioritising of basic needs is equally applicable to villages in Gangajalghati, despite the fact that it has not seen any upsurge in political violence. Despite Left Front assertions to the contrary, it is evident that the discontent with these areas has not subsided and points to possible future directions in the politics of poverty alleviation in the arid districts of the state.

⁵⁴ For example see Sumit Mitra 'A Deeper Shade of Red' *India Today* July 22, 2002