Rural Capital Accumulation and Simple Reproduction in Neoliberal India: A Comparative Study of the Agrarian Questions of Capital and Labour in Two Regions of Punjab

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Abstract

This thesis critically examines the narratives of economic distress, environmental degradation, and social upheaval that have come to characterise Indian Punjab since the early 1990s. It advances our understanding of these crises by centring the relatively understudied phenomenon of rural capital accumulation that has continued amid broader agrarian distress. Grounded in Agrarian Political Economy, this research first undertakes a novel 'conjugated class-caste analysis' of rural households to arrive at the concept of 'conjugated privilege'—through an adaptation of 'conjugated oppression'—that frames our analysis of rural capital accumulation as embedded within social structures of caste, religion, and gender. Through twelve months of intensive comparative fieldwork in a village and town in two distinct socio-political regions of Punjab—Malwa and Majha—this thesis reveals the diversity in the bases and patterns of capital accumulation and differentiation in rural Punjab. The Majha study region exhibits a growing trend of economic diversification among rural landowning Jutt Sikhs, while in the Malwa study region, land and agriculture remain the most important sources of capital accumulation and differentiation. To explain these differences, this thesis also demonstrates the centrality of examining the factors beyond the village and agriculture. Majha study region's proximity to Amritsar and its integration within global production networks have contributed to dynamic economic growth, which, alongside the lack of entrenched monopoly by the Hindu trading castes in the aftermath of the political crisis of the 1980s, has provided an outlet for rural landowning Jutts—both classes of capital and petty commodity producers—to diversify their accumulation. This was not the case in the Malwa region, where capitalist growth remains relatively muted and trading castes' have reproduced their domination in the non-farm economy. The evidence presented allows us to contribute to the debate on the resolution, or bypassing, of the Agrarian Question(s) of Capital (AQC) at a sub-regional level under neoliberalism.

While maintaining its focus on rural capital accumulation and AQC, this thesis also explored its profound implications for the 'classes of labour' and Agrarian Questions of Labour (AQL). CoL in the more dynamic, high growth Majha region witnessed an adverse incorporation in this diversified, predominantly informal economy, exhibited through their hyper exploitation brick kilns, construction sites, factories, and urban businesses, heightened socio-economic and spatial fragmentation of livelihoods, and segmentation on caste and gender lines. Conversely, in the less dynamic Malwa region, many within classes of labour, especially Dalit women, were excluded from direct labour exploitation and relegated mainly to the sphere of social reproduction and petty commodity production, contributing to higher levels of economic distress among CoL here. Finally, this thesis reflects on the scope and practice of progressive, emancipatory rural politics in both regions, examining both the farmers' protest movement 2020-21 and the movement for land rights and dignity led by Dalit women.

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Abbreviations

AQC	Agrarian Question of Capital
AQL	Agrarian Question of Labour
AQP	Agrarian Question of Politics
CF	Contract Farming
CoC	Classes of Capital
CoL	Classes of Labour
GR	Green Revolution
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IFR	International Food Regime
KCC	Kisan Credit Card
KPMU	Krantikari Pendu Mazdoor Union (Revolutionary Rural Workers Union)
MFIs	Micro-Finance Institutions
MSP	Minimum Support Price
NFE	Non-Farm Economy
NREGS	National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PCP	Petty Commodity Producers
PDS	Public Distribution System
SC	Scheduled Castes
SSA	Social Structures of Accumulation
ZPSC	Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee (Committee to struggle for gaining land)

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1: Introduction

In November 2021, more than a year after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government had introduced the three farm laws, the laws were repealed through a television announcement.[1] This announcement coincided with the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, the founder of *Sikhi* or the Sikh religion, possibly a move to appease the Sikh farmer protestors, who had remained undeterred in the 400-day-long movement. The protests and their success have been touted as a significant win against India's rollover neoliberalism, authoritarian populism and Hindu majoritarianism (Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022; P. Singh, 2020). The movement is also credited with having opened up space for popular resistance and transformative dissent (Moliner & Singh, 2024, Thandi, 2022), along with a renewed discussion on rural and agriculture issues, which have been systematically marginalised in India's public policy and media discourse, except perhaps during the elections (Sainath, 1996, 2025).

Many of the protesting farmers were from Punjab, a state in north-western India, and various scholars from different disciplines have attempted to understand why farmers from this region spearheaded the movement (see Jodhka, 2022; Lerche, 2021; Pattenden & Bansal, 2021, Ram 2022). Political economists and sociologists have explained that while the three farm laws may have been the immediate trigger, the root causes of the protests and its longevity lies in the long-term political economy of growth and development in Punjab over the last few decades. Punjab has emerged as a low-growth, highly distressed economy since the 1990s, diverging sharply from the high-growth, high-inequality trend seen at the all-India level (Chandrasekhar, 2023). While agriculture and agricultural growth rates have declined overall at the all-India level since the implementation of neoliberal policies in agriculture in the late 1990s (Ramakumar, 2022, p. 202; Athreya, 2013; Mollah & Krishnan, 2016), the decline has been more pronounced in the case of Punjab (P. Singh & Singh, 2020). The impact of

[1] The three farm laws: (a) *The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020*; (b) *The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Service Act, 2020*; and (c) *The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020* were push through the Parliament in September 2020. The laws were designed to liberalise India's agricultural markets but were widely seen as an attempt to undermine the existing *mandi*s and Minimum Support Price protections and increase corporate control over agriculture (Singh 2020, Lerche 2021).

this decline is visible across various aspects of Punjab's economy, society, agroecology and polity. These issues took centre stage during the farmers' protest movement of 2020-21, which invoked concern not only within Punjab but also among its relatively large and influential diaspora (Thandi, 2017, Singh, 2024).

The narrative that emerges from the literature is that Punjab went from being a state with a prosperous agricultural population to one that has among the highest numbers of farmers and labourers suicides as well as high rates of depeasantisation (Singh et al., 2021; 2022; Singh & Bhogal, 2014, p. 20), from being seen as a state that offered opportunities to its youth and migrant workers to one that has emerged as the largest hub of international migration, including illegally (Kaur & Bansal, 2025; Arora et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2023)[2], from being seen as a model of agriculture-focussed economic development to be emulated by other states and other developing countries to being used as a case study of how not to get stuck in an agricultural trap and the 'Dutch disease'[3] (Singh & Singh, 2016, Dhesi & Singh, 2008), from being an ecologically rich state with vast fertile land due to five rivers that flow through its landscape, giving the region its name, to being mired in an impending ecological crisis, characterised by degraded soil, polluted air and rivers, severely depleted groundwater, among others (Brown, 2013; D. Sharma, 2019). In contrast to other Green Revolution states, Punjab is the only state in India whose contribution to the national GDP has declined over time—from 4.4 per cent in 1970-71 to 2.4 per cent in 2023-24 (Sanyal & Arora, 2024), a sign that Punjab has been left behind or lost out from India's gradual integration with the global economy.

While the articulations during protests and in the existing literature have significantly contributed to our understanding of distress and its manifestations among the labouring masses in Punjab and across India, this thesis contributes to this literature by focussing on three relatively underexplored issues. The issues relate to capital accumulation in rural areas under neoliberalism, which has continued amidst distress,

[2] This incident captured headlined recently with 40 per cent of those deported from the US after Trump administration's return being from Punjab (Kaur and Bansal 2025).

[3] "Dutch disease" refers to the economic phenomenon where a sudden surge in natural resource wealth, like oil or gas, leads to a decline in other sectors of the economy, often due to currency appreciation and reduced competitiveness.

and its links with (a) the political economy of the towns and the non-farm economy, including but not limited to agricultural markets, b) simple reproduction of the rural-based classes of labour and the agrarian distress faced by them, and c) the scope and diversity of progressive rural politics among both farmers and landless labourers. With the exception of a few notable works, such as Sinha (2020a, 2021) and Singh (1999), these aspects remain largely absent from the dominant discourse on Punjab.

This thesis, therefore, explores capital and labour simultaneously, drawing the links between what this thesis terms as the "Classes of Capital" and the "Classes of Labour" (Bernstein 2007). The former involves a discussion on their capital accumulation, their bases or sources of accumulation (whether land-based or non-land, agrarian or non-agrarian), their long-term patterns of capital accumulation, but also their embeddedness in social institutions such as caste, religion, gender. The latter examines the socio-economic and spatial fragmentation of the labouring classes, their segmentation along line of caste, gender, religion, as well as the nature and extent of economic distress faced by them. This thesis draws on and extends the 'conjugated oppression' framework (Bourgois 1988 as cited in Lerche & Shah, 2018) to incorporate caste into Marxian class analysis, yielding a novel classification of contemporary rural societies under capitalism. This classification frames the classes of capitalist farmers, peasants or petty commodity producers, and the labouring classes, not only as owners of capital, surplus, or labour power but also as possessing a distinct caste identity with its historical trajectory—characterised by exploitation, oppression, as well as domination and privilege.

While the focus remains on the rural, this thesis also examines the political economy of the towns and the non-farm economy, and how the two shape each other. These aspects are fundamental when the rural-agrarian economy and its conditions of distress or progress are no longer confined to the village but rather constitute an integral part of more extensive economic processes, both nationally and internationally. (Bernstein, 2010; Jodhka, 2018; Jodhka & Simpson, 2019; Lerche, 2014). This helps analyse not just the farmers' protest movement but also other emerging

developments, such as the rising international migration among youth, as well as the growth of collective politics among landless Dalits[4] in rural Punjab.

The introductory chapter summarises the literature from rural India and first outlines in section 1.2 why it is important and useful to centre capital accumulation in our study on contemporary agrarian change in Punjab amidst a prolonged and severe agrarian distress. It then outlines the key contributions of this thesis to the three aspects listed above, using fieldwork evidence from rural Punjab. This is undertaken in section 1.3. Thereafter, Section 1.4 discusses the methodological and conceptual contributions of the thesis, which help address critiques regarding the insufficient attention to caste within agrarian studies and Marxian political economy (Jodhka, 2022a; Viswanath, 2014). This section also outlines the methodological challenges encountered in conducting fieldwork and collecting data on capital accumulation during the then-ongoing farmers' protests and the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The last section of the chapter discusses the structure of the rest of the thesis.

1.1 Why Focus on Capital Accumulation in Distressed Rural India?

Some scholars and journalists have argued that the onslaught of neoliberalism in India has been so devastating that, barring a few at the very top, the whole of the agriculture sector and most of the rural-agrarian classes have been adversely affected, including capitalist farmers (see Patnaik, 2011, 2012; Sainath, 2019). 86 per cent of farmers in India have small and marginal landholdings (less than 2 hectares), 70 per cent of agricultural households earn less than Rs 10,000 per month, and an average agricultural household earns more from wages than from cultivation (NSSO, 2021). Globally too, scholars have highlighted the role of a new international food regime (IFR)[5], led by the international agro-corporations, in deflating the incomes of the small-scale family producers by appropriating an increased share of the value they produce (McMichael, 2014), along with a sharp rise in their displacement and dispossession

[4] Dalit is accepted as a political identity to describe the ''outcastes'' (the ex-untouchables in the Hindu social-religious order); they are referred to as Scheduled Castes in the official vocabulary.

[5] IFR refers to the political and economic structuring of food production and circulation on a world scale in different phases of development of the capitalist world economy. McMichael (2009) carefully traced the long evolution of the food regimes—from the first food regime during the colonial period (1870-the 1930s), the second IFR that overlapped with a post-war period (1940s-1970s) and finally, the current IFR, which he terms as the corporate food regime.

from their means of sustenance (Borras Jr. et al., 2022). In such a context, does it make sense to talk about rural capital accumulation?

Further, the political relevance of an emphasis on domestic capital accumulation and differentiation within rural areas may be questioned today more than ever as it could weaken the potential of a broad-based mass movement against the big multinational corporations that control the international corporate food regime (Bernstein, 2006; Borras, 2023b) and their nexus with the state. The question gains greater relevance in light of the success of the farmers' protests, which has been widely credited to the coming together of farmers' unions with a support base spread across various sections of the farmers, including the bigger capitalist farmers.

In addition, rural capital accumulation is said to have lost its developmental potential and its privileged place in development theory. Agrarian accumulation is no longer necessary to kickstart or fuel the process of capitalist development in the broader economy, as observed in the case of countries in the global North; external sources of finance have largely overtaken its role (Bernstein, 2006). In Marxian terms, there is no longer an agrarian question of capital for most countries in the global South under neoliberalism, including India (Lerche, 2013).

This has warranted some scholars to argue that there is no pressing need to study what are in termed in the literature as the Agrarian Questions (AQ hereafter) of production, accumulation and politics, that is, of capitalist penetration in the countryside, the resulting socio-economic differentiation, agriculture's contribution in funding industrialisation, and agrarian classes contribution to emancipatory, progressive politics (McMichael, 2014; Moyo et al., 2013; Patnaik, 2011, 2022; Shattuck et al., 2023). Instead, they argue that there is a need to reformulate the old AQ to focus more on how global food systems are restructured and how to challenge them. Therefore, primacy is given to food sovereignty and agroecology in studying the AQ in the contemporary period of climate change (Paprocki & McCarthy, 2024; Patel, 2009; Taşdemir Yaşın, 2022).

Notwithstanding these empirical, theoretical and political realities, this thesis argues that there is merit in investigating the concrete dynamics of differentiation, capital

accumulation and local capitalism as it remains integral to global capitalism and corporate food regimes/systems, albeit in less prominent ways than in the past (Bernstein, 2016, Byres, 2016, Harriss-White, 2016). It argues that an analysis of the global roots of the agrarian crisis should be conducted in addition to, and not at the expense of, acknowledging and addressing the 'internal' fault lines of caste, race, gender, class, and their intersections. Both 'internal' and 'external' dynamics can be and need to be studied *simultaneously,* and acknowledging these class, caste and gendered relations can also be politically useful as it can strengthen the nascent but hugely significant agrarian movements such as the farmers' protests in India and the La Via Campesina movement internationally (Borras, 2023, Pattenden, 2023).

Furthermore, the relevance of studying the extent, nature, and patterns of capital accumulation and differentiation also stems from the fact that it continues to play a significant role in determining property and power relations in the countryside, with varying degrees of influence in different regions. Therefore, changes in capital accumulation, as well as its regional diversity tends to have implications for the simple reproduction of the labouring classes and petty commodity producers as well as for progressive rural politics, which merits critical investigation, especially in highly caste, gender, and ethnically stratified societies such as India (see Harriss-White, 2003, Harriss-White et al., 2020, Parthasarathy, 2015).

Focusing on accumulation is not intended to undermine or sideline a discussion on the extent of the agrarian crisis faced by the vast majority of farmers, farmer-labourers, and labourer-farmers. Instead, this thesis argues that it enhances our understanding of the crisis by bringing under scrutiny those who are shielded from it and, most importantly, by drawing links between the two. It is essential to identify precisely who is in crisis to develop a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the crisis and to ensure that the policy response is attentive to these inequalities, lest it exacerbate them, as is often the case.[6] Further, paying attention to capital accumulation brings the dominant class-

[6] For instance, the heightened notion of Punjab and its agriculture and ecology being in crisis has meant that the state government's response to it is undifferentiated: in its response to the pest attack on cotton during 2020-21, it had compensated the farmers, but not the labourers. The compensation to farmers was also equal for all, not taking into account the fact that smaller farmers were more adversely affected by the income loss.

castes under academic scrutiny, which helps address the critique levied against agrarian studies by scholars of caste, such as Jodhka (2022a) and Viswanath (2014, p. 20) and Ambedkarite scholar-activists, who have argued that caste is not merely a Dalit or Bahujan problem but as much a savarna/dominant caste problem and hence, any study of the political economy needs to also subvert the subject of research from Dalits and Adivasis to the savarna/dominant caste elites (see Samos, 2022).

1.2 Research Questions

The central research agenda of this thesis is: how does an analysis of rural capital accumulation and its social structures aid our understanding of the contemporary dynamics of agrarian change, distress, and resistance in neoliberal India? The following research questions help operationalise the above-stated research agenda:

1. What patterns of capital accumulation have emerged in rural India during the period of neoliberalism, and how do these patterns vary across different regions?
2. How does rural capital accumulation gets shaped by the extent, nature, and 'social structures of accumulation'[7] in small towns and the broader non-farm economy under neoliberalism?
3. How does capital accumulation in rural India shape, and is shaped, by the simple reproduction of the rural-based classes of labour?
4. How does diversity in capital accumulation patterns shape the practice and scope of progressive rural politics among farmers and labourers in India?

These questions aim to understand the uneven nature of India's political economy of development in the post-liberalisation period from a regional perspective. Theoretically, it engages with the literature on agrarian political economy to provide a critical and nuanced perspective on the resolution—or persistent irresolution—of the Agrarian Question(s) in India, as well as to illuminate their regional variations within the

[7] Social Structures of Accumulation (SSA) refers to a complex of social, political and economic institutions that enable and sustain the capital accumulation process (Harriss-White, 2003; Kotz et al., 1994)

country. The first fieldwork site was located in the Malwa region[8], which is characterised by a larger average landholding size and high levels of agricultural tenancy but lacked a dynamic non-farm sector, remaining at the margins of the global production networks. In contrast, the site in the Majha region exhibited growth and dynamism in both agricultural production and the non-farm economy. This was, in part, due to the latter study region's proximity to Amritsar, the second-largest city in the state, which holds historical, cultural, and religious significance for the Sikhs. This region has seen a continuous and more intimate integration in global value chains and global capitalism since the colonial period itself. The rationale for privileging these dimensions in site selection is elaborated in Chapter 4.

1.3 Contributions and Main Arguments of the Thesis

1.3.1 Bases of Capital Accumulation in Rural India and its Regional Diversity in the Post-Liberalisation Period

The first contribution of this thesis lies in the literature on provincial capital and capital accumulation in rural India in the post-liberalisation phase, which has seen a revival of interest in the last decade or so (Chatterjee, 2022; Yadav, 2022; Sinha, 2021; Arora, 2021; Pattenden, 2011, 2016; Parthasarathy, 2015; Lerche, 2014; Damodaran, 2008; Baru, 2000; Rutten, 1995; Sau, 1988; Upadhya, 1988). With respect to Punjab, the existing evidence on capital accumulation has been limited and primarily from the Malwa region. It indicates that rural capital accumulation in Punjab has continued under neoliberalism but has remained predominantly agrarian and concentrated in the hands of larger landowning cultivators, although it has become more uncertain than before (Lerche, 2014; Sinha, 2020, 2021, p. 202; Shrimali, 2021; Bansal, 2020; Singh, 2013; Bal, 2006, p. 200).[9]

[8] Malwa region is part of the Indian Punjab that lies to the south of river Sutlej and constitutes the southern part of contemporary Indian Punjab, whereas the Majha region lies between the rivers Beas and Ravi, with parts of this region now in Pakistani Punjab and constitutes the northern part of contemporary Indian Punjab.

[9] It is also shown that a larger share of the agrarian surplus is now appropriated by agro-corporations that provide agricultural inputs and control output markets (see Shrimali, 2022; Lerche, 2013; Ramachandran, 2011).

This has led to an essentialisation and an overarching representation of Jutt Sikhs—the region's dominant agrarian caste-class—as agrarian, and their lack of economic diversification is seen as a 'paradox' (Damodaran, 2008, see also Sau, 1988). Summarising this literature and case studies in his lucid and profoundly engaging account of Indian capitalism, Damodaran(2008: 266) remarks with respect to the *Jat land* of Punjab and Haryana that, barring a few from the princely or landed gentry, 'the northern farming communities have not managed to leverage their exploits in the countryside and their storming the corridors of power to make the transition from prosperous agriculturists to successful businessmen-industrialists. Instances of them doing a Kamma, Naidu, Gounder, Maratha, or Patidar are few and far between.' (see also Upadhya, 1988 on coastal Andhra; Rutten, 1995 on central Gujarat; Chari, 2004 on western Tamil Nadu).

Some have explained the lack of transformation of agrarian capital into industrial capital or entrepreneurship as part of their 'lack of merchant ideology' or 'orientations towards work, work ideologies, and primordial ties, such as a sense of family and kinship networks' (Bal, 2006). This is in sharp contrast to the Gounders in Tamil Nadu, whose Dravidian ethos and politics are said to have energised them to undermine caste hierarchies by entering the modern economic domain and higher education (Chari, 2004, Heyer, 2016, Vijayabaskar & Kalaiyarasan, 2014, Harriss, 2018) or in the case of coastal Andhra where Upadhya (1988) notes that 'the social and political history of the region, and particularly of the dominant landowning castes, has played an essential role in the emergence of the new business class. (p. 1439)

On the contrary, evidence collected from fieldwork adds nuance to this discussion on capital accumulation by showing the diversity in extent, nature and patterns of accumulation within rural Punjab. It finds that while the Malwa study region aligns well with the existing literature on agrarian-focused, labour displacing capital accumulation in rural Punjab, the Majha region presents a significantly different picture. Rural capital accumulation in Majha, especially the region surrounding Amritsar, was primarily centred around non-agrarian, non-land avenues with surpluses being drawn from and reinvested in diversified non-farm activities, such as transport businesses, real estate, agricultural trade, building materials retail, and agro-input retail shops, among several

others. Many broke ties with cultivation altogether and moved to cities, making agrarian capital from this region resemble their southern and western Indian counterparts more than their *Malwai* counterparts. However, the class base of accumulation was higher in the Malwa region—roughly one-third of the total rural households were able to generate and accumulate a surplus, whether petty or grand, compared to 16 per cent of the total rural households in the Majha region.

Through analysing contrasting evidence on rural capital accumulation in Punjab, this thesis changes the way this question has been often posed, including at the beginning of this research project from 'Why do rural landowning Jutts in Punjab not diversify outside agriculture' to another more open-ended 'Where, how, in what sectors, and in what conditions do Jutts diversify outside agriculture under neoliberalism?' This thesis, therefore, makes the case for a comparative study of the political economy to understand the class dynamics of rural capital accumulation, such as that by Jan (2024), Lerche (2023) and Pattenden (2016) among the recent ones, compared to research based on a single site or a set of villages from the same region, which has been the norm in the studies on rural capital accumulation in India (Jeffrey, 1999; Rutten, 1995; Upadhya, 1988a; Aslany, 2020; Sinha, 2020a; Harriss-White et al., 2022).

This thesis also contributes to the understanding of rural capital accumulation by introducing a typology that facilitates the identification of patterns of accumulation within a particular region and enables comparisons with other regions and political economies. This typology helps systematically review and present the existing fieldwork-based literature on rural capital accumulation, outlining its links with the non-farm economy. This allows us to understand India's growth phase and its regional diversity from the standpoint of rural capital accumulation and its movement or transfer into the non-farm economy, as well as the implications it has for the Agrarian Question of Capital (AQC) and its diversity under neoliberalism.

The evidence discussed in this thesis also speaks to the literature on the importance of the land question in India, that is, the role of land ownership as a source of power, status and differentiation in rural India (Arora, 2024; Philip, 2023, p. 20; Rawal & Bansal, 2021; Banerjee, 2017; D'Costa & Chakraborty, 2017; Harriss, 2013; Lerche et al., 2013; Levien, 2012; Shah & Harriss-White, 2011, p. 201). Contrary to studies that either prove

or disprove its importance in rural India under neoliberal capitalist development based on single-site research, comparative evidence from fieldwork suggests that land ownership and agrarian accumulation remain the primary sources of power, status, and socio-economic differentiation in the Malwa region. In contrast, its importance has declined in the Majha region overtaken by non-farm sources of capital accumulation. To be sure, even in the Majha study region, land ownership continues to matter in differentiating landowners from the landless; however, after a point, its role seems to have been overtaken by non-agrarian sources of income and the contacts or networks one needs to establish to integrate with the growing non-farm, urban economy. This also provides a context for why the Malwa region has emerged as the epicentre of politics centred around the land, both among farmers and landless labourers, as discussed later in the chapter while such politics has been pushed to the margins in the Majha region. Therefore, this thesis compels us to keep open the land question to further empirical analysis by asking, 'In what regions do landlordism and land ownership remain the primary source of differentiation?'

1.3.2 Linking Rural Capital Accumulation and Political Economy of the Non-Farm sector: Implications for Agrarian Questions of Capital in Neoliberal India

This thesis' second contribution lies in linking the political economy of agrarian change -both capital accumulation and distress—to the political economy of the non-farm sector. The existing literature has a tendency to explain the reluctance of the agrarian capital in the Malwa region to expand into manufacturing or other sectors of the non-farm economy by invoking 'Jutt or peasant culture', their supposed lack of (industrial) enterprise or experience, high incomes from farming making diversification less attractive, or by dismissing them as irrational or overly extravagant (Bal, 2006; S. Singh, 1997, 2013). Scholars have also argued that the *necessarily* antagonistic relations between Hindu upper-caste merchant capital and Sikh Jutt peasantry in Punjab has prevented economic diversification among the latter (Singh and Dhaliwal, 2011, Singh and Bhogal, 2015; see also Alam 1986). At the same time, the diversification of Jutt landowners in the Majha fieldwork region has been seen as plainly or *purely* a result of

lack of Bania or trading caste domination in the non-farm economy (see Singh, 1984; Gill, 1988; Damodaran, 2008).

While these explanations are undoubtedly helpful as broad generalisations, they serve only as a starting point and not a final explanation by themselves. Limiting the explanation to agricultural incomes, socio-cultural factors or to the domination by Banias and other trading castes risks abstracting or disguising the impact of neoliberalism and imperialism that still determines, to a significant degree, the constraints and opportunities available to rural-agrarian capital in diversifying beyond agriculture (see also Bernstein, 2010, Byres, 2016). This thesis takes forward the critique by Heyer (2019), Alam (1986) and Singh (1999) that a more comprehensive analysis of rural capital accumulation must also consider other factors, such as the extent and nature of growth in the non-farm economy under contemporary neoliberal capitalism—whether mercantile, industrial, or service-based. A deeper, nuanced understanding of the links between the political economy of the farm and the non-farm economy affords us a fresh and granular perspective on capital accumulation and agrarian change in rural Punjab.

Evidence suggests that in the Malwa region, non-farm growth remained constrained, a result of the uneven capitalist development under neoliberalism that has excluded Punjab, particularly the Malwa region, from the prosperity it promised. Moreover, despite some penetration of agrarian capital into the non-farm economy, traditional trading castes—such as the Banias and Khatris—had managed to maintain and reproduce their dominance in almost all sampled sectors of the non-farm economy. The agrarian and merchant capitals also shared more stable and equitable, or rather less antagonistic relations, with both being active and collaborative participants in each other's accumulation, which echoes Sinha's findings from her study on farmer-commission agent relations in Malwa, Punjab (2020c). It is when we take these three factors together that we can better explain the existing hyper-compartmentalised, socially regulated structure of accumulation along religious, caste, and spatial lines in the Malwa region. Hindu Banias and Khatris, based in cities, continued to dominate mercantile, industrial, and other business enterprises, while bigger landowning Sikh Jutts comfortable accumulating from capital intensive agriculture and being the

‘masters of the countryside’ (Harriss-White, 1996; see also Damodaran, 2008; Lerche, 2014; Sinha, 2020). As elaborated later, this also provides a context as to why the rural agrarian distress, manifesting in suicides, depeasantisation, and international migration, both regular and irregular, has been more severe among landless labourers and smaller landowning farmers in the Malwa region in the last few decades (see Singh et al., 2022, Dandekar and Bhattacharya, 2017, Padhi, 2012).

On the other hand, the Majha study region near Amritsar has undergone a rapid transformation of its landscape over the last two decades, with large residential buildings, hotels, resorts, and highways, among others, lining its landscape. The region has also become more deeply entrenched in global value chains and production networks through the expansion of export-oriented agro-processing, industrial production, and the establishment of national and international consumer brands. Moreover, it has had more space to accommodate new capitalists, partly due to the expulsion of Hindu trading castes from this region during the period of Sikh militancy and subsequent state repression in the 1980s and 1990s (Bal & Judge, 2001; Judge, 2015; Puri et al., 1999). It was the culmination of these factors which paved the way for a more diversified accumulation pattern among rural-based agrarian capital and petty commodity producers, primarily small and middle landowning Jutts, who entered and gradually dominated the business and merchant economy. They dominated five out of six businesses on which caste-wise data on proprietors was collected. Some upward socio-economic mobility was also observed among lower-caste landless groups, such as the Ghumiyars (OBC), who integrated into the non-farm economy as capitalists.

The argument about antagonistic relations between agrarian and merchant capital inhibiting diversification of rural capital accumulation does not quite hold. If at all, the exchange relations between those who remained in agriculture and those who had diversified into merchant capital were significantly more antagonistic in this region than in the Malwa region, even though both groups were likely to be from the same caste, class, and religion—as both tend to be middle tier of landowning male Jutt Sikhs. There was a seemingly greater distrust among commission agents regarding farmers defaulting on loans or cultivating non-MSP crops and not selling their crops through them, which contributed to significantly higher interest rates—two to three times that of

the Malwa region. The dependence of farmers on arhtiyas for insecure loans was also considerably reduced, given the high interest rates as well as diversified sources of income and finance.

Therefore, the contrasting evidence from the two regions compels us to challenge not only the socio-cultural or psychological factors that are quite prominently used in explaining the patterns of rural capital accumulation but also a simplistic or mechanical argument used by many scholars, including Damodaran (2008), such as the historical presence or absence of trading castes in the non-farm economy. It also prompts us to challenge the dichotomous way in which the dynamics between the agrarian and non-agrarian capital classes are often presented in the literature. Questions such as whether merchant capital or urban industrial capital is productive or not and whether it hinders, constrains, exploits, or is antagonistic to rural capital accumulation could be avoided. A better question to ask is how agrarian capital and merchant or other forms of capital interact with each other in shaping the capitalist development of a particular region (see also Singh, 1999). It echoes the call for a nuanced, context-specific, fieldwork-based analysis of the relational dynamics between agrarian capital and its neighbouring classes, especially merchant capital (Krishnamurthy, 2014; Vijayshankar & Krishnamurthy, 2012; Jan & Harriss-White, 2012) as well as others, such as industrial capital, finance capital (see A. Singh, 1999), and in the contemporary context, green industrial capital.

The evidence discussed on these aspects allows us to intervene in the debates on the agrarian question of capital—its continued relevance or bypassing under neoliberalism. Even in the Malwa region, the limited economic diversification among agrarian capital, or its failure in such diversification, cannot be seen as a paradox or a straightforward failure or bypassing of the AQ of capital (see Sinha's 2021 study from the same region). Fieldwork evidence shows that a substantial sum of agrarian surplus was transferred as interest payments to commission agents, who maintained a diversified investment portfolio. The surplus appropriated by the latter provided a boost to the region's industrial development, most notably in agro-processing industries, such as rice shellers, as well as other service sector enterprises (also observed by Alam 1986 and S.

Singh, 2013).[10] Therefore, agrarian surpluses continue to contribute to the limited and insufficient growth of the broader non-farm economy, pointing to continued relevance of the AQ of capital in this region, even though its role in the overall capitalist development of the region has diminished compared to before. On the other hand, in the Majha study region, despite the direct transformation of agrarian PCPs or capitalists into urban, merchant, industrial, and business capitalists, they and their surpluses have played a relatively minor role in the overall capitalist development of the region, especially in the neoliberal phase, during which there has been a much greater inflow of big capital, from Amritsar, as well as beyond the state and even international capital. In other words, the AQC can be seen as bypassed to a greater degree in this region. This adds to Bernstein's (2015) later formulation and echoes Byres (2016), Harriss-White (2016a) and Harriss-White et al. (2022) analysis that the AQC in India may have lost its national significance under neoliberalism, especially with the rise of the Modi-led NDA government but may remain relevant in some regions more than others that merit empirical investigation.

1.3.3 Linking the Agrarian Question of Capital and the Agrarian Question of Labour: Capital Accumulation and Simple Reproduction in Rural India

While studying rural capital accumulation or provincial capital is an essential academic project, this thesis emphasises the usefulness of linking it to the livelihood patterns and agrarian distress faced by the 'classes of labour' (CoL)—which includes non-accumulating petty commodity producers and the wage labourers (Pattenden, 2023; see also Lerche, 2010 and Bernstein, 2007). Studies that are attentive to these links, such as Pattenden (2016, 2022, 2023); Harriss-White (2003); Lerche (2023); Philip (2023); and Parthasarathy (2015), provide us with a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics of agrarian change and how it is produced and reproduced than most scholarship which *either* focusses on rural precarity, agricultural distress and poverty *or* capital accumulation, a trend equally prevalent in research on Punjab.

[10] This mode of transfer of agrarian surpluses to non-agrarian capital or state has not received adequate attention compared to, say, taxes on agricultural production or terms of trade between agriculture and industry (see Byres 1991, Mitra 1977).

In the context of highly mechanised agriculture, in-migration of workers from impoverished parts of the country, as well as the greater availability of credit from various sources, including microfinance institutions, the direct ties of employment, credit and neo-bondage between local labour and capital in rural Punjab have been perceived as declining, diluting, or even non-existent (IAMR, 2013; S. Singh & Bhogal, 2020; S. Singh & Singh, 2022). This is often cited as a reason behind the rise of social boycotts of Dalits by the landed Jutts as well as the recent rise in Dalit assertion against Jutt supremacy in various forms in rural Punjab (see Jodhka & Louis, 2003, Jodhka, 2018, Martin, 2015, Sharma, 2009, Ram, 2007).

On the face of it, fieldwork evidence from both sites confirms this finding of declining direct ties of employment, credit and bondage, both old and new, between rural capital and labour. However, as we look closer, one can appreciate the broader context wherein the livelihoods and simple reproduction patterns of the classes of labour were still shaped, among other things, by the accumulation patterns of rural classes of capital, more so in the Malwa region. In the Majha region, the urban-based classes of capital exerted an equally significant influence on the livelihoods of the rural-based classes of labour, if not more.[11]

Evidence suggests that in the Malwa region, most men from Dalit landless CoL households were primarily engaged in hyper-casualised and precarious jobs in construction, slab manufacturing, or loading-unloading and storing of *toodi* (wheat straw which is used as cattle fodder). Most of these jobs were accessed through short-distance commute to nearby villages or towns and through a *thekedar or mistry* (contractor). On the other hand, women from these households were restricted by patriarchal control over their bodies to work alongside men and to commute outside the village. Their paid employment was restricted to four to five weeks in paddy transplanting and NREGS work each, while domestic work in dominant caste-class households within the village was also gradually increasing. Most were, however, predominantly engaged in unpaid self-employment in livestock rearing.

[11] As discussed earlier, many of these urban-based classes of capital were originally from the rural areas who had diversified into urban businesses in the last few decades.

This decline in agricultural work and the rise of highly gendered, casualised and precarious employment in the non-farm economy had come in the context of increasing capitalisation and mechanisation of agricultural combined with increasing importance of modern housing and profits from sale of *toodi* in their surplus production and standards of living. The influence of urban-based classes of capital was also gradually increasing, especially in generating paddy husk loading work for men from classes of labour. Their preference of employing migrant labourers over local ones in their rice shellers, in agricultural markets, or in business establishments was also crucial in shaping the work available to local landless classes of labour.

Taken together, it is the relatively muted growth in the non-farm economy of the Malwa region as well as accumulation patterns of the rural and urban based classes of capital that had fuelled the creation of precarious, insecure jobs in specific sectors of the informal economy such as in house construction, loading-unloading of *toodi* or paddy husk, and slab manufacturing[12]. These jobs were undertaken predominantly by men, while women from classes of labour were systematically excluded from paid employment. This systemic exclusion alongside the socio-cultural importance of milk and milk products in the local diet, and the broader pressures or squeezes on their simple reproduction had compelled them to undertake unpaid, precarious, small-scale livestock rearing or petty commodity production of milk. This had implications for their oppression as well as they had to suffer regular oppression and humiliation at the hands of the dominant caste men when they collected green fodder and leafy greens from the latter's fields.

In addition, the cornering of all possible avenues of capital accumulation by classes of capital had constrained the opportunities available to smaller landowning farmers (and landless labourers) to seek upward economic mobility. This, in turn, had implications for agrarian distress in the region, as overcrowding in agriculture and allied activities, such as livestock rearing, had contributed to a sharp rise in land rents, land prices, and buffalo prices. This contributed to the brewing of a debt crisis among them, eventually

[12] The slabs were used to construct big storage rooms for *toodi* so that the farmers could store them during wheat harvest when there is a glut in the market and sell them dear in the winters when there is a shortage in the market.

bursting into a spate of suicides (Grover et al., 2016; S. Singh et al., 2022) as well as an exodus to the global North countries among these classes in the last two decades, including through irregular means and the dangerous '*donki'* routes (Kaur & Bansal, 2025; Sharma et al., 2023, Arora et al., 2023).

In the Majha study region, most from the classes of labour, such as the Dalit-OBC landless workers, including women, received higher paid employment opportunities but often in the precarious, informal sector predominantly in the non-farm economy such as in the brick kilns, house and building construction, service sector businesses, domestic work, among others. Agricultural employment was relatively more available in this region compared to the Malwa region due to cultivation of vegetables and other relatively more labour-absorbing crops. Most of these jobs involved commuting to the nearby villages and towns, echoing broader trend across India (Himanshu et al., 2016; Basole, 2022; Abraham, 2023). Many among them, predominantly young men with slightly stable economic position, migrated in a circular pattern to the Gulf countries (or *chhoti* countries as they were colloquially called).

This distinct pattern of livelihoods or simple reproduction patterns of landless Dalit-OBC households was shaped by higher growth in the non-farm economy in the post-liberalisation period as well as the diversified accumulation patterns of the rural and urban-based classes of capital including industrialists, traders/merchants, service sector businessmen among others. Those who remained in agriculture cultivated a variety of crops, such as sugar beet, potatoes, peas, and other vegetables, in addition to wheat, basmati and paddy, with an eye to extract greater surplus from agriculture. And those who moved out of cultivation and into the nearby cities had invested in occupations that were relatively more labour absorbing such as in the brick kilns, transport business, cot manufacturing, among others.

Despite deepening labour exploitation and exacerbating socio-economic inequality and precarity within and between caste groups, the non-farm economy in Majha functioned as a 'pressure valve,' absorbing surplus labour that was fast being released from agriculture and mitigating agrarian distress. This contributed to relatively lower rates of indebtedness-induced farmer suicides in Majha compared to Malwa (Singh & Bhogal,

2020; Dandekar & Bhattacharya, 2017; Padhi, 2012) despite Majha's comparatively weaker agrarian conditions.

By combining perspectives from both capital and labour, in both agriculture and the non-farm sector, this thesis not only describes where and in which sector labour is employed and which region is more adversely affected by the agrarian distress but goes a step ahead by explaining *why* the Malwa region has a concentration of small-scale livestock rearing, and construction sector workers and a higher degree of agrarian distress despite higher agricultural productivity while majha study region has a concentration of casual wage labourers in various sectors of the non-farm informal economy, and relatively less degree of agrarian distress.

1.3.4 Rural Capital Accumulation and its Implications for Rural-Agrarian Politics

Lastly, this thesis evaluates how differences in the patterns of rural capital accumulation and simple reproduction shape the nature and form of rural politics in the two regions, with a focus on the farmers' protest 2020-21 as well as the relatively lesser known but equally impactful, labouring class movement for land rights and gender and social justice in the Malwa region of Punjab.

It finds that the Majha study region, with greater diversification of capital accumulation among landed Jutts, presented a weaker or fragmented resistance to the three farm laws than their counterparts in the Malwa region, where most farmers, irrespective of their class, depended heavily on the cultivation of wheat-paddy monoculture and its assured procurement through the commission agents in the regulated markets (see Pattenden & Bansal, 2021, Jodhka, 2022, Sinha, 2024). The Malwa region also witnessed a much broader coalition, with participation and contributions from even landless Jutts and OBC Sikhs, in addition to the landed Jutts, inclusive of women from these classes and castes. These contradictions, along with a diversified source of income, partly explain the diversity in collective action among farmers in the two regions (Pattenden & Bansal, 2021).

In the Majha region, a more significant share of landowners had moved away from cultivation—those who had moved into urban businesses tended to limit their

contribution to the movement to financial help, while those smallholders who had leased out their small land parcels to work as informal sector workers were constrained by their ability to contribute to the protests, financially or otherwise meaningfully. The small portion of landowners who still relied on agrarian incomes typically cultivated a wider range of crops, and they tended to have diversified sources of income. This reduced their dependence on MSP, regulated markets, and the need to borrow from commission agents. Although they still cultivated wheat and paddy on some portion of their land as a buffer, they borrowed from commission agents only to cover some of their expenses and emergency credit needs. Moreover, they were not greatly concerned about the inequality in their class relations with the buyers of their produce until they benefited materially from those relations. As a result, the resistance had gradually turned into a movement of relatively bigger farmers in this region, although they could be small landowners themselves. Similar arguments have been made during previous waves of farmers' protests, highlighting the links between capital accumulation and rural politics (see Banaji, 1994, Nadkarni, 1987, Pattenden, 2005).

The evidence discussed here problematises and complicates any straightforward narrative of resistance by the peasants, Sikhs, or Jutts of Punjab, however one chooses to view it, against the growing alliance between big capital and the state, which has been a reasonably dominant tendency so far (see, for instance, Jain, 2020; Kumar, 2022; Singh, 2020; Thandi, 2022).[13] Instead, it shows that even in Punjab, widely considered the epicentre of the protests, participation in the protests was differentiated by class, caste, economic diversification, and region (Bansal, 2024; Lerche, 2021; Pattenden & Bansal, 2021).

The differences in the patterns of rural capital accumulation didn't just affect farmer politics and its regional diversity. Drawing out the links between capital accumulation and the simple reproduction patterns of the classes of labour also allows us to make tentative articulations about the impact it has had on the terrain of rural politics among labouring classes in the two regions. In the Malwa region, where the classes of labour

[13] This tendency is more prevalent in some of the popular documentaries that have been released on the farmers' protest movement, including *Trolley Times* by director Gurvinder Singh; *Kisan Satyagraha: Tremors of change* by Kersari Haravoo; *Too much democracy* by Varrun Sukhraj; *Chardi Kala: an ode to resilience* by Prateek Sekhar; and *Farming the revolution* by Nishtha Jain.

were relatively less fragmented along caste lines (with most of them being Dalits, particularly Ramdasias), spatial lines (most working within or in the nearby villages, especially Dalit women) and sectoral lines (most engaging in petty production of milk, especially Dalit women), it had laid down a context for rural politics centred around the issues of land, as sites of production and social reproduction, as well as dignity or self-respect. The left-leaning labouring class unions had been successful in drawing out their intimate links to social justice and gender justice.

This kind of politics rooted in land and social justice had not sparked interest in the Majha region, where classes of labour were more fragmented and segmented along caste line and reproduced primarily through casual wage labour in the cities and towns to which they commuted daily. Instead, the politics among them seem to have taken an identity focus—with a popularity of both ethno-religious and caste identity-based politics among the Jutt and Dalit classes of labour, respectively, which further contributes to fragmentation among them. Class politics was marginal among the classes of labour from this region and was primarily restricted to workplace-based unions, such as the NREGS workers' unions and a brick kiln workers' union. The latter had been successful in remaining relevant by focusing not just on typical labour issues or rights such as wages, working conditions, freedom from bondage, among others but also on helping the labourers access the state and its increasingly complicated 'direct' welfare benefits. The politics of the poor in this region reflects the broader patterns of rural politics among informal sector workers, especially migrant, racialised workers, in other parts of rural India (Agarwala, 2013; Pattenden, 2023; Shah & Lerche, 2020). While this precluded the possibility of any class revolt or resistance by the labour against capital, there were ample instances of *everyday* forms of resistance—or as Scott (1985) described them as 'weapons of the weak'—foot-dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on (p. 29).

1.4 Methodological Contributions and Fieldwork

In addition to these theoretical and empirical contributions, this thesis also makes a methodological contribution by incorporating caste and long-term economic mobility

of a household in determining its current class position in the rural-agrarian hierarchy. In doing so, it responds to the critics who have targeted the lack of these crucial aspects in Marxian agrarian political economy (Jodhka, 2022a; Viswanath, 2014) and contributes to existing attempts at this by other scholars, both in terms of class analysis (Chakravarti, 2001, Yadav, 2022, Pattenden, 2016) as well as assembling a theory that combines caste and class (Teltumbde, 2010, Omvedt, 1994, p. 199). It utilises and extends the 'conjugated framework' proposed by Bourgois (1988), recently revived by Lerche and Shah (2018) in the Indian context, to classify rural households.

It argues that the analytical class categories used so far in the literature need to be unpacked in a way that they are seen not just as owners of capital or labour power but also as possessing a distinct caste identity with its own historical trajectory—of exploitation, oppression, as well as domination and privilege. This nuanced approach helps differentiate between those who have gained capital in the last generation or two (e.g., a Dalit capitalist or Dalit 'middle classes') and those who have had historical access to capital due to their caste privilege—termed as conjugated privileged. Inverting the phrase used for oppression by Bourgois, conjugated privilege could be seen as when "axes of caste, class, gender, ethnicity etc 'interact explosively' to 'produce an overwhelming experience of privilege that is more than the sum of the parts" (Lerche & Shah, 2018). Likewise, this thesis differentiates between those who have only recently been proletarianised, fully or partially, and forced to enter the classes of labour (such as some landless and land-poor Jutt Sikhs) from those who have historically been forced to be a part of this class such as the Dalits and Adivasis—the conjugated oppressed.

Collecting data to undertake this conjugated class-caste analysis was very challenging, especially in the context of the farmers' protest. There was intense anti-protest propaganda, led by pro-government national TV channels and social media handles, which portrayed the protests as anti-India and as being led by larger farmers and traders (Sandhu & Wraich, 2024). It was realised quite early in the fieldwork that there was a palpable fear and distrust among the landowners and farmers that any information on their incomes, wealth, land, and possessions may eventually be used against their interests by the government. Several videos were circulated on social

media, persuading farmers not to provide any such information to people they did not know and trust. While I belonged to the same region as my respondents and spoke the same language, I faced several challenges in accessing the village and its respondents, especially the Jutt Sikh farmers. To overcome the problem of access, a considerable amount of time was spent building trust and normalising my presence in the village among the locals. This is elaborated in chapter 4.

The research was designed as a comparative case study of two sites, and a village study approach was employed to collect information from households. The village study allows for the use of multiple methods, including census surveys, in-depth interviews, and participant or simple observations, thereby providing a delicate balance between the quantity and quality of data. The fieldwork was conducted in three phases—first, a census survey of all households in the village (with roughly 255 households in the Malwa village and 360 households in the Majha study village), aimed at collecting basic information such as their caste, land ownership and tenancy, ownership of other assets, employment details, and non-farm occupations, among others. A stratified random sample of households from various class and caste groups followed this. These sampled households were then interviewed in a long, in-depth, semi-structured form, lasting on average more than 90 minutes. The interviews numbered 55 in the Malwa village and 38 in the Majha village. Most respondents were men, and interviews were conducted in the courtyards (the outer space of their dwellings), from where women were often excluded. In addition to the interviews, focus group discussions, participant observations and direct observations were also used while attending social gatherings, political rallies, religious congregations, and accessing public spaces.

During the interviews, data on accumulation was gathered through a careful deployment of three tools—first, collecting the respondents' life history data (drawing on Carlos Oya's (2007) method of collecting life histories of rural capitalists and reading them as 'stories of rural accumulation'); second through collecting family lineage or family-tree data (drawing on Craig Jeffrey (1999)'s study on rich farmers in western UP); and third, by playing an options-game of investment preferences. These tools helped overcome the challenge of studying long-term phenomena such as accumulation from

a single-point data collection. These tools also allowed for generating medium-to-long-term changes in land ownership among all households in that family lineage; their attempts to diversify outside of farming, both successful and unsuccessful, as well as the extent and nature of out-migration among family members to nearby cities or towns. This systematic data on socio-economic differentiation between caste groups, within caste groups, and within families has helped classify households in terms of their conjugated class-caste position and the changes in it over the last two or three generations. This thesis presents a strong case for incorporating family lineage and work-life history methodologies into fieldwork by economists and political economists working in rural India.

In the third phase of the fieldwork, the site shifted from villages to the city or town nearest the fieldwork village—the shops of commission agents, auction yards in the mandi, offices of businessmen and government officials, rice processing industries, and political marches and demonstrations. It draws on Harriss-White's (2003, 2016a) and Basile's (2016) research on the "social structures of accumulation" in small-town India, presenting fieldwork evidence on the growth of business establishments and changes in the caste profile of business owners in the two towns. It draws on three sets of data: (1) secondary data on registered companies in the two towns from the 1960s to 2023, sourced from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, along with the caste profile of the proprietors of the registered companies in the Malwa study site; (2) primary fieldwork on caste-based domination in the business economy, incorporating the caste profiles of 885 business establishments across six types of enterprises, spanning manufacturing (brick kilns), agro-processing (rice and roller flour mills), retail and wholesale trade (commission agents, agricultural machinery retailers), and services (IELTS and visa consultancy firms, petrol pumps); and (3) qualitative comparative evidence on the exchange relations between agrarian capital and merchant-industrial capital. This mix of primary and secondary, and quantitative and qualitative data from two towns helped gain an understanding of accumulation and its social structures within the urban economy and assess whether traditional trading castes have continued to dominate urban non-farm businesses or whether there has been sufficient movement of agrarian capital (or other classes) to challenge this dominance.

Apart from conducting interviews with state officials and some businessmen in both towns, I was able to make participant observations in the *patwari* office in both towns and among commission agents in the Malwa study region, the latter due to my privileged access to one of the bigger commission agents through a family relative. Another crucial part of the fieldwork was the interactions and discussions conducted with members of farmers' organisations and labouring-class organisations that were active in both the fieldwork regions. In total, I met representatives from seven labouring class organisations and six farmers' organisations, mainly from the Malwa region.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The rest of the thesis is structured in a manner consistent with the organisation of this chapter. Chapter 2 expands on the theoretical debates surrounding Agrarian Questions (AQCs) in India and the relevance of studying capital accumulation in rural areas under neoliberalism. It also expands on the conceptual framework used in the thesis to identify the class-castes in the fieldwork villages and summarises the significant debates in the field. This includes a discussion of peasantry versus petty commodity production (PCPs) and whether non-accumulating PCPs should be considered part of the classes of labour. It also expands on the critiques of Marxian political economy by Marxist and socialist feminists, as well as scholars of race and caste, to arrive at the conjugated caste-class analysis briefly discussed in Section 4 of this chapter.

Chapter 3 establishes the context by showing Punjab's divergent economic performance with that of India since the liberalisation reforms of the 1980s. It then reviews the literature on its political economy of development since the 1960s, when Green Revolution policies were implemented in the state. The focus of this literature has been predominantly on land ownership and agrarian structure, labour market transformations, caste- and gender-mediated labour relations, and the environmental consequences of its highly resource-intensive and fossil-fuel-dependent agricultural model. The last section of this chapter goes beyond these dominant narratives to examine the relatively underexplored aspects of Punjab's political economy such as rural capital accumulation and the role of towns, markets, and merchants in Punjab's capitalist development. It builds upon Damodaran's (2008) typology to facilitate the

comparison of accumulation patterns across different regions and political economies in rural India. This typology is later used to discuss fieldwork evidence on capital accumulation patterns in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 discusses the research methodology and research design. This chapter is structured around three challenges faced during the fieldwork: finding representative sites that fit into a comparative frame to aid analysis, gaining access to respondents after the fieldwork site was selected, especially for female respondents, and collecting data from towns and urban capitalists. This chapter also introduces the fieldwork sites.

Part 2 of the thesis, which comprises chapters 5 to 7, presents empirical evidence collected from the field, as well as data from publicly available secondary datasets. Chapter 5 introduces the political economy of production and power in the fieldwork villages by first outlining the conjugated class-caste structure and discussing evidence on the distribution of means of production (land, livestock, homestead land, tenancy, and agricultural machinery) across the identified class-caste groups. It also presents detailed evidence of the dynamics of socio-economic differentiation and diverse bases and patterns of capital accumulation in the two fieldwork sites. The patterns of accumulation are dissected between the Landlord-turned CoC and those who have joined the capitalist class in the last few decades, as well as between caste groups.

Chapter 6 presents evidence on the political economy of the nearby towns by first showing the changes, or the lack of it, in the social structure of accumulation in various sectors of the non-farm economy. This is followed by showing the nature and extent of growth in the non-farm economy in the two regions, utilising both secondary data and primary fieldwork data. Lastly, it links the regional variation in accumulation patterns with the nature and form of rural politics during the farmers' protests through a discussion on the farmer-arhtiya relations in the two regions. The evidence discussed in this chapter also allows us to contribute to the debate on the contemporary relevance of the Agrarian Question(s) of Capital (AQC) in India.

The final empirical chapter, Chapter 7, presents evidence on the classes of labour in the fieldwork villages. Firstly, the social, economic, and spatial fragmentation of livelihoods among them is examined, followed by an analysis of how the capital

accumulation patterns of rural and urban capitalists have influenced this fragmentation. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the politics of classes of labour in the two regions. Chapter 8 summarises and concludes the thesis.

2: A 'Conjugated Class-Caste Analysis' and Capital Accumulation in Rural India

This chapter explores the role of rural/agrarian capital accumulation in development theory and practice, the concepts used to study it, and how its importance has evolved—from being at the core of development theory during the period of national freedom movements and decolonisation, especially for socialist development, to being made significantly less central and even made redundant in some countries of the global South under neoliberal capitalist development. It expands on the earlier discussion in the introduction chapter on why it is still important to investigate the processes and agents of capital accumulation in rural India despite its declined role in overall capitalist development under neoliberalism. Thereafter, this chapter moves to a discussion on the framework and methods used to identify the classes that accumulate capital in rural India in section 2.2. It engages with various strands of critique of class analysis, such as those by Marxist feminists and scholars of race, caste, and ethnicity. It integrates these insights to arrive at a conjugated class-caste analysis of the rural households in section 2.3. It is proposed that this synthesis is crucial to our understanding of rural society, encompassing not only the poverty of Dalits, Adivasis, and other members of the labouring classes from different castes but also the accumulation and domination of the dominant castes. Such a synthesis brings more complexity but certainly more authenticity and proximity to the complex realities of rural societies, historical and contemporary.

2.1 Rural-Agrarian Accumulation and Agrarian Question of Capital Amidst Agrarian Distress: Some Theoretical Concerns

This emphasis on capital development in rural areas, primarily in agriculture, as a fulcrum of overall capitalist economic development was understood as the central 'Agrarian Question' (AQ hereafter) within Marxist development literature. Although less influential than the 'structural transformation' theory within mainstream development literature (Kuznets, 1973; Lewis, 1954; Rostow, 1959), it was widely used by Marxian political economists in the 1970s and 1980s. The study of AQs—of production,

accumulation, and politics—was quite prominent in the Indian social sciences, with the mode of production debate of the 1970s and 1980s being one such example (Thorner, 1982, Patnaik, 1990a). The AQ, in a classical sense, was widely regarded as resolved in any capitalist economy once agriculture paved the way for a mature industrial sector by providing land, labour, capital, food, raw materials, and a home market, while differentiating peasants into the polar classes of capitalists and landless workers (see Byres, 1986, 1991).

The idea took an explicit developmental turn in 1925 when Soviet economist Preobrazhensky brought forth the concept of 'primitive *socialist* accumulation' to remove the bottlenecks in the socialist project of rapidly industrialising a 'backward', agriculture-dependent economy by using agrarian surpluses when other sources of surpluses, especially from external sources, were scarce. The question of financing planned industrialisation and the role of agriculture in it became crucial for many countries during the heady days of decolonisation and national liberation struggles (Byres, 1991, 1996).

Byres (1986, 1991) made a valuable contribution to the study of AQ in the industrialised parts of the global north and identified several ways in which the state 'extracted' agrarian surpluses for industrialisation of these countries, such as through heavy taxation on agricultural produce, income from food exports, and the most widely discussed in the literature—'terms of trade'—that is, when the average prices received by the agricultural producers were less than the average price paid by them in buying inputs and consumption commodities, it leads to transfer of agrarian surpluses to other sectors of the economy (see Mitra 1977).

The role of agrarian accumulation and surplus transfer in the industrialisation or overall capitalist development of the industrialised global north countries, especially England and Western European countries, as well as the 'underdeveloped' economies of the global south had come to be questioned by scholars since the 1970s and 1980s, from within Marxism as well as beyond it (see Bernstein, 1996, Breman, 2019, Li, 2017). Empirical evidence from Ishikawa (1967) and Karshenas (1989) indicates that, in most developed countries, except for Japan and Taiwan, funds had to be initially channelled *into* agriculture rather than extracting a surplus *from* it. And that in most cases where

state intervention was made into the agrarian economy, it was guided more by food considerations than by extracting surplus from it to finance industry. Dunham (1989) argued that, rather than relying on surpluses from agriculture or the savings of larger farmers, industry is more likely to be funded by profits from trade or by profits generated within the industry, such as through the super-exploitation of the urban proletariat. Questions were also raised by these scholars about whether the state in global South countries was indeed capable of driving such inter-sectoral transfers of surpluses.

This theory has also been accused of being blind to the processes of colonisation, slavery, and settler colonialism in the resolution of the AQ of the global north. Since these avenues are not available to countries in the global South, which continue to operate under a new age of imperialism, the question of transferring agrarian surpluses for industrialisation is flawed. For instance, Moyo, Jha, and Yeros (2013), Patnaik & Moyo (2011), and Shivji (2019) argue that more than domestic agriculture, it was the surpluses from agriculture of the colonised countries that led to the expansion of industrialisation in the global North countries. On the labour side, the surplus population released from agriculture was not absorbed by industry alone but also shipped off to the Americas, Australia, and other settler colonies. The 'food question' for those who joined the urban proletariat in these countries was also managed through cheap food imports.[14], which reduced the cost of reproducing labour power and further augmented the surplus for capital. Therefore, these scholars have argued that what appears as a resolution of AQ (of both labour and capital) in these countries was, in reality, *exported* to the global south, which prevented the latter from resolving their AQ.

Notwithstanding the debate on the role of AQ in the industrialisation of the global north, the debate around whether agrarian surpluses in global South can contribute to their industrial development has settled over time, arguably due to the devastating impact of neoliberal globalisation. Triggered by the recession in the Western world, neoliberalism has promoted the freedom and mobility of global capital, particularly financial capital. At the same time, institutions such as the WTO, the World Bank (WB), and the

[14] More than 20 per cent of wheat in Britain was secured from the Indian sub-continent alone. Same goes for other wage goods such as sugar, beef, and other foods (McMichael 2014).

International Monetary Fund (IMF) impose restrictions on state expenditure for rural and agricultural development and welfare and enforce the deregulation and restructuring of markets (Bernstein, 2010, McMichael, 2014). This has led to other sources, such as domestic and foreign direct investment (FDI) and foreign institutional investment (FII), being viewed as the primary sources of development finance by most developing countries. Far from being seen as a source of surplus and capital, the rural and agriculture are considered primarily a source of worry and concern, to be resolved by subjugating it to the private agro-corporations, both upstream and downstream of agriculture (Bernstein, 2010, McMichael, 2016, Clapp & Isakson, 2018).

In addition to the growing dependence on private big capital for developmental finance, Bernstein argues that raw materials and food are being provided, at least partly and increasingly so, from the world market, and the national growth has been sustained, not by creating a domestic market for industrial goods in agriculture or in rural areas but through export-led sectors and sectors catering to the urban middle class. As such, the 'classic' agrarian question of capital can be considered as 'dead' or bypassed for *most* regions of the developing countries without its resolution (Bernstein, 2006, 2010), although with continuing significance and diversity in some social formations (Bernstein, 2015, Byres, 2016, Mishra & Harriss-White, 2015, Harriss-White et al., 2022). Bernstein (2015, 2016) clarifies that this does not mean rural and agricultural areas no longer contribute at all to structural transformation. Sectoral flow out of agriculture—to industry or other sectors, depending on the case—is often the case, and it happens at a different pace in different regions, but its contribution has been diminished to the point that it may no longer be a significant or primary source for broader capitalist development and accumulation in most countries of the global South. With the AQ (of capital) being bypassed without leading to any concomitant structural transformation of the economy, there remains only an AQ of labour in developing countries, which includes their land, that struggles to reproduce itself in contemporary capitalism (Bernstein, 2007; Lerche, 2010; Pattenden, 2023).

In the Indian context, many scholars in the pre-liberalisation period, such as K N Raj (1976) and Krishna Bharadwaj (1995), argued that the relationship between agricultural and industrial growth was positive, while others, such as Sau (1988), saw the lack of it

as a paradox (see Baru 2000 for a review of this discussion and evidence supporting the former view). In the post-liberalisation period, however, Lerche (2011, 2013, 2014) and Harriss-White (2016a) have taken a similar position as Bernstein. Lerche (2013) notes using secondary datasets that the data does not reveal any straightforward relationship between agrarian surplus and industrialisation.[15] He cites Chandrasekhar (2007), who used the input-output table for the Indian economy to argue that "in 1968–69, a one-unit rise in industrial output was likely to enhance demand from agriculture by 0.247 units, which was reduced to 0.087 by 1993–94." Second, there has been no net transfer of value from agriculture, especially since the liberalisation period, as the Terms of Trade, despite enormous fluctuations, have improved in favour of agriculture during this period. Third, he argues that the delinking of agriculture and industry can be further gauged by the fact that the non-agricultural sector grew rapidly during the 1990s despite the agricultural sector showing weak growth during the same period.

In a similar vein, Harriss-White's longitudinal fieldwork over forty years in a small town in northern Tamil Nadu (2016c), perhaps the best source of fieldwork evidence on this question, albeit from just one town, found that despite massive agricultural growth in the hinterland, local agriculture was not the sole or even main driver of the transformation of the town, and increasingly unimportant: in the decade since 2000, rural-agro capital (which included not just capitalist farmers but also water lords and machine-lords) have been successful in gaining foothold in agro-industry by leasing in mills from bigger industrialists. However, such movement of surplus from agriculture to industry played an increasingly minor role in the overall capitalist development of her study region, which, after economic liberalisation in the 1990s, has expanded into multiple sectors and activities, particularly silk weaving and workshop-based manufacturing, and much more expansive than what the agrarian sector could contribute to. The only thing the market town continued to depend on its rural hinterland was for labour.

[15] For instance, there is very little global financial investment in the mining sector. India remains a very unattractive place for global mining capital because of the burdens of the 'regulatory regime'. However, the current political regime under Narendra Modi has been diluting the regulations to attract more private capital in the name of 'ease of doing business' (see Jaffrelot et al., 2019; Banaji, 2020).

Under these circumstances of a bypassed agrarian question under neoliberal globalisation and an international corporate International Food Regime (IFR), led by the international agro-corporations, the incomes of small-scale producers in India, who constitute 86 per cent of the total agrarian producers in India, and similarly high share among many other countries of the global South (Athreya et al., 2017), have tended to deflate and become more volatile (Bernstein, 2010; McMichael, 2014). Moreover, their displacement and dispossession from means of sustenance have seen a sharp rise (Borras Jr. et al., 2022), the global food crises in the form of food riots have become a recurring theme (McMichael, 2014; Patel, 2013), and agroecology has been adversely impacted due to the spread of monoculture and a general agro-industrial intensification, contributing to an ecological crisis and the global climate crisis (Clapp et al., 2018; Isakson, 2014; Paprocki & McCarthy, 2024; Taşdemir Yaşın, 2022).

This has warranted some scholars to argue that there is no pressing need to study the old AQs, that is, of capitalist penetration in the countryside, the resulting socio-economic differentiation, and agriculture's contribution to funding industrialisation (see McMichael, 2014, p. 62 and Patnaik, 2011, 2015, 2022 for a similar argument from Indian context).[16] Instead, there is a need to reformulate the AQ to focus more on unpacking the global food systems and 'food's contribution to capital accumulation' (Brown, 2020; McMichael, 2014, p. 41) on a global scale. Focus is also placed on challenging the IFR, as rural inhabitants are more affected by global value creation and exchange than by the penetration of capital in agriculture alone (Clapp & Isakson, 2018). The political and policy suggestions are to challenge the labour-displacing capitalist penetration in agriculture, the argument being that those displaced from agriculture have nowhere to go, and instead to ensure the viability of small-scale farmers who provide livelihoods for the majority in the global south countries (Patnaik, 2022). The smaller farmers are said to be inherently sustainable, equitable and a

[16] Patnaik, whose work on internal class differentiation within peasantry is considered a classic in the field (1976, 1986), has moved away from that position since. She has argued that neoliberal globalisation has reproduced old colonial patterns wherein the global South is forced to produce goods which the supermarkets of the global north can place on their shelves and at the same time, reducing per-capital foodgrain availability in the global south countries. She shows that India's per capita food-grain availability in the 2010s has declined to levels that were last seen in the colonial period in 1937. Under these conditions, she argues, the problems faced by the peasantries of the global south cannot be understood through a singular focus on internal class dynamics.

naturally superior alternative to industrial food production (Li, 2023; van der Ploeg, 2014). The demand for "food sovereignty" (the democratic right of nations and people to control their food systems) and "agroecology" (sustainable, equitable, and culturally appropriate agriculture) are two bold expressions of these radical food movements, most notably by La Via Campesina (Borras, 2023a).

The above arguments have revealed the declining developmental potential of rural/domestic/provincial capital accumulation under neoliberalism, an increasingly globalised impact on the rural population of the global South and emphasised the need to build broad-based 'radical food movements' across countries. While these are certainly useful arguments, scholars like Lerche (2013) have noted a tendency among some scholars within critical agrarian studies to underplay the role of concrete socio-economic relations within particular rural social formations, such as the differentiation between peasants, or between peasants/family farmers and landless or migrant labourers (see also Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010; Bernstein, 2010, 2016; Borras, 2023; Pattenden, 2023 for such a critique). At least in India, Lerche continues, a generalised pauperisation of all peasants, as the literature on the corporate food regimes suggests, has not yet materialised. In other words, while this literature enhances our understanding of *global* capitalism, it falls short of comprehending historically and geographically specific patterns of *local* capitalism, as it tends to eschew or sidestep discussions of the fault lines of caste, gender, class, and their conjugation to build broad-based radical food sovereignty movement (see also Jakobsen, 2025; Lerche, 2013).

This has a profound impact on the scope and promise of progressive rural politics, with the Indian farmers' protest a case in point. There has been a tendency among many scholars to present the farmers' protest as a generalised resistance of the Indian peasantry to the neoliberal restructuring of the agriculture sector (see Jain, 2020; Kumar, 2022; Thandi, 2022). In contrast, many Dalit and labouring class organisations have raised concerns that such articulations allowed the farmer organisations to push their interests to the background, especially once the protest movement ended (see Lerche, 2022; Sabharwal & Singh, 2022). Therefore, this thesis aligns with Bernstein (2010, 2016), Lerche (2013), and other scholars, such as Jakobsen (2025) and Otero

(2016), in arguing that *both* internal and external dynamics of agrarian change can be, and need to be, investigated simultaneously. Acknowledging and addressing these class, caste, and gendered inequalities is crucial, both in theory and in strengthening rural progressive social movements (Bansal, 2024; Pattenden, 2023). Therefore, a focus on big capital, both domestic and international, must be accompanied by a nuanced analysis of the local, domestic or provincial capital and labour, especially in highly caste, gender, and ethnically stratified societies such as India (Byres, 2016; Lerche, 2014).

Further, the relevance of studying rural capital accumulation and differentiation does not just come from its importance in enabling or thwarting capitalist growth (or distress), or whether it has continued or halted, or if it contributes or constrains the working of the global market and capital flows, but also because, as this thesis shows, rural-agrarian accumulation and accumulating classes continue to play an essential role in determining property and power relations in the countryside, and the diversity between and within them (see also Lerche, 2023; Pattenden, 2016, 2023; Philip, 2023).

Moreover, keeping an eye on capital accumulation brings under academic scrutiny those who occupy the top of the rural-agrarian hierarchy, which helps respond to a long-standing critique against agrarian studies and Marxian political economy in India that it has excluded a study of caste and within it, the privileged or forward castes in its analysis of capitalism (Jodhka, 2022a; Jodhka & Naudet, 2019, p. 201; Viswanath, 2014). Ambedkarite discourse has also emphasised that caste is not merely a Dalit or Bahujan problem, but as much a savarna/dominant caste problem and any study of caste and political economy needs to also subvert the subject of research from Dalits and Adivasis to the savarna elites, which this thesis attempts to do.

2.2 Classes and Class Analysis: Some Debates and Critique

This leads us to a discussion on the methods of analytically understanding differentiation and accumulation within concrete rural-agrarian societies. Wright (2015) argues that the different traditions of class analysis are anchored in three distinct clusters of causal mechanisms: (1) stratification approaches to class define it in terms of individual attributes and conditions such as land ownership or incomes; (2)

Weberian approaches define classes in terms of a variety of mechanisms of opportunity hoarding; and (3) Marxist approaches define class in terms of mechanisms of exploitation and domination, usually based on their ownership over means of production in conjugation with their racial and gendered identities, such that classes identified in the society are conceived as inter-related and connected, with one class holding power to exploit and oppress the other classes (see also Aslany, 2020).

In a relational class analysis, the classes are identified and named by the power relation in which they are embedded—such as dominant classes, capitalist farmers, labouring classes, and petty commodity producers. This is unlike the apolitical and ahistorical classes identified using the semi-relational class analysis used in the works of Weber, Amartya Sen and more recently Thomas Piketty who identify classes such as the middle-classes, the rich, and the poor by mapping the distribution of individual attributes such as land ownership or income onto the distribution of inequality (Pattenden, 2016; Wright, 2015).

In class analysis of agrarian societies in India (and elsewhere), scholars have identified a thin class of landlords and capitalist farmers at the top, a differentiated class of peasantry in the middle, and the manual, working or labouring class at the bottom, who are usually the most numerous. The tradition of class analysis of rural societies among Marxists goes back at the least to Lenin (1920), Mao (see Patnaik 1976), and in the Indian context by Patnaik (1976), Athreya et al. (1990), Ramachandran (2011) and various publications by the Foundation of Agrarian Studies.

However, there are debates among Marxists around rural-agrarian class analysis and critique of such a class analysis from non-Marxists, which are relevant to our study. Firstly, there is a debate regarding the term labouring classes, with Bernstein popularising the term 'classes of labour' to better reflect the level of precarity of labour under neoliberal capitalism. Secondly, there is a debate regarding peasantry—whether they are better understood as petty commodity producers (PCPs) under capitalism and whether some among them are better seen as part of the 'classes of labour' instead of a separate class. Third, there is a critique that Marxian classification often overlooks the non-agricultural aspects of rural households despite non-agricultural wages and incomes becoming an increasingly significant part of the rural economy. Lastly, there is

a conversation around integrating race, caste, gender/patriarchy, social reproduction, tribe, and ethnicity within an analysis of capitalism, partially in response to the critique levelled against class analysis for sidestepping or using them only schematically in its analysis. These debates are summarised below, and insights drawn from them are used in Section 2.3 when undertaking class analysis of the households in the fieldwork villages.

2.2.1 From Agricultural Labourers to Rural Labourers to Classes of Labour: Neoliberal Capitalism and its Implications for Rural-based Labourers

Fieldwork-based evidence from rural India suggests that an overwhelmingly high and growing proportion of rural landless and land-poor households, who constitute the bulk of the rural households, now depend on diverse sources of incomes for their simple reproduction, by taking up insecure, informal, casualised jobs within and outside agriculture and often combining it with small-scale farming or non-accumulating petty self-employment in the informal non-farm economy (see Dhar 2017, Bakshi 2017, Ramachandran 2019, Pattenden 2016, Lerche 2010). As a result, it is becoming difficult to place workers in neat categories of peasants, agricultural workers or non-agricultural workers. These jobs could be in the local farms or in nearby cities or at far-away construction or industrial sites or farms and plantations in other states or regions where they are alienated from the local population.

Bernstein (2007, 2010) has conceptualised this growing share of in-between households as 'classes of labour' (CoL) to capture the increasing segmentation and fragmentation of labour across sites of production and reproduction, while also emphasising their shared position of being exploited by capital, directly or indirectly. These households are also subject to internal divisions of labour along gendered and generational lines, with unequal distribution of productive and reproductive labour (see Bhattacharya, 2017; Mezzadri 2020).

While such an articulation is certainly useful, this thesis adapts it for the Indian context where land and labour are often divided across caste lines, with smaller landowning farmers/PCPs usually belonging to the dominant or middle castes, while Dalits are

overrepresented among landless labourers. Even during the recent farmers' protests, small landowning farmers whose sons and daughters worked in the informal, urban economy as casual or petty salaried workers, and thus clearly a member of the CoL according to the above definition, saw a re-emergence of their *Kisan* or peasant identity, which lent power and stability to the protest movement (Kumar, 2022). This thesis uses CoL as a first-tier classification of households and then differentiates them into two sub-classes—one with a recent history of joining the CoL such as the poor or landless Jutts and the other consisting of those who have been historically oppressed and prevented from owning land and provide labour. This discussion is carried forward in the subsequent sections to finally arrive at a conjugated class-caste analysis in section 2.3 of this chapter.

2.2.2 Peasantry or Petty Commodity Producers? Are peasants/PCPs part of Classes of Labour?

Harriss-White (2023a) argues that there has been no agreed definition of a peasant in history, but Shanin's (1971) definition of peasants as "family-based, self-supporting, labouring smallholders with a distinctive community-based culture, whose surplus above subsistence, as and when it was produced, was appropriated by outsiders as rent, tax, interest, corvee or through adverse terms of trade" comes close. These peasants were declared dead by Hobsbawm (2011) and Bernstein (2004) by the late colonial period and subsequently transformed into petty commodity producers (PCPs hereafter) under capitalism. PCPs, like their previous avatar, continue to remain family-based (as they tend to use their land or other means of production and family labour along gendered and generation lines for production while also hiring some workers for some parts of the production process); small-scale (as they reproduce in simple rather than expanded form); and remain subjugated to other classes and the state (Harriss-White, 2023b). However, unlike peasants, they no longer produce solely for subsistence or self-consumption but primarily for market exchange, often using inputs purchased from the market. In Marxian terms, they produce and consume 'commodities' and cannot reproduce themselves outside the national and global capitalist commodity circuits, including land, finance, and inputs, among others, in which they are adversely incorporated through unequal exchange.

Pattenden (2016, 2022) has argued that some of the agrarian PCPs reproduce on an expanded scale, that is, they are able to generate petty surpluses, appropriate them, and invest those surpluses in a way that helps them accumulate, often through the greater exploitation of others' labour power. They were previously termed 'rich peasants' but are now better understood as 'petty agrarian capitalists' or 'petty capitalist farmers'. However, he continues, most PCPs do not accumulate, just like their previous avatar of small or poor peasantry. In fact, under neoliberalism, where opportunities for secure, upward socio-economic mobility have been minimal, they are increasingly forced to combine agrarian PCP with precarious wage labour or other forms of non-agrarian PCP for part of the year, usually in the informal sector.

Pattenden sees these non-accumulating PCPs are seen as part of the 'classes of labour' even though these PCPs sometimes hire the labour-power of the latter, often at low wages. However, when seen as part of the broader capitalist relations in which they are enmeshed, these non-accumulating PCPs are themselves exploited both 'indirectly' as the 'income they receive from the sale of commodities is lower than the value it generates' and directly when they engage in wage labour (Pattenden, 2023). The implication here is that instead of exploitation *within* classes of labour, both non-accumulating PCPs and the landless labourers they hire are exploited by capital, petty or grand.

Pattenden (2022) explains this using a concrete example of a PCP farmer- cum-street-food maker/seller who "uses family labour and does not accumulate herself, but nevertheless contributes to the broader process of capitalist accumulation by providing cheap services (street food) and commodities that lower the costs of reproduction across society and thereby allow capitalists to pay lower wages, lower their overall costs and increase their rate of surplus-value extraction" (Pattenden, 2022). Banaji's (1977, 2016) conceptualisation of PCPs as disguised wage labour when they are 'formally' subsumed to the logic of (commercial) capital is also a valuable articulation to think through this debate.

The two articulations discussed above—of peasants transforming into PCPs under capitalism and viewing most PCPs as part of CoL under neoliberalism—have been controversial among both scholars and activists and have been critiqued analytically as

well as for their political implications. Firstly, agrarian politics and some scholars on the left in India have preferred to continue using the term '*chhota/gareeb/maada Kisan*', which translates to 'smaller or poor farmers' instead of PCPs, and while calling for a broad 'farmer-worker unity', they have preferred to treat poor peasants and manual labourers as separate classes (see Athreya et al., 2017, pp. 17–18; Ramachandran et al., 2010; Swaminathan & Das, 2017, p. 201). While acknowledging the political limitations of the terms PCP and CoL in the Indian context, this thesis prefers to use PCP over small farmers or peasants for its greater analytical strength.

Secondly, scholars such as Harriss-White (2023b) have warned against the wholesale inclusion of non-accumulating PCPs into CoL. She argues that even when PCPs are exploited, when they have enough autonomy to determine their rates of return, they cannot be seen as disguised wage labour or as part of CoL. Further, even when they are indeed akin to wage labour, they may not be on the trajectory to be 'true' wage labour. Drawing from her five decades of fieldwork in a small town in Northern Tamil Nadu, she finds that many PCP firms prefer not to incur debt, as there is a moral obligation in favour of independence and freedom to bargain, as well as the security of not being dependent on others. While they may not accumulate much, they tend to expand through the multiplication of their firms, trading units, and farms, with such surpluses often transferred at marriage or as inheritance. Instead of CoL, she sees such PCPs as a separate class dominating India's informal economy, both in agriculture and outside it—86 per cent of all landholdings in India were small and marginal in 2015-16, and 95 per cent of the registered firms in the non-agricultural sector employed fewer than five workers. This, she argues, makes PCPs a persistent and even a flourishing feature of India's capitalist development under neoliberalism, contrary to conventional Marxian understanding, which she argues sees them as transitional, transitory, or pre-capitalist, or bound to disappear with the penetration of market relations and institutions (see Harriss-White, 2018; Jan & Harriss-White, 2012). The implication is that there is merit in analysing PCPs and their politics as a separate, 'awkward' class with its own politics and processes of differentiation and accumulation (Harriss-White, 2012, 2018).

Borrowing insights from the above debate and paying attention to the local fieldwork context, this thesis takes a middle path—it divides PCPs into three parts: PCPs that

accumulate, non-accumulating PCPs that do not engage in precarious wage labour, and non-accumulating PCPs that also engage in precarious wage labour or other forms of agrarian or non-agrarian PCP. In the specific context of fieldwork of Punjab, especially the Malwa region, many dominant caste PCPs were prevented by their caste identity from seeking work as wage labourers, preferring instead to start a new non-agrarian PCP venture such as petty trading, commission-based part-time work such as tractor sale/purchase, livestock sale/purchase, petty shopkeeping, from which they may or may not accumulate surplus. Since there is a lack of information on whether such PCPs determined their rates of return, this thesis considers only those PCPs as part of the CoL whose at least one member engaged in any wage labour as their primary or secondary occupation.

A detailed discussion on the share of PCPs and CoLs in the fieldwork villages will be presented in Chapter 5; however, it is helpful to note here that, contrary to Harriss-White's (2023b) finding, PCPs in rural Punjab appear to be tapering out over time. This class has been the most dynamic one—with most PCPs moving down to join the classes of labour, especially in the Majha region, where social barriers to joining the labouring class were less pronounced, and some graduating to join the classes of capital (through accumulation as well as multiplication). We will revisit this critique at the end of this section when we discuss the classes identified in this thesis.

2.2.3 Landlord and Capitalist Farmers or Classes of Capital: Non-Farm Diversification and Agrarian Class Analysis

Fieldwork-based studies have observed an increasing tendency among those with bigger and better landholdings to expand their sources of surplus by investing in non-farm businesses or through foreign emigration to developed countries or government-sector jobs. A detailed review of this literature will come in Chapter 3, but it is important here to underline the increasing flows of capital, goods, labour, and networks between the villages and towns/cities in the accumulation of rich peasants or petty capitalists in some regions as well as their control over the state in facilitating their diversified accumulation activities (see Aslany, 2020; Balagopal, 1987; Heyer, 2016; Himanshu et al., 2016; Jodhka, 2018; Parthasarathy, 2015; Philip, 2023).

Earlier, the ratio of such landowning households, which generated most of their income from non-agrarian businesses or investments, alongside income from cultivation or land rent, used to be low, and it made sense to keep them out of class analysis by labelling them as 'others' (see Athreya et al., 2017 and the classification criteria used by the Foundation for Agrarian Studies in their various publications). However, with growing numbers of such households in recent decades, especially in regions more deeply entrenched in capitalist circuits, such as the Palanpur village in western Uttar Pradesh that has been intensely studied over seven decades (see Himanshu et al., 2016) as well as the Majha fieldwork village in this study, it is essential to include them within class analysis. It must be recognised that class categorisations such as capitalist farmers, landlords, rich peasants/farmers emphasise only the agrarian aspect of their class position while concealing the diversifying bases of their accumulation in their class locations.

In addition to such diversified capitalist households, there are households that have high levels of income and the potential to expand their surpluses through investments; however, most of their surpluses are not generated directly through the exploitation of others' labour power and the appropriation of that surplus value. For instance, medium-landowning households that have stable, secure, and well-paying sources of non-farm income, such as public sector jobs, skilled and secure private sector jobs (e.g., bank managers), and remittances from members living and working in developed countries, unless they were irregular or 'illegal' immigrants. Such households, too, are usually excluded from agrarian class analysis.

Scholars such as Aslany (2020) have preferred to treat these households separately as 'middle classes' wedged between capitalists and PCPs. Aslany argued that they were neither capitalists because their labour power was being exploited in the factories where they worked, nor were they PCPs because they didn't produce commodities. While that is useful, it adds to analytical complexity and complicated presentation of fieldwork data. Instead, this thesis proposes that in such circumstances, it is more useful to update the categories by using terms like 'rural classes of capital' or 'surplus-accumulating households' for these households, mainly since such households constituted a smaller share of rural households than Aslany's (2020) case of a highly

industrialised rural setup. Moreover, non-farm diversification by these households was often aimed at capital accumulation, such as when they purchased land or an urban plot and frequently placed them in a position to exploit others' labour power, as seen when they constructed big residential houses or hired labour for cultivation. In addition, their lifestyle, class interests, and behaviour were largely aligned with those of the capitalist classes, not least because they often shared a caste identity with them, further justifying their inclusion among classes of capital or surplus-accumulating households.

2.2.4 Race, Caste and Gender within Class Analysis

Marxist and socialist feminists, as well as scholars of caste, racism and ethnicity, have critiqued Marxian understanding of class and class relations for being weak and sticky in terms of its inability to integrate issues of race, caste, gender, ethnicity and other axes of oppression within its framework as well as its politics. For instance, Ambedkar was highly critical of Indian Marxists' class analysis and class politics that homogenised the reality of caste-segregated Indian workers as proletariats without annihilating caste. This separation of class from caste and other sociological categories, Omvedt (1994) notes, came with the influence of Marxism in India in the 1920s, which was not the case earlier.[17] Later, the modes of production debate that ran in the 1970s and 80s in India has been used as an example to argue that agrarian studies in India struggle with a 'caste conundrum' (Jodhka, 2022a), often continuing to carry out class analysis using purely economic and statistical variables (Balagopal, 1986; Viswanath, 2014). Among the black population in the US, too, Marxism was seen as a 'white man's word' that had no place for the Blacks (Davis, 1994; Du Bois, 1933). Socialist Feminists, such as Gimenez (2005), Dalla Costa and James (1971), and Hartmann (1979), concluded that Marxism was a gender-blind theory, as it could not capture the dynamics of patriarchal oppression that coexisted with capitalism, having traditionally focused narrowly on the sites of production.

[17] Earlier, for Phule, she argues, economic and social and political domination, and exploitation had been interwoven factors, but with Marxism came the paradigmatic polarities of 'class and caste', 'base and superstructure', 'economic and social/cultural/ideological'. This meant that left leaning activists and academics took class as the base or primary, and for anti-caste activities, including Ambedkar himself, the primacy was in cultural/ideological spheres and a secondary relevance of class and economics.

In the following paras, we will discuss the attempts made to extend and respond to such critiques of Marxian analysis of capitalism and incorporate some of these insights into the class analysis of the fieldwork villages in the next section.

Scholars rooted in black radical tradition, such as Cedric Robinson (1983), have underscored the fallacy of some conventional Marxist understanding of capitalism being a 'progressive' force compared to the previous feudal epoch for suggesting that it necessarily dilutes social hierarchies and creates a 'doubly free' wage labour by moving away from feudalistic labour unfreedom. Instead, he argues that racialisation, bondage, and unfreedom were key components of European capitalist development. The prevalence of racialised, segmented, unfree, informal labour is not a sign of an economy being *outside* proper capitalism, but it constitutes the primary and necessary component to keep the system moving. Post (2023), in fact, argues that the "structure of capitalism both *compels* and *enables* capitalists to ideologically and politically *differentiate* workers whose conditions of life and work are ostensibly becoming *homogeneous*" (Post, 2023, emphasis in original). Capital does not just use existing stereotypes based on gender, race, caste, ethnicity, and other socially constructed identities but sometimes invents fictional characteristics to differentiate labour into free and unfree labour, superior and inferior, efficient and lazy, martial/militant and meek, and to identify specific forms of social production and reproduction systems as unproductive and primitive such as self-sufficiency. Thus, making racialisation a consistent feature of capitalism and capitalist accumulation, the solution to which must be sought beyond capitalism rather than within it.

This co-constitutive understanding of race and capitalism helps think through the intersections of caste and class and can serve as a critique for those who advocate for more capitalism for Dalits and other oppressed groups (see also Prakash and Harriss-White 2014; Prakash, 2015).[18] In the Indian context, barring a few on the left who have

[18] There is also a debate about whether race existed before capitalism—with Robinson (1983) and Virdee (2021) arguing that it did predate capitalism, while Post (2021) disagrees by arguing that race, as he defined it, was purely a product of capitalist development. The differentiation between people in the pre-capitalism epoch was on the basis of kinship, religion, etc, which was not unchangeable. Extrapolating the latter position would mean that the Indian caste system, whose origin predates capitalism, took a racialised form only after capitalism. While it is true that the caste system was more flexible, and there

stayed with the notion that the prevalence of caste and caste-based oppression is evidence of semi-feudal, semi-colonial relations of production, it is now argued to be a central and equally modern feature of Indian capitalism (Chhabria, 2023, p. 202; Mosse, 2018; Teltumbde, 2010).

With respect to gender and class analysis, the Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) has emerged as an essential framework for responding to and extending this critique of class, underscoring the need to analyse gender relations in conjunction with class and capitalism (T. Bhattacharya, 2017; Federici, 2004; Mezzadri, 2020; Mies, 1986). It recognises the centrality of gendered, racialised, un/underpaid labour of social reproduction and care work for capitalist accumulation, and even though it remains outside its wage, it *consistently* produces and reproduces the wage labour, without whom there would be no labour power to exploit in the first place (T. Bhattacharya, 2017; Guérin, 2013; Rao, 2018), and no economy, no polity, and no culture" (Fraser, 2016).[19]

Within the agrarian political economy, feminist political economists, such as O'Laughlin (2009), have emphasised the relative lack of a gendered analysis of the agrarian question. The processes of differentiation, she argues, are shaped by gender—a social relation of subordination—which can often be concealed in household-based analysis. Other scholars have demonstrated that the impact of unequal gender relations within a household can be substantial enough for men and women to be perceived as occupying distinct class positions within the household (da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999; Deere, 1995; S. Naidu & Rao, 2024; Rao, 2018; Rao et al., 2024). This is more so under neoliberalism and a bypassed agrarian transition where women from PCP and CoL have had to shoulder enhanced social reproductive burdens, in addition to their waged and unwaged productive work, to ensure their simple

have been instances of caste mobility in the pre-colonial era, including for Jutt Sikhs (Habib, 2022), it would not be accurate to see the whole system as fluid or allowing a certain degree of change. Moreover, there is a politics of who wanted a change in their caste location. However, we will sidestep this debate on whether racialisation and caste as we know it today predate capitalism.

[19] SRT has also expanded the definition of labour to include previously invisible tasks of direct and indirect care, moving the focus from the site of production to the site of its reproduction. Further, it has underlined that such labour is usually performed by groups marginalised by gender, race, ethnicity, and sometimes, in the form of a chain of care work (Ferguson and McNally 2014).

reproduction (Guérin et al., 2021; Mezzadri, 2020, p. 202; S. C. Naidu & Ossome, 2016; S. Naidu & Rao, 2024; Pattenden, 2023; Rao, 2018; Rao et al., 2024).

There have been several attempts at re-thinking the significance of caste, patriarchy and gender for the analysis of class and capitalism by assembling a theory that combines economic, social and political factors such as that by Omvedt (1994); Teltumbde (2010), Harriss-White (2003), Guha (2013) among others. Omvedt (1994) argued, for instance, that class alone does not explain the major aspects of exploitation and accumulation in a capitalist world system and that a theory of historical materialism needs to incorporate elements of violence, force, domination, and knowledge, as suggested by Phule. She insists that caste or patriarchy should neither be seen as merely superstructural or ideological nor only in the economic base. If one focuses solely on *jatis* or gender and their struggles as a means to rise in the Brahminical caste system without engaging with class, political economy, *and* capital's need to accumulate, it cannot be seen as progressive. Likewise, viewing the system solely ideologically or as part of the cultural sphere would overlook its significance in material exploitation. All exploited classes do not have an equal interest in overthrowing the caste system and patriarchy. It is, therefore, useful to identify all forms of exploitation and clarify that class-based exploitation is not the only form of exploitation and that class struggles are not the only forms of struggle against exploitation. Other struggles—of women, caste and tribal groups, etc are also struggles against exploitation and oppression and cannot be dismissed as ideological or belonging to the superstructure.

This understanding was given a concrete shape by Harriss-White (2003) using fieldwork evidence. She borrowed the term 'social structures of accumulation' from Kotz et al. (1994) to show how a complex of social, political and economic institutions such as caste, gender, religion, ethnicity, among others legitimise the division of labour and the distribution of surplus between labour and capital (p. 15). These social institutions, she argues, continue to play essential roles, suffusing the market and economy with power, authority, and force and, in process, enable and sustain the processes of capital accumulation and class formation process.

More recently, Lerche and Shah (2018) take into account the critique of Marxist feminists such as T. Bhattacharya (2017), Federici (2004) and scholars of race and ethnicity such as Bourgois (1988) and explore it in the context of the bypassing of the agrarian question in India (Bernstein, 2006; Lerche, 2013). They observe that capitalist development in India since the 1990s has led to the spread of the informal economy. Class relations in such a context are significantly different from those found in the global North, as they remain co-constituted and are shaped by complex interrelations of caste, tribe, ethnicity, gender, region, and other factors. Meaning that these axes of exploitation and oppression 'interact explosively' to 'produce an overwhelming experience of oppression that is more than the sum of its parts,' leading to 'conjugated oppression' (Bourgois, 1988).[20] This has meant that despite India's high growth period, most Dalits, Adivasis, and the poorer OBCs (including Muslims), including some from the dominant castes, remain at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy.

This thesis draws from and contributes to the rich and growing tradition among scholars of Marxian and feminist political economy, redefining class and opposing deterministic class analysis by applying its insights to the fieldwork data collected from two villages in rural Punjab. It echoes the critique that the Marxian class structure of capitalist farmer, PCPs, and Classes of labour used in the literature need to be unpacked in a way that they are seen as not just owners of capital or labour power or both, but also possessing a distinct caste identity with its own historical trajectory—of exploitation, oppression, as well as domination and privilege.

To clarify, it is not argued here that aspects of oppression and privilege are entirely absent from the Marxian class analysis of rural households, but it calls for more attention to be paid to these aspects (see also Philip, 2023; Yadav, 2022). Chakravarti (2001), for instance, prefers to refer to the Bhumihar landowning farmers in his

[20] Lerche and Shah (2018) distinguish their approach from the intersectionality framework, which while useful in highlighting how injustice and inequality are multi-dimensional involving several social identities, does not focus enough on how those identities shape each other (see also McNally & Vogel,2017). Intersectionality scholars tend to treat these categories as independent variables or vectors that may or may not intersect and, as Bhattacharya (2017) argues, fails to explain the 'logic of their intersection'. Moreover, Post (2024) argues that the later, more sophisticated versions of the theory such as by Roediger and Esch while "avoiding this atomistic understanding of oppression, still work from a simplistic, idealised understanding of capitalist accumulation and competition".

fieldwork region as '*maliks',* signifying their conjugated position as owners of land and exploiters of labour power, as well as their ability to exercise social and coercive power over landless and land-poor households. Similarly, Pattenden (2016) and Chatterjee (2022), drew on the work of M.N. Srinivas (1959), to refer to those at the top of the socio-economic hierarchy as 'dominant classes', highlighting their dominant caste and exploitative class positions.[21] This thesis contributes to this project by proposing a two-tier classification process, wherein each class is sub-classified to reflect its co-constitution with race, caste, and ethnicity while being attentive to the gendered dynamics that cut across them. This is discussed in the following section.

2.3 Using the Conjugated Framework to Identify Class-Castes in Rural India

Following from the debates discussed in the previous section and rooted in the Marxian theory of exploitation and labour theory of value, we arrive at the first stage of class analysis wherein we identify three classes—Classes of Labour (CoL), PCPs, and Classes of Capital (CoC). The data for this analysis was collected by canvassing questions related to a household's ownership and accumulation over time of means of production such as land, machinery, other agrarian or non-agrarian productive assets such as factories, commercial property etc, and net exploitation of labour power of all working-age family members (see Patnaik, 1976, Athreya et al., 1990, Ramchandran, 2011, Pattenden 2016). This requires forming an estimate of their usage of all family working age and adolescent family members on their own farm or business as well as on other's farms or businesses) relative to labour hired by them on their own land or non-farm business. The process of classifying these households, and the complications faced in such an analysis, is elaborated in Appendix 2.1.

After identifying these three broad classes, we use data collected using family lineage data (described in detail in Chapter 4) to identify the long-term changes in land ownership and occupational history over the course of three to four generations of a

[21] Literature from anthropology and sociology has used terms like 'provincial elites or provincial capital' (Kalaiyarasan A. & Vijayabaskar, 2021; Upadhya, 1988a), and 'provincial propertied class' (Balagopal 1987), among others.

household and infuse it with their caste position to arrive at a conjugated class-caste analysis. This leads us to a graded structure of inequalities at a household level (see Table 2.1) and helps us arrive at a complex but certainly more dynamic, concrete, integrated, and analytically useful social structure, and not just for those at the bottom of the structure, but also those at the top.[22] This nuancing of class analysis makes a valuable addition to the prevailing class analysis by incorporating the critiques discussed in the previous sections in four ways:

Table 2.1 Classification of households in fieldwork villages using the conjugated class-caste framework, 2021-22

Class-caste groups	Characteristics
Classes of capital	
Conjugated privileged *(including Landlord-turned CoC or dhanaad chaudhry and* Jutts or Savarnas moving up to CoC *or sarmaydar/takde jimidaar)*	HHs that accumulate surplus through the exploitation of others' labour power, appropriation, and accumulation of that surplus, allowing them to reduce their reliance on family labour. This includes ex-landlords, rich peasants, big capitalist farmers, or business owners among Jutt Sikhs, Brahmins, or Banias who have no history of their labour power being exploited or oppressed, show high dependence on hired labour for the reproduction of their class-caste position and continue to exert social dominance. It also includes Savarna or Jutt HHs that display middle or poor peasant characteristics in the past but have gained capital and wealth over time through the exploitation of others' labour power, appropriation, and accumulation of that surplus, allowing them to reduce their reliance on family labour. They exert social dominance, too, sometimes in collaboration and sometimes in competition with the above class-caste
Dalits/OBCs moving up to CoC	Dalit-Bahujan households with a history of economic exploitation and oppression or of self-exploitation in petty commodity production but who were able to generate and accumulate surplus through non-farm businesses or large-scale farming on capitalist lines by hiring others labour power.
Petty Commodity Producers (PCPs)	
Jutts or Savarna PCPs stagnant *(maade/mahtad jimidar)*	Savarna HHs that have combined positions of both capital and labour (such as middle or poor peasants), but are unable to appropriate and convert their petty surplus into capital while also successful in evading proletarianisation
Dalits/OBCs moving up to PCP	First-generation Dalit-Bahujan households with a history of economic exploitation and oppression but combine the position of both capital and labour now through the production or trade of petty goods and services but are unable to appropriate and convert their petty surplus into capital

[22] To be sure, Lerche and Shah (2018) and other Marxian political economists also look at exploitation and oppression relationally, meaning that it is also a study of those who exploit and oppress, but that aspect is rarely explored intensively.

Jutts or Savarnas moving down to PCP *(maade/mahtad jimidaar)*	Savarna HHs who exhibited a position of surplus production and economic exploitation in the past but failed to accumulate surplus over time and are forced to contribute family labour for their simple reproduction
Classes of labour (CoL)	
Jutts or Savarnas moving down to CoL *(be-zamine jimidar)*	HHs whose members work as casual wage labourers or as private salaried workers in the informal economy or as self-exploiting their labour in petty commodity production but are historically privileged in caste and/or class terms
Conjugated oppressed *(khet mazdoor/kirti kaame)*	Households whose members have been historically oppressed, and their labour power exploited on the intersection of caste, class, tribe, religion and others continue to be so

Note: (1) The usage of different types of terms for various caste groups is primarily to reflect their growing usage in contemporary socio-political discourse in India rather than relying solely on official classifications. For instance, Dalit, a political category first used by Phule and later popularised by Ambedkar is used instead of the constitutional term Scheduled Castes (SCs). Similarly, Adivasis is preferred over Scheduled Tribes (STs) to reflect indigenous self-identification. Likewise, Savarna, a theological category that has gained prominence within recent anti-caste discourse is used over the census category of General or Other Castes to refer to Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. However, Other Backward Classes (OBCs), a constitutional term is retained for the ex-Shudras castes, given its widespread usage in in contemporary academic and socio-political discussions.
(2) The parentheses mention the local terms used for these class-castes in the speeches of the various labouring class organisations.

Firstly, this framework enables us to understand the intricate relationship between caste and class and how it has evolved to reproduce socio-economic differences, resulting in its current state (see also Barth 1960, Guha, 2013). For instance, this classification helps differentiate within CoL between those who have only recently been proletarianised, fully or partially, such as the landless and land-poor Jutt Sikhs or Savarnas in our context from those who are termed in this thesis as 'conjugated oppressed' households, that is, those among Dalits, OBCs, and Adivasis who have historically been forced to be part of this class.[23] [24] Evidence reveals a marked difference in the nature of their economic exploitation—with the conjugated oppressed

[23] Notwithstanding a shared history, Dalits, OBCs (including Muslims), and Adivasis face different forms and severity of oppression and exploitation (see Lerche & Shah, 2018). Many ex-Shudra OBC peasant castes have, in fact, gained a dominant character in the post-independence era in various parts of India (see Jaffrelot 2003). Scholars have also pointed to rising differentiation within Dalits, with some sub-castes gaining a better foothold in education, secured employment, political representations, and other spheres of public presence than other Dalit sub-castes (see Teltumbde, 2009). Clubbing them together into one group, therefore warrants, analytical consideration. While methodologically, it is preferable to examine these groups separately, but in the local fieldwork context, it wasn't analytically very useful. Adivasis were non-existent and OBCs constituted a very small share—around 10 per cent—in both fieldwork villages. As a result, it was deemed useful to consolidate OBCs with Dalits to avoid creating a separate category for them or to exclude them from analysis altogether. Nevertheless, when discussing empirical evidence, the distinctions between Dalits and OBCs, as well as within Dalits and OBCs have been examined in detail, for instance, in Chapter 7 on simple reproduction patterns of CoL households.
[24] All Jutt or Savarna households in CoL category had a history of land ownership and were earlier part of the peasantry. Hence, there is no category for stagnant Savarna CoLs in this analysis.

households facing heightened insecurity and precarity, stigmatisation, and marginalisation than newly proletarianised Jutt Sikhs (see Chapter 7), which is often concealed by terms like CoL alone (see also Guérin, 2013). While both these groups face economic exploitation under neoliberal capitalism, the social oppression experienced by the latter contributes to the hyper-exploitation of their labour, keeping them locked into this system. As shown later in Chapter 7, roughly ninety-seven per cent of Dalit-OBC households continued to experience exploitation and social oppression under a bypassed agrarian transition.

Secondly, we are able to identify and differentiate within CoC to distinguish classes of capital from the historically oppressed and exploited groups of Dalits, OBCs, and Adivasis, from those who have been termed in this thesis as the 'conjugated privileged' households, that is, those Jutt[25] and/or Savarna households who have been historically privileged in terms of ownership over land and other means of production and whose location in the local caste hierarchy has helped them justify and reproduce their socio-economic position through cultural and socio-political domination.[26]

The need to distinguish between the two groups speaks to the literature on the experiences of the upwardly mobile Dalit-OBC-Adivasi capitalists or professionals/entrepreneurs/middle class who have continued to face systemic

[25] The location of Jutts in the varna hierarchy has seen momentous changes, as discussed by Habib (1969, 2022), moving up from Shudra status in the 7th century when they were a pastoralist group in what is now Sind province of Pakistan to that of a Vaishya status by the 14th century as they settled down and took to cultivation sometime between this period. This is followed by a rise in their social status with their conversion to Islam or Sikhism starting in the mid-14th and mid-17th centuries, respectively. Thereafter, their position at the top of the rural hierarchy was crystallised by the Sikh empire under Ranjit Singh as well as the British colonial policies that racialised them as sturdy, superior peasants with martial features, especially in the regions under their direct rule (Gill, 2024, Mooney, 2013). Following the devastating loss during the partition when many of them had to migrate back to India, Jutt Sikhs benefitted politically from the reorganisation of the state on linguistic lines into a Punjabi-speaking Sikh majority state and economically from the green revolution policies as they were the main landowning caste in the state (Judge 2015). Therefore, despite being seen as lower castes in the varna hierarchy until the 16th century, the subsequent changes in their socio-economic hierarchy have allowed the bigger landowning class among them to exercise social control as well as make economic gains.

[26] While methodologically, it is preferable to examine Jutts and Savarna castes separately, but in the interest of data presentation and analytical simplicity, they have been consolidated into one category here. The Savarna castes constituted only 8% of households in one village and zero in the other village. Therefore, it was considered useful to club them with the Jutts to avoid creating a separate category for them or to exclude them from analysis altogether. There were, indeed, differences in terms of accumulation patterns between Jutts and savarna castes, and within savarna castes such as between Banias and Brahmins. These distinctions in patterns of accumulation have been explored in Chapters 5 and 6.

oppression, exclusion, and discrimination from their upper caste colleagues or workers, even as they exploit their workers and accumulate surplus from it (see Prakash, 2015, Harriss-White et. al, 2015, Jodhka, 2010).

Inverting the phrase used by Bourgois (1988) for conjugated oppression, 'conjugated privilege' can be seen as occurring when 'axes of caste, class, gender, and ethnicity' interact explosively to produce an overwhelming experience of privilege that is more than the sum of its parts. The term "conjugated privilege" has been employed over other terms such as "rich or elites" (Jodhka and Naudet, 2019) or "propertied class" (Upadhya 1988a) or the more commonly used "Landlords" due to its theoretical complementarity with "conjugated oppression" and superior analytical precision. The privilege-oppression dyad is conceptualised here as relational, and as "two sides of the same coin" within systems of social stratification under capitalism, with both dimensions being equally important for achieving equity. The term 'privileged castes' to refer to so called "upper-caste" savarnas has also gained prominence in academic literature (see, for instance, Zare and Pathania, 2025, Kumar 2024) as well as anti-caste discourse in India, serving to centre these groups in analyses of caste, inequality and domination. Beyond the Indian context, this approach aligns with broader shift in the focus towards privilege and domination in race and gender studies (see Kimmel & Ferber 2017, McIntosh 2017).

Among PCPs, we identify three class-caste groups—savarnas with downward class mobility (from their CoC position earlier), Dalits moving up to PCP (from CoL position), and Jutt or Savarna PCPs who managed to avoid proletarianisation but have neither been able to accumulate nor become net exploiters of others' labour power, hence labelled as 'Savarna PCPs stagnant' for the lack of a better term. Technically, there could also be Jutt or Savarna households that experienced upward class mobility to PCP status from among the CoL; however, no such cases were found in the fieldwork sites and are therefore excluded from this analysis.

Before we move on to the next argument, it is important to clarify that this analysis neither suggests that Dalit-OBCs with upward class mobility into PCP or CoC are now free from social oppression, nor that the Jutt or savarna CoL households who engage in wage labour no longer benefit from their caste privilege. As acknowledged earlier, Dalit-

OBCs in CoC or PCP classes are categorised separately from savarnas or Jutts in these classes precisely because they continue to experience social oppression despite their class mobility.

The evidence presented in Chapter 5 demonstrates that it is due to the combined force of caste oppression and class exploitation in the context of a bypassed agrarian transition under neoliberalism that only a tiny fraction of Dalit-OBC households have achieved an upward socio-economic mobility (see also Lerche and Shah 2018). We will discuss such cases among Dalit-OBC and how they were able to make this upward mobility in Chapter 5. In such a scenario, class relations faced by Dalit-OBCs in CoC or PCP classes were qualitatively different from Dalit-OBCs in CoL. While the former now exploit others' labour and appropriated surplus value, the latter continue to face hyper-exploitation due to their social oppression. This qualitative difference necessitates separate class-caste classifications despite both experiencing social oppression.

Extending the argument for Jutts and Savarnas in CoL, while such households benefit from caste privileges, these households were unable to leverage or translate them into accumulation and domination, unlike many other Jutt and Savarna households.

While oppression and privilege, which are two sides of the same coin, are systemic and structural and permeate all households, they get actualised and concentrated in certain groups more than others, reproducing broader socio-economic hierarchies. This is why only households at each end of the class-caste hierarchy are labelled as "conjugated oppressed" and "conjugated privileged"—their social identities facilitate either hyper-exploitation or private accumulation.

Thirdly, the two-tier class-caste classification takes into account the long-term economic trajectories of a household, thereby enriching the otherwise static framework of some Marxian class analysis. By incorporating family lineage data and their life histories, this framework partially overcomes the limitations of one-point data collection, thereby capturing the evolving dynamics of production, power, and property within complex rural-agrarian formations across multiple generations. Using this framework, we can see not only the share and types of capital-owners in the overall rural-agrarian structure but also the 'social origins of capital' (Jan 2024) and of labour—

that is, who has climbed up the socio-economic hierarchy, who has reproduced their class-caste position and who has fallen, particularly since the green revolution took hold in the two regions. Moreover, it integrates knowledge of the diversified economic portfolios of rural households, spanning farming and various non-farm occupations, rather than excluding such households from class analysis, as discussed in Section 2.2.2 above.

Fourthly, the class-caste positions are determined while being attentive to the gendered dynamics of work, employment and unemployment within a household. Making use of the suggestions by Marxist-Feminists of exploring the profoundly gendered nature of class dynamics using survey tools (S. Naidu & Rao, 2024; Rao, 2018; Rao et al., 2024), attempts were made to enhance female participation in surveys and interviews wherever possible, as men tend to under-report or misreport the economic contributions of the female working members (see Deere, 2020; Rao, 2018). Moreover, gender-segregated data was collected for all activities performed by working members of a household and targeted questions were asked to capture the wide variety of women's productive and reproductive, paid and unpaid labour. This helped us understand the gendered nature of class dynamics and how it shaped the simple reproduction patterns of the PCP and CoL households. For instance, in a Dalit agrarian PCP household where the male head works primarily in agriculture and animal husbandry while his wife works in casualised wage employment in agriculture or NREGS, along with animal rearing, a form of PCP, and unwaged productive and reproductive work, that household is considered as part of the CoL and not PCP (da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999; S. Naidu & Rao, 2024).

To conclude, this class structure attempts to include aspects of caste, gender, economic diversification and long-term socio-economic mobility of a household in determining the contemporary class structure in rural Punjab, which so far in the literature has been predominantly limited to the current economic position of a household, and in some scholars' work, primarily to the agrarian economic sphere of the household. Including all these variables brings infinitely more complexity but certainly more authenticity and proximity to the complex realities of rural societies, historical and contemporary.

While it may be argued that such a schema could potentially complicate political mobilisation and weaken the potential of a broad-based movement against the local capital or multinational corporations, this thesis argues instead that this framework actually provides a more authentic understanding of the contemporary rural political economy in caste-segregated societies (as it may not be very valid in tribal/indigenous societies which have their own social structures). More importantly, it does so from the perspective of those who inhabit it. For instance, conversations with labouring-class organisations revealed that it is the landless or smaller landowning Jutts, under the patronage of upwardly mobile Jutt PCPs or a capitalist household (and not the landlords), who turn out to be their direct enemies in their fight for their rightful share of the common lands. The classes of labour, therefore, have their direct enemy within their class. The understanding of this dynamic has also shaped how the labouring class organisations mobilised and protested: in their speeches, they attacked '*dhanaad*' or '*ghadam chaudhries*' (loosely translated as those exercising social dominance) and not '*sarmayedaar* or '*jagirdaar*' (capitalist or landlord) (J. Singh, 2021). The political dynamics are further discussed in chapter 7.

3: Accumulation amidst Distress: Situating Punjab in India's Political Economy of Development in the Post-Liberalisation Period

The decline of Punjab's social, economic, and ecological conditions has long been a subject of discussion; however, these narratives experienced a renewed and intensified resurgence during and after the year-long farmers' protest movement of 2020–21. The discourse on Punjab's crisis—often framed as the 'Punjab problem'—first gained prominence in the late 1970s in the context of the Sikh ethnoreligious separatist movement, which was rooted in demands for greater state autonomy and a more equitable federal structure within India (Singh, 2008, Gill and Singhal, 1984). Over time, however, this sense of crisis has become an enduring feature of Punjab's political economy, particularly in the wake of the economic downturn that followed the period of political upheaval. Today, a wide range of socio-economic issues—the large-scale migration of Punjabi youth to developed countries, including illegal, '*donki*' routes; the drug epidemic; and even the prevailing political vacuum—are all framed and understood through the lens of agrarian distress. Notably, the roots of the agrarian crisis are not traced to the liberalisation reforms of the 1990s, as is often the case elsewhere in India, but rather to the introduction of the Green Revolution (GR) in Punjab in the 1960s (Dhesi & Singh, 2008; Jodhka, 2006a; Shergill & Mehta, 2023; L. Singh & Singh, 2016).

This chapter examines the evidence of Punjab's prolonged economic decline and its growing divergence from India's buoyant growth trajectory since the 1990s, particularly in comparison to the western and southern states. Section 3.1 synthesises the existing literature spanning over five decades of Punjab's capitalist development, which has tended to focus on certain aspects of Punjab's political economy and ecology, such as (i) the changes in land ownership, agrarian structure and resulting distress in agrarian incomes, (ii) labour market transformations and labour relations, and in the last few decades, (iii) the environmental consequences of its highly resource-intensive and fossil-fuel-dependent agricultural model.

While this expansive literature presents a differentiated and nuanced understanding of the longue durée period of growth and then distress, section 3.2 of this chapter identifies at least two aspects of Punjab's political economy that have been largely marginalised and obscured in the literature—(i) rural capital accumulation, which recent research shows has continued alongside agrarian distress (Bansal, 2020a; Lerche, 2014; Shrimali, 2021; Sinha, 2020a), thus countering the implicit argument that the agrarian crisis is for all classes but some groups such as small and marginal landowners have been disproportionately affected, and (ii) the role of towns, merchants and markets in Punjab's growth and distress (see Singh A., 1999, Jodhka 2006, Sinha 2020), which has so far been limited to the relationship between predominantly Sikh Jatt peasants and predominantly Hindu merchant capital, especially since the political crisis of the 1980s. An analysis of terms of trade between agriculture and industry and how it has evolved over time has also been sidelined in this literature on Punjab's political economy, which may be useful but remains beyond the scope of this thesis.

Firstly, section 3.2.1 presents available secondary data on land distribution, agricultural income, and allied activities, revealing that Punjab has the highest average land ownership, the highest average yield, the highest agricultural household income, and one of the highest rates of private investment in agriculture among all major Indian states. Section 3.2.2 shifts the focus to the role of the non-farm economy, including towns, markets, and merchants and critically reviews the existing scholarship, which, barring a few nuanced works by Singh, A. (1999), Singh, S. (2017), and Sinha (2020), has often framed the interests of Hindu merchant capital as inherently and necessarily antagonistic to those of all peasants and farmers.

Section 3.2.3 zooms out from this literature on Punjab and engages with a specialised body of literature that examines India's capitalist development and its regional diversity through the role of agrarian or provincial capital and its movement across different sectors of the economy (Baru, 2000, Damodaran 2008, Lerche 2014, Parthasarathy 2015). It introduces a typology to systematically review and categorise the expanding fieldwork-based evidence on capital accumulation in rural and provincial India over the past decade. This typology helps identify dominant patterns of capital accumulation across regions, enabling comparative analysis and facilitating empirically grounded

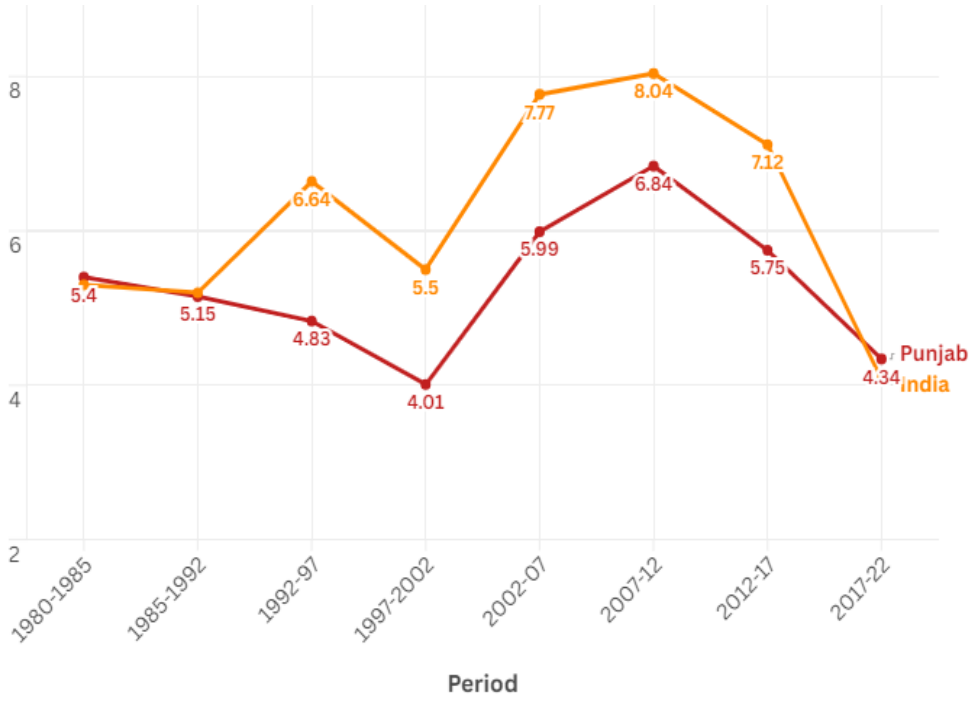
generalisations about India's capitalist development from the standpoint of capital accumulation and capitalist classes. At the same time, it offers a framework to challenge reductive narratives, such as the North-South divide in India's political economy.

Before we discuss the literature on distress and capital accumulation, it needs to be reiterated that pivoting the discussion around rural capital accumulation is not to shift the focus away from the distress or to delegitimise it and its devastating consequences for the labouring classes and the environment, as was the tendency among the government loyalists during the farmers' protests. Instead, as this thesis later reveals through fieldwork data, understanding rural capital accumulation and the factors shaping its patterns *enhances* our understanding of agrarian distress, its regional unevenness, as well as the scope and strength of resistance to it. This discussion also highlights why Punjab is an intriguing context for examining rural capital accumulation.

3.1 Tracing Punjab's Political Economy of Development Since the 1960s

Punjab's average annual growth rate, while growing parallel to the overall Indian economy, has been consistently lower than the latter since the 1990s (Figure 3.1) after being the state with one of the highest growth rates across states in the 1970s, primarily a result of the Green Revolution (GR) induced growth in the state (S. Singh, 2002).

Figure 3.1 Average annual growth rate in GDP (constant prices), Punjab and India, 1980-2022

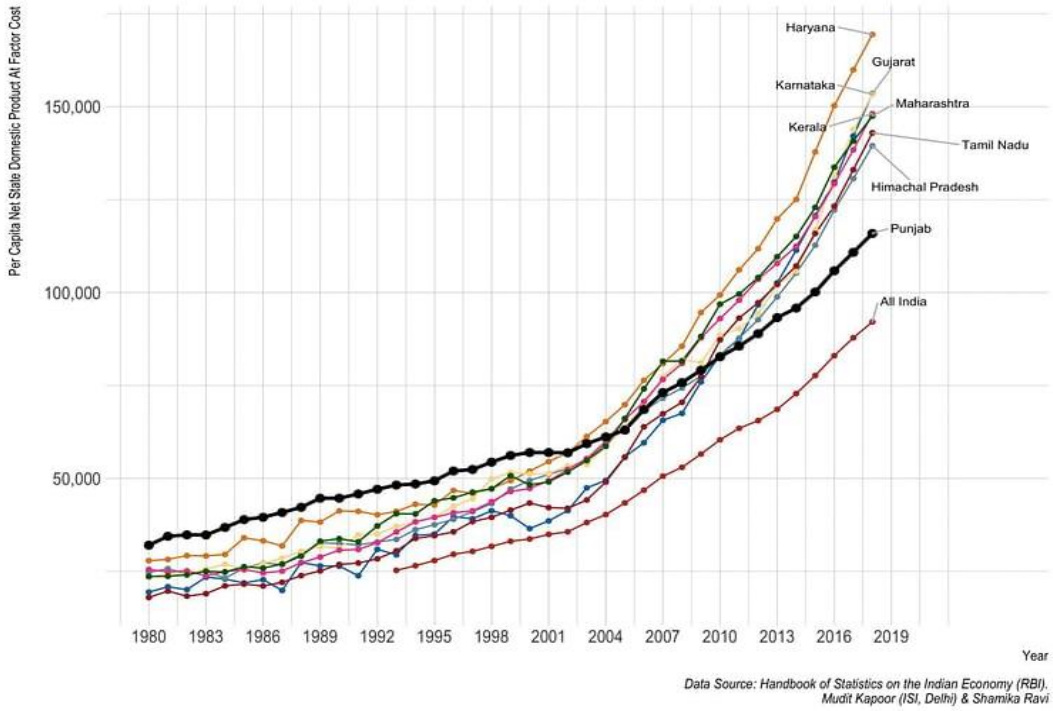


Source: (i) Economic & Statistical Organisation, Punjab cited in Economic Survey of Punjab 2023-24, (ii) Central Statistical Organisation

The impact of this turnaround can also be read from per-capita income figures. Punjab had one of the highest per capita incomes among states until the early 1980s but now lags in 18th place among all states and 12th among the 16 major states (RBI Handbook of Statistics 2023; see Figure 3.2). In terms of contribution to the national GDP, Punjab is notably the only 'Green Revolution' state whose share has decreased—from 4.3 per cent of the national GDP in 1990-91 to 2.4 per cent in 2023-24. In contrast, other states, particularly Haryana, which was separated from Punjab in 1966, have consistently increased their contribution to the national GDP, especially since the 1990s (Figure 3.3).[27]

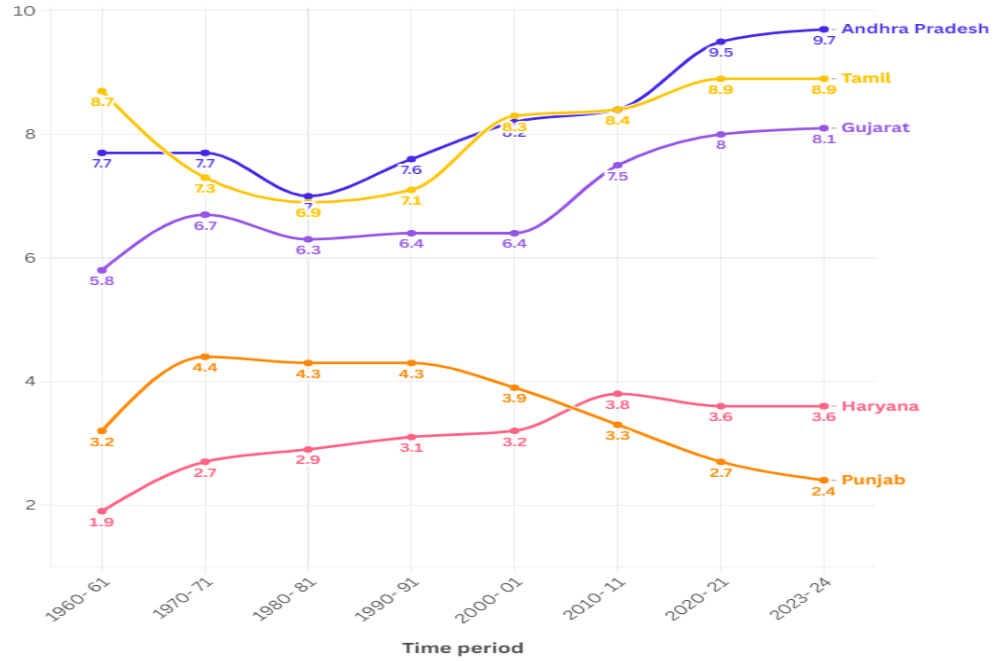
[27] The comparison with Haryana is particularly revealing with respect to the changes in relative per capita income. Haryana has experienced a pronounced divergence from Punjab since the economic liberalisation of the 1990s, with its relative per capita income, which was lower than that of Punjab until the 1990s, being 1.5 times higher than that of Punjab in 2023. This positions Haryana as the fourth-highest relative per capita income among major states, following Delhi, Telangana, and Karnataka. Much of this economic gain is concentrated in a few cities—Gurgaon in Haryana, Hyderabad in Telangana, and Bangalore in Karnataka—and is not evenly distributed within these states, resulting in the highest increase in economic inequality during this period (Jodhka & Vakulabharanam, 2023).

Figure 3.2 Per capita Net State Domestic Product at Factor Cost (constant prices) base year 2011-12, select Indian states, 1980-2019



Source: Ravi (2020)

Figure 3.3 Contribution to national GDP, select Green Revolution states, 1960-61 to 2023-24



Source: Sanyal and Arora's (2024) calculations using MoSPI data

The political economy framework views the spectacular growth of early GR era of the 1970s and 80s and the subsequent period of distress in Punjab as an outcome of consolidation of capitalist development and a period which exacerbated socio-economic inequalities in its already highly unequal agrarian economy, partially a result of the failed land reforms in the 1950s and 60s (Chopra, 1974, p. 197; Ladejinsky, 1969; Mukherjee, 2004). Research from the 1970s and 1980s shows that while poverty and malnutrition improved, the high-growth period of the 1970s was overall detrimental to Dalit landless labourers, although it did reduce unfreedom and shift away from caste-based occupations (Bhalla & Chadha, 1982; Jodhka, 1995). Moreover, large-scale landowners benefited more than smaller farmers (Bhalla & Chadha, 1982; Byres, 1981; Rudra et al., 1969). Likewise, it informs us that the period of distress and its manifestations in the form of suicides, distress exit from farming or 'depeasantisation', and a concerning rise in international migration, even via irregular means, is predominantly a crisis among smaller and marginal landowning farmers (S. Sharma et al., 2023; S. Singh & Bhogal, 2014).

This attention to a differentiated understanding of agrarian crisis may, in part, stem from the significant overlap of caste and religion among the distressed groups such as the smaller landowning farmers as most belong to the dominant Jutt caste and follow Sikhism, a faith with a long-standing ethos of advocating for the underprivileged. The concerns for Dalit Sikh landless labourers, as seen through research and politics centred around them, have been relatively less pronounced, but they have grown over time. This was also evident during the recent farmers' protests, which highlighted that smaller farmers and landless Dalit labourers, alongside environmental conditions, have been the most adversely affected by the prolonged agrarian distress in the state (Jodhka, 2022a; Sabharwal & Singh, 2022).

The subsequent sections summarise this vast literature on the differentiated impacts of the GR period and the post-reform period that has focussed on some key aspects of political economy: changes in the agrarian structure, particularly the distribution of landholdings; labour absorption in agriculture and its gendered impact; and labour relations in rural Punjab.

3.1.1 Changes in Landholding Structure in Punjab

The commercialisation of agricultural output in Punjab had increased during the colonial period, but it was predominantly limited to wheat and cotton, particularly in the parts of Punjab under direct colonial rule, most of which were allocated to Pakistan during partition. It was after the introduction of HYV seeds for wheat and then rice, alongside state investment in public infrastructure such as canals, roads, agricultural markets, and subsidies of farm inputs such as fertilisers, pesticides, and gypsum, among others, that the area under cultivation, yields,[28] and marketed surplus[29] increased significantly in the 1970s. This was particularly the case for paddy, a crop that was barely cultivated in the state before this period (Frankel, 1971; Mann, 2017). Furthermore, due to protection from price volatility through the implementation of a pre-announced, reasonably remunerative Minimum Support Pirce (MSP) and the reduction of secondary forms of exploitation, such as usury, the higher marketed surplus translated into higher profits for the cultivators. As a result, landowners saw it more beneficial to cultivate their land than to lease it out, leading to widespread tenant evictions in the 1960s and 70s (S. S. Gill, 1989). Many of those evicted were landless Dalit tenants, and they were virtually extinct by the late 1970s (S. S. Gill, 1989; Grewal & Rangi, 1981).

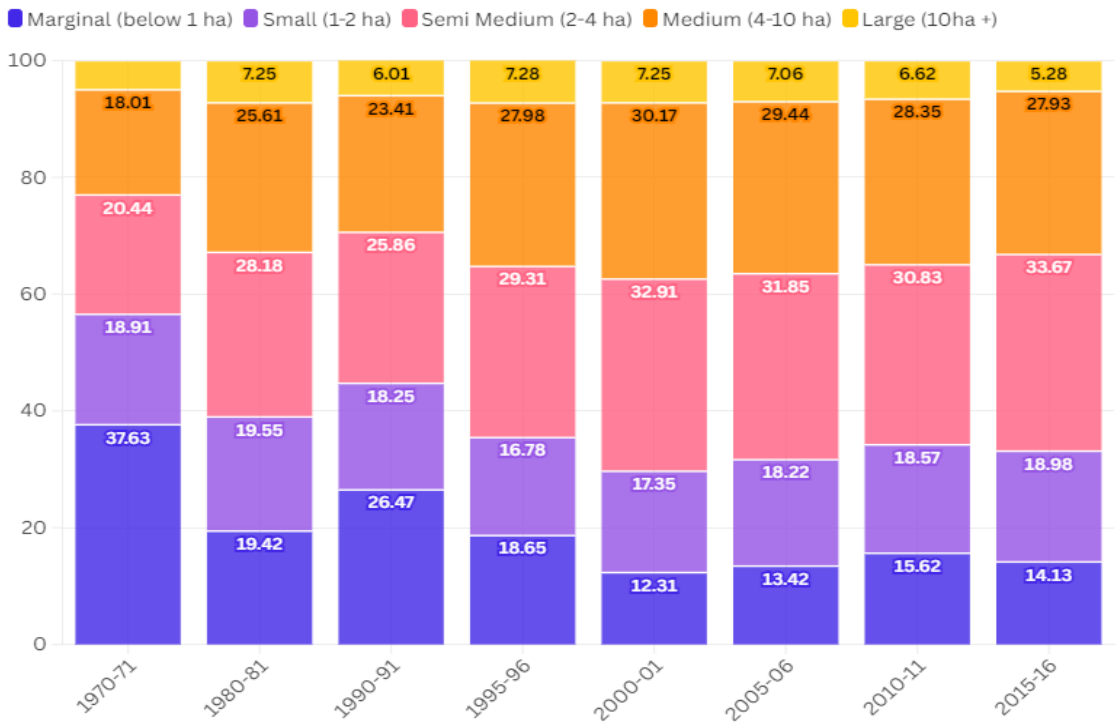
As a result, while landholdings got miniaturised with further division of land in other GR states, Punjab, on the other hand, saw a higher concentration and consolidation into fewer hands, leading to a more polarised landownership and landholding structure. During the first decades of GR, there was a sharp decline in marginal landholdings—from 37.63 per cent in 1970-71 to 12.31 per cent in 2000-01, accompanied by a concomitant rise in medium and semi-medium landholdings (see Figure 3.4). While the distribution of landholdings has stabilised since the 2000s, in part due to the stagnation

[28] The yield of wheat increased from 1863 kg per ha in 1968 to 3593 kg per ha in 1990 and further increased, although at a slower rate of growth, to 5004 kg per ha in 2020. Yields of rice increased from 1321 kg per ha in 1968 to 3506 kg per ha in 1990 and to 4367 kg per ha in 2018 (Source: https://www.data.gov.in/catalog/area-production-and-yield-food-grains-cultivation-punjab?page=1. Last assessed 30/12/2024.

[29] Market arrivals of wheat as percent of total wheat production increased from 55.95 per cent in 1971 to 58.47 in 1991 and 79.08 in 2014-15. For paddy, the corresponding figures were 64.98 per cent, 81.17 per cent and 93.80 per cent in 1971, 1991, and 2014-15 respectively ((P. Singh & Singh, 2020)).

of yields, cropping intensity and per acre profitability, Punjab has emerged as the only state in the country where the average size of landholding has increased over time, alongside the increase in the share of the slightly bigger landholdings (above 4 ha) in total landholdings in total landholdings—from 23 per cent in 1971 to 37.42 per cent in 2000-01, the highest share across all states (see Figure 3.4; see Figure 3.5 for comparison with other states). Fieldwork evidence on the distribution of landholdings across land-size classes and caste groups is presented in Chapter 5, but it is useful here to briefly state that the Malwa village is closer to the state-level distribution of landholdings, while in the Majha village, there was a preponderance of small and marginal landholdings.

Figure 3.4 Changes in the distribution of operated landholdings by categories of extent of operational holdings, Punjab, 1970-71 to 2015-16, in per cent



Source: Statistical Abstract of Punjab 2019-20

Figure 3.5 State-wise distribution of landholdings across major size groups, 2005-06

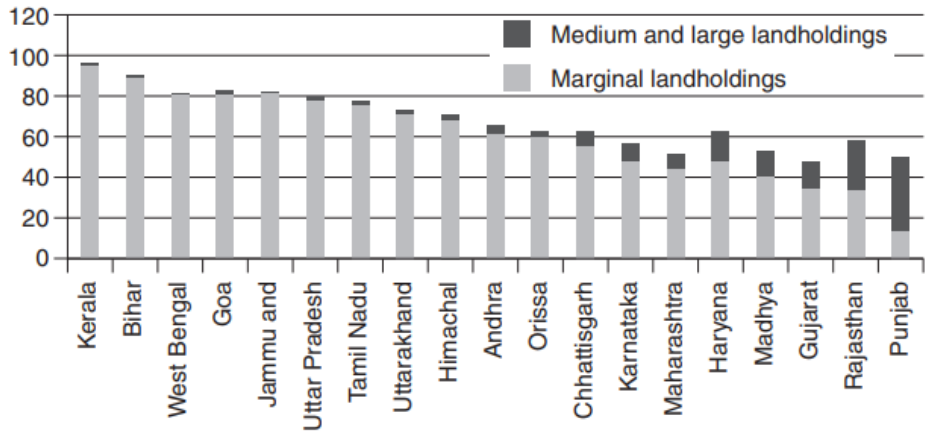


Figure 3.1 Landholdings – major size groups, 2005 to 2006 (source: Government of India (2008)).

Notes
Marginal: less than 1 hectare of land.
Medium and large: more than 4 hectares of land.

Source: Lerche (2014)

At the same time as the rise in average size of landholdings and the share of such landholdings in total landholdings, landlessness in Punjab has remained one of the highest in the country. As many as 46 to 65 per cent of rural households in Punjab did not own any agricultural land in 2011, according to different government datasets. Most of them are Dalits. This is one of the highest extents of landlessness and caste-based inequality in land ownership across all states, and much higher than all-India figures of 34.5 per cent to 56.4 per cent (Rawal & Bansal, 2021). As a result, the Gini Coefficient of land ownership in Punjab was the highest in the country, at 0.82, compared to an already high 0.75 at the all-India level (Rawal, 2008).

Since the returns from cultivation were directly correlated with the size of landholdings, the shifts in the distribution of landholdings point to the most significant beneficiaries and losers of the GR period reforms—the middle to the top tier of landowners (Bhalla & Chadha, 1982; Byres, 1981; Patnaik, 1990b). This emerging class of bigger capitalist farmers turned part of their profits into ‘capital’ by continuous acquisition of 'new means of production’ such as agricultural machinery, especially tractors and tubewells, while also increasing their consumption of consumer goods, leading to an

increase in their material standards of living (Byres, 1981; A. Singh, 1999).[30] Punjab's tractor density has been the highest in the country since the 1960s (Sarkar, 2013), with significant inequities between bigger and smaller farmers (Chopra 1974). The adoption of combined harvester-threshers in the 1990s was also one of the quickest and most widespread in Punjab (Devi et al., 2013).

3.1.2 Indebtedness and Distress among Smaller Farmers

While benefiting medium and larger landholders more, the GR also benefited smaller landholders through increased yields and incomes. This is reflected in the impressive decline in income poverty and increase in per capita income, making it one of the richest states across India (Ahluwalia 2008). This pattern was also observed in both fieldwork villages, as we discuss later in Chapter 5.

However, Bhalla and Chadha's (1982) comprehensive and well-cited study of the impact of GR policies on smallholder farmers reveals that by the early-1980s, a large share of them was in deficit. This was in part due to stagnating yields and cropping intensity, but also due to rising costs of cultivation on biochemical inputs, machines, as well as interest payments on the loans taken from the *arhtiyas* and the banks to meet the growing expenses of cultivation.

This situation worsened in the post-liberalisation period as changes in the form of state agricultural subsidies has led to a substantial rise in the costs of cultivation (M. Kaur et al., 2017), and the increase in Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for wheat and paddy has been inadequate (Das, 2020; Kamra and Ramakumar 2019). This has contributed to stagnation in real incomes, along with an increasing debt burden among smaller and marginal farmers (Chand, 1999; A. Gill, 2004; Sidhu, 2002; K. Singh et al., 2009; S. Singh, 2004).[31] While the amount of debt increases as the landholding size increases,

[30] Singh (1999) shows that the average per capita consumption expenditure in Punjab was among the highest across all states, especially in terms of consumption of meat, liquor, clothing, footwear and durable consumer goods such as motorcycles, cars, refrigerators, TVs, Video Cassette players, Radios, Cameras. Vehicle density has also been one of the highest in Punjab among different states in India, another sign of prosperity among Punjab's peasantries.

[31] An average farmer in Punjab is likely to be more indebted than an average Indian farmer. Narayanamoorthy and Kalamkar (2005) found that in 1991-92, an agricultural household in Punjab had the highest extent of indebtedness across all states, and 3.1 times more indebted than an average Indian agricultural household. Twenty-five years later in 2017-18, an average agricultural household in Punjab

the burden of debt tends to be higher for smaller landholders. For instance, the debt-to-income ratio, which provides a more accurate estimate of indebtedness than total outstanding loans, reveals that marginal farmers have the highest debt-to-income ratio—1.34 times their incomes, indicating a precarious situation, while the ratio for large farmers is the lowest at 0.46 times their incomes (Singh et al., 2017). Moreover, smaller landholders tend to pay higher interest rates, as they rely more on informal sources of credit than larger landowning farmers, who have better access to government loans that help them accumulate (G. Singh et al., 2017; Sinha, 2020c).

Together, these dynamics have contributed to the brewing of a debt crisis among the smaller and marginal farmers in Punjab, eventually bursting into a spate of suicides in the 1990s and 2000s (Grover et al., 2016; S. Singh et al., 2022), high rates of depeasantisation (S. Singh et al., 2022; S. Singh, Kaur, et al., 2021), as well as an exodus to the global North countries in the last two decades, including through irregular means and the dangerous '*donki*' routes (K. Arora et al., 2023; N. Kaur & Bansal, 2025; S. Sharma et al., 2023).

At the same time, the full environmental and related sociological costs of the GR had started to become increasingly apparent by the early 1990s. Even though national accounts show that mining contributes less than 0.1 per cent to Punjab's GDP or employment, scholars of agro-ecology have shown how monoculture of wheat and paddy in Punjab, especially the latter, has a clear extractive nature, with unchecked mining and degradation of soil, alarming depletion of groundwater levels, and unprecedented loss of minerals and biomatter (Patel, 2013; Shiva, 1991, p. 199). This is also linked to higher incidences of cancer and reproductive health issues, resulting in Punjab having seen the highest expenditure on private health care in the country. The myopic lens used to study the impact of GR without considering its long-term effects on agroecology has led some to call it a 'green ecocide' (Kalra, forthcoming).

There is also regional unevenness in various manifestations of agrarian distress. Malwa region, especially Sangrur, Mansa, and Bathinda districts, has emerged as the hotspot

was 2.74 times indebted than an average agricultural household in India, behind only Andhra Pradesh and Kerala (NSSO SAS 2018-19).

of suicides and 'depeasantisation' since the 1990s (Dandekar & Bhattacharya, 2017; Padhi, 2012). The recent surge in international migration to the global North countries is also predominantly due to its spread to the Malwa districts, which was previously restricted to the Doaba and Majha regions. The environmental consequences, especially in terms of groundwater depletion and soil degradation, have also been most severe in this region. This provides a broad context for why the Malwa region has emerged as the epicentre of the farmers' protests, as well as the movement for land rights and dignity among landless Dalit labourers. This will be explored further in Chapter 7.

3.1.3 Gendered Nature of Rural Labour Market Transformations

The cultivation of relatively more mechanised crops such as wheat and paddy over previously cultivated crops such as cotton, gram, peanuts, and pulses, among others, and the continuous replacement of human energy with bio-chemicals and fossil-fuel-powered energy led to a substantial reduction in labour input in the production process, both family labour and hired labour (see Table 3.2).

The impact was highly gendered, as tasks performed by women, such as cotton picking, weeding, threshing, and winnowing, as well as other post-harvest operations, were no longer required or had been completely mechanised. This has produced a gendered division of labour in agricultural production that was more male-dominated than the pre-mechanisation gendered division of labour.[32] As a result, peasant women's contributions to the production process have been mainly confined to activities within the household, such as livestock rearing, which can be interpreted as the "housewifisation" of peasant women (see Heyer, 2015). This came alongside an increase in their social reproduction burdens, like preparing food and tea for hired labourers, especially during peak seasonal periods. This change also reinforced a stricter separation between men's and women's roles in production and social reproduction activities in peasant households, which has been linked to increased

[32] This is contrary to the trend of 'feminisation' of the agricultural labour force that has been observed in many other parts of rural India, although the latter trend can be attributed primarily to the outmigration of rural men from such regions (see da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999; Pattnaik et al., 2018; Ramachandran, 2019)

levels of patriarchy and control over the female body and autonomy (Baruah & Singh, 2020). Fieldwork evidence from both villages confirms this observation as Jutt landowning women had to very rarely provide labour on their farm, let alone on others' farms. This is elaborated further in Chapter 7.

Table 3.1 Human labour-use for Wheat and Rice, Punjab, in person-hours/ha

Type of labour	Wheat			Rice		
	1985– 1986	2013– 2014	Change	1985– 1986	2013– 2014	Change
Family (F)	218.99	69.22	−148.78	308.09	132.84	−175.25
Permanent (P)	44.83	16.23	−28.60	75.7	32.79	−42.91
Casual wage (C)	164.24	51.03	−113.21	434.59	187.83	−246.76
Total Hired (P+C)	209.07	67.26	**−141.81**	510.29	220.62	**−289.67**
Total Labour (F+P+C)	428.06	136.48	**−291.98**	818.38	353.46	**−464.92**

Source: Singh and Singh (2020)

The impact of an increase in average size of landholdings as well as fast-paced mechanisation of irrigation and most other parts of the production process was also seen on the landless labouring class households. Initial studies on the GR, such as Sharma (1974), Billings and Singh (1969, 1970) and Bardhan (1976), showed a partial increase in wages and days of employment in agriculture, especially on bigger farms which tend to have higher cropping intensity and more extensive area under tubewell irrigation, but most of those gains had saturated by mid-1970s itself. Further, due to the influx of 'hyper-racialised', predominantly male migrant workers escaping bondage and feudal attachments in their villages, many local landless labourers, especially Dalit women, were left with an overall decline in employment or faced under-employment (Agarwal, 1984). Since the nominal wage rates in Punjab agriculture were among the highest across states and three times that of Bihar, even stagnation of wage rates did not halt the in-migration of labour to the farms in Punjab (M. Singh, 1995).

This led to substantial changes in the rural labour livelihoods in Punjab, much faster than in other regions of India—leading to a more balanced structural transformation than many other states in India (Agarwal, 2016). Longitudinal fieldwork-based research of rural labourers in Punjab conducted by Singh and Bhogal (2020) found that the share of labourers that depended entirely on agricultural labour declined from 88 per cent in 1987 to only 7 per cent in 2018-19, with the most significant chunk of labourers

identifying themselves as solely non-farm workers (56 per cent in 2018-19, up from zero per cent in 1988) followed by those juggling both sectors (37 per cent in 2018-19).

This growth of non-farm sector's contribution to employment has also been highly gendered—while Dalit men have found employment in the hotels, transport sector, or at construction sites, Dalit women have been excluded from accessing even these highly precarious jobs in the informal sector (IAMR 2013; Baruah & Singh, 2020).[33] This was also confirmed from fieldwork data, especially in the Malwa region, which is elaborated in Chapter 7. Additionally, the deeply entrenched and highly oppressive forms of patriarchy in the region manifest in their extremely low female labour force participation as well as abysmal sex ratio and female nutrition levels.[34]

3.1.4 Caste and Gender Mediated Labour Relations in Rural Punjab

This transition from agricultural labourer to rural-based labourer, particularly for Dalit men, also involves an element of caste-based occupational mobility, as observed by Jodhka (2002, 2014). He shows that Dalits are no longer stuck in occupations reserved for them in the *jajmani* system, or at least not as an obligation in return for patronage. For instance, the picking up of dead animal carcasses is no longer performed by the Chamars, a sub-caste among Dalits who were earlier obligated to perform this work. Instead, it has now become a commercialised activity, with auctions conducted to determine which thekedar will conduct this work.

The impact of these momentous changes was also evident in the rural labour relations between landless Dalit labourers and Jutt farmers. The unfree, patron-client-based labour arrangement between landowners and landless male labourers called *seeri*, a unique mix of sharecropping and labour, has declined sharply since the 1970s (Singh,

[33] Female participation in construction work is significantly higher in the southern states, partly due to the more moderate forms of patriarchy prevalent in these regions (Heyer, 2013; Kapadia, 1995).
[34] Punjab has the third lowest (female-male) sex ratio across states in India (895) after Jammu and Kashmir and Haryana, and one of the worst in the world. The child sex ratio in Punjab declined from 875 in 1991 to a low of 798 in 2001 and then improved significantly to 846 in 2011. Among the ten districts in India that have the lowest child sex ratio, seven were from Punjab (UNDP 2004). Further, in terms of health coverage and nutrition for girl child, Punjab lagged not just behind richer, developed states but also poorer ones (Singh and Singh 2017). Lastly, in the sphere of female labour force participation, Punjab ranked one of the lowest and its performance declining, with only 33.4 per cent of women in labour force compared to 83.1 per cent of men in 2017-18, down from 35.2 and 88.5 per cent for female and male in 1993-94.

1995, 2012; see Table 3.2 above), as they did in other parts of India (see Breman 1974). These *seeri* labourers were metamorphosed into year-long permanent workers, now called *naukar,* farm servants, who received fixed wages instead of a share of the produce and exhibited significantly fewer instances of inter-generational bondage than before (see Breman et al., 2009; Brass, 1990, 2002 has a counter view arguing that labourers were instead being de-proletarianised).

The decline in unfree labour relations, however, has neither been linear nor uniform across Dalit castes or between Dalit men and women. In Punjab, cases of 'old-style' bondage and unfreedom surface now and then, and there has also been a rise in circular migration to the Gulf countries under the *kafala* system that has been widely seen as a form of modern slavery (Kaur & Singh, 2023). Within Dalits, Ravidasias or Ad-Dharmis, the erstwhile Chamars, have experienced relatively higher mobility, especially in the Doaba region, due to the greater availability of non-farm employment and self-employment, as well as emigration to developed countries, compared to the more rural and impoverished Mazhabis, Bazigars and Sansis (Juergensmeyer, 1988; Ram, 2004, 2007). At the same time, landless Dalit women, especially those widowed after the suicide/deaths of their husbands who leave behind a heavy debt, are forced to clean the cow shed and make cow dung cakes for some Jutt Sikh and other upper caste households for meagre wages, a relation they cannot escape (J. Mishra, 2022).[35] This lack of escape from unfree relations for Dalit women in Punjab can be attributed, in part, to the gendered nature of the non-farm sector's growth in the post-liberalisation period discussed earlier. The transition from agricultural labourer to rural-based labourer, particularly for Dalit men, also involves an element of caste-based occupational mobility, as observed by Jodhka (2002, 2014). He shows that Dalits are no longer stuck in occupations reserved for them in the *jajmani* system, or at least not as an obligation in return for patronage. For instance, the picking up of dead animal carcasses is no longer performed by the Chamars, a sub-caste among Dalits who were

[35] This gendered nature of decline in unfree labour was observed in some other regions too. For instance, da Corta and Venkateshwarlu (1999) observed that while Dalit men recused themselves from attaching themselves as agricultural workers on their farms, upper caste agrarian capitalists resorted to using short-term tied labour arrangements with female Dalit labourers by extending them credit or leasing-them small parcels of wet land. Similar observations have been made by scholars such as Chauhan (2022) in western UP.

earlier obligated to perform this work. Instead, it has now become a commercialised activity, with auctions conducted to determine which thekedar will conduct this work.

Notwithstanding the conditions that sharpened class conflicts due to increased intra-class, inter-class, and intra-household inequalities, manifesting through tenant evictions and labour displacement, the actual instances of caste and class conflicts or clashes between the Jutt farmers and Dalit labourers were reportedly very few in the post-GR period (A. P. Singh, 1979). Many on the left have argued that the Green Revolution (GR) was largely successful in halting the spread of the 'red revolution' in its countryside, which had gained momentum in the aftermath of the Naxalbari revolution, miles away in North Bengal (G. Singh, 1984). This period saw a fragmentation of the rural workforce and a diffusion of the base of organised power among local Dalit agricultural labour, with migrant labourers often blamed for it (M. Singh, 1995, p. 198). Singh (1995) recounts an incident from a village in the Ludhiana district, where local labourers resisted the entry of migrant workers into the village. The conflict was mediated by the sarpanch, who was himself a big landowner, who assured equal employment to local labourers, provided they accepted the same wages as that of migrant workers. The local labourers had to accept the terms, as they had lost their collective bargaining power.

This absence of class polarisation and conflict in high-growth agricultural economies was also observed by Scott (1985) in his study of rural Malaysia. He explained that removing the poor from the production process, rather than exploiting them, helped eliminate the terrain of political struggle. The new technology bulldozed the very sites where classes clashed earlier—such as the threshing floor—where piece rates or rents were settled.[36]

[36] "In place of the struggle over piece-rates for cutting and threshing, there is now only a single payment to the machine-broker. In place of negotiations over transplanting costs, there is the option of broadcasting the seed and avoiding the conflict altogether. In place of tense and contentious disputes over the timing and level of rents there is increasingly the alternative of hiring the machines and farming oneself or of leasing to an outsider for a lump sum" (Scott, 1986: 13). "If the profits of the green revolution had depended on squeezing more from the tenants, rather than dismissing them, or extracting more work for less pay from labourers, the consequences for class conflict would surely have been far more dramatic" (Scott 1986).

While internal class conflict between Jutt farmers and Dalit labourers saw a decline in the post GR period, the ascendant class of agrarian capitalists from the dominant caste gave rise to a new kind of rural politics in Punjab and elsewhere, termed in the literature as the 'New Farmers Movement' (see S. S. Gill, 1988, 1994 on Punjab; Brass, 1994 for a collection of essays on similar movements from other parts of India). They mobilised to demand continued state support to maintain high agrarian profitability while eschewing the class relations between cultivators and displacing the landless Dalit labourers from their agenda altogether (Assadi, 1997; Banaji, 1994; Dhanagare, 2017; S. S. Gill, 1994; Pattenden, 2005).

In the post-liberalisation and late GR period, however, class-caste relations in rural Punjab appear to be taking a new turn. The economic independence between Jutt farmers and Dalit labourers has been argued to have contributed to Dalit assertion against Jutt landowners, particularly in the electoral, religious, and cultural spheres, as well as in demands for land, employment, and wage rates (Jodhka, 2014; Jodhka & Louis, 2003; Judge, 2015; Martin, 2015; N. Sharma, 2009; Venkatesh, 2017). Jutts have also retaliated with collective punishment in the form of 'social boycotts' of Dalits. More recently, these conflicts have flared over wage rates of paddy transplantation but also other factors, which shows the concentration of Jutt's class and caste power. Jodhka (2002) has conceptualised these changes through the categories of dissociation (from polluting jobs), distancing (from the village or farm economy and Jutt-dominated Sikh religion), and autonomy (through the building of independent gurudwaras, cremation grounds, and community centres). It has also been reflected in the popular culture with the rising popularity of young Dalit singers such as Ginni Mahi and her proud proclamation of identity in her songs, alongside posters and stickers behind vehicles reading '*chamaar da puttar*' (son of chamaar).

There seems to be a notable regional disparity in this assertion. In the Doaba region of Punjab, where Dalits—particularly Ravidasias—have experienced some degree of economic advancement, their assertion often assumes a cultural dimension. In contrast, in the Malwa region, especially in its south-western parts, which has witnessed limited opportunities for mobility in the non-farm sector or through emigration, Dalit assertions have been more direct. It has manifested in conflicts over

wages for paddy transplanting, proper implementation of the NREGS scheme, and disputes over village common land. Despite significant internal cleavages, which are wrought by the dominant class-castes, Dalits in some villages in this region have successfully organised and expressed their demands for issues that have been long considered dead in Indian politics. These include rights to a one-third share of cultivable common land managed and leased by Gram Panchayats and, more recently, the implementation of land ceiling acts and land redistribution (India Labour Solidarity 2025).

However, this assertion comes with its limits. Quite often, various jatis within the Dalits get co-opted by different political factions among the Jutts in the village, preventing them from constituting themselves as a bloc during elections, in their day-to-day village relations, or from exercising any meaningful influence in the village panchayats even when they attain political office (Judge, 2015; N. Kaur & Kaur, 2021; Martin, 2015).

We will return to this literature in Chapter 7 where we add nuance to the argument that Dalit have faced greater economic independence from the Jutts in terms of employment, credit and bondage. Instead, it is argued that the livelihoods of Dalit labouring class households continue to be shaped be local capital and their accumulation patterns.

To conclude, this section has summarised the discourse of economic distress, environmental degradation, and social upheaval has come to dominate Punjab's social, economic, cultural, and political landscape since the early 1990s, contrasting with the narrative of prosperity, vibrancy, and growth that characterised the early Green Revolution period (Dhesi & Singh, 2008; Jodhka, 2006a; Shergill & Mehta, 2023; L. Singh & Singh, 2016). While revealing essential insights, this narrative has obscured certain other aspects, such as the extent and patterns of capital accumulation in rural and small-town Punjab, as well as among agrarian and merchant classes. The following section turns our attention to the literature on these aspects.

3.2 Beyond the Dominant Narratives: Limitations in the Literature on Punjab's Agrarian Crisis

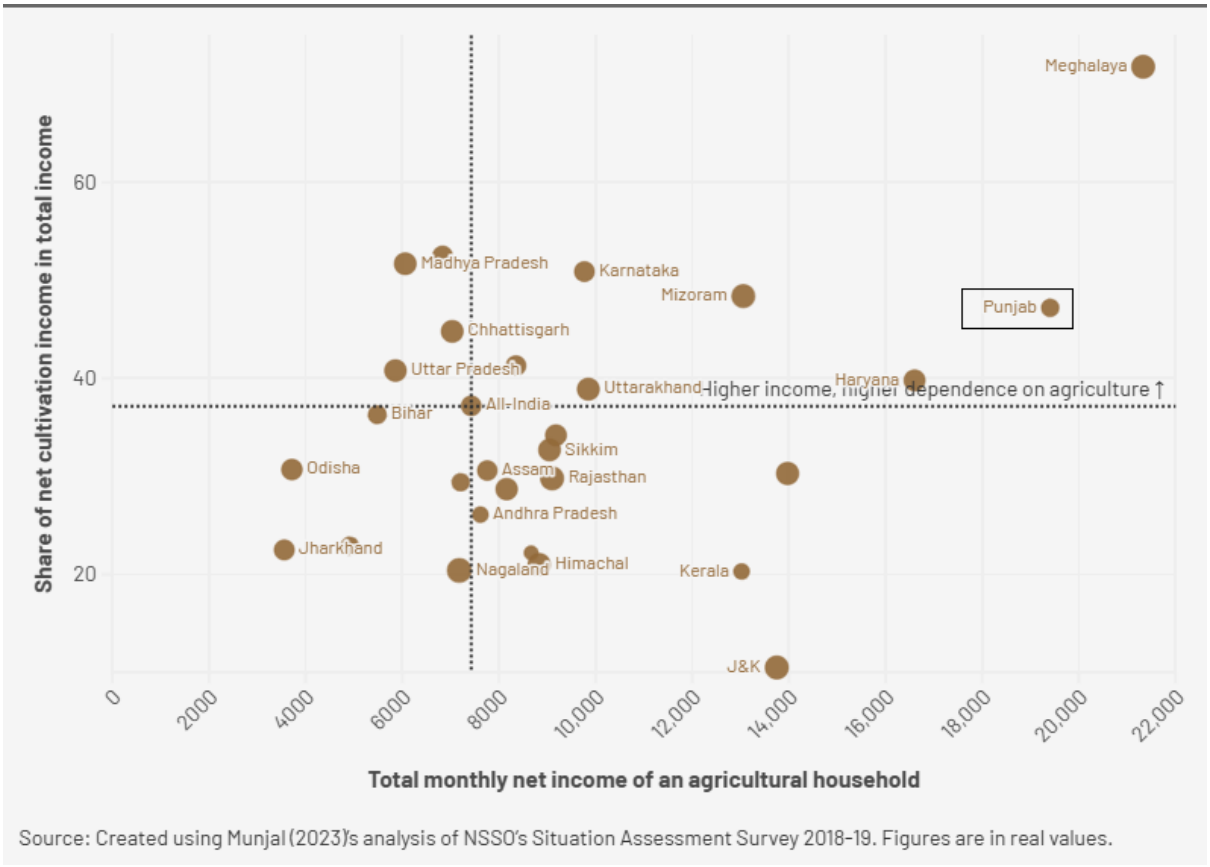
3.2.1 Capital Accumulation in Rural Punjab in the Post-Liberalisation Period

Secondary datasets, which provide some information on agrarian incomes and investments, inform us that the distress in agriculture in Punjab is not that of the average median farmer but rather that of those below her. According to the two subsequent rounds of the National Sample Statistics Office (NSSO)'s Situation Assessment Survey 2012-13 and 2018-19, an average Punjabi *agricultural* household, despite facing stagnation in incomes and facing higher levels of indebtedness in the last few decades, still earns the highest monthly income across all states, and thrice as much as an average Indian agricultural household (see Figure 3.6; see also Munjal, 2021).[37] In median terms, too, 74 per cent of Punjab's agricultural households earned a monthly income above Rs 10 000 per month, compared to only 32 per cent at the all-India level (Shukla 2024).[38] This was the highest share across all states in India, with Kerala and Haryana's agricultural households ranking second and third, respectively.

[37] This is also confirmed from other secondary data sources. Kannan (2014), for instance, makes use of another data source (Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices) to compare farm income between four states—Punjab, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Karnataka—and found that during the period 2001/2002 to 2007/2008 an average farm household in Punjab, despite a stagnation in profitability, earned 6 to 7 times as high as their counterpart in Maharashtra, 3.6 times as high as in Karnataka and 3.0 times as high as in West Bengal. Another study by NABARD (2017) found a similar observation.

[38] An average agricultural household in India, in fact, now earns more from wages (40% of total income in 2018-19, up from 32% in 2012-13) than from cultivation (37% in 2018-19 down from 48% in 2012-13), another sign of acute distress among Indian farmers.

Figure 3.6 State-wise monthly income per agricultural household and share of cultivation income in total income for an agricultural household, 2018-19



Source: Created using Munjal (2023)'s analysis of NSSO's Situation Assessment Survey 2018-19. Figures are in real values.

Note: the size of the dot represents the share of agricultural households in rural households—the bigger the dot, the greater the share of agricultural households.

An average agricultural household in Punjab also invests thrice as much as an average Indian farmer household, at least in nominal terms (Bathla & Kumari, 2017). As discussed earlier, an average Punjabi farmer cultivates five times the amount of land of an average Indian farmer and twice that of an average Punjabi farmer two decades ago.[39] What it makes clear is that while an average Punjabi citizen is now only slightly richer than an average Indian citizen, the gap halved in the last three decades (as shown in figure 3.2 in section 1 of this chapter), it is not because its average farmer has become poorer relative to their counterparts from other regions. This implies that Punjab has lagged either because its average labourer or its big bourgeoisie has fallen

[39] According to the recent Situation Assessment Survey 2018-19, a median Punjabi agricultural household operates on somewhere around 6 acres of land compared to a median Indian farmer who operates on less than 1 acre of land.

behind their counterparts from other regions. Damodaran (2008) places his bet on the latter. This is not unfounded—only 12 Punjabis made it to the latest Hurun rich list 2024 out of a total of 1,271 billionaires in India—a paltry share of 0.9 per cent, lower than even impoverished states like Rajasthan (see Jodhka & Vakulabharanam, 2023).[40]

Within agricultural households, there are vast differences. Surveys conducted by local agricultural universities such as Punjab Agriculture University reveal that the average annual income of a large landholding farmer (that is those owning and operating between 10-25 acres) was 9.75 times that of a marginal landholding farmer and 4.16 times that of a small landholding farmer (A. P. Kaur & Singh, 2023, p. 20). If not an average farmer in Punjab, these bigger farmers, that is those owning and operating above 10 acres of land, who constitute one-third of the cultivators as seen in the previous section, can certainly be seen as accumulating surplus from agriculture.

What we have arrived at, in essence, is the crux of Punjab's capitalist development in the post-liberalisation period, which holds for capitalism in general: there is distress *alongside* surplus production and capital accumulation. This is corroborated by fieldwork-based studies on capital accumulation by the bigger landowning farmers in the post-liberalisation period. Evidence suggests that they have continued to accumulate through contract farming (Shrimali, 2021), cultivation of potatoes and other higher-value bit riskier crops (Sinha 2020), large-scale leasing-in of land (Bansal, 2020a), and even purchase of land for cultivation abroad (Lerche, 2014), although it is also evident that a larger share of agrarian surplus is now appropriated by the transnational corporations that operated upstream and downstream of agriculture (Shrimali 2022, Lerche 2014). The fieldwork evidence discussed in Chapter 5 of the thesis contributes to this growing literature on rural capital accumulation in Punjab (and elsewhere) by providing a comparative perspective from two regions of Punjab—one where capital accumulated has remained primarily agrarian (the Malwa region), and the other where it has diversified into various sectors of the economy (the Majha region).

[40] https://indianexpress.com/article/trending/top-10-listing/top-10-richest-cities-in-india-2024-9541232/ Last accessed 22/03/2025

However, when it comes to non-farm sources if incomes, both secondary data sets and fieldwork-based studies reveal that Punjabi farmers tend to have a much smaller share of non-agrarian incomes compared to their counterparts from other states. For instance, while an average agricultural household in India earned 8 per cent of its total income in 2012-13 from non-farm business, which declined to 6.3 per cent in 2018-19, the corresponding figures for an average agricultural household in Punjab were roughly half of that at 4.2 per cent and 3.8 per cent respectively (Munjal, 2021). Even among the larger farmers, who tend to be more diversified, data reveal that 1.52 per cent and 0.73 per cent of the income of medium and large farmers in Punjab came from non-farm businesses (Saini & Kaur, 2022).

Sociologists and anthropologists, too, have observed and been puzzled by the lack of diversification beyond agriculture among Jutt agrarian capitalists. In the context of a Green Revolution-led increase in the incomes of middle to upper sections of the peasantry (Byres 1981), there was considerable interest in understanding what the Kammas, Reddys, Patidars, Vokkaligas, Marathas, and Jats were doing with their surplus, but there was a lack of information. Writing in the early 1980s, Bhalla and Chadha (1982) note in their comprehensive research on income distribution in the aftermath of GR policies that "big farmers, rich peasants and landlords are using only a fraction of their surplus for capital formation in agriculture itself. There is little evidence of what is happening to the huge surpluses nor any evidence of large-scale house construction or investments in the industry".

In this respect, evidence from Punjab seems to be in stark contrast to evidence from other GR regions, which have shown growing importance of non-agrarian incomes in the surplus accumulation of top-tier landowners and/or farmers (see Baru 2000, Parthasarathy 2015, edited volumes by Himanshu et al., 2016 and Jodhka & Simpson, 2019 contain a collection of essays on long-term changes in India's rural economy and its growing integration with the urban, non-farm economy). Bal (2006) and Mooney (2013) find that even among the diaspora, Jutts have engaged more as industrial workers and as agriculturalists, with the exception of the taxi and transport business, compared to similarly placed Patels who have monopolised the motel and corner shop business in the US and UK.

Different scholars have offered different explanations for this. Some political scientists have highlighted the role of Sikh militancy, the subsequent state repression in the 1980s and '90s, and the worsening economic relations with Pakistan (G. P. Singh, 2015). Further, Alam (1986) notes a historical disjunction between agriculture and industry in Punjab since the colonial period to explain its lower-than-average industrial performance in the post-colonial period (see Tewari 1998, Baru 2000 for a counterview who have cited the decent growth of small-scale manufacturing in Punjab as a successful case of agro-industry linkages similar to other GR-regions such as deltaic Tamil Nadu and coastal Andhra). Sau (1988) explained this failure as a result of the introduction of the New Economic Policy, which adversely affected the small-scale enterprises (SSE) as they came under pressure from above (the bigger corporations and rising imports) as well as from below (rising demands of the workers). Murali (2017) has exposed a clear agrarian bias in Punjab's policy and in electoral promises, most notably as free electricity subsidies to agriculture[41] to appease the dominant agrarian community of Jutt Sikhs and prevented them from diversifying before agriculture. Punjab's unequal and worsening relations with the union government have also been used as an argument: Punjab has not had the same party as the centre since the 1980s and is argued to have been deliberately kept agrarian to meet India's food grain production requirement in the country (P. Singh, 2008; P. Singh & Singh, 2020).

Much of the explanation for this lack of economic diversification among Jutts, who controlled much of the agrarian surplus in the state, has been confined to the socio-cultural and psychological factors such as 'lack of a merchant ideology' and a 'rugged temperament' (Bal 2006), lack of 'risk-taking capacity', adequate knowledge about industry and trade, not being used to a 'sitting job' like trade (S. Singh, 1997), lack of 'networking culture' or 'community belongingness' (Bal, 2006; S. Singh, 2013), lack of 'business acumen, necessary expertise and aptitude' (Gill 1988), a sense of 'complacency' especially in the context of rising incomes from agriculture, making diversification 'unnecessary' (Damodaran 2008), 'disdain for small-scale manufacturing' which tends to have low rates of profit (Sau 1988), among others. It is

[41] The power subsidy alone accounts for 18 per cent of state expenditure, which had significantly increased Punjab's debt problems. As discussed in chapter 3, Punjab now has the highest debt to GSDP ratio in the country, and at a most severe risk of Sri Lanka-like economic and political crisis.

also not uncommon to dismiss them as irrational or overly spendthrift for their excessive expenditure on weddings, housing, and feasts, a trope attached to them since the colonial period (N. Gill, 2024).

However, as Harriss-White (2003) has argued, it is not very insightful to study capital accumulation or investment behaviour of agrarian capital (or of any class, for that matter) in isolation from its relations with neighbouring accumulating classes, such as merchant capital, industrial capital, business capital, or even finance capital. While cultural factors and path dependency certainly play a role, many scholars such as Alam (1986), Sau (1988), Gill (1988), Singh A. (1999), and Damodaran (2008) have argued that one may have to look beyond the rural to understand the 'paradox of the north Indian agrarian castes' (Damodaran's 2008 articulation). Instead, these scholars have argued that it is the Hindu Bania merchant's domination of the non-farm economy (Alam 1986, Gill 1988, Singh A. 1999, and Damodaran 2008), their lack of interest in industry (Sau 1984), and their antagonistic relationship with the Sikh Jutt peasant (Singh and Dhaliwal 2011) that has acted as a strong barrier to Jutt's transformation from capitalist farmers into 'new capitalists' and the lack of sufficient growth in industry in Punjab.

A more nuanced position was taken by Singh (1999), who cited the demand-led growth of commercial activity due to the rise in peasants' incomes as a kind of merchant-industrial development. Punjab's proximity to industrial production centres such as Delhi, and well-established commercial networks between trading castes of Punjab with Delhi's industrial and commercial capital allowed Punjabi peasants to meet their demand for consumer goods without any need for setting up industries within the state.

These latter perspectives, which have attempted to explore the links between Punjab's agrarian and non-farm economy, provide a dialectical and nuanced perspective to understanding Punjab's political economy—its distress as well as accumulation—compared to the plethora of literature on agrarian distress, which has shown a preoccupation with the villages, agriculture, smaller farmers, and to a lesser degree, agricultural labourers. The following section critically engages with the latter set of arguments and situates this thesis' contribution to them.

3.2.2 Towns, Markets and Merchants in Punjab's Capitalist Development

The focus of the 'agrarian question' primarily remains on how the rural shapes the urban—through its contribution of capital, labour, land, food, raw materials, and being a market for industrial produce. Scholars of commercial capitalism, on the other hand, have explored how the intimate dynamics of commercialisation and merchant class-castes have shaped the rural-agrarian production and classes. Notable in this work on India are historian Jairus Banaji's (2016) analysis of how British commercialisation led to the commodification of agricultural production through 'formal' subsumption of labour; and Barbara Harriss-White's (1996, 2003, 2016) long-standing research from a small town in northern Tamil Nadu These scholars have shown that whether the non-farm economy expands or contracts, the manner in which it does so and who benefits or loses from it have profound and differentiated impacts on the various rural classes and the relationships between/among them.

A systematic critical examination of this aspect has been lacking in the case of Punjab. Analyses of agrarian capitalism have remained largely disconnected from the political economy of small towns and their social structures of accumulation, and vice versa, except for a few studies, such as Alam (1986), Singh (1999), Singh (2008) and, to some extent, Sinha (2020). By implication, political economists have missed the merchant as another significant beneficiary of the GR-led capitalist development.[42] However, in the backdrop of the communal-political crisis of the 1980s, the rise of the "new farmers movement" in the 1980s, and the prolonged agrarian distress among small and marginal farmers in the 1990s and 2000s, some scholars have paid attention to the relational dynamic between peasants/farmers and the agricultural trader-cum-moneylender (or the *arhtia)* through whom the peasants sold their grains. Summarising this literature, Sinha (2020) argued, there is often a tendency to see the rural and peasants' interests as *necessarily* antagonistic to the town and the merchant-middleman, which has been a common trope since the colonial period (see N. Gill, 2022). Interestingly, this trope was recently rejuvenated by the Indian state during the farmers' protests to make space for its dominant ally—the larger corporate groups

[42] Anthropologists have been more attentive towards the merchant/business communities since the 1960s itself. See Upadhyay (2023) for a discussion on these.

eyeing the lucrative agricultural markets to expand their surpluses (J. Singh, 2020; S. Singh, Harriss-White, et al., 2021).[43]

In the 1980s, some economists and political scientists argued that the Bania domination in the urban business economy and the strong barriers they erected were the root causes of the political crisis of the 1980s. For instance, Alam (1986) argued that "the bourgeois aspirations among the Sikh rural gentry have come into clash with the bourgeois hegemony of Hindu traders, merchants and industrialists; in other words, the growing aspirations got blocked by the established hegemony. This clash has been an important source of *simmering discontent* within the rural gentry (emphasis added)" Similar arguments have been made by other scholars such as S. S. Gill & Singhal (1984) and G. Singh, (1984). Alam (1986) continues that the merchant/trading caste domination is much stronger in Punjab due to the communal differences between agrarian and merchant capital compared to other parts of India where "the clash between the two forms of capital has remained a straight-forward economic one".

Later, in the 2000s, when Punjab and especially the Malwa region was reeling with a spate of farmer suicides, the arhtiyas and their debt were once again projected as the leading cause of distress among farmers (A. Gill, 2004; P. Singh, 2008; S. Singh, 2018; S. Singh & Bhogal, 2014; S. Singh & Dhaliwal, 2011). Various recommendations were made to protect small farmers from exploitation by the *arhtiyas* and to reduce, or even eliminate significantly, the role of the arhtiyas, in line with the Madhya Pradesh government's decision to abolish procurement through arhtiyas (Singh and Dhaliwal 2011: 120-22). The most significant step in this direction was the enactment of a direct payment system in 2017, after which the state agencies pay farmers directly after procurement of the produce in their bank accounts instead of through the arhtiyas who, it was argued, used their power to delay payments to farmers, along with charging exorbitant interest, and other malpractices (S. Singh & Dhaliwal, 2011).

The argument here is not that commercial capital in Punjab (or India, or anywhere else) did not or does not, exploit or cheat peasants and labourers or bind them in ties of debt

[43] It is another matter that it was the state itself that had consolidated the power of the arhtiyas in the small towns of Punjab five decades ago, although admittedly the state then was of a slightly different kind.

through the interlocking of credit, agro-inputs, consumer goods, and output markets. It does all of this, as merchant capital does elsewhere. Nor is the argument that merchant capital is a powerless figure, far from it.[44] Instead, as argued by Sinha (2020); Jan and Harriss-White (2012); and Shankar and Krishnamurthy (2012), the existing narratives have pre-empted a concrete understanding of the relation between the two. There is a need for nuanced, context-specific, fieldwork-based analysis of the relational dynamics between different classes of agrarian producers and their neighbouring classes, especially merchant capital, in shaping the capitalist development of a particular region.

Research by scholars such as Jan and Harriss-White (2012) and Banaji (2016) from colonial India, and Jan (2019) from colonial Punjab and Sinha (2020) on contemporary Punjab have shown that the role of markets and merchants is not always exploitative of peasants, nor are they always 'unproductive' or 'transitory' as has often been argued in the literature, including among agrarian political economists. Moreover, there exists a vast diversity among peasants and merchants, and their class relations are mediated by various factors, such as their respective class and caste positions. Sinha's (2020) research finds that the economic interests of arhtiyas were closely aligned with those of the larger landowners at the expense of small and marginal farmers. By extension, a Dalit landless peasant would have a different dynamic than a Jutt small peasant with the Bania *arhtiya* (Harriss-White, 2014; Sinha, 2019).

In addition, the market conditions of commerce (forced vs normal commercialisation; oligopolistic vs competitive conditions among merchants), the nature of the commodity—perishable fruits and vegetables vs grains (Olsen, 1993; Sinha, 2017), as well as state support for agrarian or commercial capital play a crucial role in determining the quality of farmer-arhtiya relations. For instance, states such as Madhya

[44] That the commercial capital in Punjab has strong ties with the state is abundantly clear: till 2019 they had avoided the direct payment to farmers for the crops sold through them, they were also successful in increasing their commission from 1.5% to 2.5% in the 1990s and have continued to pressurise the state to increase the commission lately. More recently, when the state government had amended its APMC act, it had been done without touching the figure of the arhtiya and without allowing private markets in wheat and paddy. It is also an open secret that arhtiyas engage in informal moneylending, but the state doesn't regulate nor tax such incomes. Arhtiyas are also electorally and politically strong lobbies, constituting a big share of the towns and the cities.

Pradesh and Maharashtra seem to have diminished the power of the merchant class (Krishnamurthy, 2012, Baru 2000, respectively), while in others such as Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, the state policy has been argued to have a clear merchant bias (Chhotray et al., 2018; Harriss-White, 1996, 2008 respectively). In Gujarat and Punjab, state policies have bolstered the interests of both landed and mercantile capital (Rutten, 1995; S. Singh & Bhogal, 2014).

The empirical evidence discussed in Chapter 6 will contribute to this latter literature by analysing two distinct cases of farmer-*arhtiya* relations—one in which Hindu, Bania merchants had been able to reproduce their domination in the non-farm economy but maintained relatively equal and non-antagonistic relations with the agrarian capital (similar to Sinha's 2020 case), and the other where Hindu (and upper caste Sikh) merchant's domination was challenged during the militant, separatist movement in the 1980s, and its place taken over by the Sikh Jutt agrarian capital, who shared relatively more antagonistic relation with agrarian classes. More importantly, this analysis compels us to conduct a further critical evaluation of the farm-non-farm linkages in Punjab. Chapter 6 extends the terrain of such an analysis from farmer-arhtiya relations to include other aspects, such as the extent and nature of growth in the non-farm economy under contemporary neoliberal capitalism—whether mercantile, industrial, or service-based—and the social structures of accumulation within this sector. This nuanced understanding of the class relations between different classes of agrarian producers and merchant capital is also helpful in our comprehension of the diversity of political actions among farmers and arhtiyas in the two fieldwork regions during the 2020-21 farmers' protest. This is further elaborated in Chapter 6.

3.2.3 Accumulation and Accumulation Patterns in Rural India: Towards a Schema

Having emphasised the role of rural capital accumulation and its links with the non-farm economy and non-agrarian classes, this last section of this chapter zooms out from the specific context of Punjab to ask a more general question: how does one make sense of India's capitalist development in the post-liberalisation period and its regional diversity from the standpoint of rural capital accumulation and its movement across

different sectors of the economy? Evidence on rural capital accumulation among larger landowning farmers, contractors, gatekeepers, politicians, land brokers, etc, has been growing in the last decade or so. However, much of this evidence remains scattered across studies from different regions. This section synthesises the burgeoning literature into a systematic review, facilitating the identification of diverse patterns of accumulation in a particular region (its movement in and/or out of agriculture) and enabling comparisons with other regions and political economies. In doing so, it builds upon and contributes to previous attempts at such an analysis, most notably those by Damodaran (2008), Baru (2000), S. Singh (2013), Lerche (2014), Parthasarathy (2015), Kalaiyarasan and Vijayabaskar (2021), and Sinha (2021).

Damodaran (2008) offers a novel analysis of the social origins of the contemporary business and industrial class in India, outlining the routes taken by different groups into urban, industrial, and trading capitalism within India's expanding urban economy. He identified three general trajectories of transformation of Indian castes and communities into industrialists or capitalists— (1) *the bazaar to factory* route as seen among mercantile groups of Banias, Khatris and Marwaris who channelled their surplus from trading before and during colonial period into industrial production since the latter half of the nineteenth century, while maintaining their grip on agricultural trading; (2) *the field to factory* route as observed among some farming communities who successfully diversified into the capitalist non-farm economy such as Kammas, Reddy and Rajus in Andhra, Naidus and Gounders in Tamil Nadu, and Marathas and Patidars in western Maharashtra and Gujarat respectively, although for the latter it was possible only through pooling their resources through milk and sugarcane cooperatives and strong political support; and finally (3) the *office to factory* route, with literati or scribe castes of Kayasthas and Ezhavas turning into local businessmen over time. Vicol (2019) also employed a typology to analyse the livelihood strategies of different class groups in his study villages—hanging in, stepping up, and stepping out.

However, both Damodaran's (2008) and Vicol's (2019) framing does not differentiate between cases where rich farmers used their agrarian surpluses to diversify into the non-farm economy, such as the case of Kammas and Reddys, from the instances where diversification into non-farm capitalist economy happens as petty commodity

producers or even as labourers, as discussed in the case of the Gounders in western Tamil Nadu's growing knitwear industry. Both cases are classified under the same 'field to factory' route by Damodaran (2008), in part because his focus is on the routes taken by different groups into urban, industrial, and trading capitalism operating in India's growing urban economy.

As elaborated later in this section, as well as in Chapter 6, these distinctions hold immense importance for our purpose, in part due to their differential influence on the resolution, or lack thereof, of the agrarian question(s) of land, labour, capital, and rural politics. It also has implications for urban transformation (see Parthasarathy, 2015) and for processes of local democratisation through their shaping of public policy, regional politics, and even national politics (see Baru, 2000). To capture these nuanced dynamics, this section proposes a modified schema, which is argued to be more suitable for identifying and analysing the diverse patterns of accumulation in rural India. This schema is later used in Chapter 5 to understand the fieldwork evidence on the accumulation patterns of the classes of capital in the study villages.

1) *Upward and outward*—where the agrarian capital class was able to generate and appropriate agrarian surpluses and used that surplus to diversify outside of agriculture successfully

2) *Outward and upward,* where the dominant agrarian caste-class did not benefit to any significant degree from agriculture for several reasons but benefitted from a successful integration into the growing urban or non-farm business economy

3) *Upward but not outward*—where the agricultural production conditions were developed, and a surplus accumulating class in agriculture existed, but they were unable, or unwilling, to diversify into the urban economy

4) *Neither upward nor outward*—regions with poor irrigation and not-so profitable agriculture, as well as a non-dynamic non-farm sector, which prevents them from diversifying into the non-farm economy; yet they are able to reproduce their position at the top of the rural-agrarian hierarchy.

To reiterate, the schema proposed here is designed to capture the primary or dominant patterns of accumulation in a particular region and its political economy. As shown using fieldwork evidence in Chapter 5, in reality, multiple trajectories often coexist in a village or a region (sometimes even within a household), making it not only challenging to identify a dominant trend, especially if it was not the main research question of the study, but may also undermine the relevance of delineating the main trend from the undercurrents. While being aware of these limitations, this schema is still useful in at least three ways:

(1) A macro-level, comparative picture helps us understand India's capitalist development and its regional diversity from a new standpoint—that of rural capital accumulation. Moreover, while helping us appreciate the diversity of the patterns of capital accumulation, it also allows us to draw some informed generalisations that can act as a good starting point for further exploration. It also compels us to revisit the debate on the Agrarian Question of Capital, which remains an important project despite being largely bypassed under neoliberalism.

(2) the comparative analysis empowers us to link the capital question to the 'land question' that is, the role of land ownership as a source of power, status and socio-economic differentiation in rural India, by asking more open-ended questions about its continuing importance.

(3) the incorporation of rural/provincial capital into our analysis will also add more nuance to our understanding of the Agrarian Question of Labour—their organisation of work, labour processes and patterns of simple reproduction—and the Agrarian Question of Politics, by shaping the scope and practice of progressive politics among farmers and labourers.

We will return to this thread after a discussion on the proposed schema, which is elaborated on below:

Firstly, the *upward and outward* trajectory could be seen amongst the rich capitalist farmers of coastal Andhra, mainly Kammas and Reddys, who turned their agrarian surpluses and proceeds from land sales into seed capital for trading, entertainment, and urban businesses of various kinds, which provided better overall returns

(Balagopal, 1987; Upadhya, 1988b). In some cases, the businesses included the IT and software sectors.[45] However, more recently, land brokering, speculative land deals and infrastructure development projects amidst a real estate boom have been used more vigorously by them to accumulate further surpluses in cities like Hyderabad, Vijayawada and Amravati in Andhra (Benbabaali, 2018b; Parthasarathy, 2013; Ramachandran et al., 2010; Upadhya, 2021). Their caste, kinship networks, employment, and connections in the cities helped men from these castes to embed themselves in these markets, as well as facilitated their spatial and trans-local mobility and domination (Benbabaali, 2018b; Roohi, 2019).

A similar pattern can be observed in Rutten's (1995) study of Patidar capitalist farmers in western Gujarat, who converted their surplus from potato cultivation into trading, setting up small-scale rural industries such as tile and pipe factories, cement trading, and transport companies, among others. Furthermore, Damodaran (2008) also elaborates on the cooperative route taken by larger Maratha sugarcane farmers in their outward trajectory. More recently, Yadav (2022), Vicol (2019) and Chatterjee (2022) found a similar accumulation pattern, although at a much-constrained scale, among agrarian capital Ahirs in southern Haryana and Marathas in different regions of Maharashtra, respectively, who gradually diversified into petty urban businesses, while continuing to engage in agriculture.

Notably, most of these regions were early recipients of the new agricultural technology. In addition, they were situated in privileged locations: close to the boomtown of Vizag city, the IT and software boom town of Hyderabad, and the brand-new state capital city, as well as the Bombay-Ahmedabad railway line, the Delhi NCR industrial cluster, and the Delhi-Mumbai industrial corridor, respectively. Furthermore, the dominant agrarian class-castes of the region ensured that they were favourably integrated into this booming economy, becoming a conduit for international capital and greatly benefiting from their control over the local state apparatus and its resources (Parthasarathy 2015). In most of these cases, this expansion of provincial agrarian capital has sparked a dynamic urbanisation process and contributed significantly to the growth of

[45] This includes the infamous case of Ramalinga Raju of Satyam computer services whose agrarian origins never captured the headlines (Parthasarathy 2015).

provincial towns and a restructuring of the urban spaces, leading to 'agrarianisation of the urban' (see (Balakrishnan, 2018; Balakrishnan & Gururani, 2021; Harriss-White, 2021, Parthasarathy 2015).

Secondly, the *outward and upward* trajectory denotes an accumulation pattern where the dominant agrarian or landowning caste-class did not benefit to any significant degree from agriculture for reasons such as smaller landholdings, relatively poor agricultural conditions, the presence of an exploitative moneylending/trading class but benefitted from a successful integration into the growing urban or non-farm business economy. The most prominent example of this trajectory is the garment manufacturing cluster in the western Tamil Nadu town of Tirrupur, where small and medium Gounder landowners, who belonged to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) or middle castes, successfully diversified into owners of small-scale garment manufacturing units and other related activities (Carswell & De Neve, 2013; Chari, 2004; Djurfeldt et al., 2008; Heyer, 2016, 2019).[46]

Harriss-White's (2016) long-term study of a small town in northern Tamil Nadu also reveals a similar trajectory, where smaller landowning agrarian castes transition into urban businessmen investing in agri-business or agro-processing industries and subsequently move from rural areas to nearby towns and cities. Harriss-White et al. (2022) long-term study on the political economy of Arunachal Pradesh also shows that the movement of tribal elites into occupations such as renting out and brokering (of land, licenses, buildings, machinery/vehicles), contracting (of materials like stone, sand and wood), petty trade/services, while also seizing land and cultivating on capitalist lines. In the north, Lerche (2023) and Das et al. (2024) found a tendency among smaller and middle-landowning Thakurs in eastern UP to diversify into urban businesses. The contribution of these smaller peasants and PCPs, typically from middle castes to the overall capitalist development of their region can be seen as a form of 'capitalism from below'.

[46] Caste-based networks seem to have played a greater role in their success as businessmen than their agrarian surpluses, as shown by Chari (2004), while also allowing them to bar entrepreneurs from other castes from entering the business (see Soundararajan et al., 2024; Vijayabaskar & Kalaiyarasan, 2014).

Thirdly, the *upward but not outward* represents a trajectory where the agricultural production conditions were developed and a surplus accumulating class in agriculture existed, but for reasons such as a stagnant non-farm economy, lack of institutional support, high social barriers to enter the business economy such as the dominance of the trading castes, or a combination of these factors, most agrarian capitalists were unable, or sometimes unwilling, to diversify into the urban economy. Punjab's case fits well within this pattern, alongside other Jat-dominated green revolution areas of Haryana and western UP and the irrigated parts of Madhya Pradesh (see Damodaran 2008 and Sinha 2021 for Punjab; Jeffrey 1999 for western UP; (Rawal, 2006, and Kalaiyarasan and Vijayabaskar 2021 for Haryana; S. Arora, 2021 for Madhya Pradesh). In such regions, the rural capital owners seem to have continued to invest *primarily* in agricultural modernisation such as in land purchase, land improvement, leasing-in land (often from smaller landholders, termed as reverse tenancy), purchase of agricultural machinery and providing farm services, cultivation of more profit-generating crops, labour tying among others. Outside agriculture, their interests lay in securing public sector employment, controlling local state apparatus, money lending, and/or emigrating to countries in the global north. Contrary to their counterparts who have contributed to agrarian urbanism, they seem to have urbanised their rural settings through expenditures on urban-style housing, maintaining an urbanised modern, consumerist lifestyle. They seem to have not benefitted or only to a limited degree from globalisation and India's increased global integration since the 1980s.

Lastly, regions with poor irrigation and not-so-profitable agriculture and a not-so-dynamic non-farm sector (sometimes due to geographical remoteness) and/or high social barriers to enter the business economy due to the monopoly of traditional business castes such as the Banias or Brahmins, the class of capital owners in rural areas tends to be very thin and the extent of their accumulation relatively lower. In such scenarios, as found by Pattenden (2016) in northern Karnataka, the economic preferences of the dominant caste in the countryside focused on securing state employment, gatekeeping state resources for the poor, obtaining government projects, and labour-tying. In Telangana villages with similar dynamics, Picherit's (2009) and Benbabaali's (2018a) research showed similar trajectories—a big landowning farmer

from a dominant caste had become a labour contractor with control over a hundred labourers, supplying them to construction sites and industrial units in faraway regions.

This schema is, therefore, helpful in identifying and comparing the vast diversity in the patterns of accumulation in rural India and the standard features running through those trajectories. This schema is used in Chapter 5 to identify the patterns of capital accumulation in the two fieldwork villages—with the Malwa fieldwork exhibiting an 'upward but *not* outward' pattern in line with the existing evidence on capital accumulation in Punjab, while the Majha fieldwork site showing a predominantly 'outward and upward' trajectory.

Moreover, this typology enables us to form some broad generalisations on capitalist development in rural India from the capital's point of view. For instance, it can be concluded that the direct transformation of agrarian capital into manufacturing or industrial capital is a relatively rare event. Only Patidars in central Gujarat and Gounders in western Tamil Nadu seem to have followed that path. Increasingly, the tendency appears to be growing in the importance of speculative land deals, real estate, and other rentier activities in rural capital accumulation, which aligns with the rising contribution of the FIRE sector—finance, real estate, and insurance—to India's service-led growth boom (Chandrasekhar, 2023; Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2023).

It also echoes the broad generalisation that has been made by scholars such as Baru (2000) and Parthasarathy (2015) that the regions that have emerged as the centres of growth in the post-liberalisation era, such the western and Northern Tamil Nadu, western Maharashtra, coastal Andhra, are also the regions where there has been greater fluidity of agrarian surpluses and agrarian classes into the non-farm economy, and vice versa (see Baru 2000, Parthasarathy 2015). By implications, it could also lead one to prematurely claim that the agrarian question of capital has been resolved in these regions. The narratives of the growing 'North-South' divide in India are also an offshoot of such generalisations, which have gathered some force in the post-GST regime in India.

While these generalisations, as well as the one discussed earlier, are undoubtedly valid and provide a broader perspective, they are helpful only until they serve as a starting

point and not as a final explanation. The evidence from a large and growing number of studies on a wide range of accumulation patterns suggests that determining where, how, and what drives the flow, or lack thereof, of agrarian capital to other sectors and activities is an open empirical question. It cannot be explained by singling out one factor, such as socio-cultural factors or the Bania domination of the non-farm economy in the case of Punjab, to explain rural capital accumulation patterns in any region. As mentioned earlier, a nuanced understanding of this topic necessitates engaging in the laborious task of examining the long-term political economy of a region, encompassing both its historical and contemporary aspects. This includes an understanding of (i) the changes to the agrarian structure and the extent of agrarian accumulation in the region, (ii) the extent, nature, and pattern of growth in the non-farm economy, (iii) the social structures of accumulation and domination within the farm *and* non-farm economy, and (iv) the relations between the agrarian and non-agrarian classes, including but also beyond the relations between farmers and merchant. Pressures from below, due to progressive political mobilisations from the labouring classes, can also play a crucial role, although it has not been elaborated here.

3.3 Summary and Discussion

To conclude, this chapter illustrated how and why a discourse of economic distress, environmental degradation, and social upheaval has dominated Punjab's social, economic, cultural, and political landscape since the early 1990s. This contrasts sharply with the narrative of prosperity, vibrancy, and growth that characterised the early GR period. This remarkable decline in Punjab, especially compared to the faster-growing states such as Haryana, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu, has raised concerns not only among its residents but also within its influential diaspora, who have actively engaged in discussions about the state's welfare (Thandi, 2017). These issues took centre stage during the historic farmers' protest movement of 2020-21 and reportedly played a crucial role in sustaining its longevity (Moliner & Singh, 2024).

This chapter first summarised the literature that has keenly observed the deeply differentiated nature of growth and distress in Punjab, particularly how smaller and marginal landowners and landless Dalit-OBC labourers had started to be adversely

affected long before the current narrative of distress took over. On the other hand, the bigger landowning cultivators, who constituted one-third of the total landholdings, and the urban-based merchant capital not only accumulated during the GR period but also continued to accumulate in the post-liberalisation period, although with less certainty than before. These nuanced perspectives have helped challenge the oversimplified portrayal of rural India as uniformly suffering, urging a closer examination of concrete economic complexities.

The discussion then pivoted towards two significant yet overlooked aspects of agrarian capitalism in Punjab: rural capital accumulation and the intricate linkages between farm and non-farm economies. As suggested by the limited literature on these topics discussed in this chapter, these processes continue amidst distress and warrant further investigation. By shifting the focus to these components, this thesis aims to move beyond conventional narratives and offer fresh insights into the political economy of development and distress in Punjab.

Taken together, this chapter equips us with the knowledge of the existing literature, the framework, and the tools necessary to appreciate and critically evaluate the fieldwork data on capital accumulation presented in Chapter 5 and the non-farm economy's role in shaping rural capital accumulation in Chapter 6. This is coalesced into Chapter 7, which elaborates how changes in capital accumulation continue to have a profound impact on rural-agrarian politics as well as the simple reproduction of the classes of labour despite the declining *direct* links of employment and credit between rural capital and rural-based labourers.

4: Research Methodology

When I left for Punjab to conduct fieldwork in September 2021, the farmers' protest was at its nadir—it had almost been a year since they had camped at the three main highways connecting Delhi to the rest of the country, but there were no signs of any truce or victory. There was an intense anti-protest propaganda campaign led by pro-government national TV channels and social media handles, which portrayed the protests as anti-India and as being led by larger farmers and traders (Sandhu & Wraich, 2024). I realised pretty early in the fieldwork that there was a palpable fear and distrust among the landowners and farmers that any information on their incomes, wealth, land, and possessions may eventually be used against their interests by the government. Appeals were made on social media not to let any government or private company collect data from the villages. Conducting fieldwork and gathering information on capital accumulation amidst such an atmosphere, alongside the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and strict lockdowns and curfews, was more challenging than I had planned and prepared for. This chapter elaborates on the challenges encountered and the strategies adopted to overcome them.

It also discusses the use of fieldwork methods and tools that helped overcome the challenge of studying long-term phenomena, such as accumulation and proletarianisation, from a single point of data collection. This included using three primary tools—first, collecting the respondents' life history data (drawing on Carlos Oya's 2007 method of collecting life histories of rural capitalists and reading them as 'stories of rural accumulation'); second through collecting family lineage data (drawing on Craig Jeffrey's 1999 study on rich farmers in western UP); and third, playing an options-game of investment preferences to initiate a discussion on their accumulation patterns. Together, these tools help reveal the changes in the accumulation patterns of the surplus-accumulating class-castes and map it across the simple reproduction of the labouring classes against the backdrop of broader political and economic transformations in the state since the 1960s.

The research was designed as a comparative case study, which required identifying two sites in Punjab and conducting fieldwork in a village and its nearby town at each site. The strengths and limitations of this design are discussed in Section 4.1. Section 4.2 discusses the process of scoping and selecting representative sites for fieldwork. A description of the chosen fieldwork sites is provided in Section 4.3. Thereafter, Section 4.4 discusses positionality and biases, as well as the process of gaining access to the field amidst the multiple challenges mentioned above. Section 4.5 elaborates on the process of collecting data on urban-based capitalists, businessmen, and state officials. The chapter concludes in Section 4.6 with some reflections on the village study as a method.

4.1 Research Design and Research Methods: Comparative Method and Village Study

The research questions discussed in the introduction chapter required the collection of quantitative data to capture the agrarian and caste-class structure as well as in-depth qualitative data to capture the relational aspects between and within class-castes as well as those beyond the rural. To this end, instead of an in-depth single-site case study of a village/region or a peripatetic study of several villages in an area, which has been used by some studies on rural accumulation discussed in the previous chapter, a comparative case study of two carefully selected representative sites using the 'village study' as a method was considered more suitable. Village study, an established method among political economists, allows for a certain degree of flexibility in employing a range of tools and techniques tailored to a researcher's requirements (Ramachandran, 1990), providing a delicate balance between the quality and quantity of data, which proved quite valuable for this project.

A comparative study, as Byres (1995) argued, can lead to asking very useful and sometimes new questions and can serve as a rough negative check on accepted historical explanations. It can also lead to new historical explanations. This research has benefitted on the same lines by adopting the comparative approach as it has allowed me to keep a check on accepted social facts and explanations, such as that Jutts are agrarian 'by culture' and that they do not usually invest outside agriculture

helped ask better questions such as 'what explains the gradual diversification of jutts from one region into urban business economy' instead of 'why do jutts not diversify beyond agriculture? Rather than 'In what ways does commercial capital exploit the peasantry?' consider 'What is the relationship between agrarian and commercial capital?' This method also allows explorations of new explanations for such questions.

However, this approach comes with its constraints and limitations, which were encountered during fieldwork. Firstly, village studies suffer from limited coverage and hence place considerable demand on the representativeness of the field sites, especially in a comparative case study setting. Secondly, it requires that uniform questions be posed across both the research sites and that congruence is maintained in analytical categories during analysis, which imposes constraints on both data collection and analysis. For instance, gathering data on specific aspects from one of the sites proved challenging, occasionally due to outright unavailability, which hindered meaningful comparative analysis on those dimensions and made the site selection process more difficult. Furthermore, there was some risk of posing questions that were significant at one site but not at the other; nevertheless, these questions still needed to be asked to ensure comparability across sites.

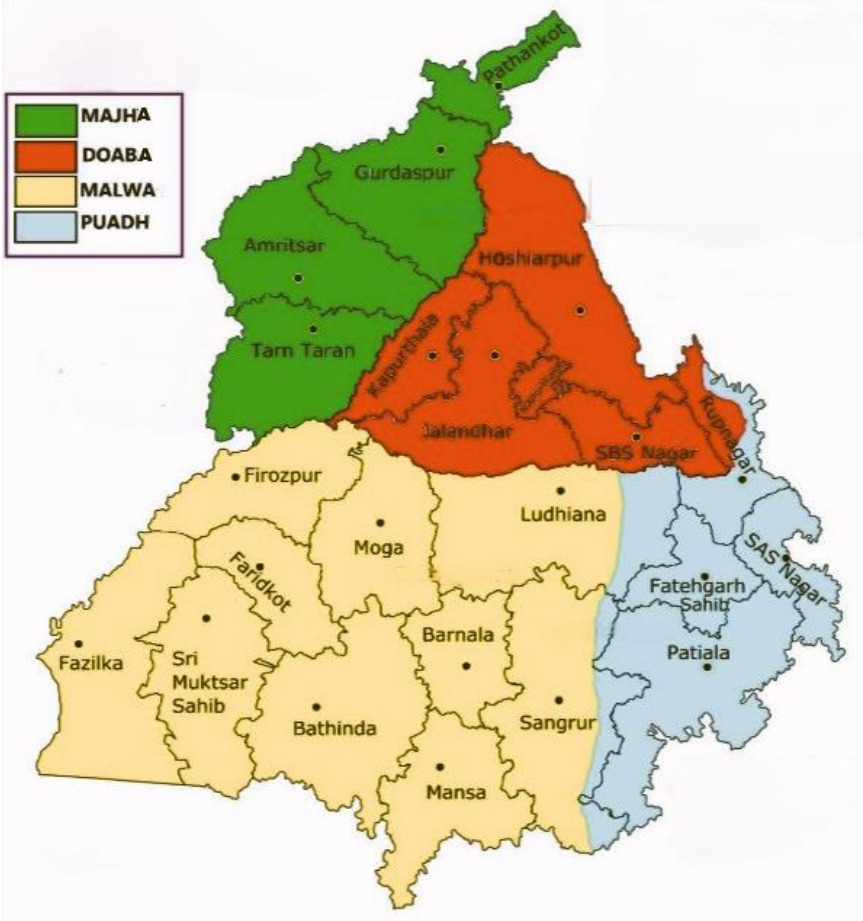
The issue of representativeness was navigated through a prolonged and careful scoping process for fieldwork sites, which helped form a sense of the different types of structures and relationships in various villages across different regions of Punjab. Moreover, collecting information from multiple sources, including those not accessible over the internet, such as data and records from gram panchayats (village council), ASHA workers and Anganwadi centre records,[47] as well as discussions with farmers and labouring class organisations helped form an informed sense of the socio-economic and political conditions in the region. This process is described below.

[47] ASHA workers, or Accredited Social Health Activists, are female community health workers, often from the villages they serve. Anganwadi Center is a government-sponsored childcare and Mothercare centre in India, part of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program, focusing on the holistic development of children aged 0-6 years and pregnant/nursing mothers.

4.2 The First Challenge: Scoping for Research Sites

Despite being a geographically small state, Punjab is divided across three (or four) prominent geographical, cultural and political regions with significant differences in terms of its pre-colonial and colonial history as well as contemporary developments—Majha (between the Ravi and Beas rivers), Malwa (below river Sutlej), and Doaba (between the Sutlej and Beas rivers). Puadh (located between the Sutlej and Yamuna rivers) is typically considered a sub-region within the Malwa region, but it has a distinct dialect from Malwai Punjabi (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 Geographical and socio-political regions in modern Punjab, India



While shortlisting the regions for fieldwork, the Doaba region and its districts were excluded from the design due to their unusual characteristics, which were influenced by five decades of regular emigration to developed countries and remittances from the diaspora to resident families. This has put this region in stark contrast to the

countryside of the rest of Punjab and, indeed, the rest of India.[48] This decision was also informed by my previous fieldwork experience in this region (see Bansal 2019). On the other hand, the Majha region has been relatively under-researched in Punjab from a political economy of development perspective (although it has been a site of research for political scientists given the history of deep-rooted ethno-religious Sikh insurgency and the subsequent state repression in the region). Therefore, it was decided to select a site in each of the Malwa and Majha regions.

Table 4.1 Stages and timeline of fieldwork

Stage	Time period	Description and methods of data collection
Literature review and analysis	October 2020-July 2021	Explorative review of literature on capital accumulation, labour relations, caste and class, market relations, political economy of development in Punjab
Pre-exploration phase	August-September 2021	Finalising research plan and research design, collating district-wise statistical data on various aspects of the agrarian and industrial economy, interviews with some academics
Looking for fieldwork sites	September-October 2021 (Majha and Malwa) and May 2022 (majha)	Shortlisting potential tehsils and villages, visiting them, and further shortlisting villages, followed by another round of visits to finalise a fieldwork site
Fieldwork stage-1	Nov 2021-Jan 2022 (Malwa) and May-June 2022 (Majha)	Gaining access to the field followed by door-to-door collection of data using surveys and participant observations followed by preliminary analysis of the quantitative data; reflections on fieldwork
Fieldwork stage-2	February 2022 (Malwa) and July 2022 (Majha)	In-depth semi-structured interviews with sampled respondents; Focus Group Discussions; discussions with key respondents
Fieldwork stage-3	March-April 2022 (Malwa) and July-August 2022 (Majha)	Meeting state officials to collect data; semi-structured interviews with urban-based businessmen; participant observations among commission agents; interviews with academics, journalists, and members of farmers and labouring class organisations

[48] Moreover, most parts of the region, barring Jalandhar, fall under a sub-mountainous agro-ecological zone and showed lower cropping intensity, a higher proportion of small and marginal cultivators in the landholding structure, lower yields, slightly different cropping pattern (maize and fruits instead of paddy in the monsoon season) and lower profitability from the cultivation of crops. This made these districts unrepresentative of the state pattern.

After collecting and analysing district-wise statistics on various parameters related to the agrarian economy and industrial development, mainly through secondary databases such as Statistical Abstracts, Census reports, Economic Surveys, reports released by various state ministries, previous fieldwork-based studies and meeting some academics with long term fieldwork experiences in the regions, the districts of Sangrur, Patiala and Mansa districts were shortlisted in the Malwa region.[49] In the Majha region, there are four districts, of which Pathankot was excluded at this stage due to its sub-mountainous terrain and agroecology. In contrast, Amritsar was excluded for its highly industrialised and service-based economy, thus shortlisting the remaining two districts of Gurdaspur and Tarn Taran.

Thereafter, brief visits were made to some villages in these shortlisted districts. Sometimes, villages that local academics had earlier surveyed were also visited. In the Malwa region, eight shortlisted villages from two blocks of Sangrur district—Sunam and Lehra—were visited. These two blocks were selected due to my relatively easy access here, given my familial connections. In the majha region, the scoping exercise was stretched over two periods—first in October 2021, when seven villages from 4 blocks in 2 districts (Gurdaspur and Tarn Taran) were visited, and then in April 2022 during which 10 villages from 5 blocks in 2 districts (Amritsar and Tarn Taran) were visited before finally selecting a site for fieldwork.

At this stage, data was collected from the sarpanch or the *lambardar* (a pre-colonial position of revenue collector) of the village. This included, very broadly, the caste-wise distribution of households, the distribution of land ownership and tenancy prevalence, the employment scenario, and economic diversification activities in the village, among others. Sometimes data was also gathered from ASHA workers or Anganwadi workers to get more accurate data on caste-wise distribution on the number of households if the sarpanch or lambardar allowed access to them.

[49] The south-west part of the Malwa region (Faridkot, Muktsar, Fazilka, Abohar, Bathinda) were not shortlisted due to their relatively higher agrarian dependence while Ludhiana, SBS Nagar, SAS Nagar (Mohali) districts were excluded due to their much higher industrialised or service-centred economy, making them non-representative of the overall state and sub-regional economy.

At this stage, the villages visited differed in terms of their population size, distance to the city, varied levels of economic diversification among its landowners, land holding distribution, and types of jobs workers were engaged in, among other things, which allowed me to form broad, informed generalisations on the patterns of accumulation as well as patterns of simple reproduction among labouring classes. The final selection of fieldwork sites was contingent on certain practical constraints as well as the concern to ensure representativeness and a good contrast between the two sites. First, villages too large to cover during a time-bound PhD fieldwork, such as those with more than 400 households, were excluded. Second, villages located too close (less than 10 km) or too remote (more than 30 km) from a city were excluded, as they tend to have a profound impact on their political economy. Thirdly, villages with an excessively high or low share of Dalits in the village population, that is, above 50 per cent or less than 30 per cent, were excluded to ensure representativeness of the state and regional averages. Keeping these three variables relatively constant between the two sites, the idea was to choose two villages that varied in forms and avenues of capital accumulation while being representative of the broader region in terms of other aspects of the agrarian economy.

Based on district-wise statistical data and observations from the first scoping stage, it was found that villages in the Malwa region had, on average, larger landholdings and a prevalence of agrarian-focused accumulation among their farmers. In comparison, the Majha region villages had smaller landholdings and a higher degree of diversification among farmers, both within agriculture and outside it. The extent of farmers' distress and suicides, as well as the outrage against it, was also relatively muted in the Majha region than in Malwa, where a discussion around it elicited strong remarks and finger-pointing.

These first impressions helped shortlist two villages from Sunam block in Sangrur district, which had agrarian-centred accumulation patterns. Both were revisited to collect more information and clarity and to triangulate some of the data already collected this time from a different respondent. The decision to finally select one village was based not only on the village's characteristics and its suitability for the research design but also on the initial rapport built with the respondents during the initial

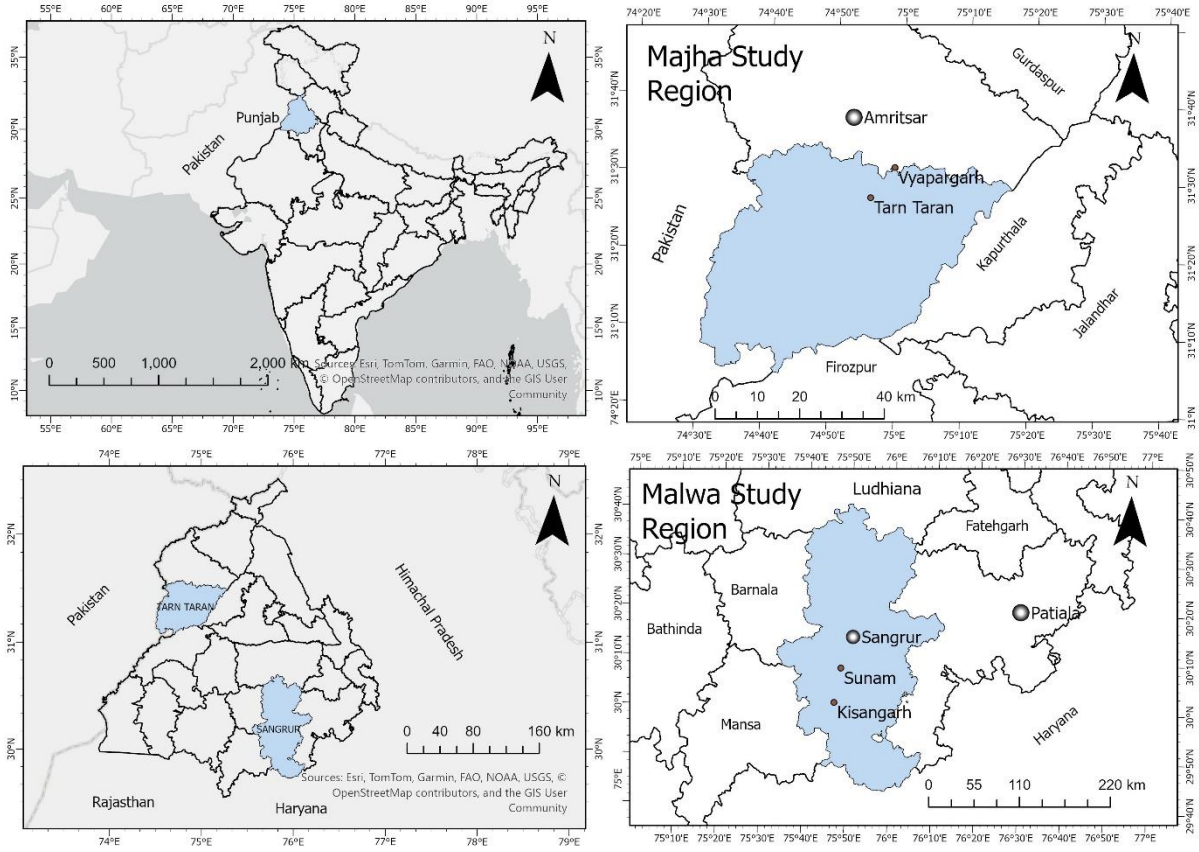
conversations, the perceived access, and the ease of data collection. The selection of the majha study village was finalised after returning to the region in April 2022. The following section provides an overview of the basic details of the two selected villages.

4.3 Introduction to the Fieldwork Sites

In the Malwa region, fieldwork was conducted in Kisangarh[50] village (name changed) and its tehsil headquarters, Sunam, which is 17 km from Kisangarh. Sunam was located 13 km from Sangrur, the district headquarters. Sangrur had a population of approximately 1.65 million and a density of 457 people per square kilometre in 2021, classifying it as a census town. In the Majha region, fieldwork was conducted in Vyapargarh (name changed) and its district headquarters, Tarn Taran, which is 12 km from the village. Tarn Taran district had a population of 1.11 million and a density of 464 people per sq km in 2011. The city of Tarn Taran, a district headquarters, was not significantly different from Sunam, a tehsil headquarters, in terms of its economic size and population—Tarn Taran city had a population of 66, 847 while Sunam's population was 69,069 in 2021—but its proximity to Amritsar lent certain dynamism to the region that was lacking in Sunam. We will briefly discuss the economic and social history of the two regions below.

[50] The pseudonym Kisan-garh means a village of peasants or farmers or a centre of agricultural activity which reflects this village's dominant agrarian character. On the other hand, the word Vyapar-garh which means a centre of trading or business activity has been used for the Majha fieldwork site to reflect high economic diversification among its class-castes. This juxtaposition is aimed to help remember the differences between the two villages.

Map 1 Location of fieldwork sites in Punjab, India



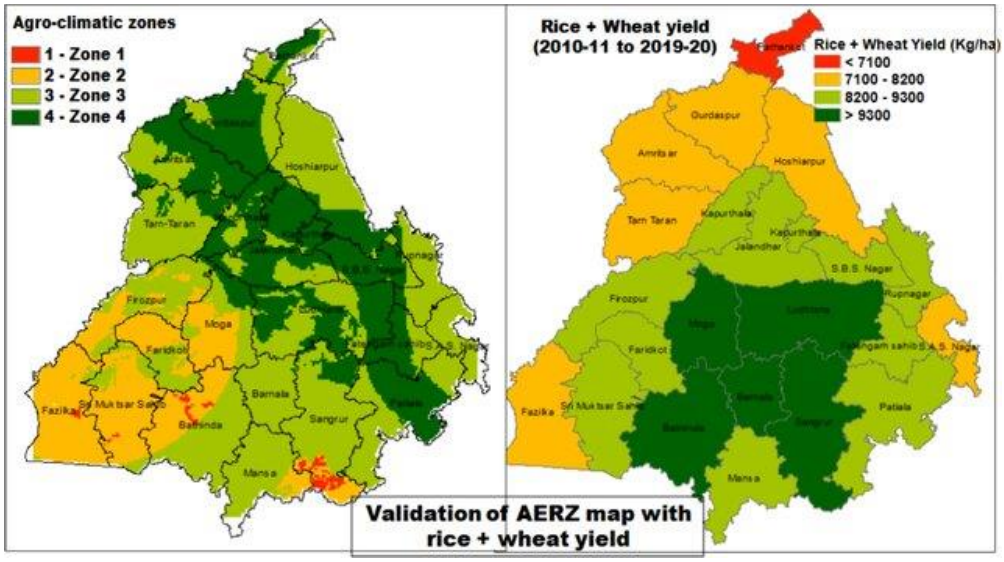
Courtesy: Manikantha Nataraj

Sunam is a small market town with a 54% Hindu population, most of them Banias and Khatris. Many among the latter had settled in the city after partition from west Punjab (now Pakistan) and were still referred to as refugees.[51] Sangrur and Sunam were classified as 'backward' districts until around the 1970s due to their poor agricultural productivity, limited industrial development, inadequate rail and road connectivity, and the presence of feudal landlordism, which had been prevalent since the pre-colonial period, as they were part of the princely states of Patiala, Jind, and Nabha. Sunam was part of the separate state of PEPSU after independence, which later merged into Punjab in 1956. Older male respondents in various villages, including both Dalit labourers and Jutt and Brahmin landowners, often spoke of the *Jagirdari* period as one of high poverty and indebtedness, along with problems of waterlogging, soil alkalinity, low levels of

[51] Sunam was officially renamed Sunam Udham Singh Wala in 2006 after the famous Indian freedom fighter celebrating his defiant act of shooting the perpetrator of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 in London, UK, in 1940.

perennial irrigation, and fragmented landholdings.[52] This meant that, before the 1970s, only land at a certain height level, which constituted half of the village land, was suitable for double cropping. The advent of GR in the 1970s, not just in the form of HYV seeds of wheat and later paddy and tubewell connections, but equally importantly, free distribution of gypsum and the building of a drainage canal, reportedly brought significant improvement in agricultural productivity, cropping patterns and income prosperity, especially for the landowning class-castes and the urban trading class, making it emblematic of the GR period growth in rural Punjab discussed in the previous chapter (see Figure 4.2). There were also marked improvements in road connectivity, rural electrification, and the establishment of mandis, banks, cooperative societies, and other public infrastructure in this period.[53]

Figure 4.2 Rice and wheat yields by agro-climatic zones, Punjab, 2010-11 to 2019-20



Source: Kaur et al. (2024)

Kisangarh, the fieldwork village, lies on the state highway that connects Sunam and Lehra, another tehsil in Sangrur.[54] There are frequent public and private buses to Sunam

[52] Many villages in Sunam district had participated in the militant *muzara* movement, a land and tenancy reform movement in the 1940s against the maharaja of Patiala and the post-colonial Indian state which protected the interests of the Maharaja (Mukherjee 2021).

[53] The new mandi was established in 1984 and the mandi sub-yard in Kisangarh was established in the 1990s (interview with Sunam mandi chairman).

[54] Roughly 10 per cent of the village land lies on either side of this highway, and it is expected to see a significant appreciation in value in a couple of years due to its proposed widening and anticipated land acquisition for the Ajmer-Ludhiana economic corridor. See https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/why-bharatmala-economic-corridor-is-facing-backlash-from-punjab-farmers-2309740-2022-12-15 Last assessed 20th March 2025.

from Kisangarh, departing every 30 minutes. The route is well-connected to the larger cities of Patiala (75 km), Ludhiana (96 km), Chandigarh (135 km), and Delhi (260 km) via road and railway networks. Despite its connectivity with the bigger cities, Sunam was not an industrial hub. According to the Sangrur district industrial profile, agro-processing industries, particularly rice shellers, constituted the bulk of medium and large enterprises, alongside a few large-scale factories manufacturing agricultural machinery. There were 90 rice shellers in 43 villages within Sunam Tehsil itself, with an average of roughly two rice shellers per village, primarily employing migrant labourers. There were some small- to medium-scale construction-related industries, such as lock tile manufacturing, roof slab manufacturing, and PVC pipe manufacturing, as well as liquor factories, among others, that also primarily employed migrant workers (GoP 2016). Most capital was, therefore, provincial, and there was very little entry of large capital, both national and global, into the region. This region remains largely on the sidelines of the global value chains.

Most local Punjabi workers preferred not to work in these industries due to the poor wages and harsh working conditions, which have implications for the structural transformation and employment dynamics in the village, as discussed in detail in Chapter 7. In the last decade or so, Sangrur, and within it particularly Sunam, has emerged as the district with the most alarming decline in the water table, making it less suitable for the ongoing wheat-paddy monoculture and most affected by farmer and labourer suicides along with a fervent farmer and labouring class politics (Dandekar & Bhattacharya, 2017). In essence, Sangrur and Sunam are quintessential GR regions, representing Punjab's story of growth until the 1990s, followed by agrarian distress in the state.

The second fieldwork site, Tarn Taran, part of Amritsar district until 2006, is considered to be the cradle of *Sikhi*[55] since the 15th and 16th centuries and constituted the core of the Sikh empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the pre-colonial period (1799-1849) due to its proximity to Lahore, the seat of the throne. The region came under direct British

[55] Sikh scholars prefer to use the term Sikhi over the more Eurocentric term Sikhism. This region is home to the Harmandir Sahib, the holiest place for Sikhs and the birthplace and resting place of several Sikh Gurus and icons.

rule after the annexation of Punjab in 1849, in contrast to Sangrur and other 'native states,' as they were called, which were governed indirectly by the British through princely states. This region had a much higher population density. It was relatively advanced in terms of agrarian structure (lack of big landlords and high presence of peasant-cultivators who owned and cultivated the land themselves), as well as production and commercialisation of crops, especially tobacco and sugarcane, compared to the native states like Patiala since the period of Sikh empire itself, partly due to fertile alluvial land and adequate rainfall (Banga, 1997; Sachdeva, 1997). This had crystallised its image as a 'land of peasant proprietors' among British colonisers (N. Bhattacharya, 2018; N. Gill, 2024 Chapters 1 and 5). The Sikh Jutts and the other landed class-castes from this region, racialised by the British as sturdy cultivators and as members of the martial race, had benefitted from colonial rule in several ways, such as the advent of canal irrigation, receipt of land grants in the newly established canal colonies in west Punjab (now Pakistan), recruitment into the British imperial army which acted as an additional source of income and security, exclusive access to land ownership and the land market, all of which has been argued to have consolidated their position at the top of the rural-agrarian hierarchy (Gill 2024 Ch-1, 6; Judge 2015).

The end of colonial rule came with the partition of Amritsar, which transformed a region that derives its name from being at the centre of the landscape (majha) into a 'border region' sharing the international border with Pakistan. Being relatively well-developed in terms of irrigation infrastructure, the benefits of the Green Revolution (GR) reached this region in the early 1970s, resulting in increased productivity of rice, wheat, and especially Basmati rice.[56] In the 1980s, this region was widely affected by the separatist Khalistani movement and the subsequent state repression. While the impact of this ethnoreligious nationalist movement on the agrarian economy was relatively limited, it had consolidated the position of the landed Jutt community in villages by expelling the established Hindu and Sikh trading castes from these areas (Judge, 2002, 2015; Puri et al., 1999).

[56] Yield of wheat in 1968 in Amritsar district (of which Tarn Taran was then part) increased from 1570 kg per ha to 3717 kg per ha in 1991 further increasing to 4546 kg per ha in 2020. Similarly, yield of rice increased from 1428 kg per ha in 1968 to 2752 per ha in 1991 to 4170 kg per ha in 2018.

This has had a profound impact on the political economy of development in the region, as well as on its farmers' politics, resulting in a relatively less cohesive front, which is elaborated upon in Chapter 6. In the post-liberalisation period, the city headquarters of Tarn Taran, as well as Jandiala Guru, a small but dynamic town in Amritsar district with a population of 29,232, has seen a rapid transformation of its landscape in the last 2 decades with the advent of neoliberal enclave growth, turning Tarn Taran and Jandiala into satellite towns of Amritsar with big residential buildings, hotels, resorts, and highways among others lining its landscape. The region is much more deeply entrenched in global value chains or global production networks through the investments of big capital of all varieties—local, national, and international —that have dotted the landscape in export-oriented agro-processing, industrial production, and consumer brands.

The study village of Vyapargarh (name changed) is situated on the state highway connecting Tarn Taran and Jandiala. Vyapargarh is well-connected through relatively cheap public and private buses, as well as private autos, to Tarn Taran (12 km), Jandiala (8 km), and Amritsar (33 km). The commutable distance and affordable travel made the towns and cities relatively accessible to the people in Vyapargarh, resulting in a higher share of those who commuted daily for work (discussed further in Chapter 7). In terms of industrial development, proximity to Amritsar and its satellite towns has led to the establishment of several small to medium-scale factories and industries in this region, where many village residents and migrant workers are employed. This meant that livelihoods were less oriented towards agriculture among both labourers and capitalists here, a point further elaborated in Chapter 5 and later in Chapter 7. The agrarian economy of the region has been quite rich and diversified, with the cultivation of basmati rice and paddy in the *kharif* season, followed by wheat, potatoes, peas, and other vegetables in the rabi season. More recently, sugar beet, a crop never cultivated in this region before, has been introduced to the region during the rabi season. All of this makes Vyapargarh representative of the Tarn Taran block but vastly different from the Tarn Taran district, which, due to sharing an international border with Pakistan, has resulted in economic 'backwardness', especially in the growth of the non-farm economy.

In addition, both villages were in close proximity to a degree college, a hospital, a market yard, commercial and state banks, a railway station, Gram Suvidha Kendra[57] and the agricultural cooperative societies, as summarised in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2 Information on basic amenities and facilities in the study villages

Parameters	Kisangarh	Vyapargarh
Tehsil, District	Sunam, Sangrur	Tarn Taran, Tarn Taran
Distance from main cities/town	Sunam (17 kms); Sangrur (30 kms); Patiala (75 kms)	Jandiala (8 kms); Tarn Taran city (12 km); Amritsar (30 kms)
Distance from state/national highway	17 kms (state highway)	2-3 kms (state highway); 8 kms (national highway)
Agricultural market yard	Within the village	2 kms
Nearest Railway Station	5 kms	8 kms
Degree College	7 kms	2 kms
Hospital	5 kms	2 kms
Gram Suvidha Kendra and Agricultural Co-op Society	5 kms	2 kms
Bank Branch	ICICI Bank branch within the village; SBI (5 kms)	Canara Bank, HDFC Bank (both within 1 kms)

Source: Fieldwork data

The census survey of all resident households in the village during fieldwork in 2020-21 revealed 246 resident households in Kisangarh and 353 resident households in Vyapargarh, which was understandably slightly higher than the number of households captured in the government census data from 2011-12 (Table 4.3). Scheduled Castes (SCs) constituted approximately 35 per cent of the total population in Kisangarh and 43 per cent in Vyapargarh. This is not unusual in Punjab's context, where Scheduled Castes (SCs) constitute 38.03 per cent of the rural population, the highest across any Indian state and roughly three times the national average. Fieldwork data indicate that within Dalits, Ramdasias were numerically dominant in Kisangarh (32 per cent) and Mazhabis in Vyapargarh (42 per cent) (Table 4.4).

[57] Gram Suvidha Kendra is a program that offers a variety of services for consumer welfare such as banking, bill payment, Government services (applications for ration card etc), registration services, among others.

Table 4.3 Comparing population statistics between Government Census data 2011-12 and fieldwork data 2020-21

	Kisangarh		Vyapargarh	
	Govt Census data 2011	Fieldwork Survey 2020-21	Govt Census data 2011	Fieldwork Survey 2020-21
No of Households	223	246	346	355
Total Population	1219	1194	1761	1797
Sex Ratio	**819**	**861**	926	937
SC population	432	420	708	787
Share of SC population	35.43	35.17	40.2	43.7
Sex Ratio among SCs	846	806	913	907
Total workers	350	708	567	913
Male workers	334	433	489	611
Female workers*	16	**275**	78	**302**

Source: Fieldwork data

Note: *Women engaged in livestock rearing activities were recorded as self-employed workers during the fieldwork, which contributed significantly to the high number of female workers revealed by the census data, which tends to invisiblise work performed by women in rural India (see Rao 2023; Usami et al 2022 for a discussion on undercounting women's work in rural India by all statistical surveys).

The other larger group was the Jutt Sikhs—around 45 per cent in both villages—who constituted the politically and economically dominant caste in the state. The OBCs had several jati groups, but they constituted approximately 10 per cent of the households in both villages.

In terms of religion, approximately 90 per cent of the population in Kisangarh and 99 per cent in Vyapargarh identified as Sikhs. In Kisangarh, there were 2 Banias, 18 Brahmin households, and 2 Lohar households, all of which were Hindu, and 2 Lohar households, which were Muslim. In Vyapargarh, only 2 Sansi households reported their religion as Hindu.[58]

In terms of gender, the inequalities were very steep, especially in Kisangarh, where the sex ratio was abysmally low at 861 as per fieldwork data, while the 2011 census data recorded it at a shocking 819, much lower than the state level (895) and that of Sangrur district (885), which is one of the lowest in the country. This indicates a wide prevalence

[58] There has been a growing movement among Dalits in the Majha region, including in Vyapargarh and its neighbouring villages, to convert to Christianity (Misra 2021). One of the respondents mentioned that a few Mazhabi Sikh households had converted in the village, but none reported Christianity as their religion during the survey.

of female foeticide in this region and village. In the Majha village too, the sex ratio was very low (937) but considerably better than in Kisangarh, including among SCs (907).

Table 4.4 Jati wise count and distribution of households in the study villages

	Kisangarh		Vyapargarh	
Caste groups (disaggregated across Jatis)	Count of total HHs	Share of HHs	Count of total HHs	Share of HHs
Savarnas	**131**	**53.3**	**162**	**45.9**
Bania	2	0.8	0	0.0
Brahmin	18	7.3	0	0.0
Jutt Sikh	111	45.1	162	45.9
OBCs	**22**	**8.9**	**36**	**10.2**
Chhimba	8	3.3	3	0.8
Ghumiyar	2	0.8	12	3.4
Jheer/Mehra	6	2.4	4	1.1
Lohar	2	0.8	12	3.4
Nai	1	0.4	5	1.4
Tarkhan	3	1.2	0	0.0
SCs	**93**	**37.8**	**155**	**43.9**
Mazhabi	12	4.9	150	42.5
Ramdasia/Ravidasia	79	32.1	3	0.8
Bauria/Sansi	2	0.8	2	0.6
Grand Total	**246**	**100**	**353**	**100**

Source: fieldwork survey, 2021-22

Note: Under the traditional *Jajmani* system, Chhimbas were traditionally tailors, Ghumiyars were potters and petty transporters, Mehra/Jheers were water carriers, Lohars were ironsmiths, Nai were barbers, Tarkhans were carpenters and masons.

Between the two villages, Kisangarh was larger—1020 acres—compared to 550 acres in Vyapargarh, according to data maintained by the Patwari (land record officer). However, Vyapargarh had a higher population and population density. This resulted in lower average land ownership in Vyapargarh, at 1.36 acres per rural household, compared to 3.56 acres in Kisangarh—2.6 times that of Vyapargarh (Table 4.5). This had significant implications for both simple and expanded reproduction from different class-castes in the village. To compare with the district average, the average size of land ownership per rural household, according to a report by Punjab Agriculture University, was 3.34 acres in Tarn Taran and 3.64 acres in Sangrur. This makes Kisangarh representative of the district in terms of land ownership; however, Vyapargarh had a lower average land ownership than the district average. This is further elaborated in Chapter 5.

Table 4.5 Select socio-economic characteristics of fieldwork villages

	Kisangarh	Vyapargarh
Area under cultivation (in acres) (approx)	1026	550
Average size of land owned (in acres)	3.56	1.36
Average size of land operated (in acres)*	7.72	5.65
Cropping Pattern (apart from fodder)	Wheat and paddy	Wheat, basmati, paddy, some vegetables
Main source of employment among Classes of labour	Construction work, husk loading, slab manufacturing work, livestock rearing	Construction work, private salaried work, agricultural labour, truck driving, gulf migration
Main avenues of surplus accumulation among classes of capital	Land purchase, tenancy, renting out agricultural machines, emigration to developed countries	Non-farm businesses (several kinds), cultivation of high-value crops, emigration, government jobs

Note: * calculated as total land operated among those cultivating land divided by the number of households cultivating land
Source: fieldwork data

4.4 The Second Challenge: Positionality and Gaining Access in the Context of the Farmers' Protests

Born in an upper-caste, middle-class household in a small market town in Haryana, the neighbouring state, and residing in bigger cities in India for the last 10 years and undertaking a PhD in the UK, looking to study rural economy and society in Punjab would mean a certain degree of unfamiliarity with the challenges and lifestyles of my respondents. Notwithstanding these differences, I was neither a complete stranger to rural Punjab nor to conducting fieldwork in that region. I grew up speaking Punjabi as my mother tongue and spent a considerable part of my childhood summers in my paternal village, located near the Kisangarh fieldwork site in the Malwa region. My paternal family belongs to a traditional trading caste group, but they had engaged in small-scale farming until the late 2000s. This meant that I was not completely unaware of the cultural and social aspects of rural Punjab, especially those of smallholder agrarian households. In this sense, I was a stranger but not a complete 'outsider' to many of my respondents, particularly in Kisangarh. Moreover, I had prior experience in conducting fieldwork in rural Punjab. These prior experiences allowed me to approach the fieldwork with a reasonable amount of confidence, insight, and belief.

Despite prior experience, the suspicion and distrust among landed Jutts, accentuated by media propaganda that portrayed the protesters as wealthy farmers, made initial access quite difficult. Even after the farmers' protests had ended successfully, there was continued suspicion and hostility towards any stranger or outsider collecting data on assets and employment, which was never experienced in my previous fieldwork experiences. In this regard, my experience of conducting fieldwork was in stark contrast to that of Western male researchers who have conducted research with wealthy farmers. Consider Breman's (1985) experience among rich Patidars, which was also how Jeffrey (1999) described his experience with rich Jats, below:

> I had much less to worry about gaining access to the farmers. The members of the dominant caste, especially, behave rather as the owners of the region – as, in fact, they are – and take it for granted that visitors come to them first of all, if not to them alone (Breman, 1989: 20).

Considering this context, it was decided to hire a research assistant to accompany me for the first few weeks. In both fieldwork villages, the RAs were young men from a nearby village. This helped smoothen the cursory greetings and initial interactions and helped gain some acceptability. This was particularly true in the Majha study village, where the fieldwork assistant was popular among the village youth due to his involvement in sports and his role as president of the neighbouring village's youth football association. His appearance of a young, strong, visibly Sikh boy with a turban and twirling moustache, as well as his ease in speaking with people of all ages, emanating partially from his dominant caste identity, was an added advantage.

Before beginning the fieldwork, permission was sought from the sarpanch and other members of the panchayat, and more importantly, from the president and other office bearers of the farmers' union, who had gained a higher authority in the village than the panchayat during the farmers' protests. We also met some prominent or respectable Dalit men, often retired army personnel or schoolteachers. We informed them and sought their permission and cooperation in conducting a survey about agrarian distress, rural employment, MFI loans and related issues in the coming weeks. Additionally, the content of the questionnaire was discussed with interested parties. Most of them were okay with the sarpanch having given the permission. However, the

two *lambardars* of Kisangarh raised objections to the need to ask questions on the ownership of farm machinery and the names and ages of the household members, especially female members. Even though these questions were important, they had to be eventually dropped from the questionnaire. In the Majha village, these questions were added back to the questionnaire, as no one objected to the collection of this data. However, we were given a stern warning to stick to questions on employment and not to bother with anything 'political'.

In addition, we also got announcements from the village gurudwaras[59] and Ravidas mandir about the survey for the first 5 days. This yielded instant results, as it helped increase our acceptability and reduce suspicion. Thereafter, we spent the first few days conversing with people without collecting any data. Being a male in a highly gender-unequal society allowed us access to public spaces and social gatherings where important observations were made about how class and caste shaped public relations, although, at the same time, it restricted our access to female respondents and their valuable insights. We travelled on foot to different neighbourhoods and spent some time in each neighbourhood's social and public spaces, which were usually dominated by men. We explained our research objectives and our intention to collect data on their employment and agrarian conditions over the coming weeks so that I could 'write my book' and 'pass my exam,' as they later referred to it. Some were supportive, some seemed suspicious, and most appeared unsure during these interactions.

Further, being a student and having spent a year in the UK, a choice of destination among many rural Jutt youth, allowed us a certain level of ease in some households who aspired to send their son or daughter abroad and sought immigration advice from me or expressed curiosity about my life in the UK, especially those in Kisangarh. At the same time, it prompted excessive suspicion from other households—many had family members in various parts of the UK and cross-checked about my university and my whereabouts in the UK. Eventually, our consistent presence, patient assurance, measured behaviour, and prolonged contact with the respondents provided us with a

[59] Both villages had caste segregated gurudwaras—one each in the Dalit and Jutt Sikh neighbourhood.

sufficient degree of acceptability to begin fieldwork and access public spaces and their participants.

The fieldwork in both villages was conducted in two phases: a door-to-door survey of all households was followed by interviews with a stratified random sample in the second phase.

4.4.1 Door-to-Door Census Survey

The survey was conducted using the traditional pen-paper method to avoid any unnecessary suspicion, especially among the landed households. We conducted a pilot survey of five households and made some adjustments to the questionnaire, including the wording of questions, the way they were asked, and the order in which they were presented. The questionnaire was then finalised, translated into Punjabi and printed. The questionnaire had eight sections: 1) household members and demography; 2) Land and livestock ownership, irrigation and tenancy details; 3) employment details of working-age family members; 4) non-farm business/activities; 5) machine and labour usage in farming, both family and hired labour (from those who cultivated land); 6) micro-finance loans and other debts, especially from labouring class households; 7) housing condition and year of house construction, access to public programs; 8) collective action and participation in the farmers' protests. The collection of information on costs, incomes, and debt from landowning and cultivating households was avoided due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Information on debt relations between landless and landed households was also avoided at this stage and was collected during interviews with some respondents. Data on debt, apart from microfinance loans, was not systematic. The questionnaire used for the census survey of all households is presented in Appendix 4.1.

The survey was usually conducted with a male member—the head of the household or the son. Female members were present on several occasions during the survey, although their participation was limited, with a slight increase in their participation in the interview stage. In cases where a male member was unavailable or did not exist, we sought permission from the female members to provide the information. If someone seemed uncomfortable, it was decided to return to the household later or skip it, based

on the judgment formed on the spot. I was aware of the consequences of this limitation of data collection, and in order to overcome the bias of men to underreport the labour undertaken by the female members, extra efforts were made to ask targeted questions about female working-age members, including their unpaid and paid home-based productive work (such as livestock rearing, cloth stitching or caning of cots among others) and paid reproductive work (such as private tuitions). This understanding was derived from the four-dyad framework used by Rao et al. (2024) to study women's work. Only if the respondent reported that the female members did not participate in any of these activities were women primarily captured as homemakers. The implications of this can be seen in the differences between the statistics of women workers in the government census data and my fieldwork (see Table 4.3 above).

Conducting surveys in Dalit neighbourhoods was relatively easier, as they often sat outside their houses or in common spaces due to the lack of space in their homes, which made it easier to strike up a conversation or continue it. They recognised us more, often jibed at us, asking how many days of work was left, and their children often accompanied us to the houses of their neighbours. On the other hand, in wealthy Jutt or Brahmin houses, we had to call them out of their house, ring a bell, and wait outside until we received a response, then explain the purpose of our visit through half-opened gates. The survey was typically conducted on the verandah or in one of the bedrooms of Dalit households, as well as in the large courtyards or 'drawing rooms' of forward-caste households. In some instances, other people were present during the survey, who often interjected, which compromised the survey in a few cases. Consequently, it was decided to return and conduct the other half of the survey later. In other cases, the presence of other people was not a hindrance.

Travelling to and spending more than a week at the Tikri protest site in Delhi, between surveys, with several members of the farmer union helped build a particularly strong relationship with some of them. We also visited the NREGA work site during lunch on one of the survey days, which helped us meet and greet many Dalit households in one location. In Vyapargarh, the president of a farmers' organisation had spoken highly of us, which facilitated access in some households. As a result, only 10 households in the Malwa village and 7 in the Majha village declined to participate in the survey. Some

agreed to be surveyed on a second attempt after initially declining to participate. The survey took an average of 12 to 15 minutes per household. Usually, we did not encounter any hesitation among most respondents when sharing information about land ownership, occupations, or non-farm businesses. There was, of course, underreporting of land, especially of leased-in land and some non-farm sources of income, more so in the Majha village. However, much of this was triangulated during the interview stage and with key respondents, as elaborated in the next section.

4.4.2 Sampling Respondents for the Interviews

The census survey was conducted not only to collect data on various socio-economic aspects of households but also with the clear objective of building rapport and creating a sense of ease, acceptability, and recognition, which was helpful in selecting respondents for interviews and conducting those interviews. The preliminary analysis of the survey data allowed me to select a sample size that better suited the research design. Since one of the main objectives of the study was to understand the long-term patterns of accumulation in rural Punjab, it was decided to oversample the accumulating households as a deliberate strategy, a standard practice in sampling procedures (see Subramanian & Jayaraj, 2008). In Kisangarh, while such households constituted roughly 33 per cent of the total households (not shown in the table), they accounted for 43.63 per cent of the interviewed households. In Vyapargarh, they comprised 16 per cent of the total households but constituted 26.3 per cent of the interviewed households. The sampling of PCP households was also slightly overrepresented: while they constituted roughly 10 per cent of the village population in both villages, they formed 12.7 per cent and 15.8 per cent of the interviewed households in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, respectively.

As a result, classes of labour (CoL) households were slightly underrepresented in the sample, especially those from the savarna castes. CoL constituted 54 per cent and 74 per cent of the total households in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, respectively, but only 45.5 and 57.9 per cent of the interviewed households in the respective villages. The total number of respondents interviewed was 55 in Kisangarh and 38 in Vyapargarh. The interviews were conducted without assistance of any research assistant at both

fieldwork sites, as I had gained a certain degree of familiarity with the respondents during the survey stage. An average interview lasted 70-80 minutes in Kisangarh and 50-60 minutes in Vyapargarh, with some interactions running up to 4 hours in length. Interviews were often conducted over tea, sometimes more than once.

Table 4.6 Count and share of interviews in fieldwork villages, socio-economic class-wise

	Kisangarh		Vyapargarh	
Row Labels	Count of interviews	Share	Count of interviews	Share
Classes of capital	**24**	**43.6**	**10**	**26.3**
Bigger landowners/capitalist farmers)	15	27.3	4	10.5
Medium capitalist farmers	2	3.6	0	0.0
Diversified	6	10.9	6	15.8
Purely non-agrarian	1	1.8	0	0.0
PCPs	**7**	**12.7**	**6**	**15.8**
Agrarian	0	0.0	4	10.5
Non-agrarian	4	7.3	1	2.6
Diversified	3	5.5	1	2.6
Classes of labour	**24**	**43.6**	**22**	**57.9**
Primarily agrarian	5	9.1	4	10.5
Primarily factory worker	3	5.5	1	2.6
Primarily construction	3	5.5	4	10.5
Others	13	23.6	13	34.2
(Caste wise)				
Dalit	23	41.8	16	42.1
Jutt/Brahmin	1	1.8	6	15.8
Grand Total	55	100	38	100

Source: Fieldwork data

In terms of age and gender, the respondents were overwhelmingly men, equally represented among youth (18-35 years), middle-aged individuals (35-50 years), and the elderly (50-70 years) in both villages. In Kisangarh, eight elderly men (aged 70 and above) were also interviewed. Access to women, although slightly better than during the survey stage, was still dismal during the interviews. Only four women were interviewed as primary respondents, however they were present during at least 18 out of 48 interviews in Kisangarh and 9 out of 34 in Vyapargarh. When women were present during the interview, questions were also posed to them, especially to middle-aged and elderly women. They were also asked if they agreed with their husband or son on a question, and sometimes they disagreed, which helped improve the quality of the discussion. Younger women, married or unmarried, were the least accessible. Access

to women during interviews was higher in Dalit houses and in traditional Jutt houses, where the kitchen space was often part of their large courtyards, where interviews were frequently conducted. On the other hand, in the newly constructed modern houses, such access was restricted due to the separation of the guest/drawing room and the kitchen.

The rooftops also proved to be an excellent location for interviews, especially during the late winter and spring seasons. Only in three cases were interviews conducted in the respondent's field or in the village's common spaces, and in five cases, at the shops owned by the respondents, such as flour mill owners, cement slab factory owners, and agricultural-input dealers. The latter interviews often involved some interruption and interjection, either on the part of the customers or input suppliers and sometimes even their workers, which compromised the interview and had to be concluded immaturely by skipping a few sensitive questions such as their scale of operations, their earnings, about their relations with the workers, etc.

In Kisangarh, the larger capitalist households were interviewed first, followed by labouring class and caste men, and then some PCPs and capitalist households. This was mainly because interviews were initiated in January, a relatively lean season for the farmers, which allowed me to conduct interviews without being rushed. In Vyapargarh, a reverse order was adopted—beginning with non-agricultural casual male labourers, followed by larger landowning households. It was the busy paddy transplanting season when I started conducting interviews, which resulted in reduced access to farmers and agricultural labourers at that time. I was fully aware that spending the first few weeks interacting with the capital owners or labourers might create hurdles in gaining the trust of members of other class-castes, similar to what every researcher has experienced while conducting fieldwork in rural India. However, steps were taken to ensure that I was not associated with a particular group or hamlet, such as by spreading out my time across different common spaces or gathering points within the village.

Apart from the interviews, focus group discussions were also conducted, including those with a group of husk-loading workers, women engaged in paddy transplanting work, and Jutt youth with ambitions to move abroad, among others. Participation observation method was also used in observing how Jutt men and women engage and

interact with their Dalit counterparts in public spaces, or when attending social gatherings such as *bhog* ceremony and akhand path ceremonies in the prominent gurudwara, ravidas jayanti celebrations, akhand path, MFI meetings in ravidas mandir, village fair, village sports ground, among others which people across caste groups attended.

4.4.3 Conducting the Interviews

Building a rapport with the respondents was an ongoing effort throughout the fieldwork, but it took centre stage during the interviews. I realised the value of discussing the survey results with the interview respondents as a fairly non-threatening way of initiating the conversation. It drew several reactions from them—wonder, excitement, and, in some cases, outright dismissal, which provided fodder for the subsequent discussions. MS, for instance, a young Dalit man working as a construction labourer, was surprised to learn that one in three working-age Dalit men in the village were also engaged in construction work like his, which led to a discussion around his work and its precarity. NS, a large capitalist farmer, questioned my data, which stated that there were only two large landowners in the village. He started counting the names and operational holdings of four households with more than 25 acres, which helped me triangulate that information. P.S., another big capitalist farmer was altogether dismissive of my data, which showed that only 18 percent of men in the village were engaged in agriculture as a primary activity in Vyapargarh, which helped segue the conversation into the conditions of agrarian distress faced by farmers. Not only did this help strike a conversation, but more importantly, it helped the respondents get a sense of the kind of work I was doing and how I was using the data collected from them. This helped foster trust and sometimes prompted discussions about my research and research design.

The task of 'alliance building' involves a detailed analysis, relying on common sense, tact, patience, a sense of humour, and even disagreements, which helped improve the quality of the information collected. The subsequent discussions were mostly semi-structured and centred around five broad aspects that I had memorised, thus preventing the need for any printed questionnaire:

1. Changes in their socio-economic conditions compared to their previous generations
2. Changes in their relational aspects with other class and caste groups in the village, for instance, relations between landless Dalits and the bigger as well as smaller landowning castes
3. Changes in their relations with those outside the agrarian economy—for instance, between different class-castes of farmers and the arhtiyas, or between labourers and their urban-based labour contractors or employers.
4. Changes in their avenues of accumulation, or lack thereof, among those who were understood as belonging to the surplus-accumulating class castes.
5. Their views on and participation in the farmers' protests, or the lack thereof, especially among the Jutt households, whether landed or landless.

These questions were asked through a careful deployment of three tools—first, collecting the respondents' life history data (drawing on Carlos Oya's 2007 method of collecting life histories of rural capitalists and reading them as 'stories of rural accumulation'); second through collecting family lineage data (drawing on Craig Jeffrey's 1999 study on rich farmers in western UP); and third, by playing an options-game of investment preferences. These tools not only allowed a certain degree of flexibility, allowing us to move between topics or themes according to the interest or will of the respondent without losing sight of the core questions but more importantly, they helped overcome the challenge of studying long-term phenomena such as accumulation and proletarianisation from a single point data collection, which fed into the class analysis discussed in chapter 2.

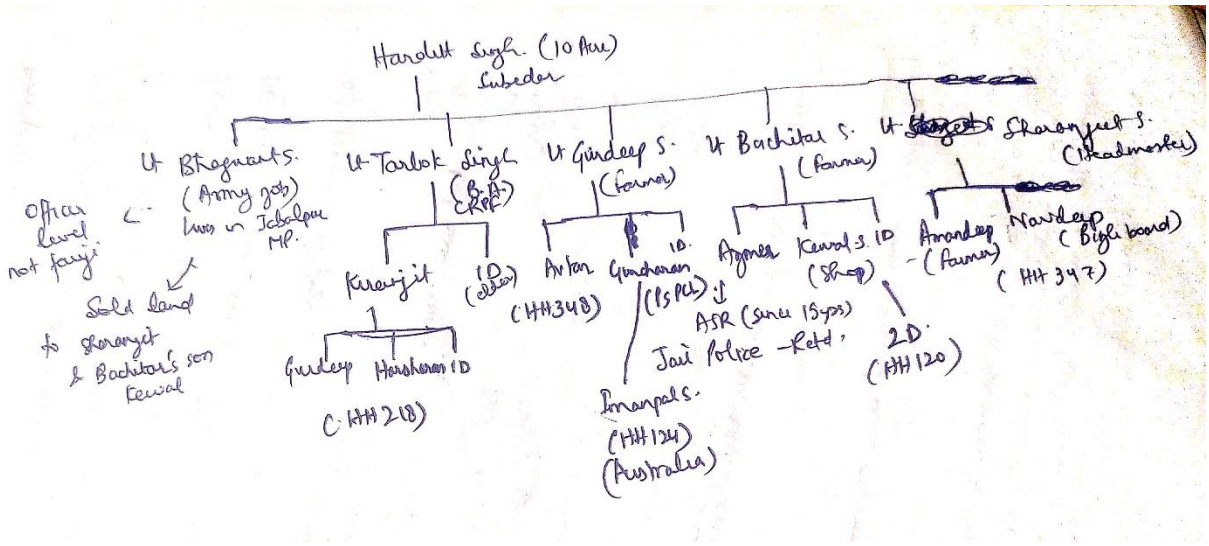
4.4.3. Family lineage/family tree data

In terms of collecting family lineage data, my experience resonates with that of Jeffrey (1999):

> A genealogical approach often generates a measure of camaraderie or fund of goodwill in the early stages of the interview....knowledge of one's male descendants is a matter of pride for the Jats, and many richer farmers enjoyed this opportunity to illustrate their rise to prominence within the village.

Even among Dalit households, I did not experience any hostility or suspicion while collecting their lineage data, partly due to the degree of familiarity established during the survey stage. Family lineage was explored through questions such as whether the respondents lived with their brothers, which was often responded to negatively, followed by how they felt about breaking down the joint family structure. This often segued into a discussion about their number of siblings and their position in the sibling order and how that had affected their roles and responsibilities growing up. A sample family lineage can be seen in Figure 4.4 below:

Figure 4.3 Example of family lineage collected during fieldwork



The family lineage data was an instrumental part of the interviews because of at least three reasons. First, it helped collect systematic data on socio-economic differentiation between caste groups, within caste groups and within the family, which sometimes brought forth extremely interesting stories of accumulation and proletarianisation, and how the respondents felt or made sense of deeply socio-economic processes seen through the rise or fall of their brothers and nephews—as hard work, deceit, cunning/wickedness, austerity, or laziness. For instance, in one of the interviews with a labourer-cum-farmer in Vyapargarh, the respondent elaborated on why he owned 2 acres while his brother's son owned 10 acres. He explained it as a result of his brother's cunning nature for usurping the land from their unmarried brother and luck, for they were helped by the militants to accumulate wealth during the separatist movement. In another case, a household in Kisangarh explained the

meteoric rise of their brother from owning 2 acres to now owning 20 acres and operating 35 acres, a result of his hard work, austerity, and perseverance. Even among landless Dalit households, family lineage data helped reveal patterns of primary employment among brothers and how these patterns changed over time. This knowledge of long-term socio-economic mobility or decline, as observed in farm and non-farm businesses (among landed households) or occupations (among landless Dalit labourers), feeds into the conjugated class-caste analysis discussed in the previous chapter, and is further elaborated in Chapter 6.

Secondly, it helped capture households that were missed during the survey or those that had moved to a different village and were no longer living there, and the reasons for this. This helped initiate a discussion on the movement towards urban areas and on diversification of economic activities. In the absence of this information on non-resident households and their economic activities, a village with a high degree of urbanisation or out-migration among classes of labour and a high degree of urbanisation and diversified accumulation patterns among classes of capital, as was the case in Vyapargarh, could easily be misjudged as opposite (also pointed out by Bernstein 2016). This method enabled us to collect information on 36 emigrant households in Kisangarh and 65 in Vyapargarh, which helps in making a more confident analysis of both urbanisation and capital accumulation patterns, as well as the differences between the two regions. This is discussed in Chapter 5, on classes of capital, and Chapter 7, on classes of labour, respectively.

Lastly, it helped triangulate a significant amount of previously collected information, not just from the respondent, but also from other strands of the family lineage. It revealed their land ownership, sometimes their land purchase history, as well as their non-farm businesses or occupations, both past and present.

4.4.3. Life/work history data

The discussion on life and work history was also an engaging part of the interview, especially among labouring-class households. This discussion was initiated with questions such as their first job, their age at that time, whether they were still in school, and their financial condition during that period. Thereafter, they were asked to proceed

with their subsequent wage employment and self-employment activities, including their migration patterns and histories, how often and why they moved from one job to another, and how they felt precarity had changed for them, if at all. This was, however, rarely a linear conversation. A labourer who started working at the age of 16 would rarely be able to recall all the employments undertaken by him since then. He would initially mention that he had worked as a construction worker his entire life, only to reveal later that he had worked at a kiln for three years before his marriage. Many respondents skipped some milestones, their short-term occupations or failed self-employment. Many would not mention livestock rearing, which hints at the normalisation of livestock rearing as a livelihood activity in Punjab. As a result, specific questions were asked about certain occupations: if they didn't do it now, had they ever done it, when did they stop that occupation, and why? Many would not be certain of the exact year of some of the changes in their employment, and in such instances, important life events such as marriage, the birth of children, the death of a parent, or other personal life events served as a reference. Whenever possible, respondents were also asked about their methods and sources of credit in the event of an emergency, which enabled me to capture their credit relationships with village landowners compared to external sources, such as employers or MFI companies. This helped reveal the extent of employment dynamism in rural Punjab and map it across changes in the accumulation patterns of the surplus-accumulating class-castes against the backdrop of wider political and economic transformations since the 1960s. This is elaborated further in chapter 7.

Among the Jutt landowners, many rarely ventured outside farming, especially in Kisangarh; hence, their life/work history was a relatively straightforward part of the interviews, but it helped gather information on the changes in their scale of operations over time—the highs and lows, as well as their land purchase and tractor purchase history, questions which were otherwise difficult to administer. When Jutt women were part of the interviews, they were asked to speak on the impact of these changes on their lives. Moreover, it allowed for triangulation of data, including self-reported land details provided by participants during the survey stage. Other information, such as changes in land prices and periods of 'land rush,' was also revealed in this conversation. For

instance, it became clear that large tracts of land changed hands in Vyapargarh and its vicinity between 2007 and 2012 due to land acquisition for the Amritsar airport, 50 kilometres away, and for the expansion of the national highway a few kilometres away. These long-term trajectories of capital investment in agriculture and beyond are then examined to reveal their accumulation patterns, similar to Oya's study on reading the life histories of larger farmers as stories of their capital accumulation.

4.4.3. Accumulation preference options-game

Capturing qualitative insights into the accumulation trajectory of surplus-accumulating households so far and their future accumulation preferences was undertaken by asking hypothetical questions that generated interesting responses. They were asked if they received Rs 25 lakh lottery today, would they prefer to buy another piece of land or invest in a business (such as *arhtiya* business) or another option with a similar investment outlay such as emigration of a family member, a modern house in the village, an urban plot, among others. I used their responses as prompts to probe further why they preferred to stay within agriculture or to gradually diversify out of it, as their responses may suggest. This brought out several interesting stories about their experiences with economic diversification, including those that had failed, those that didn't materialise at all, and the reasons behind them.

It also led to a discussion on their outlook towards those who dominated the non-agrarian economy—the Banias and the Khatris, and especially their relations with the arhtiyas. However, considering that this discussion took place in the context of the widespread resistance to the three farm laws, which had endangered the relationship between farmers and their arhtiyas, is likely to have generated a bias in their response. However, such bias was minimised by often beginning with the dominant narrative of presenting the arhtiya as a villain figure who charged an exorbitant rate of interest and a source of agrarian distress and suicides among farmers. Based on their response, it helped continue the discussion on the importance of an arhtiya for their livelihoods and the changes in it. These insights are discussed in Chapter 6.

Overall, using the above three tools acted as an anchor during the interviews, facilitating a free-flowing dialogue while simultaneously allowing the conversation to be

redirected towards the primary questions when respondents diverged in multiple directions, which was frequent. More importantly, these tools contributed to the triangulation of information collected during the survey, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the data.

4.5 The Third Challenge: Conducting Fieldwork in the Towns

In the final phase of the fieldwork, the site shifted from villages to the city or town nearest the fieldwork village—the shops of commission agents, auction yards in the mandi, offices of businessmen and government officials, and political marches and demonstrations of Dalit labouring class organisations as well as by farmers' unions. It was an equally challenging part of the fieldwork, if not more, partly due to a lack of prior experience in conducting fieldwork in the towns and a lack of access to traders, merchants, businessmen, and state officials, especially in Tarn Taran.

The primary objective of this phase was to gain an understanding of accumulation and its social structure within the urban economy. More specifically, it aimed to assess whether traditional trading castes continue to dominate urban non-farm businesses or whether there has been sufficient movement of agrarian capital (or other classes) to challenge their dominance, as observed in the cases of Andhra, Gujarat, and other states. To achieve this, several prominent businesses in each region's political economy were identified through discussions with a key resource person, while others were kept constant at both sites to facilitate comparison. Subsequently, data on the firms in each industry or business within that tehsil or district was gathered. This involved meeting with several government officials and persuading them to provide such data. Lastly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with as many capitalists from these businesses as possible in both regions using the 'snowball' method. The participant observation method was also employed to observe the relationships between commission agents and farmers in Sunam.

Some of the shortlisted businesses were historically well-established in the region, including commission agents and brick kilns in both towns, as well as retail businesses for agricultural machines and agro-processing operations in Sunam. Others have emerged recently, including the IELTS centre in Tarn Taran and husk/*toodi* trading in

Sunam. Some operated in the manufacturing sector (agro-processing, brick kilns), while others were in the services sector (agricultural trading, agro-machine trading, IELTS centres). Certain sectors were labour-intensive and generated employment for a large part of the year, such as brick kilns and husk loading, while others created jobs for only a short period during the year, including agricultural trading. Some, such as the IELTS centre and agro-machinery trading, barely generated any employment at all.

Data on commission agent firms in the market yard was collected from two different sources—the chairman of the market committee as well as the *arhtiya* telephone directories produced by the *arhtiya* association in 2012 and 2019; information on agro-processing industries such as rice shellers, solvex plants, sella plants, roller flour mills was obtained from food supply inspector and the list maintained by rice millers association; details on long-term changes in cropping patterns in the region and agricultural subsidies were gathered from agriculture development officers; data on IELTS centre businesses was sourced from the office of the district commissioner; and finally, information on private educational institutes in the town was collected from the block education officer. Additionally, Right to Information (RTI) requests were filed to obtain state-level data on rice sheller industries and brick kilns. In some cases, such as the brick kilns in Tarn Taran, the list of firms was sourced from a labour organisation that worked with brick kiln workers. In Sunam, this list was provided by a brick kiln owner. The list of agricultural machine retailers in Tarn Taran was also supplied by a businessman. In the case of commission agents and rice mills in Sunam, I also managed to get access to a previous list of firms—from 2012 and 2006, respectively—which helped observe changes in the number of firms between the two periods as well as the caste profile of those who entered and exited the business between then and 2021. The results from this analysis are elaborated in Chapter 6. Apart from the list of businesses, data on the extent of land sales and purchases in the fieldwork villages over the last two decades, as well as details of the sellers and buyers, were collected from *Patwari* and *Kanungo* officials, both of whom are land record officers.

Having obtained a list of firms in each business, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a few capitalists from as many of these businesses in both regions (see

Table 4.7).[60] Even when approached with a reference, some businessmen would straight away decline to speak with me. Another agreed and set a date, only to cancel it after I reached his place on the meeting date, and two kept me waiting for long hours. Some agreed to be interviewed but sidestepped specific key questions. It was also challenging to explain the research objectives to them or to convince them to delve into the data on the caste of other businessmen in their industry. However, persistence and perseverance came in handy, and some people saw merit in my work and agreed to delve into the information.

Table 4.7 Count and share of interviews outside the fieldwork villages

Rough classification of the respondents	Malwa region	Majha region
Classes of capital		
Rural based (diversified)	1	1
Urban-based (industrial)	2	0
Urban-based (trading/retail/commission agents)	6	6
Urban-based (other services)	1	2
Others		
Academic/journalist/civil society member	6	3
Farmer Union/organisation	1	5
Labouring class organisation	5	2
State officials	4	6
Grand Total	27	25

Source: Fieldwork

Apart from conducting interviews with state officials and some capitalist businessmen in both towns, I was able to make participant observations in the patwari office in both towns and among commission agents in Sunam, the latter due to my privileged access to one of the bigger commission agents in the mandi yard through a family relative. I closely observed their relationships with farmers, their proximity to state officials, and their interactions with other commission agents and their workers. Many commission agents would gather at my relative's friend's shop in the evening, and my presence

[60] The interviews with the businessmen included a discussion on their personal journey in that business, their past occupations, investment outlays in starting that business, their peak and lean seasons, changes in labour absorptions, labour troubles, preference between local or migrant workers, their understanding of the growth or distress in that industry, the opportunities and challenges faced by them, their diversified economic activities if any, and most importantly, the caste profile of the capitalists in their industry.

there as his acquaintance provided a non-hostile and less suspicious space. The insights from this access are discussed briefly in Chapter 6.

Lastly, I also attended several political rallies and gatherings organised by farmers' and labouring-class organisations, interviewed their leaders (the list is provided in Appendix 4.2), as well as attended religious congregation of the fast-growing Pentecostal Christianity in the Majha region. This allowed me to gather useful insights on political dynamics in the two regions and how they were evolving over time, which are discussed in Chapter 7.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter showed that adopting a comparative case study as research design and the village study as a method of data collection equip a researcher in their study of a region's agrarian question of labour and capital in rural India while also enabling integration of caste, non-farm diversification, and a household's long-term economic trajectory in determining its class position. It allows for a certain flexibility in utilising several tools, including surveys, in-depth interviews, and participant observations, among others, to understand the rural economy through a fine balance of quantitative and qualitative data. The collection of family lineage and life history data, in particular, was instrumental in studying dynamic socio-economic processes and structures such as accumulation and proletarianisation, and together with data collected on the social structure of accumulation in the nearby towns, it allows us to develop a deeper and nuanced understanding of the rural-urban linkages, labour mobility as well as of capital.

5: Rural Punjab Beyond Distress: Political Economy of Capital Accumulation and Differentiation

This chapter examines the conjugated class-caste structure in the two fieldwork villages and analyses sources and patterns of capital accumulation and differentiation within these class-caste groups. The analysis explores the distribution of agricultural land, irrigation equipment, machinery and livestock across different class-caste groups, and how much these inequalities mattered in capital accumulation of some at the expense of the others. It also discusses the differential access of these class-castes to various kinds of markets, such as tenancy, farm inputs, as well as output markets for high-value crops, and access to non-farm sources of income.

It shows that in Kisangarh in the Malwa region, there was a broader base of capital accumulation—with classes of capital constituting 34 per cent of rural households, most of them bigger landowning Jutts. Capital accumulation in this village was primarily centred on incomes from cultivation. Land ownership, which itself was determined by one's location in the caste hierarchy, and access to tenancy market were the most important sources of accumulation and differentiation in this village, while successful international migration has also gained importance lately.

In Vyapargarh in the Majha region, the base of capital accumulation was narrower—16 per cent of the total rural households—with most of them owning less than five acres of land. Land and agrarian incomes, though important, were no longer the single most important source of accumulation for the classes of capital. It had been supplemented by other factors, such as access to government sector jobs, non-farm businesses, international migration, and the gatekeeping of state resources, among others. Two in three from the classes of capital exhibited a diversified economic portfolio.

In both the regions, it was the conjugated privileged class-castes, especially Jutts with a more recent upward class mobility, who constituted the biggest share of the classes of capital. Their ability to exploit others' labour power in the production process, be it on the fields or beyond it, and appropriate the surplus value resulting from it was

legitimised and sustained by their privileged location in the post-colonial caste hierarchy.

Therefore, this chapter shows that Kisangarh broadly fits into a pattern or trajectory of 'upward but not outward' that has been observed in the existing literature discussed in Chapter 3 on capital accumulation in Punjab (Bansal, 2020a; Shrimali, 2021, p. 202; Sinha, 2020a, 2021, Lerche 2014). This has contributed to an essentialisation of Jutts as agrarian 'by nature' as discussed in Chapter 3 (Bal 2006, Singh 2013; see also Damodaran 2008 Chapter 8). On the other hand, evidence shows that the capital accumulation patterns in Vyapargarh had more similarity with the trajectories seen in southern and western states, particularly with the 'outward and upward' trajectory seen among Gounder smallholder farmers from western Tamil Nadu (see Chari 2004, Heyer 2010). Two-thirds of classes of capital households in Vyapargarh did not have agrarian surpluses to begin with, rather most of them come from middle or poor peasant background.[61]

Therefore, by bringing in a fresh, valuable comparative perspective from the Majha region of Punjab, which has been a relatively understudied region by political economists, this chapter helps appreciate the diversity in the sources as well as patterns of capital accumulation in rural Punjab. By examining this regional variation, the analysis also illuminates how the 'land question' operates differently as a source of power, status, and socio-economic differentiation in rural India.

This chapter is organised as follows: Section 5.1 sets the stage by discussing the broad class-caste structure in the two fieldwork villages and situates them by comparing it with villages in other parts of India. It examines the distribution of land ownership across castes and land-size categories, as well as the distribution of labour force across different sectors of the economy. It also compares it with secondary data on

[61] There were, of course, nuanced differences in their trajectories; for instance, in Vyapargarh, the rural classes were being integrated into the growing urban, informal, service-oriented, neoliberal economy, whereas the Gounders had integrated into the booming knitwear industry in western Tamil Nadu since the 1980s, close to the cities of Tirupur and Coimbatore. Moreover, land continues to be circulated within Jutts through an active tenancy market rather than being leased out to landless or land-poor Dalit-OBC households in most southern states (S. Bhattacharya, 2019).

rural Punjab and rural India that helps form broad judgement of where these villages stand in comparison.

Section 5.2 then expands on the conjugated privileged class-castes in the two regions, presenting a snapshot of sources of surpluses for both, the landlord-turned CoC and the new Jutt/Savarna CoC, at the time of fieldwork. Section 5.3 unpacks the long-term patterns of accumulation in the fieldwork villages using the schema/typology developed in Chapter 3 and presents some relevant qualitative case studies of capital accumulation from both fieldwork sites. Section 5.4 concludes the chapter.

5.1 Class-Caste Structure and Sector-Wise Distribution of Work Force in Fieldwork Villages

Using the conjugated framework discussed in Chapter 2 to identify the class-castes in rural India, we arrive at the following class-caste structure in the fieldwork villages (Table 5.1). It shows that classes of capital in Kisangarh constituted a higher share in total rural households—34.1 per cent, double that of Vyapargarh—16.1 per cent.[62] The share of classes of capital in Kisangarh is much higher than in most parts of rural India: village studies conducted by the Foundation for Agrarian Studies in 22 villages from 12 states, which, as briefly discussed in Chapter 2, uses a similar criterion to identify rural-agrarian classes, puts the range of landlords and capitalist farmers at somewhere between 0 to 10 per cent of the total households in their study villages (Table 5.2). This included data from a village in the Doaba region of Punjab that was located between Ludhiana and Jalandhar, two of the biggest and most industrially advanced cities in Punjab, where the share of this class in total rural households was 7 per cent, which rises to 39 per cent among cultivator household, the highest across all their study villages (Table 5.2; see also Bansal 2020).

[62] Classification of household, as discussed in Chapter 2, was based on several factors, such as ownership of land and other assets, labour exploitation and family labour usage, non-farm diversification, among others (see Appendix 2.1). However, if one had to give a crude sense of the income-level cut-off that allowed for capital accumulation, barring exceptional circumstances, by a rural household that owned a house was around Rs 5-6 lakhs per annum for a family of 4 or 5 members, which translated to an income of Rs 40,000 to 45, 000 per month per household. On the other hand, the cut-off for a basic simple reproduction level of a household was roughly around Rs 1.5-1.8 lakhs per annum for a family of 4 or 5, or roughly Rs 12,000 to 15,000 per month.

Table 5.1 Distribution of households in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh using the conjugated class-caste framework, 2021-22

Class-caste groups	Kisangarh		Vyapargarh	
	No of HHs	% of HHs	No of HHs	% of HHs
Classes of capital	**84**	**34.1**	**57**	**16.1**
Landlord-turned CoC	38	15.4	16	4.5
Jutt/Savarnas moving up to CoC	44	17.9	36	10.2
Dalits/OBCs moving up to CoC	2	0.8	5	1.4
PCPs	**27**	**11.0**	**37**	**10.5**
Jutt/Savarna PCPs stagnant	17	6.9	31	8.8
Dalits/OBCs moving up to PCP	5	2.0	5	1.4
Jutt/Savarnas moving down to PCP	5	2.0	1	0.3
Classes of labour	**135**	**54.9**	**259**	**73.4**
Jutt/Savarnas moving down to CoL	27	11.0	78	22.1
Conjugated oppressed	108	43.9	181	51.3
Grand Total	246	100	353	100

Note: The demarcation between PCP and CoC, as well as between PCP and CoL households, was not entirely neat in reality. There were CoL households that were also engaged in PCP activities; however, since at least one member worked as a casual labourer in the informal economy, these households have been classified under CoL. This is elaborated further in Appendix A2.1.
Source: fieldwork survey, 2021-22

Table 5.2 Share of landlords and capitalist farmers in total rural and cultivator households, FAS study villages

Village	State	Share of landlord and Capitalist farmers in total households	Share of landlord and Capitalist farmers in cultivator households
Ananthavaram	Andhra Pradesh	7	15
Bukkacherla	Andhra Pradesh	4	7
Kothapalle	Telangana	3	9
Harevli	Uttar Pradesh	3	4
Mahatwar	Uttar Pradesh	3	5
Warwat	Maharashtra	1	2
Nimshirgaon	Maharashtra	2	6
Gulabewala	Rajasthan	10	30

Rewasi	Rajasthan	4	5
Gharsondi	Madhya Pradesh	5	8
Ala'halli	Karnataka	1	1
Siresandra	Karnataka	0	0
Zhapur	Karnataka	4	10
Panahar	West Bengal	3	5
Amarsinghi	West Bengal	0	0
Kalamandasaguri	West Bengal	0	0
Tehang	Punjab	7	39

Source: Das and Swaminathan (2017)

Consequently, the second main distinction in the class-caste structure of the two villages was the share of classes of labour and their caste composition. Vyapargarh had a higher share of classes of labour—73.4 per cent—a sign of greater differentiation here than in Kisangarh, where 55 per cent of households were classified as classes of labour. More importantly, 30 per cent of the classes of labour in Vyapargarh were Jutts, making it a more caste heterogenous class than in Kisangarh, where 80 per cent of the classes of labour were Dalits or OBCs. These Jutt CoL households had PCP or CoC characteristics three generations ago, and all of them had a history of land ownership and cultivation. This is elaborated upon further in Chapter 7, where we discuss the social, economic, and spatial fragmentation within the classes of labour in the two villages.

This higher share of classes of capital in Kisangarh compared to Vyapargarh and other parts of India is explained by unusually high average land ownership—at 7.06 acres among all landowners and 3.6 acres among total rural households (including landless)—which is higher than the state average, but representative of the Malwa sub-region. In addition, stable and assured irrigation throughout the year, along with the state's procurement of the entire produce at pre-announced prices, ensured a stable, though declining, surplus, as discussed earlier in Chapter 3.

This higher-than-average land ownership was not as much due to the presence of big landlords who skewed the average upwards (although such landlords still existed in some of the villages in this region that were visited during the scoping stage) but instead due to the presence of a significant share (24 per cent) of those owning between 10 and 25 acres in its landowning structure (see Table 5.3; Figure 5.1). These households are termed as “medium landowners” as per state official classification but are considered

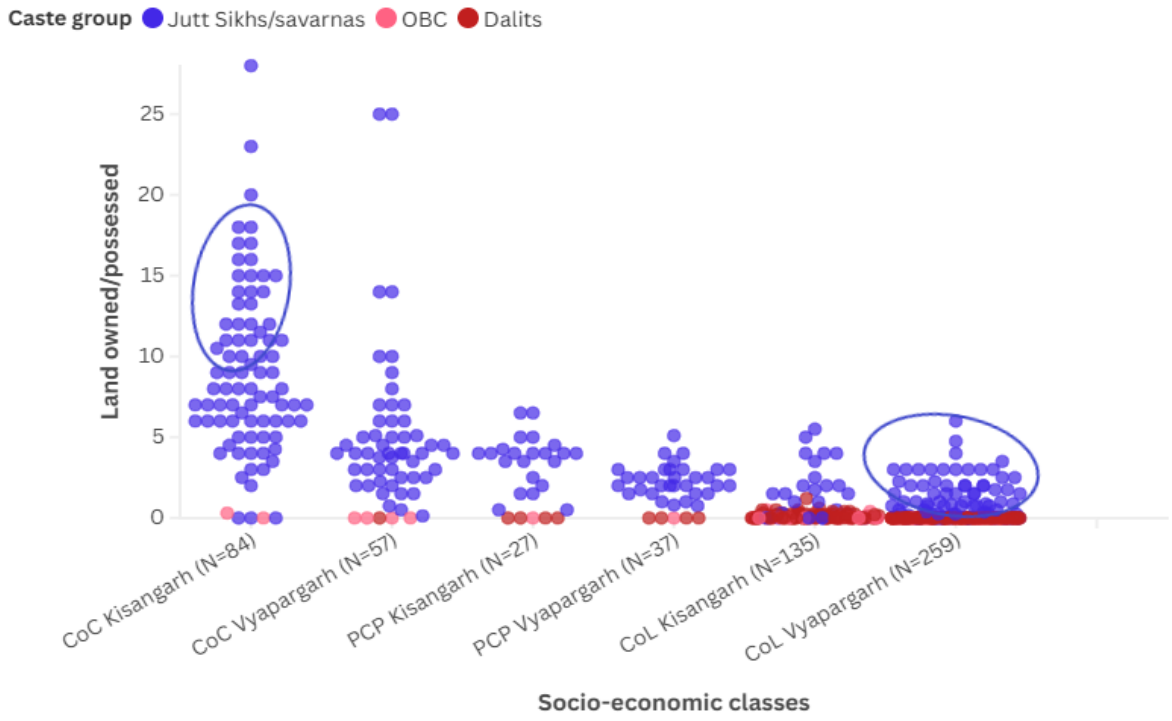
"big capitalist farmers" in the Indian context, where 86 per cent hold less than 5 acres of land (see Ramachandran et al. 2010, Athreya et al. 2017; and Sinha 2020, Kaur and Kaur 2022, Bansal 2020 for Punjab). The two biggest landowners in the village owned 28 acres of land each. A median landowning household in Kisangarh was, therefore, a 6-acre-owning Jutt farmer, who was more likely to be a PCP or CoC than a CoL. Corollary, if one owned more than 10 acres of land, they were almost surely a Jutt, with some of them being Brahmins.

Table 5.3 Land ownership and operational holdings across conjugated class-caste categories, Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, 2021-22

Class-caste groups	Average Land owned	Average land operated	Average Land owned	Average Land operated
Classes of capital	8.9	10.5	4.9	5.6
Landlord-turned CoC	10.8	10.3	5.7	5.2
Jutt/Savarnas moving up to CoC	7.7	11.3	5.2	6.5
Dalits/OBCs moving up to CoC	0	0.2	0	0.4
PCPs	2.9	3.1	1.9	3.2
Jutt/Savarnas moving down to PCP	4.4	3.4	5.1	5.1
Jutt/Savarnas PCPs stagnant	3.3	4	2.3	3.8
Dalits/OBCs moving up to PCP	0	0	0	0.2
Classes of labour	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.2
Jutt/savarnas moving down to CoL	1.6	0.6	1.3	0.7
Conjugated oppressed	0	0.4	0	0
Total Households	3.6	4.2	1.3	1.4

Source: Fieldwork data

Figure 5.1 Caste, class and land ownership in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, 2021-22



Source: Fieldwork data
Notes: Each dot represents a household.
*OBCs include several jatis, including Chhimba, Mehra/Jheer, Lohar, Ghumiyar, Nai and Tarkhan
**SCs in Kisangarh include mainly Ravidasias, but there were 12 Mazhabi and 2 Bauria households.
SCs in Vyapargarh primarily include Mazhabis, but there were also 3 Ravidasias and 2 Sansi households.

On the other hand, landownership in Vyapargarh was dominated by small and marginal landowners (owning less than 5 acres), with only four households owning more than 10 acres, leading to a lower average size of landownership—only 4.9 acres among landowning households and 1.3 acres per rural household, which is much lower than Kisangarh as well as the state average. A median landowning household in Vyapargarh was, therefore, a 2-acre-owning Jutt who was more likely to lease out his land to work in the informal economy—as PCP or as a labourer. However, some of the smaller or even marginal landowners appropriated and accumulated surplus produced by their workers in their farms or their non-farm businesses or a mix of the two. In fact, as shown later, two-thirds of CoC households in Vyapargarh owned less than 5 acres.

One of the reasons behind the higher average land ownership in Kisangarh lies in its historical trajectory, as briefly discussed in the previous chapter. Till the 1950s, the

Malwa study region was semi-arid. Its agriculture was predominantly rain-fed, and its productive forces were underdeveloped due to the presence of landlordism under the Maharaja of Patiala. It was also a relatively more sparsely populated region of Punjab, resulting in higher average landholding among landowners here. The Majha region, on the other hand, was the centre of political and economic power and where agricultural development had improved slightly under direct British rule (Agnihotri, 1996, p. 199; N. Bhattacharya, 1985).

Eighty-four per cent of the landowners in Kisangarh and 100 per cent in Vyapargarh were Jutts, while the rest in Kisangarh were Brahmins. Except for one Dalit and 2 OBCs in Kisangarh, who were all marginal landowners, all other Dalit or OBC households in the two villages were landless.[63] Overall, 49.6 per cent of all resident households in Kisangarh and 59 per cent in Vyapargarh were landless, which is around the same as the state average (45 to 65 per cent depending on the data source, see Chapter 3) and the national average. The extent of caste-based inequality in land ownership is not exceptional or unheard of in Punjab, where less than 3.5 per cent of total landholdings are held by the Scheduled Castes (or Dalits) (GoP, 2015). This means that while caste-based inequality in land ownership is among the steepest in Punjab across the country, it is worse still in the two fieldwork villages.[64]

Sectoral distribution of work force in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh

The effect of the higher average land ownership among Jutts in Kisangarh, who constituted 45 per cent of the village population as seen in the previous chapter, was evident in its employment structure and the sectoral distribution of its labour force.

[63] 33 Dalit households who were part of a co-operative society had hereditary possession and cultivation rights over tiny parcels of low value *nazool* (government owned) land (an average of 0.26 acre per household), which they mostly used for fodder, wheat and cotton cultivation. Paddy was not possible due to lack of water source on the land due to which these households had to purchase water for cultivation, which made high-water intensive crops like paddy unviable. The production was mainly for self-consumption or for animals, and they barely had any marketed surplus. They had received this land after a prolonged battle with a Jutt household who had earlier occupied and cultivated this land. Nazool land are those that are either evacuee property of Muslims that left for Pakistan after partition or land which has no legal heir, which was the case in Kisangarh. Such land, according to one of the land reform period laws, can be given to a cooperative society of Scheduled Castes.

[64] This does not make these villages atypical, in almost all villages visited during the scoping stage, the share of Dalit landowners was nil. This is also confirmed from other fieldwork-based studies on rural Punjab (Ohno et al 2022, Fujita et al 2021), while some studies have found Dalits owning small parcels of land in south-west region (see Kaur and Kaur 2022).

52.7 per cent of Kisangarh's total labour force was employed in agriculture and allied activities, which is significantly higher than the state average of 40.6 per cent but lower than the all-India figure of 59.8 per cent (see Table 5.3). These were mainly male Jutt farmers and landless Dalit women engaged in small-scale livestock rearing.

On the other hand, Vyapargarh had only one-third of its total labour force engaged in agriculture and allied activities, indicating a greater integration of its workers into the non-farm economy. They were either male Jutt farmers or female and older male landless Dalit labourers. This suggests a more balanced 'structural transformation' in Vyapargarh compared to rural Punjab and rural India in general. This follows from the Majha region's earlier and more intimate integration with the broader circuits of capitalist development since colonial rule, partly due to its proximity to the historically important centres of trade and commerce, most notably the Amritsar metropole.

Table 5.4 Distribution of labour force in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh based on primary and secondary occupation, compared with rural India and rural Punjab

Sectors of Primary Employment	Kisangarh	Vyapargarh	Rural Punjab	Rural India
1. Agriculture and allied	**52.7**	34.1	40.6	59.8
2. Secondary sector	13.9	**27.1**	29.7	21.1
2.1 Manufacturing	8.0	16.8	13.4	8.3
2.2 Construction	5.9	10.3	15.3	12.5
3. Services	29.8	30.0	29.6	18.9
4. International Migrants	3.59	8.71	-	-
Total working population (1+2+3+4)	100	100	100	100

Source: Fieldwork data for Kisangarh and Vyapargarh. PLFS (2024) for rural Punjab and rural India

A significant share of the labour force in Vyapargarh was engaged in the secondary sector, especially in manufacturing (16.8 per cent), primarily brick makers, most likely landless Dalit couple, followed by construction workers (10.3 per cent) in its workforce, mainly young Dalit men, which aligns with broader patterns in Rural Punjab, where 29.7 per cent of the workforce is engaged in secondary sector employment, surpassing the national rural average of 21.1 per cent. In contrast, Kisangarh had merely 13.9 per cent of its workforce engaged in the secondary sector, with 8.0 per cent in manufacturing, primarily comprising slab manufacturing factory workers, and 5.9 per cent in construction, typically consisting of young, landless Dalit men, reflecting the much

smaller industrial base in the region discussed in the previous chapter. At the state level, construction emerges as a significant employer, accounting for 15.3 per cent of employment in Rural Punjab—higher than both Kisangarh and Vyapargarh and exceeding the 12.5 per cent recorded at the national rural level (PLFS 2024).

The services sector exhibits remarkable consistency across Kisangarh (29.8 per cent), Vyapargarh (30.0 per cent), and Rural Punjab (29.6 per cent), reflecting the increasing significance of service-based employment in Punjab's rural economies. In contrast, the national rural average for service-sector employment remains lower at 18.9 per cent. In Kisangarh, most workers in this sector were employed as casual labourers in occupations such as husk loading, typically involving young, landless Dalit and OBC men. In contrast, in Vyapargarh, most workers in this sector were engaged in petty non-agricultural self-employment—usually among landless Dalit or land-poor Jutt communities.

Furthermore, what makes Vyapargarh unique is the notable share of individuals working and living abroad, including developed countries, Gulf countries, and, to a lesser extent, East Asian countries. 8.71 per cent of its workers were engaged in international migration, compared to 3.59 per cent of the workforce in Kisangarh, although the share of the latter was rapidly increasing. This suggests that international migration serves as an important livelihood strategy in rural Punjab while also facilitating remittance flows. These remittances shape capital accumulation and local labour markets through expenditure on modern housing, as discussed later in Chapter 7. Although NSSO's PLFS data on rural Punjab and rural India do not explicitly capture this category, which limits direct comparisons, it underscores the distinctiveness of migration-dependent employment patterns in these two sub-regions in Punjab, especially in Vyapargarh.

Overall, these patterns of declining dependence on agriculture accompanied by an expansion in industrial and service-based livelihoods reflect Vyapargarh's relatively higher degree of structural transformation of labour and rural economic diversification compared to Kisangarh, which remains relatively agrarian. Having been made aware of the broader patterns of caste and class-based land ownership structures, as well as the distribution of employment across sectors in the two villages, we will now expand on the classes of capital in the two villages and discuss their sources of surplus.

5.2 Diversity in Rural Capital Accumulation: A Snapshot of the Sources of Surplus among Classes of Capital in Fieldwork Villages

When we look at the sources of surplus for the classes of capital in Kisangarh, it can be seen that 37 out of 84 CoC households, that is 50 per cent, were entirely dependent on agrarian or allied activities incomes, which included income from cultivation, animal husbandry or from renting out land, and further 32 per cent were *primarily* dependent on agrarian incomes, with a smaller share of non-agrarian incomes (Table 5.5). The tendency to depend on agrarian incomes was high among both Landlord-turned CoC and new Jutt/Savarna CoC households, although it was slightly higher among the former. While higher land ownership has acted as seed capital and a means to accumulate wealth from non-farm sources among similar class-caste groups in other parts of India, as discussed in the 'upward and outward' accumulation pattern in Chapter 3, this was not the case among classes of capital in Kisangarh. Only three CoC households were entirely dependent on non-agrarian incomes, and 17 had diversified into non-agricultural sources of income, such as government jobs or foreign migration, while deriving a smaller share of their income from land, including rent or livestock rearing.

Among PCPs from Jutt/savarna castes too, agricultural commodity production—of grains and milk—was the primary source of livelihood for 15 out of 27 households (55 per cent); the rest mainly engaged in non-agricultural commodity production or service provision such as flour mill owners, petty shopkeepers and traders, confectioners, among others. PCP households from Dalit-OBC caste groups were primarily engaged in non-agricultural commodity or service production, such as tailoring and flour milling.

Table 5.5 Sources of surplus among classes of capital and PCPs in Kisangarh, 2021-22

Conjugated class-caste groups	Agri only	Mainly agri with some non-agri	Mainly non agri with some agri	Purely non agri	Grand Total
CoC	**37**	**27**	17	3	84
Landlord-turned CoC	19	13	6	0	38
Savarnas moving up to CoC	18	14	10	2	44

Dalits/OBCs moving up to CoC	0	0	1	1	2
PCP	11	4	8	4	27
Savarnas moving down to PCP	1	2	2	0	5
Savarnas PCP stagnant	10	2	5	0	17
Dalits/OBCs moving up to PCP	0	0	1	4	5

Source: Fieldwork Data

In sharp contrast to Kisangarh, 35 out of 57 CoC households in Vyapargarh, that is 61.4 per cent, were wholly or primarily dependent on non-agrarian incomes while also deriving some income from land rent or animal-rearing activities (Table 5.6). These non-farm sources of income included urban businesses, public sector jobs, and remittances from international migration, among others. Very few households were entirely or primarily dependent on agrarian and allied activities for their incomes—those that did usually owned a higher amount of land and also doubled their operational holdings through the land lease market.

However, among PCP households, their economic dependence in Vyapargarh was similar to that of their counterparts in Kisangarh. Two-thirds of them were agrarian-dependent households, especially Jutts/Savarna households (29 out of 37 households). In contrast, Dalit-OBC PCP households were entirely or primarily dependent on non-agricultural commodity production (such as food or services) for their livelihoods, similar to the pattern observed in Kisangarh.

Table 5.6 Sources of surplus among classes of capital and PCPs in Kisangarh, 2021-22

Conjugated class-caste groups	Agri only	Mainly agri with some non agri	Mainly non-agri with some agri	Purely non agri	Grand Total
CoC	6	16	**31**	4	57
Landlord-turned CoC	4	6	6	0	16
Savarnas moving up to CoC	2	10	24	0	36
Dalits/OBCs moving up to CoC	0	0	1	4	5
PCP	23	6	5	3	37
Savarnas moving down to PCP	1	0	0	0	1
Savarnas PCP stagnant	22	6	3	0	31
Dalits/OBCs moving up to PCP	0	0	2	3	5

Source: Fieldwork Data

Data from Kisangarh, therefore, echoes previous evidence on capital accumulation in rural Punjab, which is often based on studies in the Malwa region (Sinha 2020, 2021;

Shrimali 2022; Kaur and Kaur 2022), or the Doaba region (Bansal 2020) while that of Vyapargarh resembles the pattern observed in the southern and western states discussed in Chapter 3 earlier. This merits an in-depth discussion of some aspects of agrarian and non-agrarian accumulation in both study regions, which the following sections aim to provide.

5.2.1 Rural Capital Accumulation and Differentiation from Agriculture and Livestock Rearing

This section examines the factors within the agrarian economy that contributed to capital accumulation of some households over others, as well as how these factors differed across various conjugated class-caste groups. Apart from the differences in ownership of land between households, it also discusses the differences in ownership of irrigation equipment, agricultural machinery, livestock, as well as access to a wider range of markets and merchants. All of this shaped the differential output, costs, prices, incomes, and labour usage within these class-caste groups. This section also contributes to the literature on differentiation in rural Punjab by identifying new sources of differentiation, such as *toodi* prices.

For this section, instead of the conjugated class-caste categories, we will use land size class categories to make it comparable with other studies, such as the more comprehensive surveys conducted by local universities, including Punjab Agricultural University, and by NSSO. Most of the data discussed in this section was collected systematically during the survey stage, while other sensitive information, such as profits and costs of cultivation, rate of interest and loans taken, are estimates based on conversations during the interview stage with some key respondents as this information could not be collected systematically, partly due to the context of the farmers' protests as described in the previous chapter.

In Kisangarh, the Gross Value of Output (GVO) from cultivation was relatively stable, with no significant year-on-year variation, ranging from Rs 90,000 to Rs 120,000 per acre per annum. This is also affirmed by a PAU study by Kaur et al. (2017). Contextualising it in the rough income cut-offs discussed earlier, this means that on an average, a 6-to-7-acre landowning farmer could start generating and appropriating

petty surpluses, barring exceptional circumstances, while a 10-acre owning farmer indeed produced and appropriated surplus on an annual basis. Yields for wheat and paddy, the main crops in the village, had been standardised and made more-or-less scale-neutral *per acre of land*, irrespective of the land-size class of the farmer, partly due to relatively equitable access to timely and sufficient irrigation through privately owned tubewells at zero cost (see Table 5.8), and significantly high ownership of tractors (Table 5.7). Access to agricultural machinery was also high due to an active rental and outsourcing market, with even a 1-acre cultivator reporting the hiring of combine harvester and tractor services (see also K. Singh & Rangi, 2008; S. Singh, 2017, 2024). Roughly all farmers received uniform prices and assured procurement of the whole produce.

Table 5.7 Share of cultivator households owning a tractor across land operated size categories, Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, 2020-21

	Kisangarh		Vyapargarh	
Land-operated size categories	Count of cultivator HHs	Share of cultivator households who own a tractor	Count of cultivator HHs	Share of cultivator households who own a tractor
0.1-2.5 Acres	48	6.3	39	15.4
2.51-5 Acres	11	27.3	18	**55.6**
5.01-10 Acres	36	69.4	21	81.0
10.01-25 Acres	34	91.2	7	100.0
25.01 and above	4	100.0	2	100.0
Total cultivator households	133	49.6	87	48.3

Source: Fieldwork data

Table 5.8 Share of cultivator households owning a tubewell and pump set across land ownership size categories, Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, 2020-21

	Kisangarh		Vyapargarh	
Land ownership size categories	Count of HHs	Share of landowning households who own a tubewell	Count of HHs	Share of landowning households who own a tubewell
0.1-2.5 Acres	26	50.0	87	**86.2**
2.51-5 Acres	31	93.5	42	**78.6**
5.01-10 Acres	37	100.0	12	91.7
10.01-25 Acres	29	100.0	4	100.0

25.01 and above	1	100.0	0	NA
Total cultivator households	124	87.9	145	84.8

Source: Fieldwork data

On the other hand, the range of Gross Value of Output (GVO) from cultivation was significantly wider in Vyapargarh, spanning between Rs 30,000 and Rs 300,000 per acre per annum, with substantial year-on-year variation, primarily due to the cultivation of higher-value crops in this village. Overall, at least two-thirds of the sown area in the village during the Kharif season and one-third of the area during the Rabi season were under such high-value crops (Table 5.9). Just as in Kisangarh, there was relatively equitable access to irrigation and tractors (see Tables 5.7 and 5.8 above), thereby reducing the yield differentials between smaller and larger farmers for most crops.

Table 5.9 The extent of the area under different crops in study villages, in acres (2021-22)

		Kisangarh		Vyapargarh	
Season	Crop	Area under crops (in acres)	As per cent of Net Cropped Area	Area under crops (in acres)	As per cent of Net Cropped Area
Kharif	Paddy	860	**84.3**	181.8	32.5
Kharif	Basmati	22	2.2	159.2	**28.4**
Kharif	Cotton	10	1.0	0	0.0
Between kharif and rabi	Peas	0	0.0	33	**5.9**
Rabi	Potatoes	0	0.0	43	**7.7**
Rabi	Wheat	900	**88.2**	308.6	55.1
Rabi	Sugar beet	0	0.0	29.5	5.3
Rabi	Mustard	5	0.5	7.75	1.4
Between Rabi and Kharif	Spring maize	3	0.3	15	2.7
Between Rabi and Kharif	Moong Dal	0	0.0	31	5.5
Year-long crops	Fodder	120	11.8	51.65	9.2
Year-long crops	Sugarcane	12	1.2	7	1.3
Other crops	Green manure, oilseeds, etc	0	0.0	4.5	0.8

Source: Fieldwork data

Note: The area under crops in Vyapargarh was under-reported, mainly for basmati and wheat, as the total area under cultivation in both Rabi and Kharif is lower than the total area under cultivation in the village; however, in percentage terms, the figures are relatively more accurate.

However, incomes from cultivation differed across land-size classes of farmers in both villages, even though most of them belonged to the same caste, the Jutt Sikhs. Larger farmers in Kisangarh, who were typically medium or large landowners, earned per-acre incomes that were roughly double those of a marginal landowning farmer and four to six times those of a landless tenant farmer. It is estimated that in Kisangarh, the combined income from cultivation of wheat and paddy (and wheat straw) was approximately Rs 75,000-80,000 per acre per annum on one's owned land for a semi-medium to bigger farmer, whereas it fell to Rs 40-50,000 per acre per annum for an average marginal landowning farmer (after deducting the expenses incurred during cultivation plus the imputed value of family labour used in cultivation, often called A2+FL in literature). On leased-in land, due to high and rising land rent, as discussed in the next section, most surplus was partitioned as rent, leaving a tenant with a surplus of not more than Rupees 10,000-20,000 per acre per annum at the A2+FL level, depending on the scale of the tenant's operation. Considering that Kisangarh had higher average land ownership and operational holdings, as well as a greater share of households with medium or larger landholdings, the share of those who could accumulate a surplus from agriculture was high despite low per-acre profitability and higher rent on leased-in land.

On the other hand, the differences in GVOs between smaller and bigger farmers per acre of land were much broader in Vyapargarh, contributing to a more polarised and differentiated agrarian class-caste structure here than in Kisangarh. Profits from cultivation for the diversified bigger farmers (who could themselves be marginal or small landowners) were, on average, upwards of Rs 140,000 per acre per annum on owned land and Rs 80,000 per acre per annum on leased-in land. This could jump up to Rs 2 lakhs per acre or drop to Rs 30,000 in case of crop failure or price crash. For the marginal and smaller PCP and CoL farmers, who primarily cultivated wheat and paddy, returns hovered around Rs 35,000 to Rs 40,000 per acre per annum, which is a fifth of their bigger counterparts. They were as low as Rs 15,000 to Rs 20,000 for a landless tenant cultivator.

To clarify, these are conservative estimates and not based on systematic data collection from all size classes of farmers, but the estimates are not far from those by a much more representative and expansive study of farmers' incomes by Punjab Agricultural University (Kaur et al 2017: vi-xii) and in line with the evidence from national statistical agencies such as NSSO discussed in Chapter 3.

While access to timely irrigation and usage of tractor may no longer be important factors in determining differential surpluses of smaller and medium or bigger farmers, there were several other key sources of income differentiation, with some sources being more important in one village than in another. We will discuss evidence on four of these sources: (i) difference in marketed surplus of main produce and by-products like *toodi,* (ii) differences in costs of cultivation, particularly in machinery cost and interest on informal *arhtiya* loans, (iii) ability to cultivate high value crops and access to markets for such crops, (iv) marketed surplus of milk.

First and foremost, as wheat is the staple crop of the region, marginal and small farmers kept a higher share of their output for self-consumption, leading to less output being sold in the market and lesser per-acre incomes from cultivation. Grover et al. (2012) estimate, based on an extensive survey across different regions of Punjab, that on average, a marginal and small landowning farmer sold only 67.64 percent and 79.15 percent of their wheat output, respectively, compared to more than 90 percent among medium and bigger farmers.

Secondly, smaller and marginal farmers produced less *toodi* (wheat straw), which was used as fodder for milch animals. Being bulky in matter, *toodi* required big rooms to be stored. Most smaller farmers did not have such large stores. They were forced to sell a portion of their toodi after the wheat harvest when prices were low due to a market glut, only to purchase it later in the year at a higher cost, making them net buyers of *toodi* and negatively affecting their incomes from livestock rearing. On the other hand, larger

farmers had a surplus of toodi, which they stored until winter when a shortage in supply tends to put upward pressure on *toodi* prices.[65]

Thirdly, larger farmers had relatively lower cultivation costs, especially for machinery as they usually owned these machines. In contrast, most marginal and small landowning farmers had to outsource these mechanised crop operations to them—such as mechanised sowing, harvesting, threshing, and *toodi* making—contributing to their accumulation.[66] However, the high availability of this service kept costs competitive and was not seen as a major source of differentiation.

In addition, the smaller cultivators usually borrowed more and paid a higher rate of interest on informal loans from *arhtiyas* than the bigger farmers, whose higher as well as diversified sources of income made them less dependent on arhtiyas for advance loans, especially in Vyapargarh. Larger farmers in Vyapargarh reported paying around 18 per cent per annum, while smaller farmers paid on average 24 per cent per annum, and sometimes even 36 per cent. In Kisangarh, rate of interest paid on informal loans did not seem be an important source of differentiation as all farmers, irrespective of their land ownership, reported paying the standard 12 per cent per annum.

Fourthly, there were significant differences in crop choice and prices received across the land size classes of farmers in Vyapargarh. Table 5.10 below shows that the smallest farmers mainly cultivated MSP crops of wheat and paddy like their counterparts in Kisangarh, but all other land-size class of farmers devoted roughly one-third of their Gross Cropped Area (GCA) to cultivation of high-value, riskier, non-MSP crops, such as basmati rice, potatoes, peas and other vegetables, as well as sugar beet, an entirely industrial crop non-native to the region and introduced in 2014 by a private sugar mill owned by a big local industrialist-politician. In fact, the biggest farmers had three-fourths of their land under non-MSP crops. These crops were riskier

[65] *Toodi* prices had reached a peak of Rs 900-1000 per trolley during the winter season in the fieldwork year of 2021, up from Rs 300-400 per trolley during the months after wheat harvest in April 2021, which resulted in windfall gains for the bigger farmers who had leftover toodi in their storage (also observed by Kaur 2022).

[66] The cost for outsourcing land preparation and sowing of wheat and paddy hovered around Rs 1200-1500 per acre and for pea, it was Rs 3000 per acre. Harvesting of wheat and paddy by a combine harvester costed between Rs 1100-Rs 1200 per acre, while *toodi* making cost was Rs 1000 per trolley or Rs 2000 per acre.

due to their weather-sensitive nature, which affected yields and resulted in fluctuating prices, as they were not regulated by the state through MSP mechanisms.[67] In good years, these crops fetched two to three times the profits from wheat and paddy.

Table 5.10 Area under non-MSP and non-fodder crops as share of Gross Cropped Area (GCA), operational holding-wise, in fieldwork villages, 2021-22

Land size class of operational holdings	Kisangarh	Vyapargarh
0.01-2.5 Acres	2.5*	13.2
2.51-5 Acres	0	28.5
5.01-10 Acres	0	30.1
10.01-25 Acres	0	32.9
25.01 Acres and above	0	78.6
All cultivators	0.4	22.7

Source: Fieldwork data

Note: * Some Dalit nazool landholders had cultivated cotton on small parcels of land in the survey year. Apart from that, many Jutt landowners had devoted small parcels of land to the cultivation of vegetables, sugarcane, and other crops for their own consumption, which are not included in the analysis here.

Bigger Jutt farmers and their conjugated class-caste position enabled them to be better hedged against risks or even weather a seasonal loss as they also had other sources of income (discussed later). Most of them cultivated wheat and paddy as cushion crops to ensure that they didn't suffer negative overall incomes. In fact, MSP and assured procurement of wheat and paddy, along with high demand for basmati, enabled them to venture into the cultivation of riskier crops. The larger farmers were also more aware of the price differentials across mandis and were more flexible in choosing which market to sell their crops, depending on the price received. They could also hold off on selling crops immediately after harvest, especially potatoes and peas, when there might be a slump in prices, as they tend to have better access to cold storage.

Fifth, data collected on the livestock economy was limited to livestock ownership. No systematic data was collected on milk output and prices received, as both fluctuated very frequently, preventing any informed estimate. Still, if we take livestock ownership

[67] As mentioned in the previous chapter, Majha region has geo-tag for basmati production and is considered to be the basmati belt of Punjab, cultivating more basmati than paddy during the kharif season, as revealed by a district-level study of crops by Punjab Agriculture University (PAU) (Kaur et al 2017).

as a proxy for higher incomes from livestock rearing, then Table 5.11 below shows that the larger farmers usually maintained a larger fleet of cows and buffaloes than marginal farmers and landless households—roughly three times more in Kisangarh and four times more in Vyapargarh. This was especially true in Vyapargarh, where a few larger farmers (operating upwards of 10 acres) had a significantly larger fleet of 10 animals on average—with two to three of the new Jutt capitalists owning more than 20 animals (Table 5.11). The landless, non-cultivating households in Kisangarh kept on average, one milch animal, whereas those in Vyapargarh had largely moved away from livestock rearing. Livestock rearing by landless households was undertaken not only for the self-consumption of milk but also to generate a profit from the production and sale of milk. Moreover, livestock ownership increased creditworthiness and served as a source of readily available cash in the event of an emergency. However, the low scale of operations meant that most milk produced was consumed at home, resulting in less output to sell, which further widened the gap in Gross Value of Output (GVO) and incomes between smaller and larger farmers.

Table 5.11 Share of households with livestock and its average holdings across land operated size categories, Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, 2021-22

	Kisangarh		Vyapargarh	
Land-operated size category	Share of households with livestock	Average no of livestock	Share of households with livestock	Average no of livestock
No cultivation	45.1	0.7	16.9	0.3
0.01-2.5 Acres	50.0	1.1	89.7	2.5
2.51-5 Acres	77.4	2.2	88.9	3.2
5.01-10 Acres	91.9	3.2	90.5	4.8
10.01-25 Acres	96.6	3.3	100.0	7.3
25.01 and above	100.0	3.0	100.0	10.5
Grand Total	63.0	1.6	35.1	1.2

Source: Fieldwork data

Summary and discussion

To conclude this section, ownership of land and agricultural machinery, scale of cultivation, costs of cultivation, and ability to grow riskier, more remunerative crops have emerged as important sources of agrarian capital accumulation and socio-

economic differentiation among cultivator households in both the villages, which as shown later, is aided by incomes from non-agrarian sources. Those who operated on a larger scale usually faced lower production costs, had a higher marketed surplus, grew higher-valued crops, received better prices for their non-MSP crops and by-products, such as toodi, borrowed less, and paid lower interest rates. They also maintained a larger livestock fleet. Increasing the scale of operation through the leasing-in of land or tenancy was, therefore, seen as a potential means for smaller landowning farmers to generate a surplus from their agricultural activities. However, as discussed in the following section, the tenancy market has further exacerbated the ownership-based inequalities in land in both fieldwork villages, especially in Kisangarh, echoing the trend observed at the state level, as discussed in Chapter 3.

5.2.2 Rural Capital Accumulation and Differentiation through Agricultural Tenancy

Table 5.12 below presents quantitative variables related to tenancy in the two villages and compares them with available evidence from Punjab and India. It reveals that in Kisangarh, more land was being demanded by tenants than available to be leased out by the landowners. One-third of the cultivated land was leased-in land, while only 25 per cent of the land owned was offered for lease. Also, more households were looking to lease-in land (46 per cent of cultivator households) than were offering it for lease (40 per cent of landowners). This follows from the higher dependence on agriculture for livelihoods and for surplus accumulation discussed earlier. This led to a much tighter tenancy market in Kisangarh compared to Vyapargarh, where the shares of lessors and tenants, as well as the extent of leased-in land and leased-out land, were more balanced. Both villages, nonetheless, have a significantly greater extent of tenancy than seen in Punjab and India, although the secondary datasets underreport tenancy transactions (see also Bansal, Usami, and Rawal 2018).

Table 5.12 Quantitative parameters to measure tenancy in fieldwork villages, 2021-22

Tenancy parameters	Kisangarh	Vyapargarh	Punjab	All-India
	2021-22	2021-22	2012-13	2012-13
Tenant/total rural households	24.8	11.9	11	10.3

Tenants/cultivator households	46.2	47.7	20.1	15
Lessors/total landowning households	40.3	46.3	-	-
Leased-in land/net cropped area	32.5	43.4	26.1	11.1
Leased out land/land-owned area	23.1	**38.4**	**-**	**-**
Average size of a tenancy transaction	5.56	5.14	-	-

Source: Fieldwork data for Kisangarh and Vyapargarh. The data on India and Punjab are taken from Bansal, Rawal, and Usami (2018), based on the NSSO LLHS data collected in 2012-13.

This hyper-competition for land had led to a sharp rise in the rental rate of land in Kisangarh—from Rs 60,000 in 2018-19 to Rs 70-72,000 per acre per annum in 2021-22, 25 percent higher compared to Vyapargarh, where the rental rate was Rs 55,000 in 2021-22. The intense competition for land had also led to remarkable changes in the terms and conditions of tenancy arrangements over the last decade in Kisangarh—the whole amount had to be paid in cash and, more importantly, fully in advance, in contrast to the two-instalment pattern found in Vyapargarh and other regions within Punjab. The sale price of agricultural land also showed a similar pattern, ranging between Rs 28-35 lakhs in Kisangarh and constantly increasing over time, according to respondents, while hovering around Rs 22-24 lakhs per acre in Vyapargarh since the demonetisation exercise in 2016.[68] Comparison with other regions in India reveals that this is one of the highest land rents found across rural India (Das and Swaminathan 2017). Similar dynamics of competition had led to a sharp rise in the price of buffaloes in the region—from Rs 30,000 to Rs 50,000 per buffalo in 2015-16, depending on the age and milk production levels of the buffalo—to between Rs 65,000 and Rs 85,000 in 2021-22.

This upward push in land rent and land prices was led by the more resourceful medium and larger landowning farmers, who tried to maximise the total surpluses from cultivation, even though it led to lower per-acre profitability. The tenants were effectively surrendering 60 to 70 per cent of the output value to the landowner, which is among the highest shares of rent seen anywhere in the country.[69] While it served as a

[68] Land prices differed depending primarily on factors such as proximity to the main road, along with irrigation/tubewell infrastructure, proximity to the canal, among others.

[69] Given the fact that a large share of surplus was given off as rent, even more than in the sharecropping arrangements earlier, it was often remarked by some bigger tenants that they were producing to make profits for the landowners, making the tenancy arrangement seem more like disguised wage labour described by Banaji (1977). However, that was hardly the case as the tenants were often medium

significant source of accumulation for the bigger landowning lessors, as well as for the capitalist tenants, it had adversely impacted the capacity of most PCP and CoL households, who were landless or owned small parcels of land, to lease in land and increase their agrarian incomes. In other words, tenancy was a source of differentiation in both directions.

Of particular interest are the new Jutt CoC who have emerged as the biggest players in the tenancy market in Kisangarh. Constituting just 10 per cent of the total rural households in Kisangarh, they accounted for 57 per cent of the total leased-in land in the village (column 6 of Table 5.13). Furthermore, 38 per cent of them had increased their operational holdings by leasing a large extent of land (defined as more than the land they owned) (see Figure 5.2 below), and 38 per cent of their operational holdings were leased-in land (not shown in the table). As a result, their average operational holdings were 50 per cent higher compared to their average land ownership—11.3 acres compared to 7.7 acres (columns 2 and 3, Table 5.13). This data points to an excessive dependence on the tenancy market for capital accumulation among the new Jutt or Savarna classes of capital. Similar tendencies to depend on tenancy for capital accumulation have been observed in the Doaba region of Punjab, although in the context of much lower land rents (see Bansal 2020).

Table 5.13 Ownership and distribution of land owned and operated across class-caste categories, Kisangarh, 2021-22

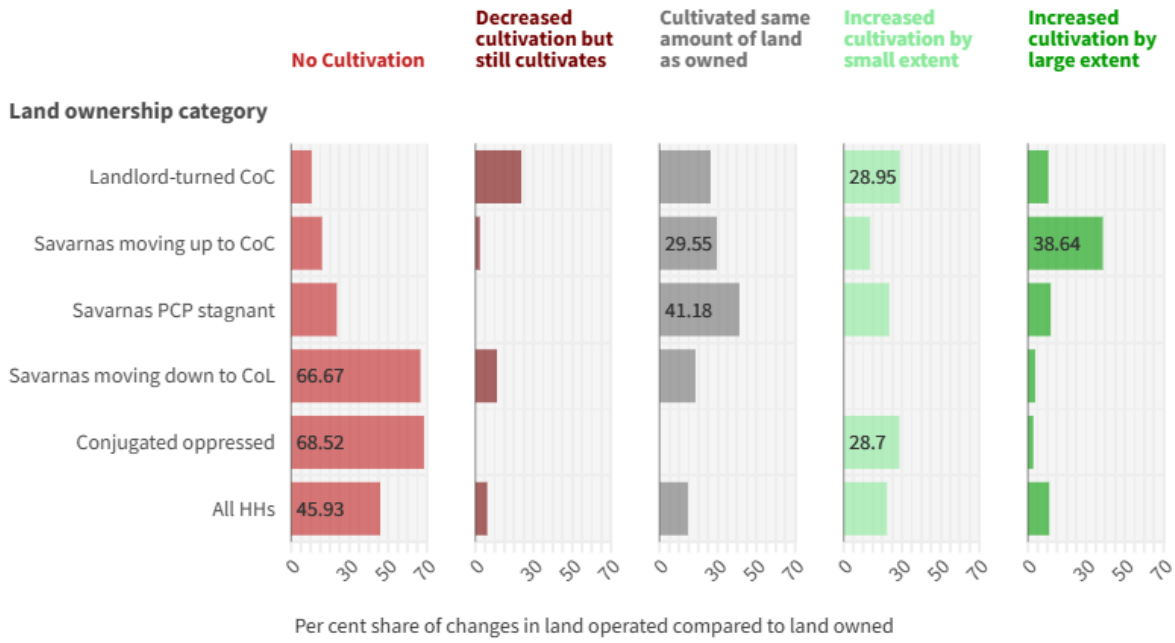
Class-caste groups	Average Land owned	Average land operated	Distribution of land owned	Distribution of land operated	Distribution of leased in land	Distribution of leased out land
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Classes of capital	8.9	10.5	85.7	86.2	81.1	72.6
Landlord-turned CoC	10.8	10.3	47.0	38.0	23.9	55.1
Jutt/Savarnas moving up to CoC	7.7	11.3	38.8	48.3	**57.2**	**17.5**
Dalits/OBCs moving up to CoC	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
PCPs	2.9	3.1	9.0	8.2	6.9	8.8
Jutt/Savarnas moving down to PCP	4.4	3.4	2.5	1.6	1.2	4.6
Jutt/Savarnas PCPs stagnant	3.3	4.0	6.5	6.5	**5.7**	4.2

landowners themselves as described later and the landowners had no control or influence over commodity production, marketed surplus or exchange. Nor were the tenants engaged in any relation of exploitation or oppression with the landowner, nor did they face ethnic, caste, or gender-based discrimination or marginalisation, as both tenant and landowners were often from the same class-caste-gender identities.

Dalits/OBCs moving up to PCP	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Classes of labour	0.3	0.4	5.3	5.6	12.0	18.6
Jutt/savarnas moving down to CoL	1.6	0.6	5.0	1.7	2.2	17.2
Conjugated oppressed	0.0	0.4	0.2	3.9	9.8	1.4
Grand Total	3.6	4.2	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork data

Figure 5.2 Per cent share of changes in land operated compared to land owned, Kisangarh



Source: Fieldwork data

On the other hand, PCP households cultivated only slightly more land than they owned on average (compare columns 2 and 3, as well as 4 and 5). The savarna/Jutt stagnant PCP households also emerge as *net-lessees* in the tenancy market (see columns 6 and 7 in Table 5.13), and on average, they operated with higher landholdings than those owned by them (see columns 2 and 3 in Table 5.13). However, they were no match for the economic strength and social power of the bigger or medium landowning Jutts in the tenancy market, reducing them to a subordinate player. More than 40 per cent of them did not lease-in any land, in part because they could not compete in the 'price war' with the bigger landowning Jutts. Rather, the increased rental prices (alongside the lack of irrigation infrastructure on some of their land) seem to have provided a thrust for many marginal or small landowning PCP and CoL households to quit cultivation altogether. Instead, they were engaged in casualised jobs in the informal, urban

economy, thereby thrusting them into the CoL category from their previous PCP status while providing for the upward economic mobility of the middle and bigger landowning Jutts. Such households, that is, Jutt/savarna CoL households, accounted for 17 per cent of the total leased-out land in Kisangarh, while leasing-in only 2 per cent of the leased-in land, resulting in their operational holdings more than halving compared to the land owned by them—from 1.6 acres to 0.6 acres.

However, Jutt/Savarna CoL households were not the primary players in the lease-out market. The Landlord-turned CoC households, who constituted just 15 per cent of the rural households, accounted for 55 per cent of the leased-out land in the village, a reflection of the sheer size of the land owned by them. This meant that they cultivated, on average, less land than that owned by them. Many among them had either reduced the scale of their cultivation, often retaining a small portion for fodder cultivation for animal feed, and some had completely leased out their land. However, those from this class who leased-in land often did it on a large scale (see Figure 5.2).

The tenancy transactions in Vyapargarh had a similar pattern but were also distinct in other ways. Here, too, upwardly mobile Jutt CoC households, as well as stagnant PCP households, emerge as the net lessees of agricultural land. In contrast, Landlord-turned CoC and downwardly mobile Jutt CoL households emerge as net lessors (compare columns 5 and 6 of Table 5.14). However, considering the different land-ownership levels of these classes in Vyapargarh than Kisangarh, as mentioned previously, it leads to slightly different dynamics. For instance, the upwardly mobile Jutt CoC households in Kisangarh were predominantly small landowners (55.6 per cent of them owned less than 5 acres) compared to most of them being semi-medium landowners (5-10 acres) in Kisangarh.

Secondly, unlike Kisangarh, the tendency to exit cultivation was not limited to PCP or CoL households but was almost equally prevalent across all class-caste groups, including among upwardly mobile Jutt CoC households, consistent with the relatively lower dependence on agriculture for employment in Vyapargarh discussed earlier (see Figure 5.3). Instead, as described in greater length in the next section, the tendency among landowners, irrespective of the land owned by them, was to move into non-agrarian occupations, either as casual labourers in the informal economy if one was

land-poor or as a PCP or capitalist if one had access to land and capital. This was made possible due to the economic dynamism of the region around Amritsar that has pulled many landowners out of cultivation compared to their over-staying in agriculture in Kisangarh.

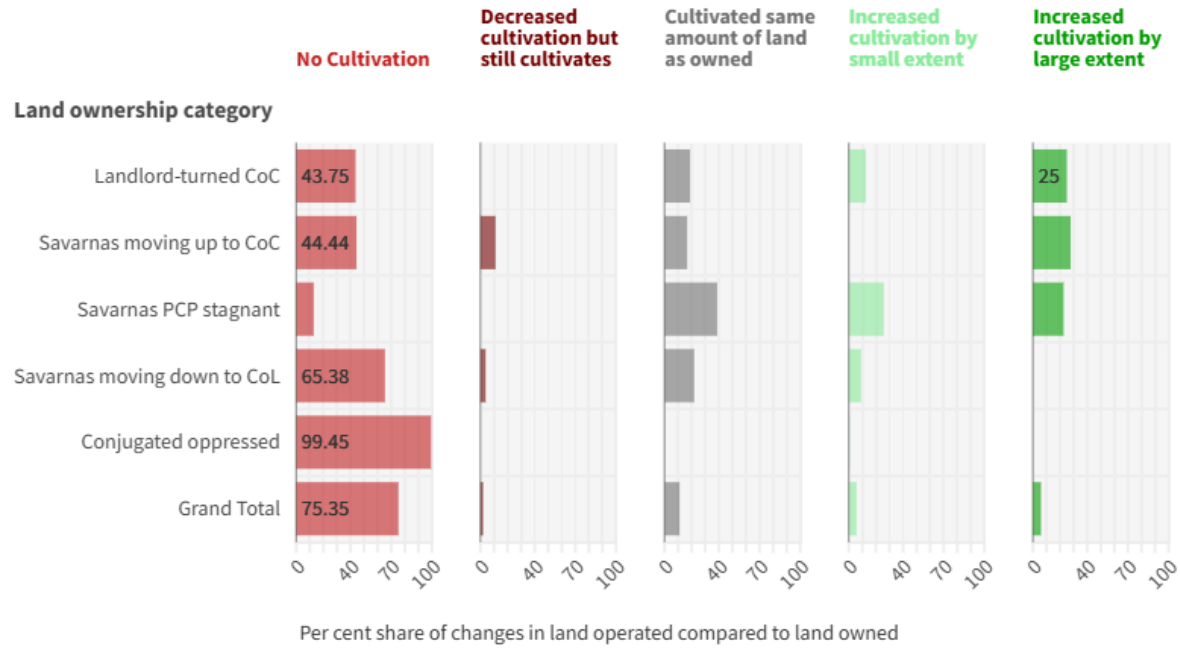
Table 5.14 Ownership and distribution of land owned and operated across class-caste categories, Kisangarh, 2021-22

Class-caste groups	Average Land owned	Average Land operated	Distribution of land owned	Distribution of land operated	Distribution of leased in land	Distribution of leased out land
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Classes of capital	4.9	5.6	61.2	64.4	69.7	63.7
Landlord-turned CoC	5.7	5.2	20.1	16.6	13.2	21.3
Savarnas moving up to CoC	5.2	6.5	41.0	47.4	**55.6**	**42.4**
Dalits/OBCs moving up to CoC	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.4	0.9	0.0
PCPs	1.9	3.2	15.4	23.7	26.2	4.9
Savarnas moving down to PCP	5.1	5.1	1.1	1.0	0.0	0.0
Savarnas PCP stagnant	2.3	3.8	15.4	23.5	**25.7**	**4.9**
Dalits/OBCs moving up to PCP	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.5	0.0
Classes of labour	0.4	0.2	22.3	10.9	4.2	31.4
Savarnas moving down to CoL	1.3	0.7	22.3	10.7	**3.6**	**31.4**
Conjugated oppressed	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.5	0.0
All Households	1.3	1.4	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork data

While most households were leasing out land, a small section, roughly 20-25 per cent, of both CoC sub-classes and Jutt PCPs were leasing in large extents of land (see Figure 5.3). Merely 7 CoC households, mostly from the upwardly mobile Jutt CoCs, operated around 42 per cent of the total land in the village. Some of them owned less than 1 acre but cultivated more than 20 acres of land, an arrangement difficult to imagine in Kisangarh. This led to a pronounced inequality in land *operated* compared to land *owned*, which is also evident from the Gini index and the Lorenz curve below (Table 5.15 and Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.3 Per cent share of changes in land operated across class-caste groups, Vyapargarh



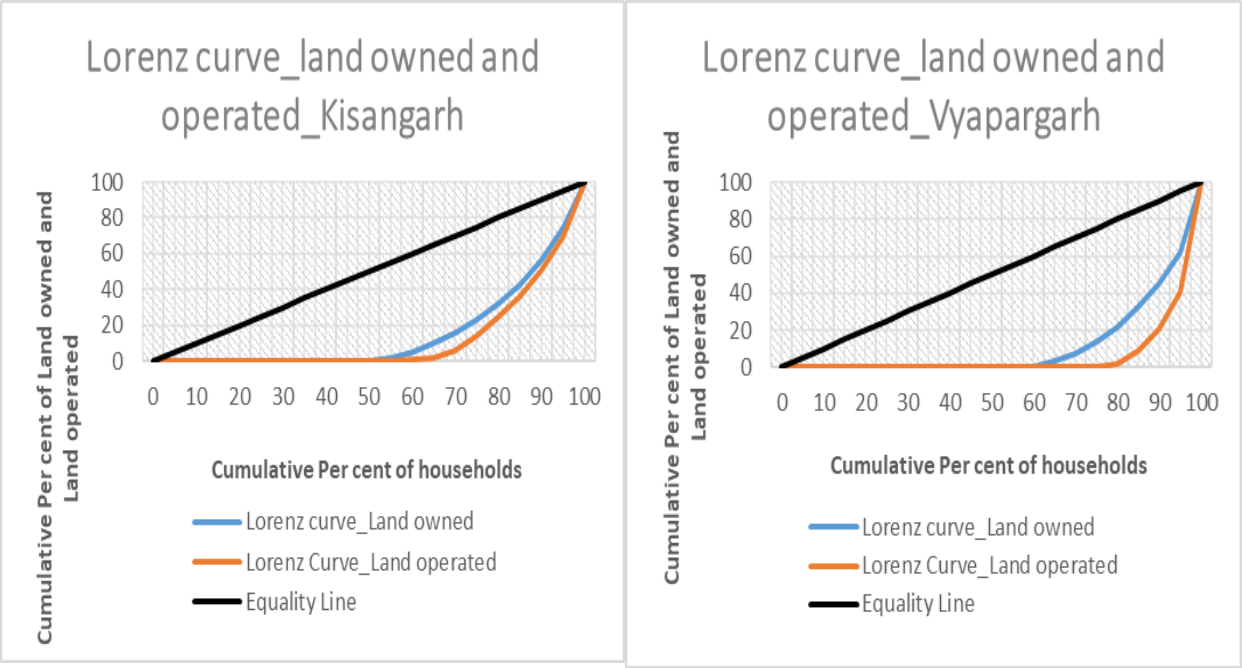
Source: Fieldwork data

Table 5.15 Gini coefficient representing inequality in land ownership and land operated, Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, 2020-21

Gini parameters	Kisangarh	Vyapargarh
Gini Coefficient of Land owned (all HHs)	0.69	0.77
Gini Coefficient of Land Operated (all HHs)	0.74	**0.88**
Gini Coefficient of Land ownership (among landed HHs)	0.40	0.46
Gini Coefficient of Land operated (among cultivating HHs)	0.52	0.54

Source: Fieldwork Data

Figure 5.4 Lorenz curve of land owned, and land operated in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, 2021-22



Source: Fieldwork Data

Summary and discussion

The evidence discussed here adds to the discussion in the previous section and to the existing literature discussed in Chapter 3 on how inequalities in land ownership and agricultural production contributed to socio-economic differentiation in the two villages in Punjab (see also Kaur and Kaur 2022, Singh and Singh 2020). It also shows the implications it had for the conjugated class-caste positions of the rural households.

A smaller share of households who sit atop the socio-economic hierarchy—both old and new capitalists from dominant castes—has been able to accumulate agrarian surpluses in the post-liberalisation period, too, through larger-scale intensive cultivation facilitated by capitalist tenancy transactions, in addition to the cultivation of high-value crops and contract farming, the latter being more prevalent in Vyapargarh. Their ability to accumulate was enabled and sustained by their location in the class-caste hierarchy, helping them reproduce their position in the rural agrarian structure, especially in Kisangarh. In Vyapargarh, there were still some possibilities for those at the lower end of the ladder to climb up through leasing in land and cultivation of riskier crops, especially if they had other sources of stable income, such as a salary or

pension from the army or other government jobs, but such mobilities were often volatile. Therefore, this evidence adds to the existing evidence on capital accumulation in agriculture in rural Punjab discussed in Chapter 3 by bringing evidence from not only the Malwa region, where such research already exists (see Sinha 2020, 2021; Shrimali 2022) but also from the Majha region, which is a relatively understudied region within Punjab.

However, this section also went beyond analysing capital accumulation by showing how it has profound implications for the classes of labour and their class formation. The accumulation of the few has come at the expense of the CoL and PCP households who have been disadvantaged or excluded from buying or leasing-in land and, therefore, from the assured, but increasingly insufficient, incomes from cultivation. The high and rising buffalo prices have, at the same time, made it difficult to expand livestock rearing, contributing to higher distress among landless and land-poor households, especially in Kisangarh. This has pushed some PCP households to seek jobs in the informal economy, thrusting them into classes of labour and laying the foundations for continuous fragmentation of this class, while at the same time imposing strict barriers on the conjugated oppressed households from escaping their conjugated class-caste location. Chapter 7 further elaborates on these links between capital accumulation and its shaping of rural-agrarian distress and its regional diversity.

What is interesting is that at least half of the classes of capital in Kisangarh and three-fourths in Vyapargarh have a middle peasant or even poor peasant background two to three generations ago. Still, they were able to climb up the socio-economic ladder during the Green Revolution period. However, they seem to have 'kicked away the ladder' (a term popularised by Chang 2003) for those below them, especially in Kisangarh. However, those at the very bottom—landless Dalits—were still excluded from it. This point is also picked up later in chapter 7 when we discuss the classes of labour in rural Punjab and their simple reproduction under neoliberalism.

This concludes the section on agrarian accumulation. The next section presents systematic evidence on the non-farm sources of income among classes of capital in the fieldwork villages and how they exaggerated these dynamics of socio-economic differentiation. As already shown in section 5.1, non-farm sources had already emerged

as the main source of capital accumulation among classes of capital in Vyapargarh, and there was a growing trend towards economic diversification among some CoC in Kisangarh too, although they remained a secondary source of income for many of them.

5.2.3 Rural Capital Accumulation from Non-Farm Sources

This section takes forward the discussion on rural capital accumulation by describing the non-farm diversification among classes of capital. The details that follow, although descriptive, are crucial to making sense of the broader picture and also provide fodder for the subsequent chapter that aims to link rural capital accumulation with the political economy of the non-farm sectors.

Table 5.16 shows that 51 out of 84 CoC households in Kisangarh, that is, 60 per cent of them, were engaged in 70 diversified activities (in addition to cultivation and livestock rearing). On the other hand, as many as 53 out of 57 CoC households in Vyapargarh, that is, 92 per cent of them, were engaged in 88 forms of diversification, an average of 1.5 sources of surplus accumulation per household, in addition to cultivation and livestock rearing, which further contributed to capital accumulation and differentiation in Vyapargarh compared to Kisangarh.

In Kisangarh, the most common form of diversification among the classes of capital, especially Jutts, undertaken by roughly 18 per cent of them, was directly linked to agriculture—providing agricultural machine services such as land preparation and sowing, harvesting, threshing, laser levelling of land, toodi making among others, which as mentioned earlier, had improved access to agricultural machinery including among smallest of farmers. The crowding of the business had kept prices and profitability in check, and some of them had significantly curtailed or closed down the business. In Vyapargarh, only the five biggest cultivator households engaged in this activity, with one of them owning all the machines. This was in part because many from the Malwa region travelled with their machines to the Majha region to provide these services.

This was followed by international migration to developed countries—among 13 per cent of CoC households in Kisangarh and one-fourth of the households in Vyapargarh, the difference being that this uptick in international migration was a more recent phenomenon in Kisangarh. In contrast, many from Vyapargarh had migrated in the

2000s (see Sharma et al., 2023 for a comprehensive region-wise study of migration trends from rural Punjab). Irrespective of whether one belonged to a landlord-turned CoC household or a new capitalist, there was a growing aspiration to send young boys and girls abroad, preferably to Canada but also Australia and the UK, first as students and with the hope of getting a PR status later. As many as 27 per cent of all landowning households and almost one-third of classes of capital households in Kisangarh had a young son or a daughter enrolled in an IELTS institute.[70]

This was facilitated by the relaxation of student visa rules by Western universities in the 2010s to keep themselves afloat and to subsidise the education of their home students. However, the rise of right-wing populism and anti-immigration rhetoric in many of these countries has resulted in a sharp rise in the cost of international student visas, tightening of the visa rules that bar students enrolled in undergraduate or masters' degrees from bringing dependents, and strict deportations by the recently re-elected Trump administration (N. Kaur & Bansal, 2025; Kukreja, 2024; S. Sharma et al., 2023).[71] These changes are widely expected to have repercussions on class formation and capital accumulation in rural Punjab.

An important distinction between CoC in the two villages was their diversification into government jobs. Only 10 per cent of the CoC households in Kisangarh received salaries or pensions from the state, compared to more than half of the CoC households in Vyapargarh, especially from the army but also other state departments. The regular pensions and remunerations, along with land rent, provided a certain amount of security and social status to these households, and even though they didn't own much land, they owned and commanded decent economic surpluses.

[70] Jutt boys were, however, poor with clearing IELTS exams, but the obsession for an overseas dream forced them to innovate new socio-cultural phenomenon such as 'contract marriage' and 'reverse dowries' where they offered to bear the expenses of a girl who had cleared an IELTS exam in lieu of a dependent visa for their son.

[71] It has been reported that 40 per cent of those deported are from Punjab. See https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/40-of-388-deported-by-us-are-from-punjab-govt-informs-lok-sabha/articleshow/119319276.cms
Published 22/03/2025. Last accessed 25/03/2025.

Table 5.16 Forms of non-farm diversification among classes of capital in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, 2021-22

Forms of non-agrarian diversification	Kisangarh	Share of CoC households	Vyapargarh	Share of CoC households
Manufacturing or agro-processing				
Manufacturing activity (hiring more than five workers)	7	8.3	2	3.5
Agro-processing or milling	0	0.0	1	1.8
Wholesale or retail trading				
Trading or retail business	9	**10.7**	14	**24.6**
Commission agent (arhtiya)	1	1.2	1	1.8
Agri-machine services	15	**17.9**	6	10.5
Rental/speculative				
Real estate developer/property dealer/investments	1	1.2	4	7.0
Restaurant/resort/banquet hall owners	2	2.4	1	1.8
Other service-sector businesses	5*	6.0	4**	7.0
Salaries and wages				
Govt salaries and pensions	9	10.7	30	**52.6**
Private, secure, skilled job	6	7.1	6	10.5
Skilled self-employed professionals	2	2.4	0	0.0
Remittances				
Migration to global North countries	11	**13.1**	15	**26.3**
Migration to middle-income countries	2	2.4	3	5.3
All forms of diversification	70		88	

Note: Since one household could pursue more than one source of diversification, this table shows a count of all forms of diversification among classes of capital in the fieldwork villages. It does not include diversification by emigrant households or previous diversifications of the resident households that had failed or shut down.
Source: Fieldwork data
*This includes a music production company, a mattress, and utensils renting out business for weddings and functions, borewell digging, school bus owner
**This includes a borewell digging business, a transport business, and a poultry farm lease-out business

However, the most important distinction between CoC of Kisangarh and Vyapargarh was their differential engagement with non-farm businesses such as trading, retail, manufacturing, or other service sector businesses. Only 10 per cent of CoC households were engaged in such activities, most of them Banias and Brahmins, compared to one-fourth in Vyapargarh, who were all Jutts, barring one OBC Nai Sikh household.

Most notable among the active businesses in Kisangarh were the four slab-manufacturing factories in the village that had been established between 2014 and 2021 by six households (4 Brahmins and 2 Jutts) (see Figure 5.5). The investment outlay for these factories ranged between Rs 4 lakhs to Rs 25 lakhs, depending on the scale of

business, thus falling under the MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) according to the government classification. Each of these factories hired 5-6 workers year-round and 10-12 workers during the peak season, mostly men.

Figure 5.5 A big landowning Jutt who had invested in a slab-manufacturing factory supervising the work sitting on his cot in his factory, Kisangarh, 2021



Source: Fieldwork

Sinha (2021) has argued that it is useful to also include failed attempts at diversification in our analysis as it tends to provide a more comprehensive picture of the non-farm diversification in a region. These failed enterprises in Kisangarh included an IELTS center by two 6-acres each owning Jutt brothers, that had to be wrapped up after the COVID-19 lockdown, a cable TV business that had to be shut down due to the entry of big capital in the industry, a private school, a toodi trading business, and a slab manufacturing factory.

On the other hand, CoC in Vyapargarh were engaged in a range of non-farm businesses within the village and the cities, and sometimes outside the state as well. These

businesses included a commission agent business in Tarn Taran market, a CCTV and computer hardware store and a pharmacy store in Khadur Sahib (another town near Tarn Taran), a construction and building materials retail store, cot manufacturing and retail business, a pesticide and agri-inputs retail store, five general/kirana retail stores and three milk procurement centers, all within the village. All of these, except two, were owned by Jutts, the other two being set up by Ghumiyars, who were landless OBCs. In addition to this, accumulation from 'gatekeeping' of public resources that flowed through the panchayat constituted an important source of accumulation for a group of households close to the sarpanch (similar to observations made by Pattenden 2011). There was complete subversion of all pro-poor welfare programs in this village such as NREGS, house construction scheme, cow shed construction scheme, and mass exclusion of labouring classes from the Public Distribution Scheme.

Moreover, some CoC households had also invested in businesses such as a hotel-cum-restaurant, a real estate construction, and retail business in Jandiala on the Jalandhar-Amritsar national highway, and transport business in Mumbai, Chhattisgarh, and Amritsar respectively, all of them by Jutts. Speculative investments in commercial and residential plots in Amritsar and other nearby cities were also common. Some had failed in their attempts to diversify. This included two Jutt households who had reduced and shut down their transport business in Amritsar and Jandiala, respectively, a poultry farm in the village that was started by two Jutts and a landless Nai Sikh (OBC) but was shut down in 2019 due to low returns, and the sarpanch's UK-returnee brother whose finance company in Amritsar failed due to bad debts and mismanagement. Incidentally, in this village, too, there was an IELTS center owned by the same person who had an *arht* shop, which had shut down due to COVID-19-induced lockdowns.

Not only trade, hotels, and real estate, but some had invested in manufacturing, too, such as brick kilns. Although none from Vyapargarh had invested in it, all four kilns within a five km radius of the village were owned and/or operated by big landowning Jutts from nearby villages. These kilns were the most stable source of employment and income for the landless Dalit households in the village, especially for Dalit women. Moreover, the sugar beet processing mill that engaged in contract farming in the region was also owned by a Jutt, who was a big politician and an MLA from the Congress party.

These farmer-turned-businessmen in Vyapargarh exhibited practices of managerial work like having an office in the city, sharing visiting cards, and a modern lifestyle, among others (see Figure 5.6). Moreover, most had leased out their land and often straddled the rural-urban landscape. Many had a plot or a house in the city, and many others had plans to move to the city. This enabled them to mark social difference and boundaries from similar landowning households who continued to farm. This places them in the same bracket as that of upwardly mobile, dominant caste-class landowners in northern Andhra Pradesh and Marathwada region of Maharashtra, as observed by Upadhya (1988a) and Chatterjee (2022) respectively and in stark contrast from their counterparts from Kisangarh who were conscious to preserve their *jimidaar* identity. The next chapter will explore these links further by unpacking the links between rural capital accumulation and the political economy of the non-farm sector, while Chapter 7 will demonstrate how these differences in patterns of accumulation shaped the simple reproduction of the classes of labour and their politics.

Figure 5.6 A small landowning Jutt who had an agricultural machine retail shop in Tarn Taran



Source: Fieldwork

Summary and discussion

To conclude, this section showed that while non-farm diversification was gradually on the rise among the Jutt classes of capital in Kisangarh, they relied primarily on land ownership and agrarian income for the reproduction of their caste-class position, especially the new Jutt capitalists. Most often, their diversification was linked to agriculture—such as providing agricultural machine services, milk procurement centers, and toodi selling—and it was usually in *addition to* agriculture, which remained their primary source of income. International migration has been on the rise, too, although the prospects for this look bleak in the future. Only rarely did they diversify into trade, retail, shopkeeping, or labour-absorbing industrial or manufacturing activity, the slab manufacturing factories being an exception. As a result, caste, class, land ownership, and occupational identities continue to be intertwined and inseparable among CoC in Kisangarh, which relates to Sinha's (2021) and Kaur and Kaurs's (2021) findings from other sites in the Malwa region.

Contrary to the CoC in Kisangarh, almost all CoC households in Vyapargarh had a diversified economic portfolio. They were deeply embedded in the broader capitalist circuits and had a spatially expansive network of capital accumulation going not just beyond the village but sometimes beyond the state. The latter was rare in Kisangarh, where capital was more or less restricted to the provincial boundaries, as has been the case among provincial capital in other regions as well (see Kalaiyarasan and Vijayabaskar 2021). Jutts in Vyapargarh were engaged in non-traditional occupations such as shopkeeping, trading, urban business activities, and brick kilns, suggesting a more fluid relationship between these identities there. Some OBCs, too, had joined the classes of capital.

Jutts in Vyapargarh had nurtured and strengthened the channels for sharing capital and risk, eliminated their disdain for non-agrarian petty commodity production, and emphasised on the economic gains of the non-agrarian business over farming and agriculture-related accumulation strategies. They spoke of non-farm businesses in the language of possibility, aspiration, profitable, and desirable, while those in Kisangarh talked about the non-farm sector in the language of risk, failure, caution, uncertainty, lack of knowledge, going against the grain, and an uncomfortable prospect overall.

As a result, the overlap between caste, class, and occupational identities was loosening in Vyapargarh.

The evidence discussed in the chapter so far also links to the discussion on the diversity in the importance of the land question in rural India, that is, the role of land ownership as a source of differentiation in rural India (S. Arora, 2024; Banerjee, 2017; D'Costa & Chakraborty, 2017; J. Harriss, 2013; Levien, 2012; Philip, 2023, p. 202; Rawal & Bansal, 2021). The evidence suggests that land ownership and agriculture continue to be the primary sources of accumulation and differentiation in Kisangarh, enabling and sustaining the reproduction of the existing socio-economic hierarchies. This also provides a context for why the Malwa region has emerged as the epicenter of grassroot politics centered around land, both among farmers as well as landless labourers, as discussed through the case of the 2020-21 farmers' protests in Chapter 6 and the Dalit land rights movement in Chapter 7.

On the other hand, non-farm sources of income and the contacts and networks one needed to integrate with the growing non-farm, urban economy had emerged as an important source of socio-economic differentiation and accumulation in Vyapargarh. Two-thirds of the classes of capital were, in fact, marginal and small landowners. Still, due to a government sector job or a transport company or a real estate development business, they were able to trump the surplus accumulated by a seven or 10-acre-owning Jutt farmer, especially if the latter cultivated only wheat and paddy. In other words, the importance of land ownership as a source of status, power, and differentiation had declined in Vyapargarh than before, although it continued to remain important, especially in differentiating the marginal landowners from the landless.

5.3 From a Snapshot to a Motion Picture: Patterns of accumulation in Rural Punjab

This last section of the chapter will use the typology developed in Chapter 3 to identify the long-term patterns of accumulation among classes of capital in the two fieldwork villages. This section poses the question: "Did the new capitalists imitate the existing capitalist households in their path to upward socio-economic mobility? How many tread a new path for themselves, and how successful were they in this?" A nuanced

analysis of the patterns of accumulation is important to ensure that we don't confound the 'upward and outward' trajectories of economic diversification with the 'outward and upward' trajectories. Exploring these dynamics demands that we further unpack capital accumulation in rural India than has been done in the literature on provincial capital and this chapter so far. These differences in the social profile and origins of provincial capital matter not as much for the broader capitalist development as it does for class and caste power and its expression in the form of rural-agrarian politics, as we discuss later in Chapter 7 (Jan, 2024; Pattenden, 2023; Parthasarathy, 2015).

In addition to unpacking capital accumulation patterns between the Landlord-turned CoC and the new capitalists, this section also makes use of the interview tools described in Chapter 4 to undertake a more comprehensive analysis of rural capital accumulation, how they were socially structured, and how rural households navigate economic opportunities and using which paths.

First, it explores how the trajectories of capital accumulation were structured along caste lines, that is, between the Jutt Sikh classes of capital and their Hindu Brahmin-Bania counterparts. The objective is to show that economic outcomes are not just a manifestation of caste, religion, gender, and other social identities but rather co-constitutive of and structured by them (Lerche and Shah 2018). This is undertaken through presenting case studies from the life histories of capitalist farmers and businessmen, like Manjeet and Inderjeet's story below, and seeing them as 'stories of accumulation' (Oya, 2013).

Second, it incorporates into the analysis those classes of capital households that no longer lived in the village. By excluding households that had relocated outside before the fieldwork, we risk underestimating the prevalence of trajectories that involved the transfer of surplus from farm to the non-farm sector (or vice versa) and inaccurately classify those classes of capital that show an outward trajectory as 'upward but not outward.' The collection of this information was facilitated by the family lineage data described in Chapter 4. While the data on non-resident households may be somewhat patchy, incorporating their trajectories is essential for capturing the full spectrum of accumulation patterns in the two regions.

Before we discuss the systematic evidence on capital accumulation patterns in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, the following two case studies demonstrate the relevance of understanding the distinction in rural capital accumulation patterns in the fieldwork context. Case 1 presents an example of an 'upward and outward' trajectory, and case 2 of an 'outward and upward' trajectory.

Case 1: 'Upward and outward' trajectory among Landlord-turned CoC households in Kisangarh

> Manjeet Singh (name changed) was a Jutt Sikh in his early 60s from Kisangarh. He was in his early 20s when they started cultivating HYV seeds and saw the gains of the Green Revolution unfold in front of his eyes. In the 1980s, his father and one uncle lived in a joint household and together owned and cultivated 52 acres of land, using both family and hired *seeri* labourers, making them one of the biggest landowning households in the village during the early Green Revolution period. The green revolution brought them huge economic prosperity as they accumulated a surplus through the 1980s and '90s and initially re-invested most of that surplus in buying more land while also diversifying in other occupations. They were among the first few landowners to buy a new tractor in the village and later purchased a combine harvester and started providing rental services. They ran this business successfully for 12 years. Then, they also established a private school till primary level, which his elder son ran from their household premises for 15 years before shutting it down in 2009 as the village got its own government school. Then, his elder son invested in a cable TV business in the late 1990s with one of his nephews, which was a huge success in the post-liberalisation period, but they had to eventually wind off in 2016 after the entry of big capital in the Dish TV business. When I interviewed Manjeet Singh, his three sons were all engaged in different occupations while he managed the slab factory that he and his two other partners (both Brahmins) established in 2018. His elder son, who used to run the school, now operated a doctor shop in the village (even though he has no formal training in medicine), the middle son cultivated the land mainly through hired labour, and the younger son had started a music and video production company and regularly produced and released popular Punjabi songs on his YouTube channel. He was also a singer-songwriter and held a PhD in music from Punjabi University.

Case 2: 'Outward and Upward' trajectory among new Jutt classes of capital

> Contrast the rise of Manjeet's family with the story of Inderjeet Singh, a Jutt Sikh by case, whose father was a retired army man and owned around 8 acres of non-irrigated land in Vyapargarh in the 1980s. Inderjeet had two brothers and two sisters, so there was pressure of land division as well as to diversify out of farming.

> He and his older brother turned to truck driving and worked as 'helpers' for the extended family members who had a small transport business. The third brother stayed back in the village and cultivated land. Inderjeet was in Delhi Azadpur mandi when an anti-Sikh pogrom broke out in Delhi in 1984 and barely survived the attack. Due to this traumatic event, he stopped working as a truck driver for some time and returned to farming, but with financial help from his in-laws, he purchased a second-hand truck and started his transport business, which eventually brought him petty surpluses. Later, his only son found out a way to move to the US and they sold off the truck to fund his move to the US in 2007. The emigration to the US turned out to be hugely successful. His son reportedly owned a 7/11 store there, which was considered a big thing in the village, as most other Punjabi emigrants tend to work as labourers. Inderjeet now leases out all 4 acres of his land, has stopped working altogether even though he was only in his mid-50s, and has maintained a leisurely lifestyle straddling India and the US.

Both Manjeet and Inderjeet were Jutts, part of the classes of capital, and had diversified sources of capital accumulation in which agrarian incomes played an increasingly minor role. In most studies on capital accumulation, as well as in the typology of Damodaran (2008), both would be clubbed under the same trajectory or category. However, there is a fundamental difference in the social and economic origins of their capital. Manjeet's story is representative of a landed elite, or 'provincial propertied class' as Balagopal vaguely called them in 1987. A typical family of this provincial propertied class, he described, 'has a landholding in its native village, cultivated by hired labour, *bataidars*, tenants or farm-servants and supervised by the father or one son; business of various descriptions in towns-trade, finance, hotels, cinemas and contracts-managed by other sons; and perhaps a young and bright child who is a doctor or engineer or maybe even a professor at one of the small town universities that have sprouted all over the country during the last two decades.'

On the other hand, Inderjeet's family had moved into the transport business not on the backs of their agrarian surpluses but rather despite and due to low agrarian surpluses. The turnaround in Inderjeet's socio-economic mobility in the last two decades started with a move as a worker in an extended family member's transport business and then as a truck driver, from which he was able to buy a truck and start his small-scale transport business. Surpluses from this business, along with petty land rent, fed into his son's emigration to the US in 2007.

In terms of the typology developed in Chapter 3, Manjeet's story is a typical example of the 'upward and outward' kind of trajectory, as shown by Kammas, Reddys, and Patels. In contrast, Inderjeet's story resembles an 'outward and upward' trajectory as shown by Gounders in Tamil Nadu (Heyer 2016, Chari 2004, Vijayabaskar and Kalaiyarasan 2015) or the Thakurs in Eastern UP (Lerche 2023), with their differences in regional contexts.

Detailed evidence on the patterns of accumulation in the two villages is presented below, which shows that several tendencies co-existed among classes of capital in both villages (see Table 5.17 for Kisangarh and 5.18 for Vyapargarh). Expectedly, the 'upward but not outward' trajectory dominated among classes of capital in Kisangarh, among both Landlord-turned CoC and the new savarna capitalists, although the 'upward and outward' trajectory was on the rise too, like Manjeet's case discussed above (Table 5.17). As discussed in the previous section, there was an undercurrent among many new Jutt capitalists to diversify out of farming gradually. When some of the younger members from this class were asked if they had any surplus in the future, would they invest in buying a piece of agricultural land or start a small business, they showed a greater appetite for diversification, mainly for emigration, but also non-farm businesses, such as an IELTS coaching center, partly due to their frustration with declining returns from cultivation.

However, so far, only one-fourth of households in both sub-categories of CoC have used their agrarian surplus to successfully diversify into non-farm activities successfully. Often, this diversification came in addition to cultivation: 18 out of 22 such households across the two class categories had continued to cultivate land, and 6 of them had even leased in land which they cultivated using mainly hired labour, and those who had failed in their diversification often returned to farming. This echoes Sinha's (2021) evidence among Jutts from another district in the Malwa region.

Table 5.17 Patterns of accumulation among classes of capital, Kisangarh, 2021-22

Patterns of Accumulation	Landlord-turned CoC		Jutts/Savarna with upward class mobility to CoC		Dalit-OBCs with upward class mobility	
	Count	Per cent	Count	Per cent	Count	Per cent
Outward and upward	3	7.9	8	18.18	2	100
Outward and upward (w/o success)	0	0	2	4.55	0	0
Upward and outward	11	28.9	11	25	0	0
Upward but not outward	23	**60.5**	20	**45.5**	0	0
Upward and outward (w/o success)	1	2.6	2	4.5	0	0
Total	38	100	44	100	2	100

Source: Fieldwork data

Table 5.18 Patterns of accumulation among classes of capital, Vyapargarh, 2021-22

Patterns of accumulation	Landlord-turned CoC		Jutt/Savarna with upward class mobility to CoC		Dalit/OBCs moving up to CoC	
	Count	Per cent	Count	Per cent	Count	Per cent
Outward and upward	3	18.75	23	**63.9**	5	**100**
Upward and outward	4	**25**	4	11.1	0	0
Upward but not outward	4	25	3	8.3	0	0
Upward and outward (w/o success)	5	**31.25**	6	16.7	0	0
Total	16	100	36	100	5	100

Source: Fieldwork Data

Compare this to patterns of accumulation in Vyapargarh (Table 5.18), where as many as 63.9 per cent of new Jutt capitalists, including Inderjeet, had reached this class-caste position using an 'outward and upward' trajectory. Their average land ownership was 3.2 acres, which meant that it did not provide them with enough capital needed for emigration to a global North country, to pay hefty bribes for government jobs, or to start a decent-sized business—unless they sold or mortgaged out big portions of their land, which fieldwork impression suggests was not a prominent phenomenon.[72]

The Landlord-turned CoC households, too, showed a similar tendency to move beyond agriculture to accumulate surpluses, although many had failed in their enterprise, as discussed in the previous section.

[72] Land sale purchase and land prices had mostly frozen in the last few years, most farmers did not express any intent to extend their land ownership as they didn't see its value appreciating in the future, and rather preferred to spend that much money into any non-farm business or funding migration abroad.

5.3.1 Caste and its Shaping of Capital Accumulation in Fieldwork Villages

Of the total classes of capital in Kisangarh, only two households were OBCs, and none were Dalits, which underscores the structural barriers present for those at the lower echelons of the ladder, even in the non-farm sector. Both were petty capitalists—one of them owned four school buses, which he used to provide rental services to a private school. He hired three drivers and four helpers and drove one of the buses himself. Another OBC household was a private contractor for electrical and wiring work in houses under construction and hired not less than five labourers who worked at multiple sites for him. While he and his younger son provided some manual labour as well, their main task was supervision and getting new building contracts. In addition, his elder son sent regular remittances from South Africa for the last 7 years, where he worked as a manager at a furniture business, which they plugged into expanding their business by taking bigger and more contracts.

In Vyapargarh, there were four landless OBC households and one landless Dalit household who had climbed up the socio-economic ladder from being classes of labour to now accumulating surpluses. None of these five households had land or agrarian surpluses, to begin with, so their accumulation pattern showed an 'outward and upward' trajectory through their diversification into non-farm occupations. One of these cases is discussed below:

Case 3: 'Outward and Upward' capital accumulation pattern of a landless OBC household

> Bhinder Singh (name changed) belonged to the Nai Sikh (OBC) caste and grew up in an impoverished, landless household with four brothers and a sister. His uncle worked in the local court and always wanted the next generation to study well. While his brothers couldn't keep up with the school, he excelled and passed his metric and then higher secondary exam, the first from his caste in the village to do so. He then got a job in the veterinary department in 1982, again making him the first from his caste to get a government job. The stable, secured salary, alongside the private vet clinic he operated in the village, allowed his strand of family to prosper financially while his brothers remained impoverished. He also started lending money privately, charging an exorbitant rate of interest—120 per cent per annum—and in 2017, after retirement, he did something that no other Dalit or OBC had ever done in the village—he mortgaged-in two acres of land for cultivation from

a Jutt and later increased it to 9 acres by lending 27-36 lakhs of rupees. His elder son helped him in cultivation, while his younger son owned a pharmacy store in Khadur Sahib. They had also invested in a poultry farm, which failed, and they were constructing a modern-style two-story house at the center of the village at the time of the fieldwork. By his own admission, he earned Rs 50,000 per month from interest income alone and Rs 40,000 from his pension, while earnings from farming, a pharmacy store, and a private veterinary clinic were extra.

The slow but gradual rise of this household to the position of CoC may easily be attributed to Bhinder's government job, but similar upward mobility was not visible among most other OBC or Dalit households with a government job, although there were still four more such cases.

There were also crucial differences in capital accumulation patterns between the Jutts and Savarna classes of capital in Kisangarh. The Banias and Brahmin CoC showed a highly diversified capital accumulation trajectory than their Jutt counterparts—among both Landlord-turned CoC as well as new savarna capitalists (Table 5.19). As many as 7 out of 10 Brahmin CoC households and both Bania CoC households showed successful diversification into non-farm activities compared to only 24 out of 70 for Jutt Sikh CoC (Table 5.18). Banias and Brahmins were also more likely to lease out land and quit cultivation. On the other hand, Jutts often articulated business or any non-agrarian petty commodity production as almost anti-thetical to their identity of being *jimidars*. As discussed in Chapter 3, such arguments have been used as a dominant explanation for agrarian-focussed patterns of accumulation in rural Punjab in the existing literature (see Bal 2006; Singh 1997, 2013; Damodaran 2008). These were not the concerns for Banias and Brahmins in Kisangarh, as well as for Jutts from classes of capital in Vyapargarh, who looked at a petty business as a logical next step.

Table 5.19 Jati level differences in the accumulation patterns of the surplus-owning households, Kisangarh, 2021-22

Patterns of Accumulation	Bania	Brahmin	Jutt Sikh	OBCs	Grand Total
Outward and upward	2	2	7	2	13
Outward, upward, then inwards	0	0	2	0	2
Upward and outward	0	5	17	0	22
Upward and outward (w/o success)	0	0	3	0	3

Upward but not outward	0	3	41	0	44
Grand Total	**2**	**10**	**70**	**2**	**84**

Source: Fieldwork data

5.3.2 Including Non-Resident Households in the Analysis of Rural Capital Accumulation

These differences between Jutts and Savarna CoC become all the more evident when we include households that no longer live in the village. In Kisangarh, we could identify at least 15 households (out of 36) that were determined as classes of capital based on their current occupations or scale of businesses. Caste-wise, 12 of them were Banias, 1 Brahmin, and only 2 were Jutt Sikhs, and all of them except three showed an 'outward and upward' trajectory. On the other hand, out of 65 emigrant households identified in Vyapargarh, only 17 were identified as classes of capital. All of them, barring one Ghumiyar household, were Jutts, with 40 per cent of them exhibiting an 'outward and upward' trajectory.

In Kisangarh, the emigrant CoC households included the case of 2-acre landowning Bania, who ran a small-scale flour mill in the village but moved to Sunam in the late 1970s while his brother continued to live in the village. The growth of the towns during the Green Revolution period had pulled many like him to the towns. In Sunam, he started a small Kirana shop and later got the license for commission agent business from the market committee, which led to their upward mobility. Now, his five sons together owned two commission agent firms, two rice mills, and three wholesale trading businesses (wholesale of tea, big cloth retail, and the third had two Kirana shops). There was also one Jutt who owned 4 acres in the 1980s when he set up a small tractor repairs workshop. He worked as a mechanic himself. It was a good time to start such a business due to the increased use of tractors and other agricultural machines in the fields. Later, his son diversified into commercial business and, at the time of fieldwork, ran a franchisee fast-food chain store in Sunam. He was the lone successful 'suit-boot' businessman amongst the Jutt Sikhs in the village.

In Vyapargarh, one of the emigrant CoC household was a 5-acre owning landowner who sold most of his land and started a hotel-cum-banquet hall on the GT road/national

highway in Jandiala, a few kilometers from the village. Another marginal landowning Jutt started a petty transport business in Raipur in Chhattisgarh, which he gradually expanded to 3 trucks. The rest joined government jobs, moved to the nearby cities post-retirement, and, with children settled abroad, lived a transcontinental lifestyle. The only non-Jutt emigrant household that accumulated surplus and joined the classes of capital was a Ghumiyar household that had been successful in setting up a medium-scale cot manufacturing factory in Jandiala, employing more than 10-15 workers at any time.

Summary and discussion

This section provided a nuanced and more comprehensive analysis of rural capital accumulation as well as the differences between them by showing how they were structured along their previous class location as well as social institutions such as caste, while also including the failed attempts at diversification as well as emigrant households in analysis. The classes of capital, both Jutts and Bania-Brahmins, had used their privileged location in the class-caste hierarchy to enable and sustain their processes of capital accumulation—the former in agriculture and the latter through non-farm diversification. The prevalent understanding in the literature that capital accumulation in rural Punjab, especially Malwa, remains predominantly within agriculture is, therefore, limited to the Jutt classes of capital, who constitute a disproportionately vast share, 84 per cent, of the classes of capital in Kisangarh. The relevance of this section of the chapter was more critical for places like Vyapargarh, where the social origins of the classes of capital were more diverse and fragmented, with some of them from a poor-peasant or a middle peasant/PCP background. There were some landless OBC castes, such as Ghumiyars and Nai Sikhs, who had also seen an upward socio-economic hierarchy in the last few decades.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter started with presenting evidence on the conjugated class-caste structure and sectoral distribution of the work force in the fieldwork villages. The higher share of CoC households and agriculture-dependent work force in Kisangarh was attributed to historical as well as contemporary dynamics of capitalist development. It then

discussed the sources and long-term patterns of capital accumulation and socio-economic differentiation in the two fieldwork villages and how they differed between Majha and Malwa fieldwork sites. It also showed that capital accumulation was structured along caste lines between the Jutt and Brahmin-Bania classes of capital. While Jutts in Kisangarh and the Malwa region broadly fit into the pattern that has been observed in the existing literature on capital accumulation in Punjab, by bringing in a fresh and valuable comparative perspective from the Majha region of Punjab, this chapter helps appreciate the diversity in the sources as well as patterns of capital accumulation in rural Punjab.

In Kisangarh, higher than average landholdings and stable returns from cultivation, although with declining per acre profitability, had meant that the base of capital accumulation was relatively more significant—with one-third of the total households classified as classes of capital—84 per cent of them Jutts. The medium and bigger landowning farmers, especially the new Jutt capitalists, whose ascent closely aligned with the Green Revolution reforms due to the increase in yields, price stability, and relative protection from secondary relations of exploitation in the agricultural markets, were still able to accumulate from agriculture under neoliberalism, primarily through tenancy, providing agricultural machine services, livestock rearing and selling of *toodi*.

However, this agrarian-focused accumulation strategy has been under stress and attack due to rising land rents and the constant restructuring of India's agrarian sector through WTO and other transnational organisations and corporations. The latter have sought to remove legal ceilings on land ownership and tenancy transactions (through draft land tenancy laws) and to liberalise the agricultural produce markets through the now repealed three farm laws to facilitate their entry into agrarian production, procurement and stockholding (Singh, 2020; Lerche, 2022). In this context, there has been increasingly an attempt among this class to diversify their sources and patterns of accumulation. The opening up of student and dependent visas by the countries of the global North, especially since 2016, has provided them with exactly this window of opportunity, and the sudden exodus of youth from this class needs to be read and understood in this broader context of a stressed agrarian accumulation and a stagnating non-farm economy. However, even this opportunity too seems to have been

constrained by the return of right-wing populist, neoliberal government and their policies in some of these countries of the global North.

On the other hand, capital accumulation in Vyapargarh depicts a significantly different pattern. The classes of capital in this village, predominantly Jutts and constituting 16 per cent of the rural households, were a highly diversified lot, depending primarily on non-agrarian sources of income for the maintenance and reproduction of their caste-class status. More importantly, for almost two-thirds of the new Jutt capitalists, this diversification into non-farm sources of accumulation was not on the backs of their agrarian surpluses but rather as salaries from state government jobs, remittances from members living and settled abroad, and lastly, as petty surpluses from non-farm PCP activities. The few that depended on agriculture or allied activities for accumulation tended to lease on a large scale and cultivate riskier, high-value crops while also expanding their livestock. As a result, while Vyapargarh may have less share of classes of capital in its agrarian structure, but the richest in Vyapargarh were wealthier than their counterparts in Kisangarh despite much lower land ownership. At the same time, they were slightly more precarious, as losses and failures in both agriculture and non-farm businesses were not uncommon, which further prompted them to have a more diversified portfolio.

By doing so, this evidence expands the scope of analysis from 'Why do agrarian capital, and especially Jutts, in Punjab not diversify outside agriculture like the Kammas or Reddys or Patels,' which was the starting point of this research project and what Damodaran (2008) and other scholars have articulated as a paradox, to asking 'In what contexts and scenarios are Jutts able to break their so-called agrarian mould?' Moreover, contrary to studies that either prove or disprove the relevance of land reforms in rural India under neoliberal capitalist development based on single-site research, the comparative evidence from two distinct regions in Punjab compels us to open the land question to empirical analysis by asking, 'In what regions does landlordism and land ownership remain the primary source of differentiation?'

Social historians such as Gill (2024) and Bhattacharya (2018) inform us that the overlap of caste, land ownership, and occupation, and placing of Jutts at the top of the rural-agrarian hierarchy, now understood as 'natural, timeless, and hence permanent' (Gill

2024: ch 1) was anything but so. It has been socially engineered by direct British colonial intervention in the state through colonial laws, such as the Land Alienation Act, the granting of land in the canal colonies, and other similar laws and regulations. However, it seems that the rise of Sikh ethno-nationalism in the 1980s, as well as neoliberal growth trajectories in the post-liberalisation period, have undone or weakened the foundations of this social engineering, and interestingly, more so in the Majha region, where the impact of British policies was most direct. Whether this counts as decolonisation is a matter best left to social historians; however, the political economy of this transformation in Vyapargarh, and the relative lack of it in Kisangarh, is further explored in the next chapter by linking it to the political economy and social structures of accumulation in the non-farm economy.

6: Rural Punjab Beyond the Village: Political Economy of the Non-Farm Sector and its Implications for Rural Capital Accumulation and Agrarian Questions of Capital

This chapter moves the terrain of analysis from Kisangarh and Vyapargarh to their nearby towns. It demonstrates how the changing political economy of these towns plays a crucial role in shaping capital accumulation and differentiation in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, albeit to varying degrees. It takes forward the discussion from Chapter 3 that presented the relatively limited literature on the links between farm and non-farm economy in Punjab, as compared to other regions in India, particularly Tamil Nadu or Andhra Pradesh (see Baru 2000 and Parthasarathy 2015 for a review of this literature, and Harriss 1987, Harriss-White 1996, 2003, 2016 on Tamil Nadu; and Upadhya 1988, 2020 on Andhra Pradesh specifically). The existing literature on Punjab, as discussed in Chapter 3, has essentialised the Jutts as primarily agrarian. It tends to emphasise their socio-cultural or psychological factors as explanations for their situation, unlike their counterparts from other regions who have managed to break away from this so-called agrarian mould (see Singh 1997, Bal 2006). Other scholars suggest that this may be due to the strong dominance of the Hindu merchant class, mainly the Banias, within the non-farm economy in Punjab (see Singh 1982, Alam 1986, Gill 1988, Singh 1997, 2013, Damodaran 2008). This is argued to have created inherently antagonistic relationships with the predominantly Sikh Jutt peasantry (Singh and Dhaliwal, 2011; Singh & Bhogal, 2014, 2015).

While the latter perspectives, which draw links between Punjab's agrarian and non-farm economy, offer a fresh perspective to view the region's political economy, this chapter problematises them for potentially abstracting or obscuring the effects of uneven capitalist development under neoliberalism (see also Bernstein 2010, Byres 2016; and Alam 1986 for Punjab's context). While the trading castes' domination certainly plays a vital role in explaining the differences in rural capita accumulation

patterns in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, a more comprehensive analysis must also consider other factors, such as the extent and nature of growth in the non-farm economy under contemporary neoliberal capitalism—whether mercantile, industrial, or service-based. To undertake this, this chapter uses secondary data on registered companies in the two towns from 1970 to 2023 provided by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. This chapter also presents primary quantitative evidence on caste domination across various sectors of the non-farm economy in the two towns, as well as qualitative evidence on the unevenness in exchange relations between farmers and arhtiyas in the two regions. This mix of primary and secondary, quantitative and qualitative data enables us to offer key insights into provincial capital and its accumulation patterns, regional unevenness in rural-agrarian distress. It also allows us to intervene in the debate on the agrarian question of capital, and rural-agrarian politics in Punjab, using the case of the 2020-21 farmers' protests.

Firstly, it helps appreciate the broader context of neoliberal globalisation, which has concentrated economic growth in certain regions, leading to an uneven capitalist development within India as well as within Punjab. These perspectives often get missing from the sociological and anthropological understanding of agrarian capitalism and capital accumulation in rural Punjab. The predominantly agrarian patterns of capital accumulation among landed Jutts and the substantial barriers imposed on their inter-sectoral movement in Kisangarh need to be seen not only in the context of Bania domination of the non-farm economy, but also in *conjunction* with the relatively muted growth in the Sunam region under neoliberalism.

On the other hand, diversification in the sources and patterns of wealth accumulation among Jutt classes of capital in Vyapargarh need to be contextualised not only in the absence of trading castes' monopoly in the aftermath of Sikh separatist violence and the subsequent state repression of the 1980s but also in the high growth dynamism under neoliberal phase in the Amritsar metropole and its hinterlands in the Majha region. Although research shows that some Jutts had started trickling into agriculture-linked businesses, such as selling agro-inputs and spare parts of agricultural machines before the 1980s (see, for instance, Bal & Judge, 2001), the socio-political turmoil alongside neoliberal economic growth accelerated the movement of agrarian surpluses

and agrarian classes of capital into both petty and medium-sized businesses in the region, first as partners with the Hindu business owners and later as entrepreneurs (Bal and Judge 2001). As discussed in the previous chapter, not just classes of capital, many agrarian PCPs and some from the classes of labour, such as the landless OBCs, especially *Ghumiyars* and *Nais*, found an opportunity for upward socio-economic mobility (see also Jan 2024 for a similar observation from Pakistani Punjab).[73] While these dynamics lifted some boats, most workers from landless and land-poor households were forced into precarious, informal sector jobs in the non-farm economy, which contributed to a different manifestation of distress among classes of labour in this region than the prevalence of suicides in the Malwa region of Punjab and other regions of India (Abraham, 2023; Basole, 2022; Himanshu et al., 2016; Thomas, 2018).

Secondly, this chapter discusses the unevenness in exchange relations between farmers and commission agents in the two regions. , The mercantile class and agrarian capitalist class shared interdependent relations in the Malwa region; that is, they mutually aided each other's capital accumulation, which led to stable, caste-segregated, socially regulated structures of accumulation, maintaining a pattern of low growth and relatively lower inequality in the region. This also contributed to a higher level of distress among those excluded from this accumulation—the land-poor Jutts and landless Dalits.

It then outlines its implications for rural politics during the recent 2020-21 farmers' protests. The (now repealed) three farm laws sought to endanger this relation, which contributed to a more vocal and organised action among both farmers and arhtiyas against the farm laws. On the other hand, in Vyapargarh, where Jutt classes of capital had diversified economic portfolios and much more competitive relations with the arhtiyas, the political action was fragmented, which echoes evidence from the previous waves of the farmers' protests in the 1990s (see Pattenden and Bansal 2021, Pattenden, 2005; Banaji, 1994; Nadkarni, 1987).

[73] The latter were already engaged in non-agricultural production—Ghumiyars, for instance, were engaged in pottery and petty transport; Thathiars were engaged in utensil making as traditional caste-based occupations under jajmani system.

Lastly, the evidence discussed in this chapter enables us to intervene in the debates on the agrarian question of capital—its continued relevance or bypassing under neoliberalism. It also engages in the discussion of the relationship between merchant capital and its role in the industrialisation of a region. The lack of direct transformation of agrarian capitalists into farmer-capitalists, which, as we have seen, is more characteristic of the Jutt classes of capital from the Malwa region, is viewed as a paradox or a failure of the agrarian transition in the state—particularly the AQ of Capital. However, data suggests that even in this region, substantial sums of agrarian surpluses were transferred as interest payments to commission agents, who maintained a diversified investment portfolio. The surplus appropriated by the latter had contributed to the region's limited and insufficient industrial development, most notably in the form of agro-processing industries, such as rice shellers and other service sector enterprises. In the Majha region, the transformation of agrarian PCPs and capitalists into non-agrarian PCPs and capitalists was more direct. However, their role in the overall capitalist development of the region and the state has diminished. In other words, the AQC remains relevant in some respects in the Malwa region, while it has been largely bypassed in the Majha region. This echoes Bernstein's (2015, 2017), Harriss-White's (2016), and Harriss-White et al.'s (2021) analysis that the AQC may not be as relevant as before on a national level under neoliberalism, especially with the rise of the Modi-led NDA government but may remain relevant in some regions more than others.

Apart from a nuanced discussion of the AQC, the evidence discussed here also relates to the debate on the role of merchant capital in industrialisation. It shows that merchant capital is not an antithesis to industrial development at face value, as has often been argued in the development literature on Punjab (see Sau, 1984, 1988; S. Singh & Dhaliwal, 2011; Singh and Bhogal, 2015).

This chapter is structured as follows: Section 6.1 discusses the primary evidence on the caste profile of capitalists from 885 business establishments across the two sites in six different kinds of businesses spanning manufacturing (brick kilns), agro-processing (rice mills, roller flour mills, among others), retail or wholesale trade (commission agents, agricultural machine retailers), and services (IELTS and visa consultancy

business, petrol pumps). Section 6.2 discusses evidence on the extent and nature of growth in the non-farm economy in Sunam and Tarn Taran, drawing on both secondary sources and primary field data. Section 6.3 discusses evidence of the unevenness in exchange relations between farmers and merchants and how that impacted political action among differentiated classes of farmers in the two regions. Section 6.4 closes with a discussion on the implications for the regionally situated AQ of Capital in the two regions.

6.1 Caste domination in the Towns and Non-Farm B Economy and Changes in it over Time

This section explores the social structures of accumulation—the social institutions that enable and sustain the capital accumulation process—in the non-farm economy of the two towns. This is important, as scholar Harriss-White (2016) argues that studying the economy without exploring its embeddedness in society and social institutions such as caste, gender, religion, ethnicity, among others may not only lead to an incomplete understanding of the economy but could also be plain incorrect.

In Punjab's context, it contributes to previous attempts to systematically examine the caste composition of various non-farm businesses in Punjab, such as among commission agents (Singh and Dhaliwal 2011), agro-processing industries such as rice mills and oil mills (Singh 1997), bakeries (S. Singh, 1999) and the cycle industry (Singh 1994).

Most of this section is based on evidence collected from the field on caste profile and year of incorporation of 885 business enterprises in the two regions. Secondary datasets were not very useful. The registered companies' database provided barely any information on the social embeddedness of the business economy—the caste, gender, religion, among others—except the full names of the directors. This limitation was partially overcome due to the practice of using caste surnames, which made the process of collating the caste profiles of the company directors relatively more straightforward, especially in the Sunam region. Gaps were filled through conversations with some key respondents. This was not possible in the case in the Majha region, where a stronger influence of Sikhi had diminished the use of surnames that could be

used as markers for caste; at least, that was the case in official records. However, the use of surnames persisted in society in general. More than 85 per cent of firms in Tarn Taran in the registered companies database had the caste-neutral surname 'Singh,' which was used by all Sikhs, irrespective of their caste—including by Jutts, Sikh upper castes such as Khatris, Bhappa Sikhs, as well as by Sikh OBCs and Dalits. Furthermore, due to the lack of a key informant in this region who could help identify the caste of all business enterprises, it was not possible to collect information on the caste profiles of the proprietors of the registered companies.

Of the total registered companies in Sunam and Lehra, the share of those owned by the trading castes (mainly Banias) was 57 per cent, while that of peasant/agrarian castes (mainly Jutts) was 13.3 per cent (Table 6.1). If we look at the caste-wise share of companies registered since 2011, then the share of Jutts increases to 17.9 per cent, but their rise in share has not come at the cost of displacing Banias, who still accounted for 56 per cent of the firms registered since 2011 (not shown in the table).

Table 6.1 Sector and caste-wise share of registered companies incorporated in Sunam since the 1970s

Row Labels	Peasant castes	Trading castes	Other upper castes	Others	Grand Total
Primary sector	20	40	0	40	100
Animal husbandry and related activities	20	40	0	40	100
Secondary sector	0	68.5	5.6	25.9	100
Agro-processing	0	85.7	0.0	14.3	100
Manufacturing	0.0	65.9	6.8	27.3	100
Other manufacturing or repairs	0.0	66.7	0.0	33.3	100
Services	22.4	50.0	6.6	21.1	100
Finance and moneylending	20.0	40.0	10.0	30.0	100
Health and Education	14.3	42.9	14.3	28.6	100
Hotels, restaurants and leisure	33.3	33.3	0.0	33.3	100
IT, Business services, consultancy	21.1	57.9	5.3	15.8	100
Media and communication	33.3	33.3	0.0	33.3	100
Other services	75.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	100
Real estate, buildings, and construction	16.7	50.0	8.3	25.0	100
Retail or wholesale trade	21.4	50.0	7.1	21.4	100
Transport and storage	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	100
Grand Total	13.3	**57.0**	5.9	23.7	100

Source: Registered companies' data, Ministry of Corporate Affairs, India

Note: Trading castes include Banias, Khatris/Aroras (both Hindus and Sikhs), and Bhappa Sikhs. Peasant castes include Jutt Sikhs. Other upper castes include Brahmins, Jains, and Rajputs, among others. Others include OBC caste groups, such as the Kambojs, Ramgarhiyas, and Tarkhans, among others.

At the same time, when we look at the sector-wise distribution across various caste groups (Table 6.2), then it is clear that agrarian castes were overwhelmingly in services sector businesses (94.4 per cent of their firms), mainly in IT and business services as well as retail and wholesale trade, and very rarely in manufacturing or agro-processing, which to this day remains dominated by trading castes (Table 6.2). The trading castes, on the other hand, are highly diversified—with 51.32 per cent of their registered firms in manufacturing and the other half in services, including IT, business services, retail and wholesale trade, and real estate.

Table 6.2 Caste and sector-wise share of companies incorporated in Sunam

Row Labels	Agrarian castes	Trading castes	Other upper castes	Others	Grand Total
Primary sector	5.6	2.6	0.0	6.3	3.7
Animal husbandry and related activities	5.6	2.6	0.0	6.3	3.7
Secondary sector	0.0	48.1	37.5	43.8	40.0
Agro-processing	0.0	7.8	0.0	3.1	5.2
Manufacturing	0.0	37.7	37.5	37.5	32.6
Other manufacturing or repairs	0.0	2.6	0.0	3.1	2.2
Services	94.4	49.4	62.5	50.0	56.3
Finance and moneylending	11.1	5.2	12.5	9.4	7.4
Health and Education	5.6	3.9	12.5	6.3	5.2
Hotels, restaurants and leisure	5.6	1.3	0.0	3.1	2.2
IT, Business services, consultancy	22.2	14.3	12.5	9.4	14.1
Media and communication	5.6	1.3	0.0	3.1	2.2
Other services	16.7	1.3	0.0	0.0	3.0
Real estate, buildings, and construction	11.1	7.8	12.5	9.4	8.9
Retail or wholesale trade	16.7	9.1	12.5	9.4	10.4
Transport and storage	0.0	5.2	0.0	0.0	3.0
Grand Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100

Source: Registered companies' data, Ministry of Corporate Affairs, India
Note: Same as the above table

Fieldwork observations from Sunam confirm this finding (Table 6.3). The Table below shows that barring the IELTS centres, the trading castes, especially the Banias, have maintained and reproduced their stronghold over all other sampled sectors of the business economy. They constituted more than three-fourths of the capitalists in

almost all businesses, and they had a monopoly in some agro-processing industries, such as large-scale roller flour mills.

At the same time, the share of Jutts in the agro-processing industry, such as rice mills, and manufacturing, such as brick kilns, although minimal, was higher than that suggested by the registered company database. Moreover, they had a substantial presence in some businesses, such as IELTS and visa consultancy centres, where they constituted at least one-third of the proprietors, including two Jutt brothers from Kisangarh. Both these ventures had eventually failed due to the gradual entry of bigger capital into this business. However, the fact that this was an entirely new sector with massive growth potential and their familiarity with their customers, who were mostly students from rural landowning Jutt families, was used as an explanation by them to invest in this business. This may explain overall better representation of Jutts in this business compared to the other businesses. However, this path is becoming increasingly uncertain due to tighter immigration policies in the global North countries discussed in the previous chapter.[74] In addition, petrol pumps, banquet halls, and lock-tile manufacturing factories also experienced an increase in the penetration of Jutts recently, although no systematic data were collected on these businesses; hence, they are not included in the table. This indicates a gradual rise in diversification outside agriculture among Jutts in the region, as seen in Kisangarh in the previous chapter too. This remains somewhat muted though and has challenged the Bania domination in the non-farm economy.

[74] Media reports suggest that has been widespread closures of IELTS centres in the last two years since the announcement of these changes. https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/ielts-institutes-punjab-curbs-canada-9662555/ IELTS institutes in Punjab see sharp fall amid curbs by Canada by Rakhi Jagga, Indian Express. Last accessed: 5th March 2025.

Table 6.3 Caste-wise distribution of firms in select businesses in the non-farm economy, Sunam and Tarn Taran, 2021-22

Industry/business	Share of peasant castes		Share of trading castes*		Share of other castes**	
	Sunam	Tarn Taran	Sunam	Tarn Taran	Sunam	Tarn Taran
Secondary sector						
Rice mills (agro-processing)	8.9	0	76.7	83.3	14.4	16.7
Other agro-processing mills***	0.0	-	100	-	0.0	-
Brick kilns (manufacturing)	4.5	51.4	86.4	13.5	9.1	35.1
Services						
Commission agent (trade-cum-moneylending)	10.6	56.1	84.2	34	5.2	9.9
Agricultural machine traders (retail trade)	-	87	-	0	-	13
Petrol pumps (retail trade)	14.2	-	78.5	-	7.3	-
IELTS and visa centres (Education and Consultancy)	**31**	65-70	20.7	10-15	48.3	15-25

Source: Fieldwork Data

Note: * Trading castes include Banias, Khatris/Aroras (both Hindus and Sikhs), Bhappa Sikhs **Others include Brahmins, OBCs (which include Kamboj and Verma in Sunam, as well as Sunar, Ghumiyar, and Prajapat in Tarn Taran), and Dalits (1 in Tarn Taran). **It also includes cases of inter-caste partnerships, which were relatively few. ** Christians (two cases, both in Tarn Taran) and Muslims (one in Sunam and two in Tarn Taran) are also included in this, although information on their caste locations was not clear. They are grouped here for the sake of presentation.

*** There were three solvex plants, all owned by Banias, and four large-scale roller flour mills, of which two were owned by Banias, one by a Khatri, and one jointly owned by a Bania and a Khatri. Four husk brokers dealt with the trading of byproducts from the rice mills, all of whom were Banias.

This illustrates the extent to which both farm and non-farm economies were deeply embedded in society and sharply compartmentalised along religious, caste, and spatial lines in the Malwa region of Punjab. Banias and other Hindu trading castes, who reside in cities, continue to dominate merchant capital, industrial capital, and business capital, while most better-off Jutts are comfortable being the 'masters of the countryside' (Harriss-White's term, 1996). This reinforces the finding from the previous chapter, which demonstrated a nearly perfect overlap of caste, class, land, and occupational identities in rural Malwa. This finding aligns with the research of other scholars, including Sinha (2021), Damodaran (2008), and Lerche (2014).

The evidence from Tarn Taran and Jandiala tells a different story. There was higher growth in this region around Amritsar, especially after the 1990s, and greater space to

accommodate newer socio-economic classes, mainly due to the void left by the historically established trading castes, including both Hindu and Sikh groups such as the Bhappas, Sodhis, and Khatris. This was in the aftermath of the separatist violence and the subsequent state repression that engulfed this region in the 1980s (Bal and Judge 2001; Puri et al., 1999).

To be sure, the entry of Jutt Sikhs into the business economy began before the 1980s, particularly in sectors such as spare parts retail and machine repairs, among others (see Bal and Judge 2001), a trend also affirmed by respondents in Vyapargarh. However, it was in the 1980s and 1990s that the movement of agrarian capital and PCPs into the non-farm economy was accelerated. Although the concentration and polarisation of economic power among Jutts in these businesses was not as absolute as that of Banias in Sunam, they had indeed emerged as the dominant players. Jutts represented over half of all capitalists in most of these businesses, except rice mills. They dominated the IELTS and visa consultancy, owning at least two-thirds of the IELTS centres, and held a near monopoly in agricultural machine retail—with 14 out of 16 showrooms (87 per cent) being owned by them. Their ability to gradually emerge as a dominant player in the non-farm economy over the last three decades has been enabled by their conjugation of caste, class, gender, religious, and ethnic identities, which was not available to other caste groups in the region.

The share of trading castes, on the other hand, had shrunk to 10-15 per cent, except for the commission agent business, where they still constituted one-third share, and the rice mills, in which they maintained a dominant presence (Table 6.6). Some landless OBCs, such as the Ghumiyars, who were already engaged in trade and transport, had also successfully integrated themselves into the urban business economy, particularly in the commission agent business. This affirms the finding from Vyapargarh discussed in the previous chapter, where Ghumiyars and Nais had seen a relatively higher socio-economic mobility through non-farm businesses than the lower OBCs and Dalits.

The concentration and polarisation of the economic power of the non-farm sector in the hands of a particular caste were relatively less stark in Tarn Taran. However, that had come after a remarkable transformation in the society and polity of the region. This meant that the sharp distinction between Hindus and Sikhs, as well as Banias and Jutts,

in terms of occupation and spatial domination, was not as straightforward or strong in the Majha region. Capital in this region no longer had a clear-cut caste. Jutts were not just farmers and rural residents, but also traders and businessmen, and they were also more urbanised.

6.1.1 Case Study: Changes in the Commission Agent Business

Suppose we zoom in and take a specific look at the commission agent business, whose elites constituted a substantial share of the classes of capital in both towns, especially in Sunam. It is found that out of the total arhtiyas in Sunam mandi in 2021, more than three-fourths were Banias, and another 8 per cent were Aroras or Khatris—taking the share of trading castes to 83.3 per cent (Table 6.3). Only 10.6 per cent of arhtiyas were Jutts. Only 3 or 4 were OBCs, and none were Dalits. Other research on caste domination among commission agents in the Malwa region shows a slightly higher and growing participation of Jutts in the commission agent business. The study by Singh and Dhaliwal (2011) on arhtiyas across all districts in Punjab reveals that in the Malwa region, the share of Jutt arhtiyas was 18.9 per cent, while that of Banias was 48.9 per cent, followed by Khatris at 26.1 per cent. However, the overall patterns of numerical dominance of the Hindu trading castes remain valid.[75]

On the other hand, in Tarn Taran, Jutts constituted a 56 per cent share among commission agents, followed by Khatris, Banias, and other Hindu trading caste groups, who together constituted only one-third of the commission agents in the market (Table 6.3 above). There were also some OBCs, especially Ghumiyars, and even one Dalit in the mandi. The figures from Singh and Dhaliwal (2011) also confirm that Jutts were numerically dominant in the agricultural markets of the Majha region—at 67 per cent, followed by the Hindu caste groups.

[75] Other evidence from agricultural markets in Malwa such as from Khanna market near Ludhiana reveals that the share of Jutt Sikh arhtiyas was even higher. For instance, Damodaran (2008) noted that around one-third of commission agents in Khanna market were Jutt Sikhs, up from only 13 in number in 1985. Sinha (2020) confirmed Damodaran's finding from her 2017 study. Around 80 per cent of the new entrants were also engaged in farming. In another market yard in Malwa region which was visited by P Sainath in 2018, one-third were Jutt Sikhs. However, none of these studies were based on primary data collection and were estimates derived from discussions with the key respondents.

In terms of change over time, it is found that of the 17 new commission agent enterprises set up in Sunam between 2012 and 2021 (excluding the multiplication of firms by existing arhtiyas), 70 per cent were established by trading castes, with 58.8 per cent being Banias (Table 6.4). However, Jutts also improved their presence as they constituted 23.5 per cent of the new firms (Table 6.4). The remaining 5.9 per cent of the new firms were set up by OBCs.[76] A similar trend was observed among rice mill owners in Sunam (see Table 6.5)

Table 6.4 Caste of arhtiyas who entered the business between 2012 and 2019 in Sunam mandi

Caste Group	Count	Per cent
Arora/Khatri	2	11.8
Bania	10	58.8
Jutt Sikh	4	**23.5**
Kamboj (OBCs)	1	5.9
Grand Total	17	100

Source: fieldwork data

Table 6.5 Caste profile of rice mill capitalists who entered the business between 2006 and 2021 in Sunam

Row Labels	Count of Mills	Distribution of new mill owners	Total Milling Cap.	Distribution of milling capacity
Hindu trading castes	39	69.6	63.5	69.2
Arora/Khatri	3	5.4	3.0	3.3
Bania	36	**64.3**	60.5	**65.9**
Sikh trading castes	3	5.4	3.0	3.3
Jutt Sikh	8	**14.3**	14.3	15.5
OBCs	1	1.8	1.0	1.1
Mixed caste partnerships	4	7.1	7.0	7.6
Unclear/unsure	1	1.8	3.0	3.3
Grand Total	56	100	91.75	100

Source: Fieldwork data

In Tarn Taran mandi, one of the Khatri Sikh respondents mentioned that the changes in the *mandi* started happening in the 1980s, when '*mahaul maada ho gaya si'* [times were

[76] This information was collected by comparing the list of arhtiyas from the directory produced by the arhtiya association in 2012 and 2019.

bad] due to which many Hindu commission agents had to leave their villages and their urban occupations and move to Mumbai, Chandigarh, Karnal (in Haryana), or wherever they had any relative or safe places. Not just Hindus but some Sikh traders and commission agents, including him, were asked for extortion money, although in the form of donations to the *panthic* cause. Similar narratives have been recorded by scholars who conducted fieldwork in rural Majha during and after the separatist movement (see Puri et al 1999). It was also reported that many Hindu commission agents began partnering with rural-based Jutts during this period, with the latter acting as the face of the business while they invested the capital (also observed by Sainath, 2018). Gradually, Jutts started setting up their own firms in the mandi, purchased shops and businesses from Hindus, and thus increased their numbers to a significant degree.

Summary and discussion

The evidence discussed here sheds light on the diverse social characteristics of local capitalism in small-town Punjab, its evolution, and its differential embedding in social institutions such as caste and religion. While the previous chapter demonstrated that in Kisangarh, land and agricultural production have been polarised or concentrated in the hands of the larger landowning Jutts, this chapter shows that the non-farm economy in Sunam exhibits similar levels of concentration and control in the hands of the trading castes, if not more. The trading castes have created and successfully occupied most of the limited business opportunities that have emerged in the last two decades, helping them reproduce their conjugated class-caste position. Within the trading castes, Banias seem to have dominated agrarian commodities-related commerce as well as industry, whereas Singh (1999) has shown that Khatris tend to dominate the trade of durable goods and modern industry not related to agriculture. In section 3 of this chapter, we will see that the parallel accumulation trajectory among Jutt capitalist farmers and Bania businessmen does not imply independence of each other—the two helped each other accumulate surplus over time.

On the other hand, in the Majha region, Jutts not only dominate the agrarian economy but have marked their presence in various different sectors of the non-farm economy in the three decades since the void left after the violent expulsion of the Hindu trading castes from the region during the Sikh ethno-nationalist separatist movement and the

subsequent state repression. This suggests that the presence or absence of established monopolies by a particular caste or religion significantly influences the patterns of rural capital accumulation in the fieldwork villages.

In the next section, we further unpack this story and attempt to problematise it as an important but incomplete understanding. It poses the question: Can the diversification of Jutt landowners in Vyapargarh be seen as *plainly* or *purely* a result of a lack of Bania or trading caste domination in the non-farm economy? Was it simply that Hindu merchants were forced to leave, and the Jutts, who were next in line, took their place? Did all regions from which the Hindu merchant was forced to leave undergo a similar transformation in their social structures of accumulation as Tarn Taran? Similarly, can the agrarian-focused accumulation patterns in Kisangarh be seen purely as a result of Bania domination in the non-farm economy? Have all towns in the Malwa region experienced a similar reproduction of Bania domination in the non-farm economy?

Cursory evidence from other towns in the Majha region, such as Batala and Gurdaspur, point to a more nuance reality. Both these towns were equally affected by communal violence and state repression during the militancy period leading to the expulsion of trading castes from the region, but unlike Amritsar and Tarn Taran, these towns experienced a massive decline in economic activity since the partition. In these towns, the diversification of rural landowning Jutts into the non-farm economy was not as evident as seen in Vyapargarh (see G. P. Singh, 2015). This was also observed from other villages visited during the scoping stage. At the same time, high-growing Malwa regions, such as Khanna city near Ludhiana, which is the industrial hub of Punjab and its fastest-growing district (although much less than before) have seen a greater penetration of peasant castes in the business economy: one-third of commission agents and rice mills were owned by Jutts in this region (see Damodaran 2008, see also Singh 2013, Sinha 2020).

The next section takes forward the critique of scholars such as Alam (1986) by showing that the unevenness in the extent and nature of growth in the non-farm economy in the two study regions can play a crucial role in the reproduction or destruction of existing hierarchies in the non-farm economy, which in turn, shape rural capital accumulation in Punjab.

6.2 A Comparative Study of Growth in the Non-Farm Economy in the Fieldwork Regions

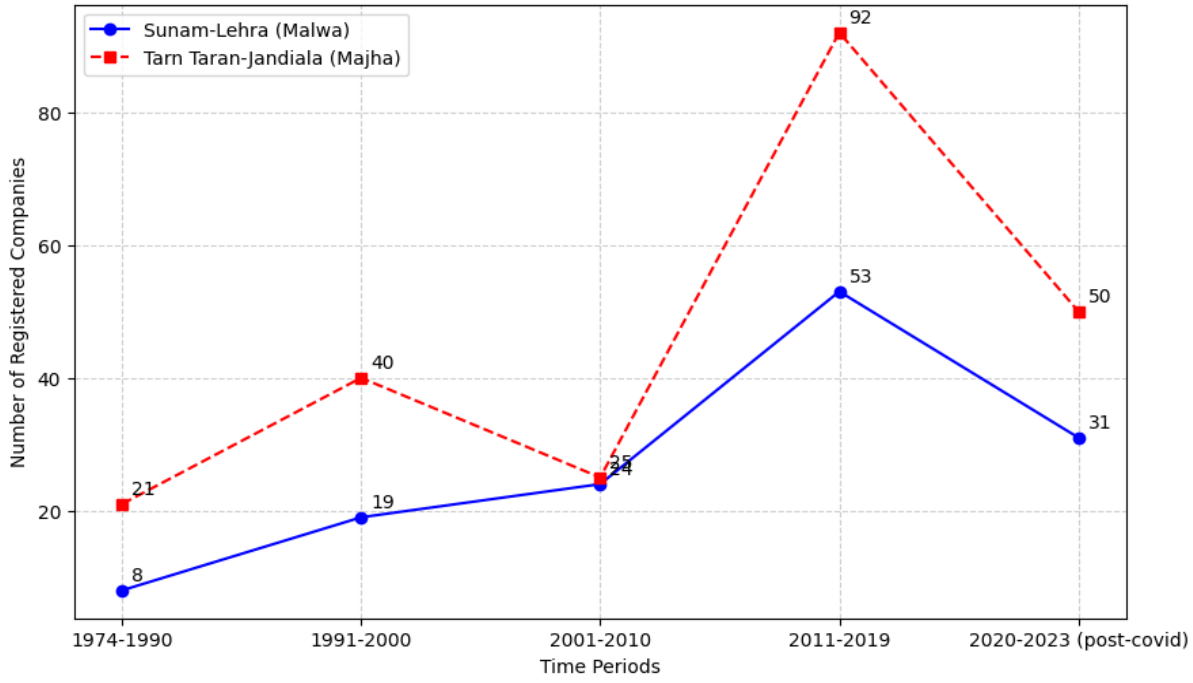
To understand the extent and nature of growth in the non-farm economy of the two regions, this chapter makes use of both primary fieldwork data collected from Sunam and Tarn Taran, as well as secondary data on registered companies provided by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. The secondary dataset, while providing an estimate or an overview of business activity, it suffers from various limitations which are important to mention before we discuss the results. This dataset includes information on the firm's name, type of activity, year of incorporation, and current operational status—whether it remains active or if it has been 'struck off.' However, it does not specify the year in which a company was struck off, nor provides reliable estimates on the way a firm is organised (nuclear/joint firms, family firms, or partnerships) or their size of operation, which would help identify bigger capitalists from petty commodity producers—petty traders, petty financiers, petty transporters, etc. This database also underestimates the level of economic activity, as two-thirds of Indian businesses are unregistered and operate in the unorganised sector, due to reasons ranging from tax evasion to not meeting the threshold that makes them eligible for registration (Harriss-White 2003). Harriss-White (2008) also argues that there exists a wide diversity in the economic activities of firms, making it difficult to classify them into a single sector, as the registered companies' data does. The fieldwork evidence discussed in the next sub-section confirms and echoes these nuanced observations by Harriss-White. Nonetheless, a comparison across two sites can be useful to draw broad patterns.

The district-wise GDP figures were not useful for this comparison. According to the latest Economic Survey of Punjab 2023-24, Tarn Taran district had the lowest per capita Net State District Product across all districts in Punjab and 0.73 times the state average, while Sangrur district had a higher NSDP, 1.14 times the state average. This was primarily because more than a third of Tarn Taran district shares an international border with Pakistan and has low levels of economic activity (GoP 2024: 368). On the other hand, an analysis of data on registered companies in Sunam-Lehra, Malwa, and Tarn Taran-Jandiala, in the Majha study region, from 1964 to 2023, reveals significant

trends in the growth and decline of businesses across different sectors. Over the decades, both regions have witnessed an overall increase in the number of registered companies, although with a higher extent in the Majha study region (Figure 6.1).

In Sunam-Lehra, the total number of registered companies increased steadily from 8 in the period 1974-1990 to 52 in the 2010s before COVID-19. The post-COVID period, too, has seen a notable rise in registered companies—in just three years since COVID-19, 31 new companies have been registered in this region. In the Tarn Taran-Jandiala region, the number of registered companies has always been higher than in the Sunam-Lehra region—particularly since 2011, including in the post-COVID-19 period. The 2001-2010 period was when Punjab's economy saw an upward tick in its growth trajectory (as seen in Chapter 3), in tune with India's 'dream run' (Nagaraj 2009), but it does not seem to have led to a rise in registered company activity in this region during this period. Barring this period, the rise in registered companies is a reflection of the economic dynamism that this region has experienced in the post-liberalisation period, largely due to its proximity to the Amritsar metropole.

Figure 6.1 Number of registered companies in Sunam-Lehra and Tarn Taran-Jandiala region



Source: Registered companies' data, Ministry of Corporate Affairs, India

Fieldwork evidence confirms the broad findings from the registered companies database. Tarn Taran had a more significant number of enterprises in almost all the businesses selected for study, except for rice mills (Table 6.8). However, as mentioned earlier, it also provides insight into the extent of undercounting of firms in the registered companies database in both regions. Across six carefully selected sectors of the non-farm economy, the number of firms far exceeds the total number recorded in the registered companies database for the respective regions over the past six decades. This reflects an India-wide pattern of low company registration among businesses (Harriss-White 2003). To gauge the extent of underrepresentation in the registered companies database, consider the case of rice mills in Sunam, which has seen no new firms and no closures since 2001 as per the registered companies database. In contrast, primary data indicate that 56 new rice mills have been set up in Sunam between 2006 and 2021.

Nonetheless, the evidence discussed here suggests that the region surrounding the Amritsar metropolis and its satellite towns, such as Tarn Taran, had generated more economic activity and higher capital inflow from outside the town and region than Sunam. Not only did Tarn Taran have more economic activity, but the size of firms in most sectors was also significantly larger than in Sunam, especially in rice mills, brick kilns, and IELTS centresThe arhtiya firms, on the other hand, were seemingly bigger in Sunam, especially in terms of money lent to the farmers. Table 6.6 Number of enterprises in select sectors of the non-farm economy, Sunam and Tarn Taran, 2021-22

	Sunam		Tarn Taran	
	No of enterprises	Impression on the state of the sector	No of enterprises	Impression on the state of the sector
Commission agent (arhtiyas)*	292	Stagnating	353	Stagnating
Rice shellers	90	Slow growth	24	Growing
Brick kilns	22	Stagnating	37	Slow growth
IELTS centres	29	Substantial growth	Approx 50	Substantial growth
Agricultural machine retailers	-	-	15	Slow growth
Petrol pumps	14	Stagnating	-	-

Note: * This shows number of arhtiyas and not number of arhtiya firms. An arhtiya could have more than one firm, reflecting their scale of operation and accumulation. Still, it was possible to identify the second or third firm of an existing arhtiya to reach the total number of arhtiyas in the mandi. This was made possible by the presence of phone numbers and addresses of proprietors in the data provided by the respective market committees in Sunam and Tarn Taran. Moreover, the data was triangulated using the arhtiyas directory list, which listed all firms owned by an arhtiya

Suppose we take the case of rice mills in Tarn Taran. Eighty-two per cent of them, according to the Food Inspector from whom this data was collected, had a specialised

export orientation to the countries in the Middle East and other countries compared to 21 per cent in Sunam, as the latter were mainly engaged in milling of paddy that went into PDS (Public Distribution System) channels.[77] Some of the bigger mills in Tarn Taran included mega-processing industries and renowned rice export brands, such as Daawat Rice and Lal Qila Rice. Amritsar district had an even higher concentration of such large-scale mills. Most of these industries were established by capitalists from Amritsar, while others were founded by those from Delhi and Haryana.

IELTS centres and visa consultancies were some of the fastest-growing businesses in both the fieldwork regions. These centres have occupied the most expensive and prime locations in both towns, such as near bus stands and highways, leading to a concentration of these centres in these areas. Large hoardings prominently announced their presence from a distance (Figure 6.2). Most of these centres in Sunam were relatively small-scale and established by local capitalists, with one-third of them by rural Jutts, as shown earlier. However, in Tarn Taran, similar to the rice mills, many centres were established by capital from outside the town, and several from Amritsar, Ludhiana, Jalandhar, and even outside the state had started their new branches in Tarn Taran.

The flow of large capital in this business, which on the surface may appear to be primarily engaged in providing education or visa consultancy, was due to many of the larger firms having begun financing students' moves to foreign countries. They paid their fees and deposited their Guaranteed Investment Certificates (GICs), a total of 2 to 2.5 million rupees per student, which most small capitalist firms could not offer. The loans were provided at usurious rates of interest (usually between 36-60 per cent per annum). However, they still attracted prospective migrants since the loan had to be repaid after they reached Canada or other destinations.

[77] Sunam had 90 mills in 2021 compared to only 24 in Tarn Taran. However, most mills in Sunam region were smaller in size and scale of operation—the total milling capacity of all mills added together was 148.25 MT, or an average of 1.5 MT per mill. On the other hand, the total milling capacity of mills in Tarn Taran was 505 MT with 4 mega plants of 100 MT each. The rest of the mills were smaller, but still had an average milling capacity of 5 MT.

Figure 6.2 IELTS centres at the 100 ft road near Tarn Taran bus stand



Source: Google Street View (2022)

Arhtiya firms, on the other hand, were larger in size in Sunam than in Tarn Taran in terms of both the quantity of grains brokered and the loan disbursal capacity of an average arhtiya. However, the total value of grains brokered in a season or year could be higher in Tarn Taran when basmati prices soared.[78] Rough estimates suggest that an average arhtiya in Sunam reportedly brokered the sale of more than 40,000 to 50,000 bags of wheat and paddy combined in a year and had a loan dispersal capacity *(grahi)* of upwards of Rs 80 lakhs to 1 crore (8 to 10 million), with some bigger arhtiyas lending upwards of 5 to 7 crores (Rupees 50-70 million) in a year, especially during the paddy season. The corresponding figures for an arhtiya in Tarn Taran were 25-30,000 bags and less than Rs 75 lakhs (7.5 million).

This links back to the discussion on the agrarian structure in the two regions discussed in Chapter 5. Kisangarh had a higher average size of land ownership and cultivation, and farmers predominantly engaged in wheat and paddy monoculture. This meant that an average farmer in Kisangarh, and the Malwa region in general, borrowed more money from the arhtiyas than their counterparts in the Majha region, whose diversified cropping patterns and multiple sources of income prevented the need to borrow

[78] This was based on semi-structured conversations with 4 arhtiyas in Sunam and 3 in Tarn Taran, along with semi-structured interviews and participant observations with market committee officers and workers in both the regions.

massively from the arhtiyas. The smaller scale of operation of arhtiyas in the Majha region can also be observed in Singh and Dhaliwal's (2011) comprehensive study on arhtiyas in all districts of Punjab, who show that an arhtiya in the Malwa region dealt with 113 farmers from 66 farm families on average, while the corresponding figure for an arhtiya in the Majha region was 74 farmers from 44 families.

Summary and Discussion

The contrasting evidence from the two regions compels us to challenge not only the socio-cultural or psychological factors that are quite prominently used in explaining the patterns of rural capital accumulation but also a simplistic or mechanical argument used by many scholars, including Damodaran (2008), such as the historical presence or absence of trading castes in the non-farm economy. As shown in the previous section, these factors are certainly important and were frequently mentioned by various respondents in the field, especially in Kisangarh. However, they require further unpacking to connect them to the broader processes of uneven capitalist development under neoliberalism. The ability or inability, or the constraints and opportunities faced by the rural-agrarian capital, especially Jutts, to invest in businesses or non-farm occupations needs to be understood not only in the context of the presence or absence of merchant castes' in the non-farm economy *but also* in the nature and extent of growth in the non-farm economy, which is in itself, shaped by the uneven capitalist development under neoliberalism. While the Malwa region has largely been excluded from the prosperity promises of neoliberalism, the Majha study region near Amritsar has undergone a rapid transformation of its landscape over the last two decades, with large residential buildings, hotels, resorts, and highways, among others, lining its landscape. The region has also become more deeply entrenched in global value chains (GVCs) or Global Production Networks (GPNs) through the expansion of export-oriented agro-processing, industrial production, and the establishment of consumer brands. It has also attracted capital from outside the region, state, and country, which has played a more significant role in shaping the capitalist development in this region, while also creating space for rural CoC and OCOs to establish and embed themselves in the growing non-farm economy. To negate this or to underplay its role is equivalent to

underplaying the role of globalisation as an increasingly important force in shaping local capitalism.

In the next section, we will examine how a nuanced, context-specific analysis of the relationship between agrarian and merchant capital further enhances our understanding of rural capital accumulation patterns.

While the focus of this chapter is primarily on explaining the diverse patterns of capital accumulation in rural Punjab, the discussion of its implications for rural-based landless labourers is presented in Chapter 7. Still, it is helpful to show how going beyond the rural also helps us unpack the uneven nature of agrarian distress in the state. The concentration of avenues of accumulation by rural and urban-based classes of capital in the agricultural and business economies of Sunam, respectively, had exacerbated the conditions of agrarian distress and contributed to the brewing of a debt crisis among agrarian PCPs and CoL. The latter were excluded from sharing the benefits of growth in the non-farm economy and also lacked resources to send their children abroad, eventually bursting into a spate of suicides among these classes in the last two decades (Grover et al., 2016; S. Singh et al., 2022). On the other hand, the diversified pattern of capitalist accumulation in the Majha study region has contributed to a decline in the reserve army of labour in agriculture, which has helped alleviate the conditions of rural distress in the region. This region saw remarkably fewer suicides among smaller farmers and landless labourers compared to the Malwa region (Dandekar and Bhattacharya 2017, Padhi 2012), even though the agrarian conditions were not significantly different in the two regions, and if anything, they were poorer in the Majha region.

6.3 Changes in the Farmer-Arhtiya Relations in the Fieldwork Regions

The changes that have happened in the agricultural markets in the two towns in the last few decades, particularly the entry of Jutts in the commission agent business, have contributed to significant transformations in the functioning of the business and the dynamics of the relations between farmers and arhtiyas, although in varying ways in the two *mandis*. This section presents qualitative evidence on the differentiated relationship between agrarian and merchant capital, highlighting how they differed in

the two regions and how they evolved. While most of the existing literature, as shown earlier, has often suggested that farmer-arhtiya relations are *necessarily* antagonistic, this thesis contributes to a nuanced understanding of the class dynamics of farmer-arhtiya relations. It builds upon the work of Singh (1999), Jan (2019), and Sinha (2020), presenting contrasting evidence from two regions. It shows that the relationship between bigger farmers and arhtiyas was more equal or less antagonistic than between arhtiyas and the smaller farmers in both regions. At the same time, the relations were relatively more competitive and less collaborative in the Majha region than in the Malwa region, including between bigger farmers and the arhtiyas.

Before we discuss the evidence, a few caveats are in order. The insights that follow are based on interviews with farmers from Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, as well as participant observations among *arhtiyas* in the two mandis and semi-structured interviews with only three to four arhtiyas in each mandi, including the Jutt arhtiya from Vyapargarh. Another important caveat is that the evidence needs to be read in the context of a protest movement against the (now repealed) three farm laws, which were likely to endanger the long-established social relationship between farmers and arhtiyas and was collected from people who were actively involved in the movement.

In Sunam, the Jutts may form a numerical minority among arhtiyas, but they were economically more powerful, as most were big landowners,[79] and had also challenged the political domination of the Banias in the mandi. The president of the association was a Khatri during fieldwork, but three out of the previous five presidents were Jutts. Their entry reportedly contributed to higher competition among arhtiyas and had contributed to downward pressure on interest rates, reducing to 12 per cent per annum somewhere around 2016 from 18 per cent per annum in the 2000s. The Market Committee had imposed strict regulations to restrict the 'poaching' of farmers by other

[79] All the Jutt arhtiyas barring one, who used to be a *muneem* (accountant) with an arhtiya and later started his own business, were big landowners, who had gradually diversified into this business and whose scale of operations of business was relatively higher than most Bania or Khatri arhtiyas. For instance, one of the Jutt arhtiya who entered the business in 2016 owned 40 acres in his village near Sunam and another 150 acres in northern Rajasthan (which is significantly lower valued than in Punjab) and owned a prominent banquet hall on the Sunam-Lehra Road. Another Jutt arhtiya had at least 70 acres of land in 4 villages in Sunam region and was also the ex-president of the arhtiya association. This connects to the discussion among bigger landowning farmers in Kisangarh who believed that only the biggest landowning Jutts could afford to start such a business.

arhtiyas, who offered lower interest rates. However, there was news that some were willing to lend at 10 per cent per annum. Although this rate of interest was higher than the interest on Kisan Credit Card (KCC) loans provided by state banks, or 'limit' as it was colloquially called—at 4 to 7 per cent—it was among the best interest rates one could find in the informal economy. Many respondents also emphasised the ease and pace at which the money could be arranged from the arhtiyas as another reason to defend the current arhtiya system.

Moreover, interviews with farmers from various landowning classes reveal that the farmers, especially the bigger ones, shared relatively equal relations of interdependence with the arhtiyas. The bigger farmers and arhtiya can even be seen as active and *collaborative* participants in each other's accumulation; many rural respondents from classes of capital considered arhtiyas as indispensable to the smooth functioning of their livelihoods—for their simple reproductive activities such as paying school fees of their children or undertaking wedding expenditures to their expanded reproduction such as when they wanted to purchase or lease-in land, or when they needed money to send their son or daughter abroad. Moreover, arhtiyas helped them remain solvent for the public banks from which they had often taken KCC loans, as explained by Sinha (2020). Arhtiyas, in turn, benefitted from farmers' accumulation. If farmers took more land on lease, bought land, or sent a member abroad, they borrowed more money, which meant more interest income for the arhtiyas.

The relations between smaller farmers and arhtiyas were relatively less equal, characterised by a reluctance on the part of the arhtiyas to lend when needed most and late procurement of their crops, among other issues. However, they did not report paying higher rates of interest than the larger farmers. Cases of fraud, cheating, usurious moneylending, making use of intimate knowledge of the borrowing history of a farmer to usurp their land, and rent-seeking behaviour such as collusion to keep commodity prices low—which are all very common practices among merchants in fruits and vegetable market as well as in grain markets in most other parts of rural India (see Banaji, 1977; Bhaduri, 1973; Bharadwaj, 1985; Harriss-White, 1996, 2013), were not the concerns among farmers in Kisangarh. Farmers also had autonomy over the

length of their relationship with their arhtiyas and even received the money directly into their bank accounts.

On the other hand, in Tarn Taran, the arrival of Jutts coincided with an increase in the rates of interest in the mandi. It was reported that new Jutt arhtiyas started lending frugally—they had their networks to know exactly how much land a farmer owned and leased-in, so they were better aware of the repaying capacity of the farmers. Moreover, it was reported that in 2011, due to the bankruptcy of a major basmati rice procurement company that had procured rice but failed to transfer the payment to the arhtiyas, many arhtiyas suffered massive losses. As a result, they had to raise the interest rates in the market. The ongoing rates of interest in Tarn Taran mandi during 2021 ranged between 24 per cent to 36 per cent per annum (with a few charging as high as 60 per cent) depending on several factors, including the land owned and operated by a farmer, trust and goodwill shared between farmer and arhtiyas, the value of crops sold through the arhtiya, among others.

The arhtiyas argued that there was no certainty that farmers who borrowed money from them would sell their crops through them, especially for Basmati rice, whose prices fluctuated on a daily basis. Farmers, too, confirmed this arrangement expressing their preference for maintaining autonomy over which market and through which arhtiya they sold their crops to maximise their revenues. This lack of agricultural produce as a collateral, in addition to other factors, appears to have also contributed to upward pressures on interest rates in the Tarn Taran mandi. Additionally, arhtiyas increasingly requested promissory notes, land entitlement papers (locally referred to as *fard*), or other proof of assets, along with a guarantor, particularly from new clients. This represented a departure from earlier, more informal lending practices. These tactics were frowned upon in Sunam *mandi* and often became the reason behind strained ties between a farmer and arhtiya.

The ties between the bigger farmers in Vyapargarh and arhtiyas in Tarn Taran mandi were also rarely as deep, long, and strong as they were in Kisangarh. In fact, the bigger farmers often had conflicting interests with the arhtiyas and spoke of the need to reduce dependence on arhtiyas. They did not speak of their relationship with arhtiyas as *'nauh maas da rishta'*—ties of nail and flesh—a commonly used slogan during the

farmers' protest and among farmers in Kisangarh. As discussed in Chapter 5, their diversified accumulation activities—at the farm and outside—were beneficial in generating a regular income flow during months when farm income was zero or minimal. This contributed to a decline in their dependence on loans from the arhtiyas.

On the other hand, the smaller and marginal Jutt farmers were relatively more dependent on arhtiyas for credit, even though income from cultivation was not their primary source of income. Consider Sukhwinder Singh's case (name changed), who worked as a private bus driver and conductor and also as a part-time farmer while his elderly father cultivated one and a half acres of owned land. When asked what he thought of farming and the arhtiya system, he said

> I have asked my father to quit farming now, but he wouldn't listen to me. But I understand his point. He can keep himself engaged in agriculture, and it also helps us make ends meet in this age of inflation. Otherwise, it is very difficult to 'pass the time' relying on my salary of ten thousand. If we leave farming, we will also lose our credit source from arhtiya. My employer does not even lend me ten thousand on credit. Where will we go if there is an emergency? (cited in Bansal 2024)

This statement captures the differentiated manner in which bigger capitalist farmers and CoL farmers spoke of their relationship with the arhtiya. While the CoL households that were still engaged in small-scale farming derived most of their income from informal, insecure, and precarious work, many among them continued to depend on the arhtiyas and the MSP system to cover their basic as well as emergency needs. Effectively, their relationship with arhtiyas had prevented them from relying on the big landowners or private moneylenders, who charged exorbitant rates of interest higher than those of the arhtiyas.

Summary and Discussion

This evidence on class-differentiated farmer-arhtiya relations in the Malwa region echoes Sinha's (2020) findings from another district in the Malwa region. The evidence is contrary to the dominant narrative in the literature on farmer-arhtiya relations in Punjab, which, as discussed in Chapter 3, tends to present arhtiyas in general as negative figures, as *necessarily* unproductive and responsible for the farmers' misery or

obstacle to their accumulation (S. Singh & Bhogal, 2015; S. Singh & Dhaliwal, 2011). On the contrary, as Singh (1999) has argued, the sharing of the benefits of agricultural commercialisation between them and the changes in the nature of exchange relations between the two is crucial for understanding the nature and pattern of accumulation in these economies. At the same time, this section contributes to a nuanced, context-specific analysis by showing that larger farmers and arhtiyas may not always share similarly collaborative and relatively equal relationships, as seen in Sunam and Sinha's (2020) fieldwork site. Sometimes the two capitals are also in competition as seen in the Majha study region.

The evidence, therefore, compels us to challenge the dichotomous way in which the dynamics between the agrarian and non-agrarian capital classes are often presented in the literature. It contradicts the prevailing understanding that the antagonistic relations and communal differences between Hindu Bania arhtiyas and Sikh Jatt farmers had prevented the latter from entering the urban, non-farm economy. Instead, nuanced fieldwork evidence suggests that the movement of agrarian capital into *arhtiya* and other sectors of the non-farm economy has been more prevalent in the Majha region, where the relations between the two capitals were supposedly more antagonistic. Or rather, the diversification of the bases of accumulation among agrarian capital created conditions for more competitive and antagonistic relations with the arhtiyas. On the other hand, the relatively equal relationship between arhtiyas and larger farmers in Sunam, with both groups helping each other accumulate, has contributed to caste-segregated channels of accumulation between agrarian and merchant capital in this region.

The evidence, therefore, responds to and echoes the earlier calls made for a more nuanced, context-specific, fieldwork-based analysis of the relational dynamics between agrarian capital and its neighbouring classes, especially merchant capital (Krishnamurthy 2018; Vijay Shankar and Krishnamurthy 2012; Jan and Harriss-White 2012), as well as others, such as industrial capital or even finance capital (Singh 1999).

The evidence discussed in the three sections of this chapter—on the social structures of accumulation in the non-farm economy, the extent and nature of growth in the non-farm economy, and the nature of farmer-arhtiya relations in the two regions—allows us

to intervene and form a nuanced take on three main aspects—rural politics during the 2020-21 farmers protests, on the theoretical question of the AQC and the role of merchant capital in industrialisation, which is taken up in the following section.

6.4 Patterns of Accumulation and Rural Politics: Understanding the Indian Farmers' Protest Movement 2020-21

Opposition to the three farm laws was almost universal, especially among Jutt landowners in both fieldwork villages. However, active on-ground participation was much stronger, organised, and broad-based in Kisangarh (and the broader Malwa region) than in Vyapargarh and most parts of the Majha region, especially in the later stages of the movement. Kisangarh also witnessed a much broader coalition across various class groups of Jutt farmers than the Majha study region. Therefore, even in Punjab, widely regarded as the epicentre of the protests, there was regional unevenness in its opposition to the laws. This section contributes to the growing literature on the farmers' protest by problematising and complicating any straightforward narrative of 'peasant resistance' by the farmers and Sikhs of Punjab to the impending privatisation of *mandis* and against contract farming, which has been a fairly dominant tendency so far (see, for instance, Jain 2020, Thandi 2022, Kumar 2022). The section consolidates various strands of argument discussed in the two chapters so far to explain the diversity of political action during one of the most significant rural social movements in recent times in India.

Chapter 5 showed that farmers across land size groups in Kisangarh, within the Malwa study region, exhibited a higher dependence on wheat and paddy, which were publicly procured at the Minimum Support Price (MSP), had relatively limited bases of income diversification, and therefore had limited sources of socio-economic differentiation. Most of them still viewed farming as part of their future while also trying to send at least one of their children abroad. On the other hand, farmers in the Majha region were more differentiated in terms of operation size, with smaller farmers being more dependent on wheat and paddy than the larger farmers, who cultivated a range of crops and had diversified sources of income. Many marginal landowners did not see a future in farming and had leased out their land to work in the informal economy as salaried or

casual labourers. They were limited by their circumstances to making meaningful contributions to the protests, either financially or otherwise. Therefore, different classes and castes of farmers had diversified stakes in agriculture and were differently affected by the farm laws.

These economic contradictions between farmers and their differential stake in the existing MSP system have also been a common understanding to explain why the protests were more intense in Punjab and Haryana than in other states (Baviskar & Levien, 2021; Jodhka, 2021). This section extends this received understanding by showing that the difference in political action was also rooted in the qualitative differences in their exchange relations with the buyers or mediators of their produce as well as their engagement and experience of contract farming (CF).

Firstly, it argues that farmers in the Malwa region were not just defending the government mandis, MSP (Minimum Support Prices), and the public procurement system but also their relatively equitable relationship with the arhtiyas, at least when they compared it to the potentially skewed and unequal relations with the big corporations that would have replaced the arhtiyas. The exchange relations between farmers in Kisangarh, who were predominantly Jutts and Sikhs, and arhtiyas in Sunam, who were predominantly Banias and Hindus, although differentiated across class groups, were relatively less antagonistic and lasted for longer and were much deeper than in Vyapargarh and Tarn Taran where both farmers and arhtiyas were more likely to be from the same class, caste, gender, religion, and economic background. Therefore, more than class-based coalitions, Sikhi and anti-Delhi narratives seem to have played a more significant role in sparking the movement in the Majha region, which had started to show signs of fatigue in the later stages of the protests.[80]

Moreover, farmers in Kisangarh, even the larger ones, had shown no interest in the contract farming (CF) of potato or onion seed that was happening just half an hour's distance from their village. Many equated CF to becoming ‘labourers in our field’ as

[80] There were of course organisational and other factors that explain the differences in political action in the two regions. For instance, Shyam et al (2024) have helped appreciate the organisational force and charismatic leadership of the left-leaning organisation BKU-Ekta Ugrahan, which was predominantly active in the Malwa region including in Kisangarh. On the other hand, Doaba and Majha regions had smaller, fragmented unions, with one or two main leaders.

they believed corporates would decide everything and would want them merely to put in labour.[81] Even smaller PCP or CoL households, who cultivated land and had relatively worse relations of exchange with the arhtiyas compared to the larger landowning capitalist farmers, were steadfast in their defence of the mandi system and the current arhtiya system. They were clear in their understanding that the arhtiyas were better than the private firms, which would lure them with better prices and relatively easier sale processes at the beginning but would change their functioning once the terms tilted in their favour.

On the other hand, some of the larger farmers in Vyapargarh were not greatly concerned by the inequality in their class relations with the buyers of their produce, perhaps because they also benefited materially from private mandis as well as contract farming. They didn't feel that contract farming firms restricted their autonomy in other parts of their economic activities but instead aided it. They primarily cultivated non-MSP crops and did not consider them a problem *a priori*.

Not only among farmers, but the protests also saw a stronger coalition among arhtiyas in Sunam than in Tarn Taran. In Sunam, the arhtiyas, although with a diversified portfolio than Jutt farmers, relied heavily on incomes from money lending to farmers—two-thirds of their income, according to a key respondent and also the most secure source of income due to low bad debts—which was rooted in the existing mandi system. They were also concerned about being replaced by the big private players such as the Ambanis and Adanis. On the other hand, in Tarn Taran, arhtiyas were not opposed to private mandis in theory. In fact, many of them had made their fortunes from open, private trading of basmati rice, while others had been forced to pack their bags due to the highly volatile and high-value nature of these transactions.

These differences in exchange relations, along with the economic contradictions between farmers discussed in Chapter 5, and between *arhtiyas* and farmers, partly explain why farmers in Vyapargarh and arhtiyas in Tarn Taran had put up a fragmented fight compared to the relatively more united front put up by those from Kisangarh and

[81] This articulation of their fear of becoming de-facto labourers can also be seen as their fear of proximity to the landless Dalits, which also explains their unanimous opposition to the unbridled corporate capitalism in the guise of liberal contract farming laws (Bansal 2024).

Sunam, even though the farmers and arhtiyas in the Majha region often belonged to the same caste, class, culture, and religion.

6.5 The Agrarian Question of Capital in Punjab: Bypassed or Still Relevant?

As discussed at the beginning of the chapter, the lack of transition of agrarian surplus and agrarian classes into seed capital and urban capitalists, respectively, and the bottlenecks preventing this transition under neoliberalism, have been termed as a paradox, a failure, or bypassing of the agrarian question of capital (AQC) (see Bernstein 2006, Lerche 2013). In the context of Punjab, scholars such as Damodaran (2008) and Lerche (2014) have taken a similar stance. Sinha (2021) has persuaded us to look beyond the debate on AQC to understand diversification among capitalist farmers.

Notwithstanding the overall argument that agrarian surpluses were not able to sustain or contribute to the overall capitalist development in both regions, the evidence discussed in the chapter helps add nuance to Bernstein's (2006) position of a bypassed agrarian question of capital under neoliberalism. It echoes his later clarification (2015) as well as that of others such as Byres (2016), Harriss-White (2016) and Harriss-White et al. (2021) that the AQC may have lost its national significance under neoliberalism, especially with the rise of Modi-led NDA government but may remain more relevant in some regions more than others. It emphasises that we must examine the regional political economy while also contextualising it within the national and global political economies.

It is argued here that within Punjab, the AQC can be seen as bypassed to a greater degree in the Majha study region, where despite the direct transformation of agrarian PCPs or capitalists into urban, merchant, industrial, and business capitalists, they and their surpluses have played a relatively minor role in the overall capitalist development of the region, especially in the neoliberal phase, during which there has been a much greater inflow of big capital, from Amritsar, as well as beyond the state and even international capital. However, it hasn’t been fully captured in the data.

On the other hand, the AQC can be seen as still relevant in the Sunam region, where barring a few cases of in-flight of capital, including from the Majha region after the separatist movement of the 1980s, the capital was predominantly provincial. There was very little direct involvement of national or international capital, the most significant being the newly established bioenergy plant by a German company near Lehra, which used paddy straw to produce biogas and manure.[82] In this context, agrarian surpluses continue to contribute to the limited and insufficient growth of the broader non-farm economy. This is argued to have occurred both directly—through its effects on aggregate demand, as discussed in the case of slab and lock-tile manufacturing enterprises —and indirectly, through interest payments to the commission agents who maintained a diversified economic portfolio, including both industrial and service sector businesses. The transfer of agrarian surpluses in the form of interest payments for broader capitalist development has been a relatively understudied aspect of the agrarian transition in the literature, which has tended to focus on agricultural taxes and the 'terms of trade' as the main forms of transfer of agrarian surpluses (see Singh 1999 for a similar critique).[83]

Conversations with several owners of concrete slab manufacturing factories, which have emerged in several villages in the Sunam district, including four in Kisangarh alone and one that failed, revealed that larger Jutt farmers were their main customers and that the peak and lean seasons of their factories overlapped with those of Jutt farmers' expenditure patterns and seasonality. As discussed briefly in the previous chapter, toodi prices tend to increase in winter when demand exceeds its availability, which has led many of these bigger farmers to build big storage houses for toodi, but instead of expensive and time-consuming lintel and beams for roofing, they used pre-manufactured concrete slabs for it, as these slabs were relatively cheap and equally effective. These small-scale units are in no way indicative of any broader capitalist

[82] https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/indias-biggest-bio-energy-plant-begins-ops-tomorrow-in-lehragaga-441962

[83] Another tool to analyse of the extent of transfer from the rural or agrarian to the urban can be the difference in bank deposit ratios of the rural and urban branches (see Harriss and Harriss 1984; Harriss 1987).

development in the region, however, they still serve as an example of how agrarian surpluses contribute to the growth of the non-farm economy.

Secondly, it is argued that the interest payments made by farmers to the arhtiyas have contributed to the region's limited industrial development. To be sure, arhtiyas who diversified into industrial activity were few, and they depended not only on agrarian surpluses—that is, their trading and moneylending incomes—but also on loans, subsidies, caste channels, and other means to raise funds for their diversified activities. Many had seemingly moved away from diversifying into industrial or trading activities. Instead, they increased their investments in financial assets, which could potentially yield much higher rates of profit than those in industry or lending.[84] Moreover, as mentioned in the previous section, due to the highly safe and practically risk-free nature of lending money to farmers, a significant share of their working capital was still invested in lending rather than in industry or other activities. However, it is difficult to estimate this in percentage terms.

Still, of the total 90 rice mills in Sunam, at least 50 per cent of them (43) had a commission agent business or were connected to an arhtiya firm through close family ties, a form of vertical integration. Many owned and operated more than one rice mill. A similar trend had been noted earlier by Singh (1997) in his study of rice mills and oil mills in Ludhiana and Bathinda districts, both located in the Malwa region. He found that 8 out of 10 rice mills in Ludhiana and 6 out of 10 in Bathinda had an arhtiya or agricultural trade business. Later, Singh (2013) found that among the total commission agent firms in his study, 16 per cent had a rice mill business. Singh (1997) noted that arhtiyas became heavily involved in the processing and milling of paddy, rice, and wheat in the late 1970s and 1980s following the increase in productivity of these grains and their procurement by state agencies. This was because the two occupations had forward and backward linkages: commission agents who owned rice mills procured paddy directly from farmers and then stored it in their mills, or sometimes even

[84] Not just rice mills, arhtiyas portfolios also included other agro-processing industries (such as large scale flour mills, oil mills, solvex plants), other industries (PVC pipes), private warehouses/godowns which they leased out to the state agencies for the storage of PDS grains, private schools, brick kilns, cold storage, transport companies, banquet halls, film production, and some smaller businesses such as retail shops, transport dealerships, among others.

procured paddy in their rice mills, thereby bypassing the mandis altogether. Rice mill owners who had arht business were reportedly more successful than those who didn't have those links. This led Singh (1999) to argue that although grain milling officially constitutes a crucial part of the state's industrial capital, it may be better seen as an extension of merchant capital in Punjab.

To summarise, this section argues that notwithstanding the broader bypassing of the AQC at the national or sub-national level, the transfer of surpluses from agriculture to other sectors of the economy is an active, ongoing process in both regions—both directly (as seen in case of the Majha region and through the case of slab manufacturing factories in the Malwa region) and indirectly (through interest payments from farmers to merchant and their subsequent diversification). However, the agrarian surpluses play a relatively minor and declining role in the overall capitalist development of regions that have received significantly higher capital inflows from several other sources, including those from outside the country, such as the Majha region. On the other hand, the transfer of agrarian surpluses may still be relatively more important as a base for broader capitalist development in regions that remain at the margins of the global production networks, especially outside the purview of big capital, such as Sunam in the Malwa region.

Apart from a nuanced discussion of the AQC, the evidence discussed here also relates to the debate on the role of merchant capital in industrialisation. It shows that merchant capital is not an antithesis to industrial development at face value, as has often been argued in the development literature on Punjab (see Sau 1984, 1988; Alam 1986). The evidence discussed here adds to Harriss-White's (2013) observation among merchants from West Bengal by nuancing this point, showing that merchant capital can potentially act as an agent of both industry and service sector businesses, especially in regions with normal conditions of exchange.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter emphasises the importance and utility of expanding beyond rural and village settings to gain a deeper understanding of rural capital accumulation and differentiation. These links have long been argued to be important by various scholars

but have been relatively less explored in the context of Punjab. This chapter contributes to the literature on these links from other parts of rural and small-town India, as explored by Harriss-White (2003, 2016), Jan (2019), Sinha (2020), and Basile (2016).

In section 1 of the chapter, we discussed the social structures of accumulation in the various sectors of the non-farm economy using both fieldwork data and secondary datasets, which showed in Sunam in the Malwa region, despite the increasing share of Jutts in many sectors, particularly the more recent ones such as the IELTS centres, Banias and other Hindu trading castes have been able to reproduce their economic domination. On the other hand, in Tarn Taran, as the political dust has settled over the last few decades, rural landowning Jutts have emerged as a dominant player in various sectors of the non-farm economy.

This argument serves as a valuable generalisation to explain agrarian-centred accumulation patterns among rural-agrarian capital in Kisangarh and diversified patterns of accumulation in Vyapargarh discussed in the previous chapter. However, the evidence discussed in this chapter problematised this well-accepted understanding by linking it to the logic of uneven capitalist development under neoliberalism. Jutts in Kisangarh have shown relatively less economic diversification so far, not only due to Bania's domination in the business economy but also because this region has experienced relatively muted growth under neoliberalism, relegated to the margins of the Global Production Networks. On the other hand, the higher diversification among rural landowning Jutts in Vyapargarh has been facilitated by their inclusion in national and international commodity circuits under neoliberalism in the Amritsar metropolitan region, from which Tarn Taran has emerged as an offshoot.

In section 3 of the chapter, we zoomed in to show the implications of the above changes in the non-farm economy in shaping the relational dynamics between farmers and arhtiyas in the two regions. The entry of Jutts in the commission agent business in Sunam had put downward pressure on interest rates. In contrast, in the Majha region, the entry of Jutts, alongside other factors such as recent incidents of bad debts, had led to an increase in interest rates over time. The bigger farmers in the Malwa region accumulated *alongside* their arhtiyas and helped each other accumulate surpluses, although the latter appear to have benefitted more. Even the smaller ones were

steadfast in their defence of the arhtiya system. On the other hand, in the Majha region, even the bigger farmers had relatively more antagonistic relations with their arhtiyas. This helped break another dominant understanding, which has explained the lack of diversification among Sikh agrarian capital as a result of their antagonistic relations and communal differences with the Hindu merchant capital.

This understanding of the links between rural capital accumulation and the political economy of the non-farm sector, derived from a combined analysis of the above three factors, was used in the subsequent sections to explain the diversity of political action among farmers and arhtiyas in the two regions. Section 4 showed that in the Majha region, heightened economic contradictions among farmers, among arhtiyas, and between farmers and arhtiyas contributed to a fragmented or relatively less organised front against the (now repealed) three farm laws. In contrast, in the Malwa study region, the overlapping of the economic interests with the existing public procurement system among all land-size classes of farmers and arhtiyas had contributed to a much more vocal and organised resistance, even though different classes have benefitted differently from the existing system and would have lost differently had the laws been implemented.

Lastly, section 5 of the chapter contributed to the nuanced analysis of AQC in developing countries under neoliberalism, adding to Bernstein (2015) and Harriss-White et al.'s (2021) analysis by showing that despite the AQC has been largely bypassed at the national and sub-national level, and despite the squeeze on agrarian incomes under neoliberalism, surplus flows out of rural and agriculture is an ongoing phenomenon in some regions such as Punjab where rural capital accumulation has proceeded under neoliberalism. However, these surpluses play a relatively minor and declining role in overall capitalist development, especially in regions that have been integrated into global capitalist circuits. In contrast, in regions excluded from neoliberal capitalist development, agrarian surpluses may still shape the broader capitalist development of such regions, although insufficiently, and without resolving the Agrarian Question(s) of Labour.

7: Linking Agrarian Questions of Capital and Agrarian Questions of Labour: Capital Accumulation Patterns and its Implications for Simple Reproduction in Rural India

In the last chapter, we return to Kisangarh and Vyapargarh. We will utilise our nuanced understanding of rural capital accumulation and the factors that shape it to comprehend how these factors influence the simple reproduction of rural-based classes of labour. In other words, this chapter links the Agrarian Question of Capital (AQC) to the Agrarian Question of Labour (AQL), thereby contributing to previous attempts at such analyses (Carswell & De Neve, 2013; B. Harriss, 1987; Harriss-White, 2016a; Lerche, 2023; Pattenden, 2016). We will also discuss the implications of these dynamics between CoC and CoL for the scope of progressive or emancipatory politics among CoL. In this aspect of rural politics, Punjab, particularly the Malwa region, is undergoing a potentially critical juncture where the scope of radical, emancipatory rural politics shows promise, which merits critical investigation. The rise in Dalit assertion in the last three decades in rural Punjab, in various forms and shapes, has brought to the fore the underlying social tensions and fault lines between them and the landed class-castes (Jodhka, 2006b; Martin, 2015; N. Sharma, 2009). More recently, the spread of the land rights movement across several districts of the Malwa region has resulted in Dalits in more than 150 villages gaining access to their rightful share of *Panchayati* land (common land owned by the state), much to the chagrin of the Jutt landed elites—or *dhanaad chaudhry* as Dalit activists refer to them. In the Majha region, this kind of progressive, collective rural politics, rooted in issues of land and dignity, is lacking among classes of labour, with a greater space being occupied by both ethno-religious and caste identity-based politics in this region.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the prevailing understanding is that the Green Revolution period reforms followed by stunted non-farm economic development have significantly reduced labour absorption in agriculture while precluding the possibility of a regular,

secure work in the non-farm economy contributing to the mounting distress faced by landless labourers and marginal farmers (IAMR, 2013; G. Singh et al., 2017; L. Singh et al., 2016; S. Singh et al., 2022; S. Singh, Kaur, et al., 2021). Within Punjab, the Malwa region has emerged as the hotspot of distress, accounting for the highest number of suicides among farmers and labourers (Dandekar and Bhattacharya 2017; Singh et al., 2021, 2022; Padhi 2012). At the same time, the decline in agricultural work, alongside alternate sources of credit, such as through micro-finance companies as well as from within the community among Dalits, is said to have contributed to the breakdown or loosening of the typical capital-labour and caste relations between Jutts farmers and Dalit landless labourers in rural Punjab, facilitating Dalits' assertion for their rights and dignity (Bansal, 2020b; Martin, 2015; Venkatesh, 2017). This economic independence is encapsulated in the following anecdote. In a village in the Malerkotla district of the Malwa region, where Jutts had announced a social boycott against Dalits for demanding their share of Panchayati land, the Dalits had pushed back against it. Sethi (2014), who conducted fieldwork in the village, reports from one of the Dalit woman protestors, 'I am not afraid … we have a toilet in the house, my brother works in Malerkotla as a casual labourer, and my father will get green fodder from his Muslim friends. We don't need these people [Jutt landowners]. We never will. (Sethi 2014 cited in Singh 2017: 35)'.

This chapter contributes to the existing literature in three ways. Firstly, Section 7.1 presents comparative fieldwork evidence on rural labour livelihoods, utilising the conjugated class-caste framework discussed in Chapter 2. It examines the simple reproduction patterns of the classes of labour (CoL) and how they were fragmented and segmented along various axes of oppression such as caste, gender, security of employment, location of work, and migration in the two villages—all of which dampen collective action and contribute to the reproduction of the existing socio-economic hierarchies, in varying degrees in the two villages.

Thereafter, Section 7.2 argues that notwithstanding the loosening of direct relations between capital and labour, allowing some breathing space to Dalits and empowering them to resist their subordination and social boycotts, patterns of accumulation of the rural-agrarian classes of capital still have a significant impact on the simple

reproduction of the labour and the distress faced by them. However, the influence of urban capitalists was increasing, too, especially in Vyapargarh. The contrasting evidence suggests that the source of the agrarian crisis among landless labourers and small farmers may not be limited to agriculture or its stagnating yields and incomes but also extend beyond it. The latter aspects have often been overlooked in the vast literature on agrarian distress, to which this thesis seeks to contribute.

Lastly, section 7.3 connects the first two sections to explain the difference in political action among CoL in the two regions. It shows that the context for progressive politics among Dalits in the Malwa region centred around the issues of land and dignity, was laid down by the fact that classes of labour were relatively less fragmented along caste lines (with most CoL being Dalits, particularly Ramdasias), spatial lines (most working within or in the nearby villages, especially Dalit women) and sectoral lines (most engaging in PCP of milk, especially Dalit women). On the other hand, the politics among CoL in the Majha study region, who were more fragmented and segmented along caste, gender, and location of work, seem to have taken an identity focus—with a prevalence of both ethno-religious and caste identity-based politics. Class politics had been pushed to the margins of rural politics in this region and limited to a few workplace-based unions such as a NREGS workers' union and a brick kiln workers' union that had been successful in remaining relevant by focusing not just on labour rights but also on helping the labourers access the state and its increasingly complicated 'direct' welfare benefits. The evolution of these unions reflects the broader patterns of rural politics in other parts of rural and urban India (see Agarwala 2013, Shah and Lerche 2020).

Therefore, by combining perspectives from both capital and labour, this chapter goes beyond describing the differences in the patterns of simple reproduction of CoL and their social, spatial and sectoral fragmentation in the two regions. It instead provides insights into why they differ in the two regions, how it generated varied conditions of distress for them, and more importantly, how it shaped their politics.

7.1 Classes of Labour in Fieldwork Villages: Social, Economic and Spatial Fragmentation

Chapter 2 defined classes of labour as those who engaged in wage labour or combined it with non-accumulating petty commodity production to make a living. In essence, it includes all those who are directly or indirectly exploited under capitalism. As Pattenden (2023) notes, using evidence from several countries in the global South, most households —both farming and non-farming —now reproduce themselves, at least in part, in towns and cities as well as in the countryside. Most farming households do not survive solely on farming but also engage in other forms of petty commodity production (PCP) and wage labour. Therefore, the pluri-activity and fragmentation of livelihoods for most rural households have become a defining feature of contemporary neoliberal capitalist development (Bernstein 2007; Lerche 2010; Pattenden 2023). In the fieldwork regions, CoL households constituted 54.9 per cent and 73.4 per cent of the total households in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, respectively.[85] All Dalits and OBCs in Kisangarh were landless, except for one Dalit and two OBC households, which owned less than 1.5 acres of land each. All Dalits and OBCs in Vyapargarh were landless.
In this section, we discuss the fragmentation and segmentation among classes of labour along the axes of caste, gender, security of employment, and location of work and show that classes of labour were relatively less fragmented and segmented in Kisangarh than in Vyapargarh.

7.1.1 Social fragmentation among classes of labour

Firstly, we discuss evidence from the two sites on jati-based fragmentation among CoL in the two fieldwork villages. In Kisangarh, 80 per cent of the CoL were Dalit-OBCs (the remaining being Jutts or Savarnas), and 90 per cent of Dalit-OBCs were part of the CoL (see columns 2 and 4, Table 7.1). Only 20 per cent of Jutts or Savarnas were part of the CoL. In Vyapargarh, on the other hand, which had seen a greater degree of differentiation among the landowning Jutts, 30 per cent of CoL were Jutts and 48 per

[85] As mentioned in Chapter 5, the relatively lower share of CoL households in Kisangarh in comparison to Vyapargarh as well as other regions within and outside rural India can be attributed to the higher share of classes of capital in Kisangarh owing to their bigger than average land ownership.

cent of Jutts were CoL (columns 6 and 8, Table 7.1). This illustrates how labour was deeply embedded and intertwined within social institutions, such as caste, particularly in Kisangarh. While Dalits and OBCs may have crossed the low benchmark set for poverty, they have not experienced any significant upward class mobility in the fieldwork villages; they remain at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy.[86]

Table 7.1 Caste and jati-wise distribution of the classes of labour households in the fieldwork sites, 2020-21

	Kisangarh				Vyapargarh			
Row Labels	Number of CoL HHs within jati	Share of total CoL households	Total HHs in village	Share of HHs within jati who are CoL	Number of CoL HHs within jati	Share of total CoL households	Total HHs in village	Share of HHs within jati who are CoL
Column no	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Savarnas	27	20.0	131	20.6	78	30.1	162	48.1
Brahmin	4	3.0	18	22.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Jutt Sikh	23	17.0	111	20.7	78	30.1	162	**48.1**
Bania	0	0.0	2	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
OBCs	19	14.1	22	86.4	31	12.0	36	86.1
SC	89	65.9	93	95.7	150	57.9	155	96.8
Mazhabi	12	8.9	12	100.0	145	56.0	150	96.7
Ramdasia	75	55.6	79	94.9	3	1.2	3	100
Bauria/Sansi	2	1.5	2	100.0	2	0.8	2	100
Grand Total	135	100.0	246	54.9	259	100.0	353	73.4

Source: Fieldwork data

7.1.2 Economic and sectoral fragmentation among Classes of labour

To understand the economic fragmentation among workers from CoL households, it was essential to integrate their primary, secondary, and tertiary employment activities. In Kisangarh, 55 per cent of the total working-age labourers from CoL households had a secondary occupation, and 21.7 per cent had a third occupation. The corresponding figures were slightly lower—at 39.5 per cent and 8.7 per cent, respectively, in Vyapargarh—partly due to relatively less engagement in livestock rearing there. This highlights that focusing solely on primary employment is insufficient for any analysis of

[86] There is some evidence for upward mobility among *Ad-Dharmis* (who are also Dalits) in the Doaba region of Punjab (Juergensmeyer, 1988; Ram, 2004), as well on 'Dalit capitalists', 'Dalit entrepreneurs' and Dalit middle class from other parts of India, such as Uttar Pradesh (Jodhka, 2010), Maharashtra (Prakash 2014) (see also Prakash and Harriss-White 2015 for a summative account of this literature; and Picherit 2009 for a counterview).

rural labour. This exercise is presented in Table 7.2 below, which shows the sector and nature of simple reproduction among working-age members of the CoL households, disaggregated by class-caste categories. The table doesn't display the gendered aspect due to a lack of space, but it is addressed in the discussion below. The detailed tables can be found in Appendix 7.1 for Kisangarh and in Appendix 7.2 for Vyapargarh.

Table 7.2 Sector and nature of paid employment and unpaid self-employment of working-age members of the CoL households in the fieldwork villages

	Kisangarh			Vyapargarh		
Sector and form of employment	Conjugated oppressed CoL	Savarna CoL	Share of Total CoL	Conjugated oppressed	Savarna CoL	Share of Total CoL
Column no	1	2	3	4	5	6
Casual wage employment only	**37.6**	18.9	**34.8**	60.3	20.5	**50.1**
Casual labourers (floating across sectors, locations and jobs) *(dehaadi-dar)*	16.4	5.7	14.8	32.5	1.2	24.5
Casual non-agri labourers in single work	16.4	11.3	15.7	16.8	19.3	17.4
Petty Commodity Production only	16.8	49.1	21.7	12.3	32.3	17.4
Animal rearing only	8.4	32.1	12.0	3.4	21.1	8.0
Petty non-agri self-employment only	6.4	7.5	6.6	8.6	3.7	7.4
Mixing wage employment and PCP	35.9	13.2	**32.5**	10.6	11.2	10.7
Livestock rearing-labourer	10.7	1.9	9.4	4.3	0.6	3.4
Labourer-livestock rearing	10.7	3.8	9.7	3.7	5.0	4.0
Regular waged employment	7.7	17.0	9.1	8.0	15.5	9.9
Pvt regular salaried (informal)*	3.0	5.7	3.4	5.2	11.2	6.7
Govt salaried	1.3	1.9	1.4	3.9	8.7	5.1
Migrants to the Gulf and other developing countries	0.7	0.0	0.6	5.0	8.7	5.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork Data

Notes: * The category of private regular salaried workers was not based solely on whether a worker received a monthly salary. A Dalit woman who worked as a domestic worker received a monthly income, but because the wages were even lower than a casual agricultural wage labourer who received 10 days of work and because they experienced high levels of precarity, it barely made sense to classify them as private regular salaried labourers. Similarly, some workers who are engaged in salaried labour for two to three months a year and as casual labourers for most of the year have also not been counted as private salaried workers.

Table 7.2 shows that most workers from CoL households in Kisangarh, especially Dalit men, primarily reproduce themselves through non-agricultural casual wage employment (37.6 per cent), which is concentrated mainly in construction work, followed by services (such as husk loading) and manufacturing (slab manufacturing) (see Table 7.3). This was followed by those who reproduced through a combination of non-agricultural casual wage employment and small-scale milk production—35.9 per cent (Column 1, Table 7.2). This was particularly the case for Dalit women, among whom as many as 40 per cent were engaged in livestock rearing (Appendix 7.1) as they

were restricted by patriarchal norms that made it harder for them to commute to other villages or to the towns and cities, where most of the jobs were generated, which points to the gendered and caste components of their conjugated oppression.

On the other hand, in Vyapargarh, casualised wage employment was the single most common form of simple reproduction among Dalits and OBCs, with men engaged in construction and women in farm work, followed by brick kilns for both men and women (Table 7.3). Dalits and OBCs in Vyapargarh, unlike their counterparts in Kisangarh, have shifted away from livestock rearing over the last two decades, with only 11-12 per cent of them still engaged in this practice. This was, in part, due to the relatively higher labour force participation in paid work among Dalit women, which reportedly left them little time for livestock rearing, resulting in their need to purchase milk instead of producing it. Apart from working in the fields and at the kilns, as many as 25 Dalit women were employed in paid domestic work in nearby towns and cities but also in the villages.

Table 7.3 Most prevalent types of jobs worked by men and women from conjugated oppressed and savarna CoL class-caste groups in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh

Conjugated oppressed men	Savarna CoL men	Conjugated oppressed women	Savarna CoL women
Kisangarh			
Construction work	Small-scale farming and livestock	Livestock rearing	Livestock rearing
Husk loading	Pvt salaried work	NREGA	
Slab manufacturing factory work	Combine-harvester driving	Paddy transplanting	
Pvt regular salaried work		Paid domestic work	
Livestock rearing			
Paddy transplanting			
Vyapargarh			
Construction work	Pvt salaried work	Farm work	Livestock rearing
Brick kiln work	Truck Driving	Paid domestic work	Caning of cots
Pvt salaried work	Factory work	Brick kiln work	
Petty non-farm self-employment	Gulf migration	Livestock rearing	
Gulf migration	Small-scale farming	Petty non-farm self-employment	
Agri labour	Army jobs		

Source: Fieldwork Data

Instead of livestock rearing, non-agricultural PCP/services were more common means of simple reproduction among Dalit-OBCs in Vyapargarh, which included activities such as petty kirana shops, barber shops, car wash stations, autorickshaw drivers, among others.

Most of the casualised jobs in both villages, except slab factory work in Kisangarh and domestic work in Vyapargarh, which was available within the village or in neighbouring one, were mostly, and increasingly, being accessed through a *thekedar or mistry* (head mason-cum-labour contractor), highlighting the increasing distance between labour and capital seen in other regions as well (Pattenden, 2018; Picherit, 2009, 2018; Raj & Axelby, 2019).

In sharp contrast to Dalit-OBCs, Jutts and Savarnas, both men and women, were primarily engaged in petty commodity production (of grains and milk, but also vegetables in Vyapargarh)—49.1 per cent in Kisangarh and 32.3 per cent in Vyapargarh. Only 20 per cent or so of Jutt or Savarna workers from CoL households in both villages reproduced themselves through casualised forms of wage employment—usually in more skilled services such as combine harvester drivers, private bus drivers or conductors, truck drivers, and sometimes even in construction but never in farms and brick kilns, despite the possibility of higher wages in the latter. These jobs were racialised and stigmatised as low and 'reserved' for Dalit-OBCs, as observed by other scholars as well (see Shah et al. 2018).

Regular waged employment in the informal economy was also more common among Savarna or Jutt CoL households, especially among men—17 percent and 15.5 percent in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, respectively, which is twice that among Dalit-OBC CoL. There were also qualitative differences in the salaried jobs they undertook. Savarna and Jutt CoL were engaged in so-called 'skilled', higher-paying jobs, such as tellers in private banks and teachers in private schools, or semi-skilled, 'sanitised' jobs, such as bus or car drivers for private schools or professionals, security guards in a factory, among others.[87] On the other hand, the salaried work that Dalit-OBC men were more

[87] Interestingly, while Jutts in Kisangarh maintained an arm's length distance from working in the slab manufacturing factories making it an exclusively Dalit workspace; in the majha village, the dynamics were opposite: Jutt men had accepted and rather preferred to work in the factories in the nearby towns

likely to work were lower-paying, precarious and stigmatised jobs such as shop assistants in various business or retail enterprises or sanitation work.

Within the Savarnas CoL, there was a marked distribution of tasks by gender. Strict patriarchal control over their mobility restricted Jutt CoL women in both villages from working outside their homes, especially since the GR period (see also Rao 2018). As a result, they had been relegated mainly to the sphere of social reproduction and to look after the livestock from their premises. They cleaned the animal shed, collected dung and made cakes, while men were responsible for harvesting fodder, cutting it and feeding it to the animals.[88] Even the few Jutt CoL women who were engaged in paid employment in Vyapargarh did so from within their household premises, such as petty home-based tailoring for profit, home-based tutoring, and caning of cots. The cots were delivered to their houses and then picked up by the factory owner. This kind of putting-out system had formally subsumed women into circuits of commodity production without challenging the Brahminical patriarchy that restricts their bodily mobility (Mezzadri, 2020; Mies, 1982; Raju, 2013).

What was interesting was that in both villages, it was challenging to find a worker, male or female, who cultivated land while also labouring in others' fields, or at construction sites, or the kilns, especially if they were Jutts. In contrast, such farmer-cum-labourers are ubiquitous in many other parts of rural India (see Bakshi, 2017; Dhar, 2017). Although within a household, one could find both a farmer and a labourer, especially among marginal landowning Jutts in Vyapargarh.

Employment in agriculture, both casualised and long-term/unfree labour was of declining relevance for labourers from CoL households, especially in Kisangarh. In contrast, the diverse cropping patterns in Vyapargarh and surrounding villages meant that there was relatively more casual agricultural work available to workers in Vyapargarh. Only six men in Kisangarh (four Dalits and two Jutts) and five men in

and cities, although the kind of work was seemingly different. Hard, physical, dirty labour with constant sun exposure by workers in Kisangarh compared to low intensity, but equally strenuous, standing labour among factory workers in Vyapargarh.

[88] This is in stark contrast to amount of labour devoted by women in animal rearing among middle caste peasant household in the neighbouring state of Haryana where they took the bulk of these responsibilities (Yadav, 2024).

Vyapargarh (all Dalits) worked as *seeri* for a large landowning farmer—all of whom operated over 25 acres.[89] In Kisangarh, 47 households reported their father's occupation as *seeri*, out of which only four households had a member who worked as a *seeri* at the time of the survey, indicating occupational mobility among these households. Some of the *seeri* labourers were forced to enter this work arrangement because they urgently needed some lump-sum money due to some out-of-pocket expenditure. One of the *seeri* workers had taken a Rs 2 lakh advance from his employer, which was interest-free, but he wasn't allowed to exit the arrangement unless he fully repaid the advance. This 'neo-bondage', as Breman (2009) terms it, doesn't, however, extend to a *seeri*'s wife, children, or other family members, nor does it shift intergenerationally. It was also common for a *seeri* to change his employer after 2-3 years.

To summarise this section, conjugated oppressed CoL households in both villages relied heavily on casualised forms of wage employment for their simple reproduction. Most of these jobs were increasingly being accessed through a labour contractor. This was more so in Vyapargarh, especially since liberalisation in the 1990s. In Kisangarh, there was a relatively higher share of workers mixing PCP with wage employment, primarily because of petty-scale livestock rearing by Dalit women. Therefore, Punjab's rural areas, particularly the Majha region, show a relatively more casualised form of simple reproduction among CoL. In contrast, petty commodity production or mixing wage employment and PCP tends to be more prevalent among the labourers from other parts of rural India who straddle the rural and rural-urban corridors (Harriss-White 2012, 2018; Pattenden 2016: 41). This profoundly shaped rural politics in the two regions, which will be discussed in section 3 of this chapter.

7.1.3 Spatial fragmentation among classes of labour

In terms of fragmentation along the location of work, 46 per cent and 60 per cent of the working-age men from Dalit-OBC households in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh, respectively, commuted short distances to work, although rarely to a fixed location

[89] There were some migrant workers who worked all year long for a farmer, some of them adolescent boys, but they could not be captured in the survey, nor be interviewed later.

(Tables 7.5 and 7.6). However, the former commuted for construction and husk loading work, which was predominantly in the rural areas, whereas their counterparts in Vyapargarh commuted mainly to Jandiala, Tarn Taran or Amritsar to work in house or building construction or to work in the shops, business enterprises, and the gated housing enclaves, among others. The rise in slab manufacturing factories in Kisangarh and the higher density of brick kilns near Vyapargarh meant that 46 per cent and 26 per cent of Dalit-OBC men in Kisangarh and Vyapargarh respectively, could find work within the village or walking distance from it.

Table 7.4 Spatial fragmentation among classes of labour, caste and gender-wise, Kisangarh, 2020-21

		Kisangarh				
		Conjugated oppressed men	Conjugated oppressed women	Savarna CoL men	Savarna CoL women	Total
Within Punjab	No or minimal commute or migration	**46.4**	97.4	58.8	91.4	**71.0**
	Short distance commute	43.0	2.6	23.5	8.6	22.8
	Both commute and migration	4.5	0.0	2.9	0.0	2.2
Outside Punjab	Circular migration within India	2.8	0.0	8.8	0.0	2.0
	Non-circular migration within India	2.2	0.0	5.9	0.0	1.5
International migrants	Migration to Gulf countries	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5
	Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Fieldwork Data

Since Jutt or savarna men in Kisangarh were primarily engaged in small-scale farming and livestock rearing, they did not have to commute to work, but 40 per cent of Jutt CoL men in Vyapargarh commuted to the nearby towns and cities where they were engaged in a private salaried job, and 17 per cent of so were engaged in tasks such as truck driving, for which they have to commute outside the state most of the times, partly due to Amritsar being a large market for agricultural and non-agricultural commodities. Gulf migration was also significant and increasing among them, undertaken by 11.4 per cent of working-age men.

On the other hand, Dalit-OBC women in both villages were restricted by patriarchal control over their mobility to seek work within village limits, but less so in Vyapargarh, where some of them commuted to the towns to work as paid domestic workers or to

the nearby villages to work in the potato, peas and other vegetable fields of the capitalist farmers. Jutt women in both villages were the most restricted from seeking any paid work unless it was home-based work, such as caning of cots, or if they could manage to find a skilled job in a bank or an educational institution, such as schools, colleges, or IELTS centres.

Table 7.5 Spatial fragmentation among classes of labour, caste and gender-wise, Vyapargarh, 2020-21

		Vyapargarh				
		Conjugated oppressed men	Conjugated oppressed women	Savarna CoL men	Savarna CoL women	Total
Within Punjab	No or minimal commute/migration	26.0	64.2	21.1	87.2	39.7
	Short distance commute	**58.9**	34.7	39.5	5.1	45.1
	Both commute and migration	0.7	0.0	2.6	0.0	0.8
Outside Punjab	Circular migration within India	4.1	0.6	17.5	0.0	5.3
	Non-circular migration within India	2.4	0.6	7.9	0.0	2.7
International migrants	Migration to Gulf countries	7.9	0.0	11.4	7.7	6.3
	Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Fieldwork Data

Overall, migration to other states or regions within India, which has been an increasingly common feature among CoL households from various states in India (Breman, 2019; Garikipati, 2008; Srivastava et al., 2020), was not prevalent among CoL households in either fieldwork regions. It was undertaken by 5 to 6 per cent of CoL labourers in Kisangarh, primarily in Andhra, MP, or Maharashtra, where they operated combine harvesters owned by the capitalists, who preferred to hire them over local labourers due to their greater experience and deftness in this work. In Vyapargarh, roughly 8 to 9 per cent of the CoL labourers migrated for work, with Jats migrating as truck drivers and Dalits migrating to brick kilns in the Jammu and Srinagar, which were reported to be operational when the kilns shut down in Punjab. More than internal migration, circular migration to the Gulf countries has been growing among men from CoL, especially in Kisangarh and the broader Majha region, under the highly oppressive

and exploitative *kafala* system. This can be seen as a form of circular migration, as they travel on a two-year visa initially, which they tend to renew after its expiry.[90]

However, a survey of resident households alone in a village may lead to an underestimation of the phenomenon of long-term migration, as it often excludes households that have permanently migrated out of the village. The family lineage data enabled capturing such households for this analysis, revealing that, overall, 36 households in Kisangarh and 65 in Vyapargarh had moved out of the village in the last couple of decades. Only 20 per cent of them in Kisangarh (all Dalits) were from CoL households, while the rest were mainly Banias and some Jutt PCPs or classes of capital. In contrast, 45 out of the 65 out-migrant households in Vyapargarh, that is, 70 per cent, belonged to CoL households. Fifteen of them were Jutts who had experienced downward class mobility, and the remaining were from Dalit-OBC households. The majority of them had moved to the outskirts of the neighbouring town or city, or even a larger village, and were engaged in wage labour activities or non-accumulating PCP activities. This indicates a significant difference in the class-based labour circulation between the two villages.

Summarising regional variation in fragmentation of simple reproduction among classes of labour

Chapters 5 and 6 showed that the Majha region in Punjab, particularly the region in the vicinity of Amritsar, has seen a greater degree of socio-economic differentiation due to its earlier and more intimate integration into the world-capitalist markets under the direct colonial regime since the mid-19th century followed by its continued expansion in the post-liberalisation period. This appears to have resulted in a faster process of socio-economic differentiation among the dominant caste landowning Jutts, leading to more significant caste heterogeneity among the CoL, increased dependence on

[90] The earnings from Gulf migration were often equivalent to the wages from a private salaried job in India but the consistency of the work often made it more appealing than looking for a salaried job in Punjab. Nonetheless, it remained a risky venture due to the presence of unscrupulous agents and *kafeels* (sponsors) who cheated the workers, withheld their passports, and forced them to work under harsh working conditions. Some were not given any work for several months which defeated the economic benefit from migration.

casualised, informal sector jobs for simple reproduction, and a higher degree of spatial fragmentation among CoL households, including for women.

On the other hand, there was a relatively lesser degree of socio-economic differentiation among Jutts in Kisangarh, with only 20 per cent of Jutts being part of the CoL, leading to greater caste homogeneity among CoL (although jati-based differences within Dalits persisted). While casualisation and spatial fragmentation were rife among Dalit-OBC men in Kisangarh, too, many classes of labour, especially Dalit women, were predominantly engaged in petty commodity production of milk while others mixed it with NREGS work and paddy transplantation when available.

These differences in the patterns of simple reproduction among CoL and their fragmentation along social, economic and spatial lines are intimately linked with the patterns of accumulation of the classes of capital and have profound implications for rural distress and rural politics among farmers and labourers in the two regions. This is elaborated below.

7.2 Capital Accumulation and Simple Reproduction: Exploring the Links Between the Two in Late-GR context of Punjab

This section shows that contrary to the literature that informs us that the links between the labourers and farmers have gradually been diluted since the GR as most rural-based labourers now depend predominantly on the non-farm sector for employment, the patterns of simple reproduction of the CoL continue to be shaped, among other things, by the accumulation patterns of the CoC. This holds for both fieldwork regions, but to a lesser extent in the Majha study region, where greater integration with the expanding non-farm economy surrounding Amritsar, especially since the liberalisation period, has increased the impact of urban-based classes of capital and their accumulation patterns in shaping the simple reproduction patterns of rural-based classes of labour. This section argues that unpacking the deeply intricate links between the two will enhance our understanding of the political economy of contemporary capitalist development and distress in rural Punjab and elsewhere in rural India.

The evidence for this section is drawn from the three-generational employment and life history portraits of the workers from the CoL interviewed during fieldwork. Information on debt relations between the landed Jutts and landless Dalit labourers would also have been crucial for this analysis, but as described in Chapter 4, a systematic collection of data on this aspect was limited to MFI loans and did not cover loans taken from village landowners. It was challenging to collect this information, not least due to the context of the farmers' protests. Nonetheless, the employment history data helps explore the evolution in the nature and type of their employment and map it across changes in the accumulation patterns of the classes of capital against the backdrop of broader political and economic transformations since the 1960s, particularly the green revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, the separatist Khalistan movement and the subsequent state repression in the 1980s, and the neoliberalisation period of the 2000s. Analytically, it helps look at the long-term changes in the structure of the labour force and its increasing social and spatial fragmentation and how it is shaped by rural capital accumulation. It underlines that rural accumulation and its impacts, while less marked than when the debates on the AQ were formulated, are still significant for the classes of labour and their politics, as it unfolds under contemporary capitalism.

This is not to argue that there is a fixed, linear causal relation between the two—patterns of accumulation may themselves be shaped by simple reproduction patterns of the labouring classes, along with other factors such as the balance of caste and class power and the state-mediated political dynamics in that region (Pattenden 2016). All these variables interact with one another, and it is the sum of these interactions that forms a broader pattern of class relations. Pattenden (2016), for instance, demonstrates in his book that in the region from which labour migrated, agrarian capital was more likely to be involved in agribusiness and formal-sector employment. Conversely, where labour commuted to nearby cities, it was engaged in state-related businesses, such as state contracts. In other words, any change, either in the bases of capitalist accumulation or in the bases of labour reproduction, will modify how class-caste relations are reproduced.

Extending Pattenden's (2016, 2018) work, this section demonstrates that the highly gendered pattern of simple reproduction among CoL in Kisangarh is closely tied to the

accumulation patterns of the Classes of Capital in Kisangarh despite the former not being employed by the latter. As described in Chapter 5, the classes of capital, especially Jutts, have continued to accumulate through labour-displacing mechanised agriculture, in modern housing, and from sales of *toodi* (wheat straw), partly due to impediments from diversifying into the non-farm economy by the Bania dominance of trade and business as well as constrained growth opportunities in this region due to uneven capitalist development. This led to a sharp decline in agricultural work and an increase in construction work and slab manufacturing, which explains why Dalit CoL men found casual employment in construction, husk loading, or slab manufacturing, while also engaging in small-scale livestock rearing. At the same time, most Dalit women were effectively relegated to the sphere of social reproduction and petty livestock rearing. On the other hand, in the Majha study region, the greater integration of the Dalit CoL in various sectors of the economy, including for women, alongside a decline in livestock rearing, was shaped by the highly diversified accumulation patterns of the classes of capital into manufacturing, trade, services, among others, alongside the cultivation of labour-intensive high-value crops by those who remained in agriculture.

The role of urban-based, non-agrarian capitalists in shaping the livelihoods and simple reproduction of the CoL was also increasing, as evident in the rise of husk loading work among Dalit-OBC men in Kisangarh and brick kiln work among Dalits in Vyapargarh.

These arguments are explored in detail in the subsequent sections. Kisangarh is discussed first through a discussion on construction work, slab manufacturing work, and husk loading work for men, as well as livestock rearing for women. This is followed by a discussion of agricultural work, as well as diverse forms of casualised work in the non-farm economy of Vyapargarh.

7.2.1 Accumulation Patterns and Simple Reproduction Patterns in Kisangarh (Malwa)

Harinder Singh (name changed), a young Dalit man who worked as a barber until 2012, left this profession due to low income and mounting debts. Like many of his contemporaries from his class and caste at that time, he eventually found employment

in the expanding construction industry as an unskilled construction labourer. When I interviewed Harinder in late December, a relatively lean season for construction work due to heavy fog, he was repairing the toilet walls of his house. When I enquired casually if he was home that day because of the lack of work in the season, he quipped, '*Saanu chutti mangni paindi aa, thekedar kade ni kehnda v teri laud nahi'* (we have to request *thekedar*, contractor, for an off, he never tells us that we are not needed). While his remarks may have been exaggerated, they still point to a certain level of regularity in construction work in the region and how it had replaced agricultural work as the fallback option for any able-bodied male worker, especially if they were Dalits.

As discussed in Section 1 of Chapter 5, the share of the construction sector in employment in rural Punjab has been marginally higher than that of rural India—roughly 15 per cent of workers in rural Punjab were engaged in construction work, compared to 12 per cent in the case of rural India. However, what was specific to this increase in demand for construction work in Punjab, especially in the Malwa region, was that the bulk of the demand was not from big industries or large-scale housing societies that have sprung up across urban and peri-urban India and become a prominent absorber of construction labour (Breman, 2019; Pattenden, 2018; Srivastava & Sutradhar, 2016). Instead, as argued below, the thrust of demand appears to have originated primarily from rural areas and small towns and specifically from those identified as classes of capital.

The survey data revealed that 37 out of the 84 CoC households, that is, almost half of them, had constructed a new modern-style, multi-level dwelling (*Kothi,* as it was called locally) in the last 10 years (see Figure 3 for an example). In addition to these, 28 households had made major repairs or extensions to their houses in the last 5 years (such as building an extra room or section of the house). Therefore, overall, almost 65 out of 84 surplus-accumulating households (roughly 77 per cent) had spent money on improving their housing conditions over the last decade. Conversations with construction labourers, as well as some thekedars, also confirmed that most of them commuted to work in the nearby villages or to the nearby towns such as Sunam and Lehra. Rarely did they travel beyond Sangrur and Ludhiana to undertake this work.

Figure 7.1 An urban-style modern house (Kothi) in Kisangarh, Malwa, study region



Source: Fieldwork

A cursory calculation with another surplus-accumulating Jutt, who had just constructed a new house like the picture on the left at the time of the fieldwork, revealed that it took a minimum of 1000 labour days of work to build his house—and he still had some furniture work pending, which would take further 150-200 labour-days. He further mentioned that, depending on the size of the house and one's willingness to spend, it could even reach up to 2,000 labour days. This information was also triangulated by a discussion with a *thekedar* (mason-cum-labour contractor), who was in a better position than the house owner to estimate the number of labour days required to complete a building. Even if we assume a lower average of 700 labour days for a medium-sized newly constructed house and an average of 4 such buildings built every year in a village, it can generate decent, regular employment for 20 to 30 men from Dalit-OBC households—which constituted one-fourth of all able-bodied Dalit men in the village.

The links between the prevalence of construction work and the accumulation patterns of the surplus-accumulating households are also revealed from the fact that the peak construction season for labourers—that of March to May—was mainly because Jutts started constructing or repairing or extending their houses right after the end of peak

winters and before the harvest season of wheat when they anticipated income flows. This also aligns well with the weather pattern, allowing them to complete shuttering and lintel work before the monsoons when they could then start indoor tasks such as plastering and plumbing.

Constructing modern housing is not typically capital accumulation in the Marxian sense if we understand accumulation as investment in value-generating means of production. Moreover, such expenditures have always been seen as irrational, excessive, and a source of peasant indebtedness (see Gill 2020), but in the cultural and moral economy context of rural Punjab, a good housing condition holds immense importance in matching the economic wealth to social prestige, particularly in terms of seeking upward marriage ties and for those diversifying into non-farm businesses (also observed by Jeffrey 1999 among Jats in western UP). Moreover, constructing a house involves the exploitation of the labour power of workers engaged in building and repairing these houses. It can also lead to capital appreciation in the value of land, hence potentially a source of realisation of surplus value in the future.

Balwinder Singh (name changed), a man in his early 30s, was constructing a new, modern-looking house at the time of fieldwork. When I asked him why he thought instead of buying land, it was vital for him to build a new modern house even though his father had advised against it, he said

> ...if I had any land adjacent to my parcel, I would have bought it; otherwise, one has to construct a house. It's important. We had a good house earlier, but it was a bit low-lying, so it created problems with sewage and rainwater, so we spent 35 lakhs on constructing this..."

His father, who was sitting beside us, provided a context behind the recent increase in desire for modern urban-style housing (*kothi*) over an old-style house (*ghar*):

> "It's not just him; *sari duniya hi kothi vall nu hoyi aa* (everyone wants a kothi)...in our *gali* (street) itself, there are four houses under construction." Now, the atmosphere is such that if you have a son to be married, you have to first invest in building a kothi. *Kothi v majboori bani payi aa* (it has become a social compulsion)"

Gurvinder Singh (name changed), another upwardly mobile capitalist farmer, highlighted a similar tendency, which attests to how old notions of purity and pollution were being challenged by the rising urbanism in the rural:

> "...earlier people would build a separate room if their son were about to be married. Nowadays, they tear down their house and build a *kothi*. You won't find a courtyard in a Jutt's house now; it's just a small verandah. They (pointing to his son) want to have attached bathrooms these days; my father would have never liked that..."

Rough estimates showed that the costs for these *kothis* ranged, on average, between Rupees 15 to 30 lakhs in 2020-21 (especially if they had to purchase land to construct the house), which was equivalent to at least ten years' worth of 'net' income from cultivation for a 20-acre owning household (using the calculation of a profit of Rs 90,000 to Rs 100,000 per acre per annum). Many reported funding this expenditure using loans from commercial banks as well as from informal loans from arhtiyas. Other studies have also observed and discussed this tendency among rural Jutts to urbanise their rural settings instead of moving to the towns or cities (Mehar, 2004).

At the same time as investing heavily in housing, classes of capital in Kisangarh, especially the larger farmers among them, were also trying to increase their incomes by holding onto the sale of toodi (wheat straw) until December, when prices tend to rise as supplies reduce. During the fieldwork year, the price of *toodi* increased from Rs 400 per trolley in April (immediately after the wheat harvest) to Rs 1000 per trolley in December. As a result, most farmers with larger operational holdings began to invest in constructing large barns and storage houses (*swaat or kotha*) in the field or near their premises (see Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2 A toodi storage house of a big capitalist farmer



Source: Fieldwork

However, instead of using expensive and time-consuming lintels and beams for roofing, they employed pre-manufactured concrete slabs, which were both cheap and effective (Figure 7.3). This generated a sharp increase in the demand for these concrete slabs, which led to the setting up of several small-scale factories that manufactured these slabs, especially in Kisangarh, where five new factories have been set up since 2016, two of which have significantly expanded production since 2021 when fieldwork was concluded, while one had failed and shut down (Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3 Workers at one of the slab-manufacturing factories in Kisangarh



Source: Fieldwork

These small-scale factories hired labourers from Kisangarh and the nearby villages and had gradually become the second most prevalent work after construction, especially among Dalit men. The slab factory workers revealed that the period from December to March, followed by the post-monsoon season from July to August, was the peak season of employment for them. They prepared the inventory to match the high demand in March and April and then in September and the subsequent months. This was when Jutts constructed the *toodi* storage rooms, allowing them to store the *toodi* after the wheat harvest in April.

Similar to larger landowning Jutts storing toodi to sell dear during periods of excess demand, rice mill owners stored rice husk to sell when prices soared. A gradual increase in demand for paddy husk over the last five to ten years, as a weaker alternative to coal, has led to a sharp rise in demand for a highly flexible workforce of husk loading and transporting labourers, who can be hired and fired on short notice. According to fieldwork data, as many as 32 Dalit-OBC men were engaged in husk loading work, with most joining this job in the last decade or so. Because the task was performed in gangs and involved picking and carrying a heavy weight on the head, the gangs preferred to include only young, able-bodied, energetic men (see Figure 7.4). As a result, only 5 of the 32 men were beyond the age of 45 years.

Figure 7.4 A group of men engaged in husk-loading work



Source: Fieldwork

However, simply the rise in demand for husk does not fully explain the prevalence of this work in the Malwa study region or why it was concentrated in a few months. It was instead rooted in the prevalence of small-scale rice mills in the region (as shown in the previous chapter), which depended not just on their incomes from shelling rice but increasingly on the incomes from the sale of husk and other by-products such as rice bran, which incentivised them to store husk till they received a higher price for it (Figure 7.5).[91] This was not the case among the mega-plants in the Majha region (producing up to 100 MT), which were more focused on securing the right price for their export-quality basmati rice than on the price of husk and bran. Moreover, due to their year-long operations, the shellers in the majha region had reportedly hired a permanent fleet of labourers for husk loading and transportation, who were mainly Bihari migrant workers.

[91] As much as 25 per cent of the rice mill premises was left to store the husk by the mill owners.

Figure 7.5 Heaps of paddy husk in a rice mill near Sunam



Source: Fieldwork

The same accumulation patterns that absorbed a decent share of men released from agriculture in new jobs such as slab manufacturing and husk loading seem to have excluded Dalit-OBC women from being gainfully employed in the non-farm economy, along with deep-rooted patriarchy, which restricted their bodily movement and prevented from joining men in the workforce (Rao 2018). The hyper-mechanisation of wheat and paddy agricultural production, aversion to riskier, high-value crops, and subversion of the NREGS prevented the generation of decent employment opportunities for Dalit-OBC women. In addition, the preference of the few urban industrialists to hire hyper-racialised migrant labourers who worked at lower wages and in poorer working conditions prevented women from joining the factories. Some Dalit women also worked as domestic workers, while others took on odd jobs, such as cleaning animal sheds, collecting animal dung, and making dung cakes from it for the larger Jutt farmers or gleaning fields during the post-harvest season. They received minimal wages for these jobs, sometimes in kind, and sometimes they did it to repay their debts (J. Mishra, 2022). Most of them, however, had no choice but to engage in small-scale livestock rearing, not only for household consumption of milk but also with an eye to profit from the sale of milk and calves

As a result, livestock rearing among landless Dalit CoL households had become a heavily feminised task, with almost all functions performed by women, including the collection of fodder, while men, especially adolescent boys, contributing sporadically (see also Rao et al 2022 for insights on time spent by Dalit women on livestock using time use survey). Marxist feminists have demonstrated how unpaid or self-employed work, encompassing both productive and reproductive activities, plays a crucial role in capital accumulation, as it enables capital to appropriate a greater surplus by cheapening the reproduction of labour power (Mezzadri, 2020; S. Naidu & Rao, 2024; Pattenden, 2022; Rao, 2018). The contradictions that arose between Dalit women and Jutt men when the former collected *hara chara* (grass) or *saag* (leafy greens) from the latter's land is argued to have contributed to the land rights movement in this region (Bansal, 2020b; Sabharwal & Singh, 2022; J. Singh, 2021), which is now entering a new phase with the unions leading well-attended rallies demanding land reforms and enactment of Land Ceiling Act (India Labour Solidarity, 2025). This is discussed further in section 3 of this chapter.

7.2.2 Accumulation Patterns and Simple Reproduction patterns in Vyapargarh (Majha)

Like their counterparts in Kisangarh, most male workers from classes of labour in Vyapargarh worked as construction labourers, especially among Dalit OBCs. However, in stark contrast to Kisangarh, most of them spent their time working in the nearby urban areas—mainly Amritsar but also Jandiala and Tarn Taran. To be sure, where a construction labourer worked and in what specific task was decided mainly by whether their *thekedar* found work in the rural or urban areas, but the fact that the Vyapargarh and nearby villages seemed to have a greater share of *thekedars* who worked in the urban areas provides a sense of where the construction work was concentrated in the two regions, as tends to be the case across India between places closer and further away from cities.

This relatively weaker link between the simple reproduction of construction labourers and the income-expenditure patterns of rural surplus-accumulating households is further underlined by the fact that the labourers in Vyapargarh didn't refer to March or

April as their peak season. The seasonality in their work was seemingly determined to a greater extent by other factors, such as accumulation patterns of urban-based classes of capital, weather-related factors (such as monsoons), and religion-related factors (such as festival dates), among others.

This is not to say that rural house construction was not a source of employment, but it paled in comparison to the demand from the sprawling metropolis of Amritsar and its satellite towns. Fieldwork data indicate that 26 out of 57 classes of capital, or approximately 45 per cent, had constructed a new house in the last 10 years, and a further 18 households had undertaken major repairs or extensions to their dwellings. Moreover, many among the CoL, especially the Gulf migrants, who constituted around 6 per cent of CoL households, were highly likely to invest in housing using their remittances, significantly more than their counterparts who did not migrate to the Gulf. In fact, interviews with some Gulf workers and their families inform that constructing a house was one of the main factors that incentivised them to migrate to the Gulf.

The classes of capital in Vyapargarh were as likely to invest in improving their housing and living conditions as their counterparts in Kisangarh. However, the difference in the overall agrarian structure in the two villages helps contextualise the extent of demand generated. Kisangarh had a broader base of classes of capital—34 per cent of total households, compared to only 16 per cent in Vyapargarh.

As shown in Chapter 5, most classes of capital households in Vyapargarh showed a clear preference for diversification of their bases of accumulation into the growing business economy in the region and across all sectors, including some labour-intensive industries such as brick kilns, but also retail trade and speculative investments in real estate, among others. At the same time, the few who remained in agriculture tended to accumulate wealth through the cultivation of a wide variety of crops, which were not as mechanised as wheat and paddy and hence generated relatively more employment in agriculture than in Kisangarh. This contributed to the rise in demand for a flexible workforce to help run their businesses and farms, which was met by the burgeoning class of labourers from rural areas.

The implications of the accumulation patterns of classes of capital also generate different forms of exploitation of the classes of labour. The leader of one of the unions that organised brick kiln workers remarked that Jutts were tougher employers than the Brahmins and Khatris, who had dominated the brick kiln business earlier, and said, "They want to keep the workers like they used to treat them in the fields." The in-built racialisation in the process paved the way for better jobs being given to Jutt men from CoL households. In contrast, Dalits were more likely to engage in highly precarious work. The capitalist development in this region also brought significantly more women under its spheres of exploitation than in the Malwa study region, not just in production such as brick kilns or home-based work, but also through hyper-commodification of reproductive labour, such as through domestic labour (see also Rao et al 2024).

As a result, many women from conjugated oppressed class-caste reported that it was difficult for them to look after the cattle, considering that fodder collection was a highly time-consuming task and laden with humiliation and oppression. Therefore, it is argued that the availability of casualised paid work generated by the outward-oriented accumulation pattern of the surplus-accumulating households contributed to a decline in unpaid, oppressive labour in the form of petty livestock rearing among landless Dalit women in Vyapargarh.

7.3 Politics of the Classes of Labour

These differences in fragmentation and segmentation among CoL across fieldwork sites—shaped by the accumulation patterns of the classes of capital—had direct implications for the distress faced by them and the potential for collective action among them. The context for progressive rural politics among Dalits in the Malwa region centred around the issues of land and social justice was laid down by the fact that classes of labour were relatively less fragmented along caste lines (with most CoL being Dalits, particularly Ramdasias), spatial lines (most working within or in the nearby villages, especially Dalit women) and sectoral lines (most engaging in PCP of milk, especially Dalit women).

On the other hand, politics among CoL of the Majha study region, who were more fragmented and segmented along caste, gender, and location of work, has taken an

identity focus—with a popularity of both ethno-religious and caste identity-based politics—the former within Jutt CoL and the latter with Dalit CoL. Class politics had been pushed to the margins of rural politics in this region and limited to a few workplace-based unions such as NREGS workers unions and brick kiln workers unions that had been successful in remaining relevant by focusing not just on labour rights but also on helping the labourers access the state and its increasingly complicated 'direct' welfare benefits. The evolution of these unions reflects the broader patterns of rural politics in other parts of rural and urban India (see Agarwala 2013, Shah and Lerche 2020).

As elaborated in Chapter 5 on capital accumulation patterns in the fieldwork villages, Kisangarh had seen a sharp rise in land rents, land prices, and even buffalo prices. This constrained and curtailed the opportunities available to the classes of labour—smaller Jutt landowners/farmers and landless Dalit labourers—to seek upward economic mobility. They found themselves blocked from all corners. This is argued to have culminated in indebtedness-induced suicides among this class of farmers and landless labourers since the late 1990s (Singh et al. 2021, 2022).

At the same time, this region has emerged as a hotbed of progressive agrarian politics over the last decade, with several Dalit labouring class organisations, such as the Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee (ZPSC) and the Krantikari Pendu Mazdoor Union (KPMU), active in several villages surrounding Kisangarh, although not in Kisangarh itself. The main reason behind the lack of political action in Kisangarh was that the one-third share of panchayat land in Kisangarh, the rallying point for these organisations, had already been leased by a Mazhabi Sikh landless household in Kisangarh. Moreover, many other Dalit households had possession of small parcels of nazool land, which is why none of the three labouring class organisations that attempted to organise Dalit labourers in Kisangarh were successful. Dalits in Kisangarh were instead divided into factions along jati groups (between Mazhabis and Ramdasias) and residences (between Dalits of two hamlets).

The demands of this social movement are primarily rooted in land, both for agricultural production and for reproductive needs, such as homestead land. The thrust of the movement has come from Dalit women, who, as shown earlier, are the most

marginalised section of rural Punjab, while Dalit men and youth have also contributed to it (see Figure 7.7). They have demanded land not just for productive use but also as a clarion call to lead a life with dignity and to prevent themselves from the harassment they face regularly at the hands of Jutt men when they collect fodder from their fields. The dominant caste discourse claims Dalit women as inherently criminal, a consequence of, as well as reinforcement of, their alleged impurity and low caste status. This discourse pervades conflicts and consequent violence, arising in particular from accusations of trespassing to harvest fodder or collect grass or of theft of *saag* (leafy greens) and vegetables, which Jutts argue damages their crops.

Figure 7.6 Dalit women protest in a village



Source: Facebook page of Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee (ZPSC)

On the other hand, in the Majha region, the integration of the classes of labour into the non-farm economy, while increasing the class-caste inequality, precarity and socio-economic insecurity, has potentially acted as a pressure valve that helped dissipate the pressure on agriculture to sustain livelihoods, among both Jutt smaller landowners as well as Dalit-OBC CoL and PCPs. The higher degree of differentiation and fragmentation of simple reproduction among classes of labour that has resulted from this integration within the capitalist non-farm economy has proved to be a fertile ground for the resurgence of identity politics, such as the Sikh *panthic* politics based on ethno-religious lines among young, 'left behind' Jutts, many of whom as we have seen as part of classes of labour, and some Mazhabis. The meteoric rise of Amritpal Singh and the

electoral victories of Sikh hardliners from the Majha region by impressive margins in the 2022 legislative assembly are emblematic of this trend (S. Singh, 2025). The meteoric rise in popularity of Pentecostal Christianity in rooftop churches has also been an important socio-cultural movement that has attracted many Mazhabis for its promise of providing dignity and aspirations for a better livelihood (Misra, 2021). Purely caste-based politics among Dalits, such as through the popularity of Bhagwan Valmiki Sena and Bahujan Samaj Party, among others, was also prevalent. Class politics had been pushed to the margins, unlike in the Malwa region.

Among the few labouring-class organisations in the region, the brick kiln workers' union was among the most organised, including in Vyapargarh. The union—*Bhatha Mazdoor Union* (brick-kiln workers' union)—mobilised under the banner of Hind Mazdoor Sabha (Indian Workers' Council), a pan-India, non-partisan trade union organisation based in Amritsar. Their union had been able to ensure a stable increase in the wage rates for various work at the brick kilns over the years and ensured its proper implementation on the ground. It has demanded toilets for female labourers and successfully challenged the neo-bondage and other forms of unfree labour arrangements among local labourers, all very significant gains. It has also been able to reduce the threat of direct, physical violence or assaults on the labourers from the brick kiln owners, which were supposedly rampant earlier, even leading to death in some cases.

However, gradually, more than their rights as brick kiln workers, the union had become popular for helping the labourers apply for various government schemes to access welfare benefits. For instance, during the time of fieldwork, the Punjab government announced a direct cash transfer of Rs 3,100 for every registered construction and building worker, also referred to locally as *'laal copy*'. The registration process was through an online portal and required various documents and certifications (from the sarpanch, panchayat secretary and Block Development Officer), which made it very tedious. The union assisted the labourers with the task despite lacking the necessary workforce to handle the volume of work. The union also helped them apply for other benefits, such as state scholarships for their children and direct cash transfer schemes for marrying a girl child or for pregnancy, among others, as part of their entitlements under the Building and Other Construction Workers Act (BOCWA) of 1996. On the day of

the interview with the union president, the office resembled a government office, with a massive queue of applicants holding their ration cards and other identity documents in hand, waiting to apply for a '*laal copy*' (Figure 7.7). These initiatives made the union very popular among rural-based labourers, even those who didn't work as brick kiln labourers, and significantly increased its membership, including in Vyapargarh.

Figure 7.7 Brick kiln labourers at the office of Hind Mazdoor Sabha, Amritsar



Source: Fieldwork

The rise of unions and organisations that go beyond the workplace or strictly labour issues to organise informal sector workers, mainly migrant, hyper-racialised workers, fit well with broader patterns observed in other parts of India as well as other global South countries such as Brazil (Agarwala 2013, Shah and Lerche 2020). In India, examples include construction workers organisations in Tamil Nadu that pushed through the Building and Other Construction Workers Act (BOCWA) of 1996, and NGOs such as Aajeevika Bureau, Centre for Labor Research and Action (CLRA) at Prayas, and Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), among others, which have focussed on issues such as providing legal education and aid to migrant workers and helping them access

state's welfare entitlements at the site of migration, among other such initiatives (see Shah and Lerche 2020).

Overall, despite various gains made by the brick kiln workers' union, class-caste relations seemed steeper and more unequal in Vyapargarh than in Kisangarh, even though CoL in Vyapargarh received more paid work opportunities, especially women. There was higher wage suppression and labour control, especially of female Dalit labourers, who were forced to work for not just lower wages but also flexible hours—beginning from 3 am—in the fields or at the kilns. Women were paid roughly 20-30 per cent lower than men for daily wage tasks. Some were paid Rs 70-100 for six hours of labour in harvesting vegetables and Rs 35 for caning of a cot that took 2-3 hours of labour. Furthermore, the complete subversion of NREGS, the government housing scheme, mass exclusion from the PDS program, and the inability to access and cultivate their rightful share of village *Panchayati* land, as discussed briefly in Chapter 5, had pushed people towards food insecurity. It also moved them towards even more unequal terms of employment with the brick kilns and MFI companies for credit.

While this precluded the possibility of any class revolt or resistance by the labour against capital, both landed elites and urban capitalists, there were ample instances of *everyday* forms of resistance—or as Scott (1985) described them as 'weapons of the weak'—foot-dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on (p. 29). Some kiln workers, for instance, didn't return to work after taking an advance, leading kiln owners to rely on labour contractors, thekedars, to supply migrant labourers from Uttar Pradesh. Others often changed their employers, sometimes in the middle of the season. Some potato pickers engaged in pilfering. Construction workers frequently reported late to work and resisted *thekedar's* (contractor) authority. The subversion of a social boycott imposed on the Dalits in the village in 2012 following a violent clash between some Dalit and Jutt youth by buying milk from Jutts of the neighbouring village, seeking employment outside the village, reducing their demand for fodder and greens by selling off animals, also points to the success of the everyday forms of resistance. However, this is what it remains. Fleeing from one employer often meant seeking another employer. Freedom from bondage and debt-trap for local workers had created conditions for debt-bonded

migrant workers while also fragmenting the workforce, thus creating a ground for populist politics, sometimes with a progressive hue but often time not so much.

The reasons behind the prevalence and popularity of left-leaning labouring class organisations among CoL in the Malwa region, who engaged in direct action against capital and the state, in contrast to those of non-partisan, non-militant organisations and everyday forms of resistance in the Majha region and other parts of India, may be several. However, it is helpful to contextualise it with the patterns of simple reproduction and fragmentation within classes of labour discussed in the previous section. The context for rural politics centred around the issues of land in the Malwa region for both productive and reproductive needs was laid down by the fact that classes of labour were relatively less fragmented along caste lines (with most CoL being Dalits, particularly Ramdasias), spatial lines (most working within or in the nearby villages, especially Dalit women) and sectoral lines (most engaging in PCP of milk, especially Dalit women). On the other hand, in the majha region, where classes of labour were much more fragmented along caste, spatial, and sectoral lines, and where links between simple reproduction and expanded reproduction of the rural-based CoL and CoC, respectively were less direct, it had forced the unions to expand their focus on to issues that went beyond purely labour or rural issues.

7.4 Conclusion

It is clear that class and caste relations between village residents have become more individualised than they were before, which has led some to argue that the landed and landless, Jutts and Dalits in rural Punjab reproduce independently of each other. This chapter demonstrates that, even in Punjab, where considerable capitalist development has occurred, and direct ties of labour exploitation and bondage have declined significantly, the simple reproduction patterns of the classes of labour—their movement into employment and unemployment or from one job to another, straddling across sectors and locations, their peak and lean seasons of employment—continue to be linked to the accumulation patterns of the classes of capital. This was more pronounced in the Malwa region than in the Majha study region. By combining perspectives from both capital and labour, this chapter goes beyond describing the

differences in their patterns of simple reproduction and their social, spatial and sectoral fragmentation. Instead, it provides insights into *why* they differ in the two regions.

The prevalence of construction work and slab manufacturing work among men and unpaid livestock rearing work among women from conjugated oppressed class-castes in Kisangarh cannot be fully explained without unpacking its links with the accumulation patterns of the rural-based CoC households, which were mainly Jutts interested in re-investing their agrarian surpluses mainly into agriculture and in better housing. Similarly, the prevalence of construction work, brick kiln work, and private salaried work among men from conjugated oppressed class-castes and of private salaried work, truck driving and factory work among savarna men from classes of labour in Vyapargarh seem to be primarily linked to the accumulation patterns of the urban-based traders, retailers, industrialists, and other surplus-accumulating classes, most of whom seem to have diversified out of farming in the last few decades in the aftermath of the separatist Khalistan movement and the subsequent state repression that ravaged the region in the 1980s. The same patterns of accumulation brought significantly more women under its spheres of exploitation instead of excluding them and relegating them to livestock and reproductive labour.

Drawing out these links between patterns of accumulation and the simple reproduction of the classes of labour also allows us to make tentative suggestions on the impact it has had on the terrain of rural politics among classes of labour in the two regions. The meteoric rise in labouring class politics is rooted in the issue of land and home in the Malwa region, aimed at both the simple and social reproduction of the classes of labour. On the other hand, class politics had been marginalised in the Majha region due to the popularity of religious conversion, ethno-religious, and purely caste-identity-based politics. This chapter demonstrated that both responses were rooted in the nuanced differences in the simple reproduction patterns of the classes of labour, as well as their internal fragmentation along caste, class, gender, and spatial lines in the two regions.

8: Conclusion and Discussion

As I conclude this thesis, Punjab is gearing up for another farmers' protest and at the same time, Dalit labouring class politics is entering a new phase with '*laal jhanda aali*' [red flag] unions leading well-organised and well-attended rallies with significant presence of Dalit women in them. They demand land reforms and enactment of the Land Ceiling Act 1972, demands that have been long considered dead in Indian politics, resurrected by the most marginalised section of Punjab's rural society, who look at land as not just their means to livelihood but also to their dignity and self-respect. This has also brought to the fore the underlying social tensions and fault lines in Punjab's rural areas, especially in the Malwa region. Class-based politics is, therefore, making a comeback in Punjab after being on the sidelines for at least three decades, and this time with a seemingly more and serious attention to issues of caste and gender than before.

This current wave of farmers' movement in Punjab also seems to be more progressive than the earlier waves of the 1980s and 90s—for being attentive to the issues of gender and caste and for being centred around the middle to lower tier of the rural population—although the efficacy and durability of these alliances need to remain under consistent scrutiny (see Pattenden and Bansal, 2021; Lerche, 2021; Sabharwal and Singh, 2022). In this sense, Punjab, and especially the marginalised sections of its rural population—smaller Jutt farmers and landless Dalit women—have emerged as a beacon of hope in an otherwise concerning rise of ethnic majoritarianism and populist politics among Dalits and small peasants in rural north India (Jaffrelot, 2022; Narayan, 2023, p. 203; Pai, 2023; A. P. Singh, 2023). This urges us to look at rural Punjab and its political economy more seriously and holistically than has been done so far.

The existing literature has explained these socio-economic and socio-political dynamics by foregrounding the prolonged and widespread agrarian and environmental distress in the state since the liberalisation of the economy in the 1990s. This thesis enhances our understanding of the multi-fold crises and their various manifestations by placing the relatively understudied part of this story—the processes of rural capital accumulation and rural classes of capital—at the centre of analysis. It draws evidence

from two distinct socio-political regions within Punjab—Malwa and Majha—the latter being a relatively understudied region by political economists. The thesis makes six key contributions:

Firstly, this thesis contributes to the exercise of class analysis of rural India under highly mechanised conditions (see Ramachandran 2011, Pattenden 2016, Yadav 2022, Singh and Kumar 2024). It borrows and adapts Lerche and Shah's (2018) concept of "conjugated oppression" to arrive at a novel conjugated class-caste structure that also integrates caste and non-farm diversification of a household in determining its class location, apart from factors such as ownership of means of production, production, appropriation and accumulation of surplus value, and net labour exploitation of a household.

Secondly, the thesis responds to the call for "theoretical and empirical research denoted to local level capitalism" by Harriss-White (2016) and joins Sinha (2020), Shrimali (2022), Lerche (2014) in showing that capital accumulation has continued in rural Punjab under neoliberalism. But it also goes beyond by discussing the diversity in bases and long-term patterns of capital accumulation in rural Punjab. It also joins Yadav (2022), Upadhya (2023), Pattenden (2016), Harriss-White (2003), Chakravarti (2001) in showing how capital in Punjab—in both villages and small towns—is socially embedded in institutions such as caste, gender, religion, ethnicity, that have enabled and sustained capital accumulation processes.

Thirdly, it shows that the political economy of agrarian change in both regions is shaped by factors beyond the village or agriculture, although to varying degrees. This includes the nature and extent of broader (uneven) capitalist development under neoliberalism as well as the changes in the social structures of accumulation in the non-farm sector. This thesis adds to the existing literature on this aspect from within and outside India by scholars such as Harriss (1987); Harriss and Harriss (1984); Harriss-White (1996, 2016); Basile (2016) on Tamil Nadu, and Jan (2024) on Pakistani Punjab.

Fourthly, it revisits the debate on the Agrarian Question of Capital by linking it to the logic of uneven capitalist development in the age of globalised production networks (see Bernstein 2006, 2015 and Lerche 2013, Harriss-White, et al. 2021 for India). The

comparative evidence compelled us to leave open the land question and the Agrarian Question of Capital (AQC) to further context-specific, nuanced empirical analysis, as argued by Bernstein (2015, 2016); Byres (2016); Harriss-White et al., (2021).

It also nuances the discussion on relational dynamics between agrarian capital and merchant capital by showing that they are neither necessarily antagonistic nor always collaborative, rather they are shaped by the local context and the long-term political economy of a region. It echoes Krishnamurthy (2018), Vijay Shankar and Krishnamurthy (2012), and Jan and Harriss-White (2012) in calling for more fieldwork-based understanding of India's local capitalism through the analysis of the relationship between various strands of local or domestic or rural capital—such as between agrarian and merchant capital and between merchant and industrial capital.

Fifthly, this thesis draws out the links between rural capital accumulation and simple reproduction of the classes of labour, which allows us to connect the Agrarian Question of Capital and the Agrarian Question of Labour (see also Lerche 2023, Philip 2023, Pattenden 2016, Harriss-White 2003). In other words, it shows that accumulation not only proceeds alongside distress but intimately shapes it.

Lastly, this thesis reflects on the intricate links between capital and labour, between accumulation and distress in shaping the diversity and future scope of progressive, emancipatory politics among both Jutt landowners and Dalit landless labourers, contributing to previous such analyses from other regions and social movements in India by Pattenden (2023, 2018), Pattenden and Bansal (2021), Lerche (1999), among others.

Situated at the intersection of caste and class, capital and labour, farm and non-farm, villages and towns, distress and accumulation, informality and exclusion, and resistance and acquiescence, this thesis challenges some of the established understandings of the political economy of development in Punjab, such as that capital accumulation has halted under neoliberalism (Dhesi and Singh 2008, Singh and Singh 2016). If it does continue it remains primarily agrarian (Sau 1988, Damodaran 2008, Lerche 2014, Sinha 2020, 2021, Shrimali 2022, Bansal 2020), which is then attributed to the socio-cultural factors such as the agrarian nature of the Jutts (Bal 2006, Singh 2013)

or simply the Bania domination of the non-farm economy (Singh 1984; Gill and Singhal 1984; Gill 1984; Damodaran 2008), and the *necessarily* antagonistic relations between the two (Singh and Dhaliwal 2011; Singh and Bhogal 2015). To reiterate, these are all useful as broad generalisations, but fail to provide a comprehensive yet nuanced picture, which this thesis provides. It also helped add nuance to the argument about the growing economic and political independence or distance of the Dalit classes of labour from the dominant caste classes of capital that is argued to have fuelled the former's assertions against the latter (Sharma 2009; Singh 2017; Martin 2015; Bansal 2020).

This chapter consolidates the key findings from the thesis and ends with reflections on the future direction of research and political engagement, especially in the context of capitalist urbanisation of agrarian landscapes. First and foremost, the discussion on rural capital accumulation first looked at who accumulates in rural Punjab, through what means, and what methods are required to address these questions in the context of diversified bases of capital accumulation under neoliberalism.

Chapter 2 borrowed from the 'conjugated oppression' framework introduced by Bourgeois (1988) in the Central American context and recently revived by Lerche and Shah (2018) in the Indian context to discuss the combination or 'conjugation' of economic marginalisation and caste or gender, or ethnicity-based discrimination leading to institutionalised oppression. It further developed this framework to analyse 'conjugated privilege', that is, when axes of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, etc 'interact explosively' to 'produce an overwhelming experience of privilege that is more than the sum of the parts' (Lerche & Shah, 2018). This approach allowed us to arrive at a two-tier conjugated class-caste analysis that helped frame the classes of capitalist farmers, peasants or petty commodity producers, and the labouring classes, not only as owners of capital, surplus, or labour power but also as possessing a distinct caste identity with its historical trajectory—characterised by exploitation, oppression, as well as domination and privilege. This helped differentiate between the 'Landlord-turned CoC', that is, those who have exerted historical domination and exploited others' labour power to reproduce themselves, and those who have accumulated surplus more recently. Likewise, it differentiated between those who have only recently been

proletarianised, fully or partially, and forced to enter the classes of labour (such as some landless and land-poor Jutt Sikhs) from those who have historically been forced to be a part of this class such as the Dalits and Adivasis—the conjugated oppressed.

Chapter 3 contextualised the thesis, its data, and arguments in the political economy of Punjab and its recent historical trajectory. It critically engages with the existing literature from both Punjab and other parts of India on the questions relevant for this thesis. **Chapter 4** on research methodology described how data for a conjugated class-caste analysis was collected using a mix of quantitative and qualitative data and a wide range of tools and methods. Data collection involved three phases at each site—a census survey of all resident households in the village, followed by semi-structured interviews with a stratified sample. Some focus group discussions were also conducted. The last phase of data collection involved interviews with urban capitalists and businessmen, state officials, members of the farmers' organisations and labouring class organisations. Participant observation method was also adopted while conducting fieldwork in the *mandis*, in protest marches and demonstrations, and in religious congregations. In particular, the use of tools such as family lineage data (used by Jeffrey 1999) and life/work histories of the respondents (used by Oya 2007) allowed for a relatively smooth segue into a conversation on capital accumulation as well as the shifts in livelihood patterns. It also significantly improved the quality of data through multi-level triangulation of data.

Chapter 5 found that the bases of capital accumulation in Kisangarh in the Malwa study region remained primarily agrarian centred, despite a gradual decline in its profitability and rise in uncertainty under the neoliberal agricultural order. Land ownership and access to tenancy continue to be the most important sources of capital accumulation and socio-economic differentiation among landowning households. Other factors play their role as well, including some old and some new ones, such as toodi prices and international migration to the countries of global North. However, the prospects for this look bleak with stricter immigration policies in these countries. As a result, caste, class, land, and occupation had all been fused and consolidated into the identity of *jimidaar* in the Malwa region, which enabled medium and bigger landowning Jutts' to continue to accumulate from agriculture, thus reproducing existing socio-

economic hierarchies. Their accumulation also helped them reproduce their political dominance in the region.

On the other hand, in Vyapargarh, in the Majha region, the surplus was being generated and accumulated from diverse sources, including high-value crop cultivation, retail trade, public sector jobs, international migration, and speculative businesses, among others. These latter sources of income and the contacts and networks one needed to get a foot into these businesses had emerged as an important source of accumulation and socio-economic differentiation in Vyapargarh, alongside land ownership. The conjugated privileged groups among CoC had a spatially expansive network of capital accumulation going not just beyond the village but also beyond the state. Jutt classes of capital, both old and new ones, were engaged in non-traditional occupations such as shopkeeping, trading, urban business activities, and brick kilns, suggesting a more fluid relationship between caste, class, land ownership, and occupation. They spoke of these businesses in the language of possibility and aspiration, as profitable and desirable, while those in Kisangarh spoke of the non-agrarian occupations in the language of risk, failure, caution, uncertainty, lack of knowledge, going against the grain, and an uncomfortable prospect overall.

Agrarian capital in Vyapargarh, therefore, resembled their counterparts in the higher-growth regions such as coastal Andhra (see Balagopal 1987, Upadhya 1988, 2020), central Gujarat (Rutten 1995), western Maharashtra (Baru 2000, Damodaran 2008), and especially northern and western Tamil Nadu (Chari 2004, Heyer 2010, Harriss-White 2016), while those in Malwa were similar perhaps to their counterparts in Haryana (Rawal, 2006), Western Uttar Pradesh (Jeffrey 1999, Lerche 2023) and central Madhya Pradesh (Arora 2021).

Chapter 6 showed that the relatively less diversified bases of capital accumulation in Kisangarh compared to Vyapargarh were shaped by several factors, notably the ability of Banias and other trading castes from the region to reproduce their dominant position in practically all spheres of the non-farm economy in Sunam, but also due to relatively constrained growth in the non-farm economy. The latter was an outcome of the uneven capitalist development under neoliberalism that has excluded Punjab, particularly the Malwa region, from its prosperity promises.

On the other hand, the diversified bases of accumulation in Vyapargarh was facilitated by dynamic economic growth in the Majha study region due to its proximity to the Amritsar metropole and its integration into global production networks, alongside the lack of entrenched monopoly by the Hindu trading castes such as the Banias, who were expelled from the region during the separatist violence and state repression of the 1980s. This left behind a void that rural capitalists and PCPs from dominant castes could fill, pointing to their conjugation of class, caste, gender, ethnic, and religious identities in enabling them to emerge as the new bourgeoisie in the Majha region.

This chapter also explained how these differences in the patterns of capital accumulation had shaped the relational dynamics between agrarian and merchant capital in the two regions. This resulted in a much more equal and collaborative relationship in the Malwa region, with both accumulating alongside each other and not at the expense of each other, which was not the case in Vyapargarh, where they competed for existing and newer sources of accumulation. Taken together, these factors had contributed to a much stronger and broader coalition of landowning Jutt farmers against the (now repealed) three farm laws than in Vyapargarh, which echoes evidence from the previous waves of farmers' protests in India (see Banaji 1994, Nadkarni 1987, Pattenden 2005, and Pattenden and Bansal 2021). This also helps to problematise and complicate any straightforward narrative of 'peasant resistance' by the farmers or Sikhs or Jutts of Punjab to an impending privatisation of mandis and against contract farming, which has been a fairly dominant narrative so far (see, for instance, Jain 2020, Thandi 2022, Kumar 2022).

The contrasting evidence from the region allows us to intervene in the debate on the contemporary relevance of AQC in developing countries. It echoes Bernstein (2015), Lerche (2014), and Harriss-White et al. (2021)'s argument that while rural/domestic capital accumulation may have largely lost its developmental potential at the national scale under neoliberalism, surplus flows between agrarian and other sectors of the economy are an active and ongoing phenomenon. These flows may be insignificant for the broader capitalist development for most regions such as the Majha, where despite the direct transformation of agrarian PCPs and capitalists into urban, merchant, industrial, and business capitalists, they and their surpluses have played a relatively

minor role in the overall capitalist development of the region. This is especially in the neoliberal phase, during which there has been a much more significant inflow of big capital from Amritsar, as well as beyond the state and even international capital. On the other hand, the AQC can be seen as still relevant in regions such as the Malwa Punjab, which have been relegated to the margins of global value chains or production networks. Most private capital invested in the region outside agriculture originates from within the provincial boundaries, and in such a context, agrarian surpluses continue to contribute to the limited growth of the broader non-farm economy, although insufficiently.

Chapter 7 showed the implications of differences in bases and patterns of capital accumulation, which were also seen on the bases of simple reproduction of the classes of labour, which were more diverse in Vyapargarh than in Kisangarh. High economic growth and diversification of capital accumulation into urban trade, manufacturing and other activities pulled most marginal landowners and landless labourers out of agricultural work, including women, and adversely incorporated them into its spheres of exploitation. This has contributed to a greater degree of structural transformation in this region. Most men from the classes of labour, among both Dalits and Jutts, commuted to the nearby towns and cities to work as informal labourers in construction, factories, shops, or showrooms, while women from classes of labour, mainly Dalit women, found work in the brick kilns or vegetable or sugar beet fields near the village. Their adverse incorporation and hyper-exploitation in the urban, informal economy had contributed to higher economic inequality in Vyapargarh but also acted as a 'pressure valve' leading to relatively lower rates of indebtedness-induced suicides by farmers and labourers in Majha compared to Malwa (Singh et al., 2021, 2022; Dandekar and Bhattacharya 2017; Padhi 2012).

On the other hand, low overall economic growth and high investments in labour-displacing agriculture, sale of toodi, livestock rearing, and improving housing among classes of capital in Kisangarh meant that construction work and slab manufacturing had emerged as the most important source of employment. These jobs were available in the nearby villages and sometimes in Sunam but rarely beyond district boundaries. This mainly absorbed able-bodied men from landless Dalit households while women

were more or less excluded from production systems. Moreover, this agrarian-focused capital accumulation had led to a sharp rise in land rents and buffalo prices, preventing classes of labour from seeking upward mobility through agriculture or livestock rearing.

Classes of labour were also more fragmented and segmented across caste and gender lines in Vyapargarh than in Kisangarh. Many smaller landowning Jutt men had joined wage labour in the informal economy, but they rarely worked alongside Dalits and were more likely to be engaged in relatively more regular and 'sanitised' jobs than Dalit men. The latter were overwhelmingly involved in precarious, low-paying, stigmatised jobs, especially Dalit women, pointing to their hyper-exploitation and conjugated oppression. On the other hand, CoL in Kisangarh were predominantly Dalits. Fragmentation of livelihoods was extremely high among Dalit men, but the gendered nature of growth in employment and stricter patriarchal control over their bodies had relegated most Dalit women to perform systematically undervalued tasks such as social reproduction and petty livestock rearing, alongside a month of paddy transplanting work and NREGS work each.

These differences in capital accumulation and fragmentation of simple reproduction among CoL in the two villages help illuminate why left-leaning Dalit labouring class organisations in the Malwa region were successful in building a collective, broad-based politics centred around issues of land and tie it to the questions of dignity and gender justice. In contrast, such organisations had been forced to recede and pushed to the margins in the Majha region. Instead, this region has seen a resurgence of identity politics based on *panthic* ethno-religious lines among young, 'left behind' Jutts (Singh Sandeep 2025) and religious conversion to Christianity among landless Dalits (Misra 2023). The few labouring class unions that were still relevant were able to do so by focusing not just on labour rights but also on mediating access to the complicated 'direct' welfare benefits of the State, which echoes the broader patterns of rural politics in other parts of rural India (Agarwala 2013, Shah and Lerche 2020).

Limitations and future directions of research

One of the limitations of this work remains its limited exposition of how Brahminical patriarchy shaped the processes of capital accumulation and social reproduction

among classes of capital and the classes of labour in the two regions. This was partly due to my relative lack of access to women and the spaces they occupy—the kitchen and the interiors—but also because it was never posed as a question in the first place. Post-fieldwork reflections inform that an investigation of the socio-economic transformation of the Jutts in the majha region since the 1980s—both as capitalists and as classes of labour—from a gendered perspective would be particularly interesting to explore in the future, and using insights from the fantastic research that has emerged from scholars of feminist political economy from a global South perspective (Mezzadri, 2020; Mies, 1982; S. C. Naidu & Ossome, 2016; S. Naidu & Rao, 2024; Rao, 2018; Rao et al., 2024).

In the future, there is also a scope to place this work at the intersection of the political economy of development, agrarian studies and urban studies. Rapid capitalist urbanisation, especially since the 1990s, and rural-agrarian transformations are simultaneous processes and the continuum between the two need to be further explored, which has been relatively underexplored by scholars of both agrarian and urban studies (see Balakrishnan and Gurunani 2021). There is increasingly a conversation to explore the limits and possibilities of new terrains of agrarian-urban studies by scholars such as Balakrishnan (2018), Balakrishnan and Gurunani (2021), Upadhya (2021), Harriss-White (2016a, 2021), Sircar (2017), among others through development of concepts such as 'agrarian urbanism' and 'urban agrarianism'. While an encouraging development, the bulk of research in this field is limited to the big metropolitan cities such as Gurgaon, Mumbai-Pune corridor, and Bengaluru, or 'speculative cities' such as Amravati (see Harriss-White 2021). Studies based on smaller cities and towns, such as Harriss-White and her collaborators' research on a small town in north Tamil Nadu (2016), remain exceptions. The discussion in this thesis on the agrarian contribution to the transformation of two towns, Sunam and Tarn Taran, does contribute to the latter literature in a way, but it is something I would like to expand on in subsequent research.

Lastly, a context-specific, nuanced analysis of the relations between agrarian capital, merchant capital, industrial capital, and even finance capital is needed, especially when considering a rural-led growth strategy amidst the demand for new waves of rural

industrialisation (Abrol, 2025; Ghatak et al., 2020) in the global South in the context of climate change and the 'degrowth' movement (Gerber, 2020; Saitō, 2024). It is essential to ask how the existing local merchant capital or industrial capital interacts with the emerging green industrial capital to shape the industrialisation of a region and what might be its cascading impact on the rural classes of capital and the livelihoods of the classes of labour.

Rural capital accumulation may no longer hold a central place in development theory. However, it remains fundamental to understanding India's local capitalism and the possibilities for progressive rural politics. As Harriss-White (2016) describes, it serves as a 'building block of development.' This thesis has demonstrated precisely that.

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Glossary of terms

Ad-Dharmi	Sect among Dalits in Punjab
Arhtiya	Commission Agent in Agricultural Market
Basmati	A long-grain variety of aromatic rice which originates from Punjab and other parts of the Indian subcontinent
Dalit	Ex-untouchables who are at the bottom of the Indian caste system
Dehaadi	Casual wage labour
Fard	Land entitlement document
Goha kooda	Cleaning cattle shed
Kothi	Modern House
Laal copy	Direct cash transfer scheme for construction sector workers
Mandi	Agricultural Market, usually grain markets
Nazool	*Evacuee Land left behind by Muslim landowners after partition, now under state control*
Panchayat	Village Council, a basic governing institution in India
Panthic	Reference to 'Sikh *panth*' or 'path of Sikh Gurus'
Saag	Leafy greens
Sarpanch	Head of *panchayat*
Seeri/Siri	Labour hiring arrangement involving a mix of sharecropping and labour.
Swaat/Kotha	Storage room to store *toodi*
Thekedar	Labour Contractor
Toodi	Wheat straw, used as fodder

Appendix Tables

Appendix 2.1: Criteria and variables used for classification of rural households: a step-by-step guide

The first tier of classification of households—into CoC, PCP and CoL—was undertaken using the political economy framework that determines a household's class location based on their relationship to the means of production (such as land or factories), production, appropriation and accumulation of surplus value into further expansion of the means of production, and net labour exploitation. Table A1.1 outlines the specific criteria and variables used to capture these dimensions. While most data was collected during the survey phase, findings were triangulated through subsequent in-depth interviews and key informant discussions.

Table A1.1 Criteria and variables used for classification of households in fieldwork villages

Criteria	Variable	Proxy variable	Stage of data collection
Means of Production (agrarian and non-agrarian)	Extent of Land ownership/possession	No	Survey
	Irrigation source and quality	Ownership of tubewell and electricity connection	Survey
	Ownership of agricultural machinery	Whether they owned tractor, straw reaper, rotavator, happy seeder, and if yes, how many. Information on value of information was not collected in a systematic manner.	Survey and interview
	Livestock ownership	Number of buffaloes and cows owned, excluding calves	Survey
	Extent of Leased-in land	No	Survey
	Ownership of factories or non-farm businesses	No	Survey
Accumulation of Means of Production	Land ownership	Using family lineage or family tree to get an estimate of change in landownership or businesses over the last two to three generations, as well as on the business that failed or had to be shut down earlier	Interviews
	Factories or non-farm businesses		Interviews

	Family labour used in agriculture or non-farm business (gender segregated)	See note below	Survey
	Hired labour in agriculture or non-farm business		Survey
Labour exploitation	Family labour use pattern outside farm/agriculture	Self-reported main and secondary occupation of all members of household, distinguishing between state employment job or skilled, private sector job with job security and casualised, informal sector work; migration to developed countries and gulf countries, paid and unpaid work, productive and reproductive work	Survey

The Marxian class analysis employed by Patnaik (1976), Athreya et al. (1990), and Ramachandran (2011) in the Indian context, while complex and requiring extensive accurate data, is qualitatively superior to the popular land-size classifications used by most secondary datasets and scholars. For instance, landowners above 10-12 acres are often categorized as capitalist farmers (Sinha, 2020; Jeffrey, 1997), while those owning less than 5 acres are classified as poor, distressed farmers.

Although such classifications offer simplicity and cross-study comparability, they ignore crucial factors including land quality, non-farm diversification, and gross output value from land. Fieldwork evidence, particularly from Vyapargarh, revealed that many small and marginal landowners achieved very high gross output values through high-value crop cultivation—sometimes exceeding those of larger farmers cultivating only wheat and paddy. Many others had diversified into non-farm businesses or secured salaried employment, generating greater surpluses than larger landowners. Landownership alone, therefore, would have been grossly inadequate in analysing and classification of households in such context (see also Yadav 2022; Singh and Kumar 2024). Chapter 4 provides additional discussion of the strengths, limitations, and challenges associated with collecting this data.

Collecting information on surplus accumulation, means of production, and net labour exploitation proved relatively challenging. For accumulation patterns, data was gathered through family lineage trees during interviews and conversations with key respondents, providing insights into the land ownership and agricultural machinery acquisition history of most landowning households in the fieldwork villages.

Understanding labour exploitation required comprehensive groundwork on production processes, drawing from existing literature, Punjab Agriculture University studies, and in-depth interviews with key respondents. This helped map labour usage patterns—including quantity (work days), type (family versus hired labour for men and women), nature of hired labour (casual, salaried, gang labour), and machine usage—across all major crop operations.

Both primary crops, wheat and paddy, were highly mechanized even for marginal farmers, with all major operations including field preparation, sowing, weeding, and harvesting fully mechanized. For wheat, only fertiliser and pesticide application, irrigation management, channel repair, and wheat straw storage remained manual crop operations. Straw storage was invariably performed by hired labour gangs of 6-8 men (typically Dalit workers) across all households. According to recent PAU reports, wheat cultivation requires only 36 total labour days—combining hired and family labour—over the 4-5 month growing period.

For paddy, transplantation remained the most labour-intensive operation, performed exclusively by hired labour gangs, usually consisting of migrant workers. No landowner or farmer—whether a 1-acre Jutt farmer or Dalit tenant—reported using family labour for transplantation. In addition to transplantation, irrigation, bund maintenance, and fertiliser application followed similar patterns as wheat.

Unlike paddy and wheat cultivation, fodder harvesting and livestock rearing, however, remained primarily family-based activities, though highly gendered. Men typically handled field operations like fodder harvesting and chopping, while women managed feeding, shed cleaning, and animal bathing. Milking appeared more flexible, with both men and women participating. Children and adolescents also contributed to livestock care.

To determine net labour exploitation in agriculture, respondents were asked about tractor ownership, machinery access and usage, and labour use for specific operations including fertiliser application, irrigation, and fodder harvesting. Questions also covered monthly or yearly or casualised labour hiring practices.

This approach enabled nuanced estimates of agricultural labour exploitation, distinguishing households that relied entirely on hired labour (even for fertiliser application and fodder harvesting) from those using mixed family and hired labour. Notably, no agricultural household relied entirely on family labour, demonstrating the extent of capitalization and mechanisation in Punjab's production processes.

Based on these insights, households were classified into three categories: Classes of Labor, Petty Commodity Producers (PCPs), and Classes of Capital.

As briefly discussed in Chapter 2, a household was classified as **Classes of labour** if it did not own or operate any means of production (or owned very little of it) and relied entirely or primarily on wages they received from selling their labour power in precarious jobs in the informal economy. This could be a casual job or salaried (although predominantly the former), on a farm or construction sites or any other sector and activity. The wages they received were used to meet only their simple reproduction needs. It also included those households where some members were engaged primarily in non-accumulating petty commodity production, such as livestock rearing in our fieldwork context, which forced them to also engage in wage employment as secondary source of income. Although household was taken as the unit of analysis, the gendered division of labour in such households was significant at both sites and was captured during the survey and used in the class analysis.

As elaborated in Chapter 4 and borrowing from Rao et al, (2024), targeted questions were posed to collect information on all tasks performed by all female members, in both productive and reproductive spheres, paid and unpaid. This was instrumental in capturing the complete base of simple reproduction of CoL households. In terms of income, very crudely and based on a couple of interviews, the cut-off for a basic simple reproduction level of a household with 4-5 members was understood as roughly around Rs 1.5-1.8 lakhs per annum, or roughly Rs 12,000 to 15,000 per month, considering that

they did not have to pay any rent for housing (even though many did not have any possession letter or legal paper to prove their ownership of their homestead land).

Classes of Capital (CoC) were defined as households that owned or possessed enough means of production that they relied primarily or entirely on hired labour for the production of commodities on their farm and/or non-farm business. They also showed a tendency to re-invest a part of their surplus into the production process with an eye to generate more surplus in the future. Borrowing from Pattenden (2022), CoC also included households who used family labour in the production process, and hence showed PCP features, but they also hired and exploited others' labour power and had generated and appropriated enough surplus to accumulate means of production over time. Lastly, it included those landed households who did not engage in any production on farm or beyond it, but they commanded substantial surpluses because of the amount of rent received on leased out land, or salaries from government sector jobs, or remittances from family members residing and working in global North, or any combination of these occupations. In terms of income, very crudely, CoC households with 4-5 members had an income above Rs 5-6 lakhs per annum, which translated to Rs 40,000 to 45, 000 per month per household.

Petty Commodity Producer households were seen as those who owned and/or operated land and/or other means of production and relied entirely or primarily on their family labour (including men, women, and children) for production of commodities on their farm and/or in non-farm occupations. They did not engage in any precarious wage labour on others' farm or beyond it and were mostly unable to accumulate surpluses over time. If at all they did, it was used in multiplication of family farms or businesses, and not in the expansion of the existing firm or used up at the time of marriages, dowry, or in achieving a basic standard of living through housing (see Harriss-White 2022). In terms of income, very crudely, the cut-off for a basic simple reproduction level of a household was roughly between Rs 1.5-1.8 lakhs per annum and Rs 5 lakhs per annum for a family of 4 or 5, or roughly Rs 12,000-15,000 to Rs 40,000 per month.

The emphasis here is not merely on the production of surplus but also on its appropriation. As explained by Athreya et al (1990), it is possible that a farmer is a net buyer of labour power and produces a surplus but does not appropriate and

accumulate it, that is, reinvest that surplus to facilitate expanded reproduction. This could be due to what they term as 'secondary relations of exploitation', such as unequal exchange in the market or high and rising costs for the social reproduction of the farmer and their family members, leaving them with an insufficient surplus to convert into capital.

The identification of CoL households was undertaken in the following steps:

1. Landless households whose all working age members engaged entirely on precarious wage labour in any sector of the economy to meet their simple reproduction were first identified and labelled as CoL (18.1% of all HHs in Kisangarh and 41.1% of HHs in Vyapargarh)
2. Landless households whose members engaged in precarious wage labour in the informal economy in combination with non-accumulating PCP activity using entirely or predominantly family labour, such as livestock rearing or service production such as barber shop, tailoring, welding, roadside kiosk, among others (22.6% of households in Kisangarh and 10.8% of HHs in Vyapargarh)
3. Then, households who owned less than 2.5 acres but leased out their land and instead engaged in wage labour or non-accumulating petty commodity or service production were labelled as CoL (6.5% of HHs in Kisangarh and 8.2% in Vyapargarh).
4. Then, households who owned and operated small portions of land (typically less than 2.5 acres), but relied primarily on wage employment or precarious, non-accumulating PCP activity of any household member(s), were also labelled as CoL (3.7% of HHs in Kisangarh and 5.1% of HHs in Vyapargarh).

While these households were easier to identify as part of CoL, there were some cases that were difficult to classify in the beginning but were later seen as better classified as part of CoL. For instance,

5. Landless households with main source of income from secured, lowest grade government salaried or pensioned jobs such as a soldier in the army or a constable in the Police were also classified as CoL. Despite job security and much better levels of income and standards of living than other landless

households, there were cases of their upward mobility not sustaining in the next generation, and hence eventually had to turn to wage labour or precarious PCP in the non-farm sector (0.8% of HHs in Kisangarh and 3.9% of HHs in Vyapargarh).

6. Similarly, those landless or land poor households (owning less than 2.5 aces) that were not engaged in any production process, in farm or beyond it, such as those dependent entirely on social security transfers from the state or from petty land rent, which made it difficult to judge how they stood in terms of labour exploitation. However, considering their low levels of income and poor standards of living, they had much in common with other CoL households, and it made sense to classify them as part of CoL instead of being left out of the analysis or treated as a separate class (0.4% of HHs in Kisangarh and 1.4% in Vyapargarh).
7. Lastly, there were households who owned between 2.5 and 5 acres of land, who had wither leased out their land, primarily due to lack of any working age male member, and relied entirely on incomes from land rent, or relied on salary from a precarious private sector job or non-accumulating PCP activity that lacked security.[92] In terms of income levels, these households fared better than CoL households, and at par with PCP households, but due to their lack of engagement in any production process or their engagement in precarious informal sector activity, they were better seen as part of CoL than being excluded from the analysis or treated as part of PCP (2.8% of households in Kisangarh and 3.7% in Vyapargarh)

In sum, CoL households were easier to identify and made up for 54.9% of households in Kisangarh and 73.4% in Vyapargarh.

Next up, CoC households were identified using the following steps:

[92] There was also an interesting case of a Jutt Sikh female-headed household who owned 5.5 acres of land but had no working age member who could cultivate that land, so she had leased out the land. However, due to some legal battle for land among two married daughters of the family, she did not receive the rent for the leased-out land and had poor levels of incomes and standard of living. Considering this situation, this household was clubbed with CoL households.

1. First, households who owned and/or cultivated more than 10 acres of land, hired labour for most crop operations, and showed a history of accumulating agricultural assets and means of production over time were labelled as agrarian CoC (2.8% of HHs in Kisangarh and 0.5% in Vyapargarh)
2. Households who owned more than 10 acres of land and cultivated that land using primarily hired labour, while also engaging in surplus-accumulating non-farm business or secure government or private salaried job, or successful regular immigration to global North, or a combination of there were also seen as CoC (6% of HHs in Kisangarh and 1.1% in Vyapargarh).
3. Households who owned more than 10 acres of land but leased out all or most of it, usually due to lack of any resident working age member, and relied entirely or primarily on this rent, while also having an accumulating, secured non-farm source of income were also seen as CoC due to high land rent and their income from rent alone helping them in their expanded reproduction (2.8%of HHs in Kisangarh and 0% in Vyapargarh)
4. Households who owned between 5 and 10 acres of land, leased-in land, and engaged in agricultural production using primarily hired labour while also using some family labour, but were also engaged in surplus accumulating non-farm activities in which they may or may not hire much labour, were also seen as part of CoC (8.9% of HHs in Kisangarh and 2.3% in Vyapargarh)
5. Thereafter, households who owned between 5 and 10 acres of land, leased out all or most of their land, and were instead engaged in surplus accumulating non-farm businesses, secured government or private salaried jobs, or received significant remittances from a member settled and working in the global North countries, were also seen as part of CoC due to their diversified sources of income and expanded reproduction over time (2%of total households in Kisangarh and 0.8% in Vyapargarh)
6. Small and marginal landowners (less than 5 acres) who operated their land, sometimes leasing in land, and cultivated it using primarily hired labour alongside using family labour but also owned a non-farm business(es) or had one or more secured sources of income mentioned earlier. They also showed

history of accumulating surpluses over time and hence were better seen as part of CoC instead of PCP (2.8% of HHs in Kisangarh and 4.5% in Vyapargarh)

7. Small and marginal landowners (less than 5 acres) who had leased out all their land and instead engaged in surplus-accumulating non-farm business or secured employment in government sector or high paying private sector job or had migrated and settled in a country of global North or a combination of these were also seen as CoC. This was because of their high dependence on hired labour for production and their accumulation of surpluses over time (1.2% in Kisangarh and 5.1% in Vyapargarh).
8. Small and marginal landowners who had leased in large quantities of land which they cultivated on capitalist lines as their primary source of income, which also helped them accumulate surpluses over time were also seen as part of CoC (2% of HHs in Kisangarh and 0% in Vyapargarh)
9. Landless households that had either leased in land or had a non-farm business which was run on capitalist line through hired labour, in addition to other secured sources of income, were also seen as CoC due to their higher levels of income and standard of living, as well as their expanded reproduction over time (2% of HHs in Kisangarh and 1.4% of HHs in Vyapargarh).

In this case too, there were some borderline cases which are discussed below:

10. There were very few households who owned between 5 and 10 acres of land, leased out all or most of their land, and relied primarily or entirely on rental income and petty milk production, but due to very few family members, usually one or two, their per capita incomes were higher than their counterparts with similar landholdings. They were decided to be better seen as part of CoC instead of PCP due to their higher per capita income and their expanded reproduction (1.2 per cent of HHs in Kisangarh and 0.3% in Vyapargarh).
11. There were some households who owned less than 5 acres of land, leased-in some land, and relied primarily on hired labour for cultivation due to injury or unavailability of the male cultivating member, they were also seen as part of CoC despite their relatively lower levels of incomes (1.6% of HHs in Kisangarh and 0.6% in Vyapargarh).

In sum, CoC households constituted 34.1 per cent of households in Kisangarh and 16.1 per cent in Vyapargarh.

Finally, coming to identification of PCP households, the following stapes were taken:

1. Households who owned less than 2.5 acres of land, did not lease in land or leased in small portions of land, and cultivated it as their main source of income primarily using family labour were seen as PCP (1.62 per cent of HHs in Kisangarh and 5.9% in Vyapargarh)
2. Households who owned less than 2.5 acres of land, but leased it all out and instead engaged in non-accumulating PCP activity using primarily family labour were seen as PCP (0.81 per cent of HHs in Kisangarh and 0.3% in Vyapargarh)
3. Households who owned between 2.5 and 5 acres of land, did not lease-in land or leased-in small portions of land, which they cultivated using primarily family labour in a way that did not leave them with enough surplus for expanded reproduction were seen as part of PCP (5.7 per cent of HHs in Kisangarh and 2.3% in Vyapargarh)
4. Households who owned between 2.5 and 5 acres of land, which they leased out, and instead engaged in non-accumulating PCP activity using primarily family labour were also seen as PCP (0.81 per cent of HHs in Kisangarh and 0.6% in Vyapargarh)
5. Landless households who were engaged in non-accumulating PCP activity using primarily family labour were also clubbed under PCPs (2.01 per cent of HHs in Kisangarh and 1.4% in Vyapargarh)

Borderline cases

1. Households who owned between 5 and 10 acres of land and had leased out all or most of their land and did not engage in production process and relied entirely or primarily on land rent for their reproduction, usually when there was no working age member in the household, were also seen as PCP even they did not engage in any commodity, instead of being left out from the analysis. This was also because their income from rent usually matched households with PCP features (0% in Kisangarh and 0% in Vyapargarh).

In sum, PCP households constituted 10.95 per cent of total households in Kisangarh and 10.5% in Vyapargarh.

Appendix 4.2: List of labouring class organisations interviewed in the fieldwork regions:

Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee (ZPSC)

Krantikari Pendu Mazdoor Union (KPMU)

Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union (PKMU)

Pendu Mazdoor Union (PMU)

Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS)

Volunteer for Social Justice Punjab (VSJ)

Appendix 7.1 *Sector and nature of paid employment and unpaid self-employment of working-age members of the CoL households in Kisangarh, caste-class wise, 2021-22*

	Kisangarh						
All employment	Conjugated oppressed men	Conjugated oppressed women	Conjugated oppressed total	Savarna CoL men	Savarna CoL women	Savarna CoL total	All CoL workers
Casual wage employment (informal)	35.2	**41.2**	**37.6**	23.5	10.5	**18.9**	**34.8**
Casual labourers (floating across sectors, locations and jobs) *dehadidaar*	16.2	16.8	16.4	8.8	0.0	5.7	14.8
Casual agri labourers *(khet mazdoor)*	2.2	8.4	4.7	2.9	0.0	1.9	4.3
Casual labourers in single non-agri work	16.8	16.0	16.4	11.8	10.5	11.3	15.7
Self-employment only (informal small-scale)	12.8	22.7	**16.8**	32.4	78.9	**49.1**	**21.7**
Animal rearing only	3.4	**16.0**	**8.4**	14.7	**63.2**	**32.1**	12.0
Farming and animal rearing	2.2	0.8	1.7	5.9	0.0	3.8	2.0
Petty non-agri self-employment only	6.7	5.9	6.4	5.9	10.5	7.5	6.6
Mixing agri and non-agri self-employment	0.6	0.0	0.3	5.9	5.3	5.7	1.1
Mixing wage employment and self-employment (informal)	36.3	35.3	**35.9**	17.6	5.3	13.2	**32.5**
Farmer-Labourer	2.8	0.0	1.7	5.9	0.0	3.8	2.0
Labourer-farmers	11.2	0.8	7.0	5.9	0.0	3.8	6.6
Dairy farmer-labourer	1.7	**24.4**	**10.7**	0.0	5.3	1.9	**9.4**
Labourer-dairy farmer	12.8	7.6	**10.7**	5.9	0.0	3.8	**9.7**
Non-agri self-employment plus labourer	2.8	1.7	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0
Labourer and non-agri self-employment	5.0	0.8	3.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.8
Regular waged employment	12.3	0.8	**7.7**	**23.5**	5.3	17.0	**9.1**
Annual Agricultural labour (*seerie*)	2.8	0.0	1.7	2.9	0.0	1.9	1.7
Pvt regular salaried (formal, skilled)	2.2	0.0	1.3	5.9	0.0	3.8	1.7
Pvt regular salaried (informal, semi-skilled)	5.0	0.0	3.0	8.8	0.0	5.7	3.4
Pvt regular salaried and petty self-employment	2.2	0.8	1.7	5.9	5.3	5.7	2.3
Govt salaried (formal)	2.2	0.0	1.3	2.9	0.0	1.9	1.4
Govt salaried	2.2	0.0	1.3	2.9	0.0	1.9	1.4
Govt pensioners and petty self-employment	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Appendix 7.2 *Sector and nature of paid employment and unpaid self-employment of working-age members of the CoL households in Vyapargarh, caste-class wise, 2021-22*

	Vyapargarh						
All employment	Conjugated oppressed men	Conjugated oppressed women	Conjugated oppressed total	Savarna CoL men	Savarna CoL women	Savarna CoL total	All CoL workers
Casual wage employment only	**55.8**	**68.2**	60.3	**21.0**	**19.0**	20.5	**50.1**
Casual labourers (floating across sectors, locations and jobs)	35.0	28.2	32.5	1.7	0.0	1.2	24.5
Casual agri labourers	4.1	20.6	10.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.5
Casual labourers in single non-agri work	15.3	19.4	16.8	19.3	19.0	19.3	17.4
Self-employment only	**10.2**	**15.9**	12.3	**19.3**	**69.0**	32.3	17.4
AH only	2.4	5.3	3.4	5.9	64.3	21.1	8.0
Farming and animal rearing	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.6	2.4	6.2	1.6
Petty non-agri self-employment only	7.5	10.6	8.6	4.2	2.4	3.7	7.4
Mixing agri and non-agri self-employment	0.3	0.0	0.2	1.7	0.0	1.2	0.5
Mixing wage employment and self-employment	**9.9**	**11.8**	10.6	**14.3**	**2.4**	11.2	10.7
Farmer-Labourer	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.6	0.2
Labourer-farmers	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.7	0.0	5.0	1.3
Dairy farmer-labourer	1.7	8.8	4.3	0.8	0.0	0.6	3.4
Labourer-dairy farmer	4.4	2.4	3.7	5.9	2.4	5.0	4.0
Non-agri self-employment plus labourer	2.0	0.6	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1
Labourer and non-agri self-employment	1.7	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8
Regular waged employment	**11.2**	**2.4**	8.0	**21.0**	0.0	15.5	9.9
Siri labour	1.7	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8
Pvt regular salaried (formal, skilled)	1.0	0.0	0.6	0.8	0.0	0.6	0.6
Pvt regular salaried (informal, semi-skilled)	6.8	2.4	5.2	15.1	0.0	11.2	6.7
Pvt regular salaried and petty self-employment	0.7	0.0	0.4	5.0	0.0	3.7	1.3
Others	1.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5
Govt salaried	**5.1**	**1.8**	3.9	**10.9**	**2.4**	8.7	5.1
Govt salaried	3.1	1.2	2.4	7.6	0.0	5.6	3.2
Govt pensioners and petty self-employment	2.0	0.6	1.5	3.4	2.4	3.1	1.9
Migrants to the Gulf and other developing countries	7.8	0.0	5.0	10.9	2.4	8.7	5.9
First world migrant	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.5	4.8	3.1	0.8
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	100.0	**100.0**	**100.0**	100.0	100.0

Appendix 4.1 Fieldwork Survey Questionnaire

Survey Questionnaire								
Village	**Nona**		Survey starting Time			Household Number		
Name of Head of Household			Sex			Caste	Religion	
Name of Father/Husband and Grandfather			Occupation of Father/Husband			PDS exclusion (if any)		
NREGA Job cards (no.)			Labour Card (Laal Copy) (Y/N)			Co-operative society membership (Y/N)		
Address						Phone No		
Household members								
Total members (no.)	M	F						
Children	M	F	Public schools			Private schools (name of school)		
Adult members in education	M	F	Public institutions			Private institutions (name of college)		
Any member studying IELTS	M	F						
Land (in acres)								
Land owned or possessed (2021-22)			Land leased out or mortgaged out (2021-22)					
Land cultivated (2021-22)			Land leased-in or mortgaged in (2021-22)					
If landless Jat, ask whether they owned land earlier? If land leased in, occupation of the lessor and his land ownership If pure tenant, land ownership of lessor If land leased out, land ownership and operation of tenant If pure lessor, year since leasing out land and reason for leasing out land								

Employment												
Member	Name	Relationship to HoH	Education Level	Primary Occupation	Place of work	Days of work	Secondary Occupation	Place of work	Days of work	Other occupations	Place of work	Days of work
HoH												
2												
3												
4												
5												
6												
7												
8												
9												

Did any member get married in the last 5 years?

If any member(s) lives abroad, their year of emigration?

Non-farm Business		
	First	Second
Type of non-farm business		
Year of establishment		
Employment generated (in peak and lean season)		

Terms of employment (daily wage labourers; salaried workers etc)		

(To be asked from labouring class households only)

Did any member of the household migrate to another district or state for work? If yes, add details in the above table

Did any member of the household work in paddy transplanting this year? If yes, add details in the above table

Did any member work in cultivation of potato, peas, sugar beet and other crops last year?

Did any member of the household work as household help for another household? If yes, add details

Did any member of the household work in NREGA? If yes, add details

Did any member work in house-based work such as tailoring or beauty parlour or private tuitions?

Cropping Pattern

	Wheat	Paddy	Basmati	Peas	Potato	Beet root	Maize	Moong	Other
Extent									

Do you plan to use DSR for paddy transplanting?

Machine and Labour use

Do you own a tractor or do you hire it for cultivation?

If you own it, does any household member operate it or do you hire labour for land preparation?

Do you own a tubewell or do you pay rent for water?

Do you provide employment to anyone for full year? (for agriculture or animal care)

Do you provide employment to anyone to apply urea or to spray insecticides?

Do you provide employment to anyone to harvest fodder?

Do you provide employment to anyone on monthly basis during paddy season?

Apart from this, do you provide employment to anyone for any other agricultural tasks?

Micro-Finance and Credit (from small farmers and labouring classes)

Do you have any outstanding loan from micro-finance companies?

If yes, number of outstanding loans

Name of the finance company

Instalment amount for outstanding loans

Did you fail to repay any instalment last year? If yes, what were the consequences?
Do you have outstanding loans from any other source? If yes, source and amount
Have you received any government loan? For livestock or construction or for commercial/business purposes?
Did you lose any money in Micro Finance or Chit Fund Scams? If yes, details.

When was the house constructed?
Did you make any repairs to the house in the last 5 years?

Details of Livestock owned (if any)

Animals	Total	Milch
Buffalo		
Cows		
Calf		

Do you provide employment to anyone to take care of the livestock?
Area of cowshed/baagal

Collective Action

Is any member part of any farmer organisation or Dalit/labourer organisation or political party?
Name of the organisation

Date of Survey		**Duration of Survey**	

Name of the respondent
Location of interview (within household premises or outside)
Whether any outsider present during interview

Comments	