Land, Labour, Dispossession, and Politics among Scheduled Tribes in India: Framing an Adivasi Agrarian Question

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Abstract

This thesis conceptualises and enquires into an *Adivasi Agrarian Question*, rooted in Agrarian Marxism, to explore the class dynamics of ongoing agrarian changes among Adivasis. It studies i) land and labour as their bases of reproduction and differentiation, ii) dispossession, and iii) compares political struggles between two villages, one where social reproduction is primarily agrarian and the other primarily non-agrarian.

Its comparative analysis of West Bengal and Chhattisgarh finds that adivasis are internally differentiated owing to historical inequalities and through the dynamics of agrarian change and capitalist relations within and beyond agriculture. They also face varying forms of dispossession. In response, they pursue different political strategies focused on defending their land, better working conditions and wages, or making claims of the state.

In Chhattisgarh, land-based occupations form the primary basis of Kawars' simple and expanded reproduction while Majhis and Agarias are typically landless and dependent on farm labour and precarious non-agrarian wage work. In the face of impending displacement due to coal mining, adivasis here have formed a cross-class cross-caste resistance with OBC groups. Building on a history of land and labour rights mobilisations, its current form advances the interests of petty capital, undermining the interests of adivasi classes of labour.

In West Bengal, Santhals are land-poor, primarily working as labourers in the urban construction sector, with limited differentiation through non-agrarian petty commodity production and salaried employment. Lodhas are landless and work under oppressive conditions in agricultural and non-agricultural wage work, demonstrating stigmatised exploitation between adivasi classes of labour. Faced with individual dispossession due to urbanisation and legacies of land reforms, Santhals are unable to build solidarities in defense of land rights or make demands to improve conditions of wage work. They focus on making welfare demands of the ruling party in return for electoral support, excluding Lodhas from such claim-making.

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Acronym

AAQ: Adivasi Agrarian Question

AQ: Agrarian Question

AQL: Agrarian Question of Labour

BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party

CITU: The Centre of Indian Trade Unions

CPM: Communist Party of India (Marxist)

FRA: Forest Rights Act, 2006

LARR: The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement Act, 2013

NREGA: National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005

NSSO: National Sample Survey Organisation

PESA: Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996

PVTG: Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups

PDS: Public Distribution System

TMC: Trinamool Congress

WB: West Bengal

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1. Introduction

On a sultry September day in I glanced at my watch and quickened my steps to return to Durgawati's house in Birampalli village in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh, when I saw a big ambulance parked in the middle of the village. It was past noon, and my host would be waiting up for lunch until I returned home after my first round of the village for interviews in the mornings. Durgawati, a Dalit widow, was the host for my stay in this predominantly adivasi[1] and Dalit[2] village. I saw the name of a private mining company written across the body of the ambulance in English, though people were still debating about where it came from. Lunch times were particularly quiet in Birampalli with men and women returning from the fields after multiple hours of work since early morning, to eat their meals of rice and lentils, with some stir fried pumpkin or bittergourd leaves on the side, and rest for an hour before resuming work. I told Durgawati about the ambulance, mentioning the name of the company in English written on the vehicle. For Durgawati who was on edge about a 'hearing' for a coal mine that would dispossess the village she came to newly married at 15, this was too much to bear. She rushed out of her home in anger and screamed at the vehicle staff and demanded to know who had sent them. One of the medical staff, partly amused and somewhat surprised at such an angry outburst casually said, no one had sent them. Durgawati was furious. 'Did you just fall from the sky? Did God send you for us?' To this one of the nurses in the vehicle said, 'We have come for regular check-ups, just in case anyone needed a quick consultation.' Durgawati screamed at them to leave immediately. The hesitance of the medical staff only made her angrier. She said, she did not need any healthcare provisions from the 'company'. She said she could travel to the government hospital (about 20 kms away) if she was ill, and she was happy to ask the *sarkar* (government) for food, water, healthcare, or education for themselves. Her rage and refusal to accept anything from the company, emboldened by increasing anger from other women from neighbouring households gathering around her, sent the vehicle out of Birampalli soon enough. The ambulance was meant as a symbol of welfare and development that would be in reach of Birampalli, once the 'company' was brought in.

Ironically, Birampalli was not even losing land to the private company that had just engaged in this act of manufacturing consent; Birampalli was due to give up land for a public sector power generation company, the private company sending out branded ambulances was the chosen mine developer, divulging the stakes that both private and public capital had in the project. The resistance to the displacement was neither

[1] Adivasi and tribes are used interchangeably in this thesis.
[2] Dalit or scheduled caste people in India comprised of the lowest ranks in the oppressive Hindu caste system.

egalitarian nor inclusive of all classes and social groups, but its contentious politics projected a broad-based mobilisation against the onslaught of extractive coal mining in one of the most backward districts of the state.

In the village of Ranipalli in Jhargram, West Bengal (WB), where Santhal adivasis live alongside OBC[3] Mahatos, *Makar,* celebrating harvest of paddy in January remains the biggest festival. While all Santhal households are landless or marginal farmers here, this festival has always been celebrated over three days with earnings from hastily sold paddy right after harvest or from wage earnings from farm labour earned in harvesting. Santhals celebrate it by making sweetmeats on the eve of *Makar* cooked with chicken or pork, eaten from evening till next morning. While savouring sweetmeats visiting multiple Santhal homes on *Makar*'s crisp winter morning here, I saw two old Lodha women from a nearby hamlet, also adivasis, visiting Santhal and Mahato homes seeking rice, old clothes, or anything that these households could afford to give. As I visited Lodha hamlets and households in the region, I realised it was common to use the names 'Santhals' and 'Adivasis' interchangeably here, while Lodhas were never referred to as 'adivasis' but only called by the name of their tribe, denying them the same social status as the numerically dominant Santhals.

A common folklore about Lodhas I heard multiple times in Jhargram involves a Lodha man and his container of rice. The Lodha, in this story, wakes up in the morning and tries to move a container of rice by the bedside with his feet. If he can easily, he knows it is empty and will go for work. And if he cannot, he knows it is still full for the day, and would stay back. Despite their work force participation rate being higher than WB's average for both adivasis and all social groups, this image of a Lodha as lazy and unwilling to work hard is repeated by contractors, Santhals and Mahatos. It represented how unequal forms of wage work between adivasi groups in geographical proximity persisted based on racialised stigma worsened under contemporary capitalism.

These narratives point towards the multiple processes of dispossession, accumulation, exploitation, and resistance that are intensified as capitalist forces make deeper inroads into the tribal heartlands of India, albeit unevenly and with varying intensity. This thesis examines the class dynamics of ongoing agrarian changes among adivasis in India enquiring into the dynamisms of drawing reproductive needs from land and wage labour work, dispossession, and politics through comparative political economic study of the states of West Bengal and Chhattisgarh. To do so, it conceptualises and enquires into an *Adivasi Agrarian*

[3] OBC or Other Backward class in India is a list of caste groups that are socially and economically disadvantaged. Since the Census data does not capture caste data, estimates vary on the percentage of OBC population in the country. Latest available estimates suggest they comprise 40-45 percent of India's population.

Question, that examines the class dynamics of capitalist agrarian transitions among adivasis in contemporary India through the analytical lens of Agrarian Marxism or 'Agrarian Questions' (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010b, 2010a; Levien et al., 2018) which encapsulates debates on reproductive conditions, accumulation and dispossession, and politics. The comparative framework shows the unevenness and inequalities in such capitalist transitions which are not just empirical variations of processes of structural and spatial transformations, as agrarian change continues in regionally specific and historically contingent manner. Adivasis, who are differentiated between and within them, are impacted unequally with processes of increasing reliance on wage labour in agrarian and non-agrarian sector, continuing or halted processes of development of capitalist relations in agriculture, and nature of dispossession. In response, they pursue different forms of political alliances and strategies to make divergent demands on land, labour rights, and social welfare.

This thesis contributes to debates on Agrarian Marxism on agrarian change and progressive politics through its focus on fragmentation of reproductive strategies between agrarian/non agrarian and rural/urban with continuing dispossessions, showing how it creates disparate dynamics of class inequalities intersected along the lines of tribe, caste, gender, age, and disability (Bernstein, 2006, 2010; Bernstein & Byres, 2001; Borras Jr, 2020; T. J. Byres, 2016; Edelman et al., 2013; Harriss-White & Gooptu, 2001; Lerche, 2013; Pattenden, 2023; A. Shah & Harriss-White, 2011). A comparative framework allows for furthering understanding of regionally specific agrarian questions in rural and agrarian India (Lerche, 2014; Mohanty, 2016; U. Patnaik, 2001). In Chhattisgarh, land-based occupations are central to adivasis' reproductive needs and currently are under threat with the onslaught of extractive coal mining; in WB, adivasis drawing primary sources of reproduction from non-agrarian wage work, are threatened by dispossession through expanding urban frontiers and developing land markets. The impact of these processes of industrialisation and urbanisation are felt unequally between and within Adivasi groups, linked to existing agrarian structures and inequalities, co-constituted by multiplicities of Adivasi politics.

It contributes to scholarship on adivasis by examining inequalities within and between tribes, while also exploring their marginalisation compared to other social groups in both reproduction and politics. The class inequalities between adivasi groups and relations of exploitation between them within geographical proximity due to historical processes and contemporary capitalist development, that this thesis explores, has remained under-explored in such scholarship. In its empirical analysis it shows the significance, fluidity and fragmentation across *both* realms of land and labour as bases of reproduction and politics, without valorising either for adivasis, nuancing literature on Adivasi livelihood and politics that focuses on any one

aspect (S. K. Bhowmik, 2014; Lerche & Shah, 2018; Mosse et al., 2005; Oskarsson & Sareen, 2020; Padel & Das, 2010; Prasad, 2014, 2021; A. Shah, 2013; A. Shah et al., 2017; N. Sundar, 2016).

Adivasis or indigenous groups in India, classified by the Indian constitution as Scheduled Tribes and comprising 8.6 percent of its population, form the most marginalised social group in the country. There are 705 recognised tribes who are 'enormously diverse and heterogeneous' in 'languages spoken, size of population and mode of livelihood' (Government of India, 2014, p. 34). A background paper published for the UN Human Development Report in 2010 found that adivasis were the most deprived social group in the multi-dimensional poverty index (Kannan, 2018, p. 39). 70 percent of India's multi-dimensionally poor are concentrated in eight states of West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, majorly in the central-eastern parts of the country (Ibid, p. 49). This overlaps with the predominantly Adivasi-inhabited territories in the country (apart from seven states in the Northeast), whose levels of poverty, education, consumption, and health are worse than all other social categories.

The gap in literacy rate between scheduled tribes and Indian average was 14.6 percent in 2011 (Government of India, 2014, p. 182), with language barriers between tribal students and the pedagogy as a significant impediment for their access to higher education. With regards to health, the gap between infant mortality rate among tribals and other social groups was 27 percent which rose to 39 percent for mortality for children below five years with high levels of undernutrition and deficiency in nutrition intake (Ibid, p. 241). In the North East, the poverty levels and development indicators among tribes are better than in these central/eastern belts (A. Shah et al., 2017, p. xvii) and the legal framework of governing tribes provides them for greater autonomy compared to adivasis in central and eastern India (Sakhrani, 2019; Wahi & Bhatia, 2018, p. 17; V. Xaxa, 2023). This thesis concerns itself with adivasis in central/eastern India.

In India, both the colonial and post-colonial state's imagination of the tribe presents an authentic intimate relationship of the tribe with the natural surrounding they inhabit, which led the state to create a complex legislative and administrative framework in a bid to protect the adivasis from expulsion from their traditional habitat. This protective framework in post-colonial India, encapsulated in the formation of the Fifth Schedule of the constitution, was 'marked by an oscillation between the fear of armed uprising, ideas of paternalistic protection, as well as a form of racism that underpinned both the fear and the paternalism' (N. Sundar, 2023, p. 10). While it valorised the relationship of adivasis with land, it created state-demarcated territories where protection of adivasis was mandated, leaving many Adivasi areas outside its ambit. It transferred power over these territories to the Governor of the state, an unelected titular head

with little executive and legislative capacities. The power imbalance between upper caste groups and adivasis both in state and central government and the 'reluctance' of the central government to implement the protective framework 'meant that the operation of the 5th schedule was a doomed cause from the beginning' (Ibid, p. 23).

Therefore, adivasis have borne a disproportionate burden of displacement in the post-colonial period due to the inadequacy of the protective framework in its ambit and in implementation worsened by aggressive state acquisition of vast swathes of such 'protected' adivasi land for purposes of industrialisation, urbanisation, dams, irrigation projects (Burra, 2009; Fernandes, 2009; Fernandes & Paranjape, 1997; Padel, 2018). Less than a quarter of those displaced in the post-colonial times have been rehabilitated (Wahi & Bhatia, 2018, p. 11). Such expulsions, particularly since 1990s, have been contested by a 'regime of representation' of adivasis (Baviskar, 2020, p. 279) who have used their indigenous identity and valorisation of their relationship with land to defend their habitats, though with very limited success (Oskarsson & Sareen, 2020).

The historically inherited inequalities in access to land from colonial times and the aggravated dispossession in the post-colonial period have pushed adivasis, like the rural poor in other parts of India, to increasingly diversify their income resources and depend on wage labour work in the informal economy to sustain themselves. The conditions of wage work in India, it has been shown, are marked by high rates of unemployment under neoliberal reforms, where between 2010 and 2018, the economy grew by 3.6 percent and the rate of employment grew by 1 percent (P. Jha & Prasad, 2020, p. 3). Informality, insecurity and precarity mark both agricultural and non-agricultural wage labour work (Basole, 2018; Basole & Jayadev, 2019; C. P. Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2014). The NSSO labour force survey in 2017-18 shows unemployment at an all-time high of 6.1 percent which by March, 2023 had grown to 7.8 percent (P. Jha & Prasad, 2020, p. 4; T. Roy, 2023). The informal economy continues to employ 80 percent of India's working population, marked by high proportion of informal self-employment in both agrarian and non-agrarian sectors (S. Bhattacharya et al., 2023). The annual Employment-Unemployment surveys of the Labour Bureau in 2011 showed 82 percent of India's male and 92 percent female workers earn less than Rs 10,000 a month (Basole, 2018, p. 18).

The scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are 'over-represented in low paying occupations and severely under-represented in the high paying occupations' with heavy disparity in pay with upper caste workers (Ibid, p. 22-23), also reflected in works of multiple scholars (Breman, 1996; Breman et al., 2009; Deshpande, 2000; Kannan, 2018; Kapadia, 1995; Lerche, 1999; A. Shah et al., 2017). The proportion of rural adivasi men

and women working as casual wage labourers in 2009-10 is considerably higher than other social groups (Karat & Rawal, 2014). As wage labourers, adivasis are entrenched in the lowest echelons in the informal economy (A. Shah et al., 2017) and research in public sector enterprises in central and eastern India have shown, they face stigmatised exclusions even in formal sector industrial jobs (Parry, 2013; Strümpell, 2022). Despite provisions of affirmative action in government jobs and higher education institutions, access to such jobs and education have remained far from the recommended reservation for adivasis (V. Xaxa, 2001).

However, the lens of marginalisation and pauperisation of adivasis in the post-colonial state can lead to a homogenisation of Adivasi experience under contemporary capitalism. In a review of scholarship on Adivasi livelihood and politics in India, Chandra writes 'While human poverty and degradation remain vital issues in these areas, they cannot be said to exist exclusively there; nor can it be said reasonably that they are all that exist in these areas' (2015, p. 305). As capitalism unevenly spreads in the agrarian and rural, it continues to deepen processes of differentiation and accumulation, even though not directly linked with industrial growth (Lerche, 2013). Therefore, agrarian change under capitalist development does not result into a homogenous impact of marginalisation and pauperisation among adivasis, as differentiations are witnessed with regards to both land and wage labour-based occupations. Chandra's critique is borne out by the latest land ownership data among adivasis, as well as some recent scholarship that documents limited differentiation among adivasis through access to secured jobs via affirmative action (Higham & Shah, 2013; A. Shah, 2010), wage work in the non-farm economy as mine workers (Nayak, 2022a; Noy, 2020; Strümpell, 2022) and through processes of disbursal of state welfare benefits (A. Shah, 2010; V. Xaxa, 2008).

9.4 percent of scheduled tribes are landless compared to the Indian average of 7.4 percent (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2017, p. 33; Wahi & Bhatia, 2018, p. 11); also, their share of households with marginal landholding is lowest among all social groups at 68.8 percent. While large farmers are almost negligible among adivasis (0.03 percent against Indian average of 0.24 percent), the cumulative share of small, semi-medium and medium farmers at 21.74 percent of households is much higher than the Indian average and identical to that of the forward caste households (Calculated from Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2017, p. 33). This indicates that despite alarming rates of alienation, the land possession of adivasis does not simply indicate pauperisation. And yet, to what extent it shows the processes of differentiation, and what might be the drivers of such processes, are both under-explored within the scholarship on adivasis, which this thesis addresses.

With regards to labour relations too, much work on adivasis has focused on their role as migrant workers, highlighting their precarity but also demonstrating the freedom and the ability to earn better from such migration (Donegan, 2018; Mosse et al., 2002; A. Shah, 2006; A. Shah et al., 2017). Macro-economic data recently has also indicated improved representation of adivasis in public administration jobs secured through affirmative action (Basole, 2018, p. 137), which shows processes of marginalisation and class mobility are working together among adivasis. Among coal mining workers, adivasis have been able to find, better paid employment leading to opportunities of class mobility (Nayak, 2022a; Noy, 2020). Even in informal manual wage work, Yadav's thesis on Gond adivasis in Madhya Pradesh shows that the Gonds 'experience dignity' and 'exercise agency' in the informal economy, by seeking forms of manually arduous wage work that face labour shortage in quarries that leads them to negotiate better wages with capital (Yadav, 2018). However, how inequalities within the agrarian structures relate to unequal forms of wage work and whether and to what extent conditions of wage work are differentiated within and between adivasis, driving processes of exploitation and domination, remains underexplored in scholarship on adivasis. This thesis addresses these gaps, of studying reproduction, accumulation and exploitation in land and wage labour work of adivasis, and how they are changing under forces of capitalism, impacted by variations in dispossession processes.

And these changes can be fully comprehended by adding a third dimension to understanding impact of agrarian changes in both land and labour as bases of reproduction, that of Adivasi politics that continue to shape both. The political engagement of adivasis is studied here beyond the debates on adivasis' opposition to the state, and the prism of depicting them as 'rebels' opposing forces of state intervention and/or capitalism (P. Banerjee, 2006a; A. Shah, 2010; N. Sundar, 2023, p. 2; V. Xaxa, 2008). There are also aspects of Adivasi politics, such as those connected with their cultural identity and belonging (Padel et al., 2013; Savyasaachi, 1994; N. Sundar, 2010; V. Xaxa, 2016) which the thesis will not explore in depth. It addresses the processes of negotiation and resistance among adivasis to ongoing agrarian changes related to access to land and labour work, loss of land, conditions of wage work, and access to state welfare benefits, which co-constitute their reproductive conditions and strategies.

Therefore, with the aim to explore the complexities of the processes of such agrarian change and politics in Adivasi lives and Adivasi inhabited areas under contemporary capitalism, I frame the key research questions as follows:

How can we understand the variations in ongoing processes of capitalist agrarian transitions amongst adivasis in rural India? How do the ensuing changes in class dynamics and reproduction impact Adivasi politics in negotiating or resisting such transformations?

This is broken down into three sub-questions:

a) In what ways and to what extent do adivasis draw their reproductive needs from land vis-à-vis non-agrarian work? What are the processes through which accumulation and exploitation are ongoing in Adivasi areas?

b) What are the processes of alienation from land that adivasis face under capitalism?

c) How and in what ways do Adivasi politics resist or negotiate such rural transformations?

The thesis is conceptually and methodologically grounded in Marxist political economy in the debates of the 'Agrarian Questions' (AQ) (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010a, 2010b; Levien et al., 2018), that in its core, unpack the impact of capitalism on agrarian society. Agrarian Questions is a body of scholarship that provides a 'rigorously flexible framework' that allows one to understand 'material conditions governing rural production, reproduction, and the processes of agrarian accumulation or its lack thereof' (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010b, p. 255) with its historical and regional specificities. I use the AQ framework to conceptualise an *Adivasi Agrarian Question*, which I define broadly as *the study of agrarian change and politics among heterogeneous Adivasi classes of farmers and labour stratified by both class and tribe.*

As I elaborate in the next chapter, AAQ has three non-discrete and co-constitutive elements: a) the agrarian question of labour (AQL), which encapsulates reproductive bases and strategies via land-based occupations or wage labour work, b) dispossession, and c) politics. The agrarian question scholarship has discussed reproductive conditions with regards to land (Araghi, 2009, 2012; Borras Jr, 2020; Edelman et al., 2013; Moyo et al., 2013; Shattuck et al., 2023; White et al., 2013) and labour (Bernstein, 2010, 2012; Lerche, 2009; Pattenden, 2016a, 2020; A. Shah & Lerche, 2020), but have focused on either one or the other. There is a growing body of scholarship on the fragmentation and fluidity of those living in the rural and agrarian, where 'pluri-active' households move between rural and urban, agrarian and non-agrarian spaces for livelihood (Bernstein, 2006; Borras Jr, 2023b; Djurfeldt & Sircar, 2016; Lerche, 2009; Pattenden, 2018; A. Shah & Harriss-White, 2011). Henry Bernstein's conceptualisation of 'classes of labour' provides the analytical entry point to this fragmentation of reproductive bases across occupations and spaces, seasonally, within households and over a lifetime (Bernstein, 2006, 2010, 2016). Classes of labour correspond to such pluri-active households, defining them as households that depend on wage work to

reproduce themselves, and may have some access to land to support reproductive needs. The debates on fluidity and fragmentation of reproductive bases, which have led to debates on fragmentation and solidarities of progressive politics (Bernstein, 2021; Borras Jr, 2023a; Pattenden, 2023; Scoones et al., 2018), have debated the primacy of land vs labour, agrarian vs non-agrarian, and urban vs rural for marginalised classes in both reproduction and politics.

The AAQ allows me to go beyond these binaries to conceptualise adivasis as drawing reproduction from both land and labour, exploring linkages between agrarian inequalities and conditions of wage work, manifesting differently in different parts of India, co-constituting Adivasi politics in diverse ways. This contributes to the scholarship on Adivasi livelihood, dispossession, and politics as mentioned above; and speaks to the rich literature on contemporary framing of agrarian questions, focused on class dynamics of agrarian change, and the forming of progressive politics and alliances.

To empirically investigate into the AAQ, I use a comparative political economy approach to study agrarian change and politics in the two states of Chhattisgarh and West Bengal in Central and Eastern India. I selected Birampalli village in Raigarh district in Chhattisgarh and Ranipalli village in Jhargram district in WB for the comparative study. Differences in their agrarian structures and history, with varying levels of work participation in land-based occupations and wage labour work, different contexts of urbanisation and industrialisation, and contrasting adaptation of the Fifth Scheduled provisions form the basis of this comparative study.

Chhattisgarh, carved out of Madhya Pradesh, adopted the provisions of Fifth Schedule of the constitution, demarcating territories for 'protection' of tribes. 19 of its districts are partially or fully covered under such scheduling and Raigarh is partially under Fifth schedule provisions. In contrast, despite sizeable tribal population in pockets, WB did not adopt the Fifth schedule and did not demarcate areas for Adivasi protection. The two states also throw up contrasting regional patterns of capitalist transition with regards to cultivation, agricultural and non-agricultural wage work forming bases of reproduction. Only 16 percent of WB's adivasis report cultivation as a main source of income while 72 percent depend on manual casual labour work for their livelihood (SECC Census, 2011). In contrast, 52 percent of Chhattisgarh's adivasis report cultivation as the main source of income with 42 percent depending on manual casual labour work (Ibid). The contrast in bases of reproduction is also reflected in the state level figures for employment generation. Agriculture generated 43 percent income in WB against 74 percent in Chhattisgarh, while the manufacturing sector generated 19 percent income in WB against 5.9 percent in Chhattisgarh (Lerche, 2014, p. 48). These differences also would reflect in variations in processes of reproduction, exploitation,

and accumulation between the two sites of enquiry. Moreover, Raigarh and Jhargram also differed in the extent of industrialisation and urbanisation, which I hypothesised would reflect varying patterns of reproduction and availability of non-agrarian wage work. Being a coal-rich district, Raigarh has mines, sponge iron factories and power plants which has led to the urbanisation of many blocks within the district, with or without reclassification of these areas as urban. In contrast, except for the Jhargram town, Jhargam district is entirely rural, with little industrial development. It is a newly formed district carved out in 2017 in response to an armed insurgency against the state government in the region and has seen increased government focus on welfare spending for adivasis in the region.

In studying the *class dynamics of reproduction, accumulation, differentiation, exploitation, and resistance among adivasis in India* in these two states, I show that access to land is sharply unequal between the two sites, and between and within adivasi groups in each site rooted in historical inequalities. On the first aspect of the AAQ, the AQL, I contend the extent of income drawn from cultivation vary widely for adivasis between the two states, and between adivasi groups in each site, due to differences in landholding sizes, fertility, development of capitalist relations and accumulation in agriculture, and access to credit and public procurement of agricultural produce. In Birampalli in Chhattisgarh, cultivable land was largely owned by Kawar adivasis, excluding Majhi and Agaria adivasis from owning land, with sharp inequalities within the Kawars in landholdings. In Ranipalli, Santhal adivasis held only fragmented marginal holdings with high incidences of landlessness, while Lodhas in a nearby hamlet were entirely landless. Low soil fertility, tiny holdings, and appropriation of surplus by commercial capital allows for no accumulation for Santhal households in cultivation, categorising all adivasi households here as classes of labour.

The differences in access to cultivable land and relations of production in cultivation led to variations in income drawn from wage work, while differences in industrialisation and urbanisation shape the conditions of work available for adivasis. In Birampalli, landless and land poor adivasis still depend substantially on agricultural wage work, in absence of regular income from the mining sector, mainly due to preference for migrant workers. Those with at least 2-3 acres of land, which excludes Agarias, Majhis and a section of the Kawars, can shield themselves from harshest conditions of mining work, relying primarily on cultivation. In Ranipalli, all Santhal households must perform wage work, mainly in the construction sector in an expanding town, with differentiated access and wages between men and women.

Dispossession in both sites also continue in very different ways: while Birampalli faces complete displacement from state-led acquisition due to a coal mining project which has already received all regulatory approvals impacting all households simultaneously, Ranipalli's adivasis face the brunt of

individualised piecemeal land alienation due to an expanding town and developing land markets which target their land for its real estate value. These processes of dispossession are different between the two sites in their scale, pace, and impact on the AQL, interacting with existing agrarian inequalities in varied ways.

The two aspects of AAQ, the AQL and dispossession, are co-constituted by Adivasi politics which have taken different shapes in each site, each looking beyond binaries of land and labour-based income in their reproductive strategies. In Birampalli, a resistance against the dispossession has managed broad based solidarities currently, in defence of land rights. This movement has garnered support both due to their own experience of compensatory jobs in the mines after a land loss in the past, and their current experience of seeking employment in the industrial sector. In Ranipalli, mobilisations in defence of fragmented semi-fertile holdings or in improving conditions of wage work in the informal economy have been difficult for adivasis who have now strengthened their alliances with the political party in power to negotiate for better delivery of social welfare benefits. Though the ruling party continues to mediate on behalf of capital in both land alienation and precarity in wage work, Ranipalli's adivasis have rallied behind the party for their dependence on state benefits for reproductive needs.

The theoretical and empirical enquiry into the AAQ shows how adivasis frame their politics in diverse and regionally specific ways, shaped by not just a 'range of access to a range of land' (Borras et al., 2022, p. 319) but also a range of access to a range of labour work, straddling between rural/urban and agrarian/non-agrarian. As dispossession processes continue across Adivasi-inhabited areas within varying trends in AQL, Adivasi politics responds not simply by valorising one dimension (land or labour) of the AQL but links its experiences across the bases of reproduction to form class alliances and strategies. Such politics can both resist and negotiate with the state, foreground the need of petty capitalist classes for defence of land, unionise to make demands as wage labour in the nonfarm sector, or mediate with a political party for distribution of welfare, depending on specific conjunctures as onslaught of capitalism continue. The thesis also contends that the progressive possibilities within such Adivasi politics is likely to vary between time and place, with processes of worsening agrarian inequalities between and within adivasis, and broad-based negotiations for improving conditions of reproduction playing out in regionally specific and historically contingent manner.

Finally, before I describe the structure of the thesis, I will provide two caveats.

One, following Xaxa's (1999a) critique of studying transformation of tribes in India only in comparison to 'mainstream communities', I do not argue that the changes studied here lead to adivasis 'getting absorbed' into a 'mainstream' or 'general society' (V. Xaxa, 1999a, p. 1520). Since Xaxa's seminal paper in 1999, scholars have gone beyond the anthropological lens of studying tribes as sites of exception or isolation (Baviskar, 1995; Chandra, 2015; Nilsen, 2019; Steur, 2017; N. Sundar, 1997). In agreement with such scholarship, I do not view transition as a 'stage' within developmental paradigm where onset of changes in their stratification, class formation, education, migration, and diversified occupations leads to 'absorption' into the mainstream. Studying agrarian changes among adivasis treat them as communities on their own terms, without treating the Hindu castes as counterparts with whom they are expected to 'assimilate'.

Two, my study is contextualised within ongoing dispossessions that alienate adivasis from cultivable, common and forest land. The significance of forest resources for subsistence needs (like fuelwood, fruits, mushrooms etc) and for income (through collection and sale of minor produce) and the historical denial of rights to these resources among forest adjacent tribes and non-tribal people have been well documented (Gadgil & Guha, 1994; K. Kumar & Kerr, 2012; Ramesh, 2016; For instance see Sarin, 1993; Springate-Baginski et al., 2008, 2013; N. Sundar, 2004). It has also been documented that forests are not just sources of income but are embedded with cultural and spiritual significance by the adivasis themselves (Fernandes et al., 2008; Padel et al., 2013; S.R & Jojo, 2019; Savyasaachi, 1994). My research is contextualised within these depleting commons that impact reproductive conditions, collective identity and belonging of adivasis. But my work is focused on the material aspects of resource use and agriculture for adivasi reproduction.

The rest of the thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 lays out the conceptual framework of the thesis, the components and debates that shape the Adivasi Agrarian Question, and its three major aspects: AQL, dispossession, and politics.

Chapter 3 substantively discusses the methodology for the thesis, including the details of research design, site selection, methods of data collection and the considerations of ethics and positionality pertinent to the research.

Chapter 4 explores the regional, historical, and political economic context within which I will the locate the empirical findings of the thesis. It takes each site of Jhargram, WB and Raigarh, Chhattisgarh individually and traces the salient features of Adivasi reproduction, dispossession and politics in post-colonial times that contextualise my field research findings.

Chapter 5 is the first of two chapters discussing the empirical findings in WB focusing on the AQL for Santhal and Lodha adivasis. It shows all adivasi households primarily depend upon wage work, categorised as classes of labour, with only a small portion of sustenance drawn from cultivation for a part of Santhal households. Wage work is limited to the construction sector, with limited differentiation among Santhals through non agrarian petty commodity production and access to salaried employment. Lodha adivasis, in contrast, work under more oppressive conditions in agricultural and non-agricultural wage work, facing stigmatised exclusion from the wage work Santhals can access.

Chapter 6, the second part of WB's findings, unpacks the expansion of the Jhargram town as a key factor for dispossession leading to individualised alienation from land impacted in turn by legacies of land reform program of the erstwhile Left front government. This nature of individualised dispossession has not led to a broad-based mobilisation against it, while the ruling party has withdrawn any patronage for any mobilisation of wage workers in the informal sector. Santhals, in response, focus on negotiating and making welfare demands of the party in return for electoral support, with little scope of such claim making by the Lodhas.

Chapter 7 turns to Raigarh, Chhattisgarh, where following Chapter 5, I explore the AQL for adivasis in the second site. I show the centrality of cultivation as a basis of reproduction, particularly for Kawar adivasis, who can reproduce and accumulate within cultivation, thereby shielding themselves to an extent, from harshest conditions of wage work in the mines. The mining sector, which has high entry barriers for women, aged and disabled people, provide precarious jobs for local men, with long periods of under and unemployment in between.

Chapter 8 concludes the empirical findings by placing Birampalli on a continuum of displacement, that has faced land loss to coal mining 15 years back, and presently face imminent displacement due to expansion of mining. The poor conditions of non-agrarian work, people's assessment of loss of agrarian assets in the past and a decade-long participation in regional mobilisations against mining induced displacement, has created a broad-based mobilisation in Birampalli to resist the dispossession. I discuss how this resistance is embedded in the unequal relations of production in the village, linking the three aspects of AQ of labour, dispossession, and politics in Chhattisgarh.

Chapter 9 makes a comparative analysis of the two sites responding to the research questions mentioned above. It concludes the thesis with a scope of further research on AAQ.

2. Conceptualising an Adivasi Agrarian Question

2.1 Introduction

The research questions that I will enquire into with regards to the nature and implications of agrarian change among adivasis in India relate to the bases of reproduction among adivasis in land-based occupations and non-agricultural wage labour work, the patterns of dispossession among Adivasi classes and their political struggles. In this chapter, I discuss the conceptual framework for the thesis, proposing and building the contours of an *Adivasi Agrarian Question* (AAQ). The AAQ, rooted in critical agrarian political economy, uses the co-constitution of tribe and class as the inception point to then use existing literature on Adivasi livelihood and struggles and contemporary debates on the Agrarian Question (AQ), to argue a case for a *class analysis of reproductive conditions, strategies, and politics* of adivasis. The AAQ has three components that are co-constitutive of each other. These are the agrarian question of labour, patterns of dispossession, and politics: the three components map onto the three research questions for the thesis as framed in Chapter 1.

The AAQ is framed particularly with reference to two debates in Agrarian Marxism referred to as the Byres-Bernstein debate (Bernstein, 2016; T. J. Byres, 2016; Oya, 2013) and the Bernstein-Borras debate (Bernstein, 2021; Borras Jr, 2020, 2023a; Pattenden, 2023). Following from the former debate, I will argue that AQ literature can provide the basis to foreground different agrarian questions for specific times and places, guided by the ongoing dynamics of agrarian change. For adivasis in India, in conversation with these debates, I propose that these three urgent agrarian questions are those of agrarian question of labour, dispossession, and politics.

The agrarian question of labour (AQL) which refers to reproductive conditions and strategies is of crucial significance for adivasis in India, who are struggling for their reproductive needs under capitalist transitions, worsened by processes of dispossession. The fragmentation of bases of reproduction and 'reproductive squeeze' faced by increasing numbers of classes of labour who must rely primarily on wage labour provides primacy and urgency to AQL within agrarian questions. This is central to Bernstein's arguments in the debate (Bernstein, 2006) and directly relates to the framing of AAQ and my research questions. The second debate relates to the possibilities of political struggles among adivasis in response to such fragmentation and dispossession. Building on this debate, I contend that while adivasi land struggles have generally

generated more interest among scholars and activists, adivasi politics is heterogeneous with diverse demands, tactics, alliances, and have class contradictions embedded in them. The debates on progressive politics within processes of 'reproductive squeeze' in Agrarian Marxism frames AAQ's political component that enquires into the class solidarities and contradictions of adivasi politics, that differ across place and time.

This chapter is divided into three parts. Section 2.2 sets out the key debates in Agrarian Marxism and the co-constitution of class and tribe that preface my framing of AAQ. Section 2.3 begins with a brief discussion on the exceptionalism in Indian government's conceptualisation and governance of adivasis in demarcated territories, which contextualises the analysis of agrarian change. I then consider the three components of AQL, dispossession, and politics by turn, reviewing literature from AQ debates and research on adivasis to discuss their relevance in answering the research questions and how they relate with each other. Section 2.4 concludes by emphasising the relational nature of these three components which provides the thesis with the analytical tools to explore the class dynamics of agrarian change and politics among adivasis in India.

2.2 Agrarian Questions, Class, and Tribe

The conceptual framing of the AQ is rooted in the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, further developed by the works of Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir Lenin, and Preobrazensky, inspiring decades of debates on both the capitalist agrarian transitions discussed in the early works and nuancing the arguments as capitalism deepened its roots in the global south (for a summary of the debates see Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010a, 2010b; Bernstein & Byres, 2001; Levien et al., 2018). The 'Agrarian Question', or Agrarian Marxism as it has been referred to in a recent article (Levien et al., 2018), encapsulates the research and debates on capitalist development in agriculture, differentiation among agrarian classes, the transfer of surplus from agriculture for industrialisation, and the class struggles among agrarian classes.

The main concerns of capitalist agrarian transitions are well summarised in Henry Bernstein's review of TJ Byres' influential book 'Capitalism from above and capitalism from below' (1996) in which the AQ was broken down into three problematics: those of politics, production, and accumulation (Bernstein, 1996; Byres, 2016). Byres frames the first question of politics based on Engels' work to discuss the possibilities of alliances between urban and rural labour and the poor peasantry in struggles for socialism; the second question is based on works of Lenin and Kautsky to discuss the nature of capitalist development in agriculture; and, the third question is based on the work on Preobrazensky in the Russian context to discuss

the transfer of surplus from agriculture to industry which could then provide the impetus for industrialisation in any national economy.

There are three arguments in the AQ scholarship in line with recent political economic changes under capitalism and globalisation which are relevant to framing the AAQ. One, the agrarian changes and *further* development of capitalist agriculture studied here assume that these changes are ongoing '*within* capitalism in all its varied and geographically uneven forms' (Levien et al., 2018, p. 856). Two, the agrarian question of capital transfer from agriculture to industry or the problematic of accumulation referred to above is treated as less relevant than the questions of politics and production (Bernstein, 1996). Three, the question of domestic capital formation at a smaller scale, as a result of any ongoing capitalist transformations is still relevant for AQL but particularly significant when understanding differentiated outcomes of dispossession (Oya, 2013) and politics.

I will place these arguments within the responses to Byres' work mainly by Bernstein (Bernstein, 2003, 2004, 2012, 2016) and Byres' developing formulations of the continuing relevance of the agrarian questions (T. J. Byres, 2012, 2016). Byres' work on historical comparative political economy of capitalist agrarian transitions was largely based in the Global North and those post-colonial economies that have 'completed' such transitions (T. Byres, 1996; Moyo et al., 2013). For the global south, including Africa, Latin America and South Asia, it has been argued that international circuits of capital have minimised the importance of national agricultural surplus to fund the process of industrialisation, thus rendering the AQ of capital 'resolved' in a general sense (Bernstein, 2004). While the linkages between national agricultural surplus and industrialisation is not the primary AQ anymore, Bernstein clarifies that this does not mean the end of development of capitalism within agriculture which can still produce differentiation and development of domestic classes of capital (Bernstein, 2016, pp. 80–81). These debates rather lead us to reconsider what the primary concerns of agrarian question must be with reference to specificities of capitalist development for particular regions or time.

What then forms the most urgent AQ continues to be debated within Agrarian Marxism, with scholars prioritising land (Moyo et al., 2013; Shattuck et al., 2023), labour (Bernstein, 2012; Pattenden, 2016a), ecology (Araghi, 2012; Moore, 2008), gender (Naidu & Ossome, 2016; O'Laughlin, 2012) and food security (McMichael, 2006). For this thesis, in conversation with literature on Adivasi livelihood and politics, the AAQ foregrounds the questions of AQL, dispossession and political struggles as the most pressing questions for adivasis under contemporary capitalism.

Before elaborating on the three dimensions in the next section, I briefly will argue that AQ debates also contribute to understanding linkages between class and non-class forms of oppression, like gender, tribe, caste, as co-constitutive and not discrete categories that interact with each other (Bannerji, 2005; T. Bhattacharya, 2017; McNally, 2017), a point that has also been demonstrated by many scholars in the Indian context (Guru, 2016; Harriss-White & Gooptu, 2001; Lerche & Shah, 2018; U. Patnaik, 2001; Pattenden, 2016a; Teltumbde, 2016). Quoting Bernstein at length, 'Class relations are *universal but not exclusive* determinations of social practices in capitalism. They intersect and combine with other social differences and divisions of which gender is the most widespread, and which can also include oppressive and exclusionary relations of race and ethnicity, religion and caste' (2016, p. 85). This argument is important to challenge the functionalist approach to studying capitalism, where class is the primary axis of social difference and other inequalities of caste, gender, tribe etc remain unchallenged by capitalism as they serve interests of capital.

For adivasis, such co-constitution of class and tribe/caste has been theorised as 'conjugated oppression' in recent scholarship within debates of AQ (Lerche & Shah, 2018; A. Shah et al., 2017). Using Philippe Bourgois's coined phrase 'conjugated oppression', scholars have investigated into exploitation of Dalits and adivasis as wage workers to show how multiple forms of oppressions work *simultaneously* and *'interact explosively'* to produce an *'overwhelming'* experience (A. Shah et al., 2017, p. 24). I contend that analysing impact of agrarian change in terms of 'oppression' is deterministic, with little scope for understanding differentiation and accumulation within adivasi classes. AAQ, as I elaborate in the next section, provides the framework to capture differential and uneven impact of the spread of capital within and between adivasis, without a functional or deterministic approach to understanding the co-constitution of class and tribe under capitalism.

2.3 An Adivasi Agrarian Question

Referring to the scholarship on AQ and linking them to ongoing agrarian changes in Adivasi-inhabited areas, I define the *AAQ* as *the study of agrarian change and politics among heterogeneous Adivasi classes of farmers and labour stratified by both class and tribe*. While the AAQ also enquires into further stratifications along the lines of gender, age, disability etc, the empirical enquiry and the methodology of this research do not foreground these categories.

Adivasis form the most ruralised social group in India, with 90 percent living in rural areas (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2014). Their material conditions in post-colonial India have been historically shaped by a valorisation of the relationship between land and adivasis, resulting into demarcating territorial boundaries for adivasi

protection in contrast to the material reality of aggressive alienation of adivasis from their land. Adivasis are perceived by the Indian constitution in terms of geographical and social isolation from the larger Indian society. They differ in demographic size, linguistic and cultural traits, ecological and material conditions of living, but were characterised by 'relative isolation, cultural distinctiveness and low level of production and subsistence' (Munshi, 2012). The colonial construct of the division between caste and tribes, were reflected in the post-colonial state's conceptualisation of tribes, particularly in the criteria of scheduling social groups as tribes set out by the Lokur committee that are still being followed. These are primitive[4] traits, distinct culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large and backwardness (Lokur Committee, 1965). The Xaxa Committee Report criticised these terms for being both pejorative and paternalistic (Government of India, 2014), for its resultant exceptionalism while continuing to analytically recognise tribes only in comparison to the 'mainstream.'

Several scholars have critiqued the colonial legacies of classifying certain social groups as tribes (Hardiman, 1987; Roy Burman, 1992; Skaria, 1999; N. Sundar, 1997). The definition and identification of specific groups as tribes have been challenged due to lack of specific criterion to do so (Roy Burman, 1994), due to heterogeneity among all groups that are classified as tribes (Béteille, 2006), and due to similarities between caste and tribal groups living in geographical proximities, particularly in the Indian plains (Bailey, 1961; Ghurye, 1963). While acknowledging the rich debates on the politics of classification, defining tribes and the politics of indigeneity (Steur, 2005; V. Xaxa, 1999a, 1999b), this research does not delve into the 'temporal congruence' (Nongbri, 2006) between tribes, adivasi and indigenous population, and treats these terms as coterminous.

This thesis contextualises the dynamics of agrarian change within this exceptionalism embedded in governance of adivasis. It draws out the material implications of this dichotomy of protection and the concrete conditions of marginalisation and expulsion through 'lawfare' (Damodaran & Dasgupta, 2022, p. 1369) which continue to push adivasis (albeit, unevenly) to depend increasingly on wage labour work for sustenance, often as migrant wage labourers outside such demarcated territories (Mazumdar, 2016; Mosse et al., 2005; Rogaly, 2003; A. Shah et al., 2017). This protective legal framework comprising mainly of the Fifth Schedule provisions, the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) 1996, and the

[4] Primitivism is now acknowledged as a problematic conception to study tribal population, where 'primitive' traits of a social group is seen distinct from 'modernity' with the implicit assumption of a gradual progress to the 'modern' which is more desirable. See (Chandra, 2013) for the debate on paternalistic notion embedded in modernity's treatment of primitivism. The word primitive used in this thesis is only in the context of referring to some government documents/scholarly work using it, and always in a critical manner.

Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA) is briefly discussed here which contextualises the conditions of reproduction, dispossession, and politics of adivasis that I discuss next.

Following British rule's demarcation of 15 percent of India's land as 'backward tracts' creating 'places as exceptions within the domain of law" (Chandra, 2013, p. 140), the post-colonial government demarcated selected areas as Sixth Schedule and Fifth Schedule areas. The tribes inhabiting these spaces came to be "described as wild, savage, or, simply, primitive. Primitive populations were, paradoxically, subjects of both *improvement* and *protection* in colonized societies" (Chandra, 2013, p. 138) (emphasis original).The Fifth Schedule provisions have been adopted in 10 states in Central and Eastern India, where the central government has administrative oversight powers on the scheduled areas yielded via the governor. Limited powers are given to the governor to restrict the implementation of laws s/he might think unsuitable for development of tribes within these areas, and 'may' take the advice of the Tribes Advisory Council established by the Government which shall include up to twenty tribal Members of the Legislative Assembly on matters relating to 'welfare and advancement of the Scheduled tribes' (Sakhrani, 2019, p. 100). The consultative powers allotted to *Gram Sabhas* (village assembly comprising all adult members of a village) are however watered down from the initial suggestions made by the Thakkar committee, as the government deemed the tribes as 'backward' and politically not adequate to cope with complicated legislations, denying them the decision-making powers (N. Sundar, 1997).

Apart from the special protective provisions of Fifth Schedule, the government also enacted the PESA Act, 1996, which framed self-governance rules for the tribal areas following the decentralised administrative systems in other parts of the country. It envisaged the *Gram Sabha* as the key player to ensure self-governance, whereby the customs and traditions of the tribal communities would be brought together with formal laws of the state (Dandekar & Choudhury, 2010, p. 5). The states, while adopting PESA into their own legal framework, have diluted most of its provisions, and many states have not framed the state-specific PESA rules as well (Bijoy, 2015).

There is also no fixed definition of a scheduled area, except for defined as those areas that are declared by the President as such. This has led to tribal populated pockets in eight states[5] to remain outside the limited protective provisions of PESA and the Fifth schedule, and discussions on tribal rights have remained concentrated largely on scheduled areas (Government of India, 2014, pp. 65–66) which acts as a proxy, as it were, for tribal inhabited areas. While not adapting PESA, few of these states have provisioned for

[5] West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala have not adapted these provisions despite sizeable tribal population.

regulating individual transfer of land from tribal to non-tribal people[6], subscribing partially to the paternalistic approach towards tribes that is embedded within the Indian Constitution (Li, 2010a).

The Indian government also passed Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, commonly referred to as the Forest Rights Act (FRA), co-written by Adivasi activists, after protracted struggles by the adivasis in different parts of India (Chemmencheri, 2015). Aiming to correct the 'historic injustice' against adivasis, the Act allows for recognition of rights of Adivasi families over forest land if they can prove they have held it for three generations or 75 years before 15 December 2005. 10 years after the implementation of the Act, community forest rights have been recognised for just 3 percent of the potential area, with high incidence of rejection, conflict between forest bureaucracy and adivasis, and under-recognition of claims in individual forest rights (K. Kumar et al., 2017).

The poor implementation of the PESA and the FRA, intensified vulnerability of adivasis outside the scheduled territories, non-adaptation of the Fifth Schedule by multiple states even in its weakened form have further marginalised adivasis, shaping the reproductive conditions, dispossession, and politics of Adivasis discussed below.

Agrarian Question of Labour

The AQL, decoupled from the primacy of agrarian question of capital, in its simplest explanation is the question of the basis of reproduction of labour, that includes classes of farmers and labour. In the AAQ, the AQL encapsulates three dimensions: crisis of reproduction, class mobility and differentiation within reproductive conditions, and linkages between land and wage labour-based occupations in reproduction.

The AQL foregrounds the 'reproduction squeeze' faced by growing numbers of 'classes of labour' in the global south economies (Bernstein, 2006, p. 455). Bernstein (2016, p. 83) contends that the 'peasantry' under capitalism find themselves segregated into capitalist farmers (those who accumulate surplus, engaging in expanded reproduction), petty commodity producers (those who manage simple reproduction of labour and capital), and the poor or marginal farmers (those who face a reproduction squeeze struggling to reproduce as labour and capital). The permeation of 'generalised commodity production' in the post-colonial global south economies and such stratification of the peasantry is also accompanied by the commodification of subsistence, adding to the crisis of reproduction.

[6] For list of all state legislations regulating tribal land transfer see (Mohanty, 2001, pp. 3860–3861).

The poor/marginal farmers along with different categories of wage labourers reproduce 'through insecure and oppressive - and in many places increasingly scarce - wage employment, often combined with a range of likewise precarious small-scale farming and insecure "informal sector" ("survival") activity, subject to its own forms of differentiation and oppression along intersecting lines of class, gender, generation, caste, and ethnicity' (Bernstein, 2006, p. 454). These growing numbers of the poor, who struggle to meet their reproductive needs, are clubbed under the analytical category of 'classes of labour' referring to those who depend 'directly and indirectly on the sale of their labour power for their reproduction' (Bernstein, 2007, p. 2; Panitch & Leys, 2000).

Following his definition, for this thesis, I use classes of labour to comprise those who work solely as labourers (agricultural or non-agricultural), farmers who work as wage labourers beyond kinship-based exchange work during peak agricultural seasons, and the self-employed engaging in non-agricultural petty commodity production (PCP) who might hire labour but do not accumulate. This analytical category is broad based and requires more empirical enquiry, like other scholars have done in rural India (Lerche, 2009; Pattenden, 2016a). When it comes to PCP that uses hired labour, the exploitation can be encapsulated within the phrase *classes* of labour, but inferences of accumulation might be difficult (Also see on PCP as Classes of labour Pattenden, 2023, pp. 6–7).

The crisis of reproduction which forms the focal point of the AQL is further exacerbated by the modern manufacturing sector's inability to absorb the labour that cannot sustain themselves within land-based occupations anymore (Cousins et al., 2018; Li, 2010b; Zhan & Scully, 2018). Such conceptualisation of AQL as the conditions and strategies of reproduction amongst increasingly fragmenting classes of farmers and labour, is extremely relevant to study agrarian changes among adivasis. It allows for analysing the fragmentation of households between farm and non-farm sources of income, rural and urban spaces of production and reproduction (Bernstein, 2004, 2006; Bryceson et al., 2000; Lerche, 2009; Pattenden, 2016a, 2018), which are increasingly reflected within changes in Adivasi livelihood. For both landless and land poor households for whom cultivation produces a deficit, simple reproduction is only possible through income diversification which is not a mechanism for accumulation (Naidu & Ossome, 2016; A. Shah & Harriss-White, 2011). There are also relations of domination, differentiation, and exploitation within such 'classes', with no necessary political implication of a homogenous class consciousness and/or class struggle.

Within the Indian context I draw from general trends of agrarian transition (Lerche, 2011a, 2013, 2021; A. Shah & Harriss-White, 2011), regional variations of such transition (Kannan, 2018; Lerche, 2014) and within Adivasi inhabited areas (Prasad, 2014, 2021; A. Shah, 2013; A. Shah et al., 2017) to formulate the relevant

aspects of framing the AQL for adivasis. In India, Lerche (2013, p. 400) has concluded that while agrarian transition in its classical sense has been 'bypassed', 'capitalism in agriculture is still deepening' and calls for 'continued investigations into the actual processes of agrarian change.' The relevance of agrarian question of capital (limited to agriculture's funding of industry) has been evidently weakened as the structural transformations in India show low growth in manufacturing, higher growth in the construction and services sectors, and shrinking contribution of agriculture to India's GDP (Basole & Basu, 2011a, 2011b; Lerche, 2021, p. 1387).

However, the development of capitalism in agriculture, differentiation among rural classes and the struggles of classes of labour to reproduce are playing out in regionally uneven manner (Lerche, 2014) with possibilities to trace 'a plurality of agrarian questions in India' with ' a set of regionally specific agrarian questions' (Lerche et al., 2013). Take for instance, the two states selected for this study. In 2009-10, while 42 percent of employment in West Bengal was generated in agriculture and 19 percent in the industrial sector, in Chhattisgarh, 74 percent people were employed in agriculture vis-à-vis 11 percent in the industrial sector (Lerche, 2014, p. 48). The regional variations in employment generation, nature and extent of industrialisation, agricultural productivity, and development of productive forces are all important variables for the AQ literature and for the AAQ.

Therefore, the conditions of reproduction of classes of labour and farmers, foregrounding the reproductive squeeze faced by the classes of labour on the one hand, and the regionally specific ways in which capitalism deepens its roots in the agrarian economy resulting into differentiation, form the two complementing aspects of framing an AQL for adivasis. The AQ framework interrogating such reproductive squeeze, in my knowledge, has rarely been linked to understanding marginalisation of adivasis in India that lay at the bottom of socio-economic-political hierarchies. Growth of capitalism in agriculture has been linked to Adivasi experiences, if only to deny it, such as in an article by Alpa Shah based on empirical findings in the forests of Jharkhand (2013). My theoretical premise contradicts Shah's (2013, p. 424) findings of the existence of Adivasi peasantry outside capitalism, with 'non-capitalist relations of production in farming'. She uses the evidence of halted development of capitalism in agriculture and no differentiation within agriculture to argue that agriculture is only for subsistence purposes, and any differentiation in the region is propelled by non-agricultural employment. 2 percent of her surveyed households own more than 4 hectares of land (10 acres), and 3 percent own 2-4 hectares of land (5-10 acre); it is not clear if accumulation is seen in those households within agriculture, and if not, why. My theoretical framework, even at the cost of repeating myself, considers adivasis 'within' capitalism: even when they grow food for self-consumption,

the surplus appropriations through circuits of exchange, credit, and petty trade can mark deepening of capitalist relations.

Such deepening of capitalist relations, coupled with large scale displacement (discussed next) have resulted in declining numbers of adivasi cultivators, pushing more adivasi workers to depend on wage labour work (P. Jain & Sharma, 2019; Mosse et al., 2005; Rafique et al., 2006; A. Shah, 2006; A. Shah & Lerche, 2020) with significant regional differences in access to land and labour work among adivasis. The proportion of cultivators declined by 9.5 percentage points among adivasi men between 2001 and 2011 and by 11.3 percentage points among women. This decline was much sharper among adivasis than among other social groups. The proportion of agricultural workers on the other hand increased by 8.3 percentage points among adivasi men and 9.4 percentage point among women. The proportion of rural Adivasi men and women working as casual wage labourers in 2009-10 at 44.8 percent (principal status) was also considerably higher than other social groups (Karat & Rawal, 2014).

Adivasi migration for both seasonal farm and non-agricultural work has been among the highest across social groups (Keshri & Bhagat, 2010; S. Sarkar & Mishra, 2021; A. Shah et al., 2017; R. Srivastava, 2011), while availability and conditions of work has worsened under the period of neoliberal reforms. The number of adivasis getting work for at least 30 days a year has declined for both men and women despite being in the labour market between 2001 and 2011 (Prasad, 2021). There is no census data available after 2011, but the labour force surveys between 1993 and 2018 show that the rate of decline in the labour force participation rate is the steepest for the adivasi population compared to all other social groups, indicating high unemployment, underemployment and duress among adivasis in the period under neoliberal reforms (P. Jha & Prasad, 2020, p. 5). Adivasis are also exploited as migrant workers as they continue to be dispossessed from land-based occupations, and are likely to work under more exploitative conditions than other social groups in the industrial sector and the informal economy (A. Shah et al., 2017; Strümpell, 2022).

Conditions of Adivasi wage labour, particularly their conditions of work as migrant labour have been studied to enquire into macro-economic changes in work participation (P. Jha & Prasad, 2020; Prasad, 2021), conditions of wage work in the industrial sector as a part of labouring classes (Nayak, 2022a; Noy, 2022b; A. Shah, 2022; Strümpell, 2022), as rural agricultural workers (Yadav, 2018), as rural seasonal migrants in agrarian and non-agrarian sectors (Rogaly, 2003; A. Shah et al., 2017), as plantation workers (S. K. Bhowmik, 2014) and in the construction sector (Mosse et al., 2005). While they have not studied Adivasi reproduction linked to the AQ framework, they engage with some key concerns of AQL including the precarity of the wage work available for tribal people, the high dependence on seasonal migration as land-based livelihood

cannot support all their sustenance needs, and the capacities for differentiation through wage work and seasonal migration. They also show while adivasis tend to be entrenched as casual workers at the bottom of labour hierarchies, but trends of seasonal migration do not only bring drudgery; they also create spaces for savings and improvement of living standards[7].

Within these trends of 'reproductive squeeze' and fragmentation of reproductive bases, the second aspect of AQL, which is differentiation is also noted among adivasis. As I mentioned before, the differentiation resulting from deepening of capitalism is recognised by debates in AQ (Bernstein, 2016; T. J. Byres, 2016; Oya, 2013) though the emphasis on processes of capital formation might be different. The AQL, by emphasising on differentiation within the larger ambit of reproductive crisis, aids in grappling with the indications of stratification among adivasis I discuss below.

Between 1999 and 2012, the rise in landlessness among adivasis has ranged from a rise of 14.5 percent in Jharkhand to a fall of 0.5 percent in Maharashtra; again, marginal landholdings of upto an acre rose by 7.6 percent in Jharkhand and 4.5 percent in Chhattisgarh to a fall of 16 percent in Gujarat. In Chhattisgarh, landlessness has fallen by 0.2 percent among adivasis in the period, but holdings between 1-2 hectare has risen sharply by 6 percent (Prasad, 2021, pp. 24–25). These interstate differences therefore show not just linear proletarianisation among tribes, but continuing differentiation among them. I also mentioned in Chapter 1 how small and medium landholdings have been consolidated among adivasis, and remain at par with other social groups, even as landlessness has risen exponentially, reflecting ongoing processes of stratification.

Differentiation is also noted within adivasis as wage workers. Recent scholarship has also shown class mobility and stratification through differential access to industrial jobs within tribal groups (M. Chatterjee, 2020; Nayak, 2020; Noy, 2020). Affirmative action policies and mediation of delivery of state welfare benefits have also introduced processes of differentiation among adivasis (Higham & Shah, 2013; A. Shah, 2010), leading to indications of a development of an salaried middle class among adivasis (V. Xaxa, 1999a, 2001).

With reproductive crisis and differentiation playing out among adivasis in both realms of land and labour, in line with Karat and Rawal's nudge to enquire into which section of adivasis is gaining land and which are losing land (2014, p. 140), I also ask, which section of adivasis are gaining what kind of wage work, and what

[7] The latter point is also made for non-tribal migrant workers in (Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan, 2003; Pattenden, 2016a, 2016b)

are the conditions of such work within capitalist development. Going beyond the valorisation of the land-based occupations in Adivasi life, I argue for the need to empirically enquire into *differentiation and marginalisation among adivasis with regards to both land and labour to understand the nature of capitalist development in Adivasi regions*. This leads me to the third dimension of AQL, which seeks to understand how access to, or deprivation of land rights can be linked to conditions of wage work. The linkages between land and labour-based income among adivasis, within fragmentation and differentiation in reproduction have received much less attention, which this thesis will address through understanding them as integral to AQL and empirically enquiring into them in later chapters.

The linkages between access to land and conditions of labour work are complicated for adivasis from what existing data suggests as they continue to have better access to land than other social groups, are alienated from such land more aggressively than others, face the most precarious conditions of work in the labour market, and remain the most marginalised social group in the country. Both landlessness (30 percent) and proportion of households that do not cultivate any land (46 percent) among adivasis have grown steadily till 2011-12[8]. However, adivasis still draw more of their reproductive needs from land-based occupations than other marginalised social groups. For instance, among the scheduled castes (Dalits), 44 percent are landless, but 70 percent do not cultivate any land. On the other hand, the rate of increase in landlessness between 1987 and 2011 is highest for adivasis among all social groups (Kujur & Mishra, 2020). Benbabaali has shown in an ethnographic study that when adivasis can access land, their conditions of wage work are better than landless Dalits (2018), leading to a suggestion that whether adivasis are better off than Dalits depend on their access to land which is regionally specific (A. Shah et al., 2017, p. 27). This is not congruent with country level data where despite better landholding status overall for adivasis and their higher engagement in land-based occupations, their rate of reduction in poverty (notwithstanding the debates regarding poverty line assessments) has been much slower than Dalits in the past two decades upto 2011-12.

Therefore, linkages between landholdings and nature of access to labour market is not straightforward and must consider the historically and regionally specific agrarian structures, agricultural conditions and the class dynamics of agrarian transformations and merits closer empirical enquiry. As I have argued above, the AQL as framed by Bernstein within the debates on Agrarian Question, makes for a compelling analytical framework within which the reproductive conditions of adivasis under contemporary capitalism can be explored. The empirical questions that become pertinent for AQL within AAQ are: what is the nature of

[8] Homestead land is calculated within land ownership figures, unlike previous rounds, in 2011-12.

deepening of capitalism in agriculture in Adivasi areas (forms of surplus appropriation and linkages to circuits of capital); if and to what extent does it support reproduction and result into differentiation among adivasis; what are the conditions of employment of adivasis in non-agrarian sectors; how do they link with access to land; and, if and to what extent do wage work result into differentiation among adivasis.

Dispossession

In this section I frame the second aspect of AAQ, dispossession, ongoing both via large scale acquisitions and individual dispossession through differentiation, processes of coercion, fraud, debt etc on a piecemeal basis among adivasis. I argue that the AQ scholarship allows me to understand the complex processes of agrarian change ensuing from dispossession, without assuming it resulting in proletarianisation and marginalisation of all adivasi classes. The inequalities of the agrarian milieux among adivasis interact with dispossession, to both produce differential impact on the AQL and extends such inequalities within Adivasi politics.

Karl Marx, towards the end of the first volume of Capital, frames his conception of primitive accumulation, which he defines as a coercive process of divorcing the producer from their means of production, freeing up both land and labour for the use of capital. Such a process of expulsion was only possible by use of brutal force, mostly via an active State. In Marx's view this process of "primitive accumulation" formed the prehistory of capital, which meant that it would cease once the transition to capitalism takes place. However the relegation of such a process of primitive accumulation to the prehistory of capital has been critiqued by many scholars, most notably Rosa Luxemburg and David Harvey (Harvey, 2007; Luxemburg, 2015[9]). Harvey's conception of accumulation by dispossession places displacement as a feature of expansion of capitalism itself. Both the concepts of primitive accumulation and Harvey's accumulation by dispossession have been used to define and understand large scale land acquisitions, including the post 2007/08 phase of global land grabs[10] (Borras Jr et al., 2012; Borras Jr & Franco, 2012; Edelman et al., 2013; Hall, 2013; White et al., 2013).

There are various other phrases that have been used to update the conception of primitive accumulation to refer to the present land grabs, including but not limited to 'primitive accumulation by dispossession' (Moyo, 2011), 'accumulation by encroachment' (P. Patnaik, 2008), 'accumulation by displacement' (Araghi, 2009), 'regimes of dispossession' (Levien, 2012, 2015). Without getting into the details of these debates

[9] First published in 1913.

[10] David Harvey uses Accumulation by Dispossession as a more overarching framework to understand workings of globalised capital beyond just land grabbing.

(For a summary, see Hall, 2013) there are two arguments that are important for this thesis while adopting David Harvey's terminology. One, the current forms of such dispossessions do not always inaugurate capitalist relations but generate more 'advanced' forms of capitalist relations (Hall, 2013; Levien, 2012). This goes back to the point that agrarian change and cultivation among adivasis is studied here *within* the ambit of capitalism; so is dispossession. Two, Harvey's emphasis on the role of imperialism and foreign capital could be refined with emphasis on the crucial role of domestic capital that can be comparable in its role in dispossession to its global counterpart (Oya, 2013). Domestic companies might have links with international capital, and they might even be in alliance but the focus need not be on the 'nationality' of capital but on the processes of agrarian change resulting into or ensuing from the dispossession (Borras Jr et al., 2012). This is important for analysing processes of dispossession (both large scale and individual) for adivasis, by asking who is displacing them and via what mechanism.

Adivasis in post-colonial India have borne disproportionate burden of displacement in the post-colonial era, driven by the 'fatal overlap' between mineral producing states and Adivasi-inhabited Fifth schedule areas in central and eastern India (Bhushan & Hazra, 2008). While the state takes on the role of the 'protector' by imposing restrictions on transfer of land from tribal to non-tribal people, it also retains absolute power by both allowing the use of 'eminent domain' principles in the tribal areas and handing immense decision-making power to the executive. The government used the colonial Land Reforms and the Land Acquisition Act (LAA), 1894, the Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and development) Act (CBAADA), 1957, the Mining Areas (development and regulation) Act (MMDR), 1957 to continue displacing adivasis from their habitats, with no scope for people to partake in the wealth generated by the future appreciation as a result of the building of the infrastructure or mining of the minerals (Sampat, 2013). The mineral belt in India corresponds to a large extent to Adivasi inhabited territories and adivasis remain the most impacted social group due to mining and infrastructural projects, often displaced without adequate compensation or rehabilitation (Fernandes, 2009; Government of India, 2014; S. Jain & Bala, 2006). The state has directly acquired large swathes of adivasi land due to industrialization, urbanization, dams, irrigation projects that have led to "loss of livelihood, massive displacement and involuntary migration" (Government of India, 2014).[11] The 10th Five Year Plan notes that between 1951 and 1990, 21.3 million people were displaced for 'development' projects, of which 40 percent, or 8.5 million, were tribal people (Burra, 2009). The Xaxa Committee report estimated that in 13 states, there were 20.41 million displaced or project-affected

[11] Multiple government reports have confirmed this including UN Dhebar Commission, 1960; Shilu Ao Committee, 1966; Bhuria Committee, 1991; Bhuria Commission, 2002-04; Bandopadhyay Committee, 2006; Mungekar Committee, 2012; Xaxa Committee, 2014.

people, out of which the proportion of STs was 'quite high' at 30.70 percent (Government of India, 2014, p. 259).

Domestic capital continues to play a key role in displacement in the agrarian in the neoliberal era, both due to accumulation and speculation purposes (Levien, 2012, pp. 6–7; Vijayabaskar & Menon, 2018). For large scale displacements aided by the state, the government has replaced the colonial law for land acquisition by the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (LARR), in India, which it uses in conjunction with the above mentioned other colonial Acts to dispossess adivasis from their land. The LARR, despite its improvements over the previous Act in terms of seeking consent and improving rehabilitation conditions, have exempted several areas from its ambit including coal mining, railways, highways, electricity etc (Srivastav & Singh, 2022, p. 3). Despite the framework of FRA and PESA, the protective legal framework has been trumped by the requirements of capital for accumulation, and some scholars argue that they only represent the contradictions within a neo-liberal government structure (R. Bhattacharya et al., 2017; Savyasaachi, 2011).

Contrary to the valorisation of adivasis' relationship with land, redistributive land reforms also failed to prioritise marginalised social groups like Dalits and Adivasis, with any preference in redistribution limited to scheduled areas (Mohanty, 2001, p. 3861). Adivasis also continue to lose land through private transfers due to heavy indebtedness, coercion, or temporarily negotiated lease arrangements (Bijoy & Nongbri, 2013; Nathan & Xaxa, 2012; N. Rao, 2005a). This is despite the prohibitive regulations on such transfers in many states. Even where adivasis have been able to file for restoration of land, implementation of restoration processes has been poor with majority of claims rejected. A recent government report admitted that 'process of restoration of alienated land is worse than alienation' due to 'interlocking' of the judiciary, bureaucracy and the administrative machinery against tribals (Ministry of Rural Development, 2017, p. 37).

Research has shown that impact of displacement is uneven across agrarian classes linked to the initial agrarian structures (Levien, 2018). Since accumulation by dispossession advances capitalism rather than 'kickstart' it, the unequal agrarian structure within capitalism is key to understand the differentiated impacts of dispossession. I have argued that for adivasis too, the landholding data illustrates processes of stratification rather than simply proletarianisation. For the landless or land poor, like in other parts of the global south, dispossession might not result in dissolution of peasantry nor create a pure class of industrial proletariat, unlike the experiences of early capitalist economies (D'Costa and Chakravarty, 2017, p. 21), thus linking it back to AQL.

Moreover, accumulation and stratification discussed as a part of the AQL can also lead to dispossession via differentiation within the agrarian intensifying the processes of large scale displacement that adivasis already face and is of equal relevance for this thesis (Byres, 2016; Oya, 2013). Such individualised alienation might be a result of capital accumulation within agriculture as capitalist relations develop, a result of reproductive squeeze faced by classes of labour that coerces them out of land, through linkages with speculative capital or any mix of these factors. Such capital formation can also result from accumulation within the labour market, as affirmative action or other salaried jobs create a class of wage labourers able to manage expanded reproduction (Higham & Shah, 2013; Parry, 2013; V. Xaxa, 2018), propelling processes of dispossession.

The impact of large scale displacement and dispossession via differentiation on reproduction and accumulation are linked to capitalist development in agriculture, conditions of non-farm employment and rural/urban linkages (O'laughlin, 2016). Tania Li wrote, "To assume a link between dispossession, and the (re)production of a labour reserve is not just too linear, it is dangerously complacent" (2010b, p. 70). The processes and impact of dispossession among adivasis, which is the second aspect of the AAQ as I frame it, thus shapes and is shaped by the AQL I discussed in the preceding section. Following Li's (2011) insistence to centre labour into the land-grab question, this thesis puts both land and labour (related to dispossession and reproduction) in conversation with each other.

In the next and final section, I move to discuss the third aspect of AAQ: politics of Adivasi classes which co-constitutes the AQL and the processes of dispossession.

Politics

The AQ of politics concerns itself with class struggles and the cross-class alliances and solidarities required for the cause of class struggle. The progressive potential of any struggle is determined by its aim for 'sustainable shifts to more equal distribution of power and material resources with a view to systemic change' (Pattenden, 2023, p. 5). Borrass (2020), based on Wright's work, says progressive politics aims at 'a deeply democratic and egalitarian organization of power relations within an economy' (Wright, 2016, p. 102). Building such class solidarities is contentious and is analysed from the class-nature of the demands of any mobilisation, rather than just the class composition of constituents making such demands.

Adivasi politics in the AAQ is not limited to defence of land rights, but ranges across the rural/urban and agrarian/non-agrarian divides, negotiates both land and labour right, sometimes within the same mobilisation, and are intersected across divisions of class, tribe, and gender. This view of struggles

foreground the 'primacy of the conjuncture and the balance of forces rather than a historically inevitable if unpredictable and uneven process' (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2016, p. 45).

Both Borrass and Bernstein in AQ debates have agreed that reproduction as well as politics are fragmented across different occupations and spaces, with the land-based occupations in the rural forming *one* of the key needs for reproduction (Bernstein, 2006, 2016; Borras Jr, 2020; Borras et al., 2022; Pattenden, 2023, p. 7). But they have argued about the emancipatory potential of agrarian movements that oppose land grabs and are 'more vital ideological and political force' under contemporary capitalism (Bernstein, 2018, p. 1146), but often foreground the interests of capital, at the cost of labouring classes. Bernstein has called for more focus on the class contradictions within any agrarian movement, 'unconvinced' by the claims of 'struggle for land is, in effect, the principal form of working-class struggle throughout the 'South'' (Bernstein, 2004, p. 206). On the other hand, within very limited scholarship on politics of classes of labour in India, Pattenden (2018) has argued that the key political question for such classes must be focused on their role as wage labourers.

In a more recent engagement on the question, Pattenden has proposed that progressive politics of classes of labour, arising from 'organizing in agrarian, rural, and urban settings and in the movement between all three… does not privilege agrarian, rural, or urban locations of struggle' (2023, p. 18). This debate in Agrarian Marxism on progressive politics provides the two key dimensions of analysing Adivasi politics in the AAQ: unpacking the class dynamics, contradictions, and progressive potential of Adivasi struggles; and the linkages between the AQL and politics, that analytically do not privilege either land or labour-based occupations. The debates within Agrarian Marxism thus allows us to go beyond the 'homogeneous voice' of 'aggregating disparate and even competing and contradictory class and group interests' (Borras Jr, 2020, p. 5) within political struggles of adivasis to understand the multiplicities and contradictions of such struggles. Returning to Bernstein (Bernstein, 2021, p. 460) the AAQ framework asks of Adivasi politics, 'the class struggles they support… and the class constituencies they attract.'

Implications of class contradictions have been discussed within Adivasi movements, but generally to a limited extent (Baviskar, 2005, 2020; Nilsen, 2013) though class inequalities within adivasis is better documented (Chandra, 2015; Moodie, 2015; N. Sundar, 2011, 2016). Adivasi struggles in defense of land, which have generally received more attention from activists and scholars than labour-based mobilisations, have epitomised 'a collective land rooted life as of greater importance than the individual life of protestor' in the context of a 'long history and an ongoing narrative of loss and resistance followed by more loss' (Dungdung et al., 2022, pp. 1643, 1647). The exceptionalism in the state's conceptualisation of adivasis is

also reflected within their own land struggles. The formation of the Adivasi identity in conversation with the colonial and post-colonial state has been summarised elsewhere (Chandra, 2015; Oskarsson & Sareen, 2020; Upadhya, 2010; V. Xaxa, 2005). The claim-making on the basis of such exceptionalism and discourses of indigeneity that foregrounds an intimate relationship with land, egalitarianism and homogeneity foregrounded by Adivasi struggles have been perceived as a political necessity (Chakrabarty, 2013; Oskarsson & Sareen, 2020; Padel & Das, 2010; V. Xaxa, 1999b) as well as critiqued for 'eco-incarcerating' tribal people into a performance of indigeneity (C. Bates & Shah, 2017; A. Shah, 2007b, 2010). Such politics of representation has been also critiqued for what has been called 'liberal-culturalism' (Steur, 2005) where contradictions within mobilisations are undermined as academic exercises. Adivasis perceived as 'embedded in a politics of representation' (Damodaran & Dasgupta, 2022, p. 1361) within the land struggles can conceal the inequalities and heterogeneities within Adivasi politics.

While Adivasi struggles for land have often found limited success against the might of state and private capital (Oskarsson & Sareen, 2020), they have also found it difficult to mobilise for labour rights within increasing precarity and fragmentation of income sources (A. Shah et al., 2017), which directly links to the AQ debates on the potential for progressive struggles for labouring classes discussed above. In labour work, adivasis who are usually entrenched in the lowest ranks of the informal economy, are often left out of traditional trade union organisations even in the industrial sector (Parry, 2009; Strümpell, 2022). As migrant workers, they face both stigmatised treatment, language barriers and dependence on patronage links (enforced via debts) reducing scope of making better demands on employers (A. Shah & Lerche, 2020). In absence of alternative employment, Adivasi workers like other rural classes of labour, often find themselves 'renewing' their relations of debt bondage to work under exploitative conditions with minimal spaces of resistance (Kapadia, 1995; Sudheesh, 2023). The traditional Left parties have also alienated Dalits, and adivasis to an extent, by not being able to grapple with the linkages between identity and class (Lerche et al., 2013; A. Shah et al., 2017, p. 208). Efforts to resist exploitation outside any unions lead to sacking, violence, and disciplining by usage of another group of migrant workers replacing the 'unruly' ones (Donegan, 2018; Sudheesh, 2023).

Despite these challenges, adivasis have participated in disparate struggles often straddling between identity based and class-based movements for better labouring conditions and for other demands beyond the anti-land-grab struggles. By linking land and labour struggles, Paniya adivasis in Kerala have demanded for better working conditions as migrant labourers in ginger farms, through solidarity with an identity-based Adivasi land rights struggle demanding land redistribution (Sudheesh, 2023; For indigeneity in land

struggles in Kerala see Steur, 2017). Similarly, an identity-based organisation, the Adivasi Vikas Parishad has gained popularity among Adivasi tea plantation workers in North Bengal as they feel alienated from traditional Left workers' unions and the Gorkhaland-movement associated unions that prioritise workers from Nepali origins (S. Bhowmik, 2011). In the claiming of spaces as labourers within an industrial township in Eastern India, adivasis have distanced themselves from their rural or urban slum dwelling relatives; by striving to come to terms with their class mobility and a 'middle class' life (for example by educating children in English-medium schools), they have been shown to 'struggle with the very meaning of Adivasi-ness' (Strümpell, 2022, p. 1712). The linkages and contradictions of labour and identity politics have been seen as both creating possibilities and undermining solidarities within working class politics (Chun & Agarwala, 2016). Moreover, nuancing discourses of adivasis opposing capitalist development and 'keeping the state away' (A. Shah, 2007a), adivasis have negotiated with political parties (Steur, 2017), with Left wing insurgencies (N. Sundar, 2011, 2012), and with trade unions (S. K. Bhowmik, 2014; Lin, 1992; Omvedt, 1981). They have also aligned themselves with counter-insurgency programs of the state against left-wing mobilisations (N. Sundar, 2010) and in recent times, been incorporated within the right-wing Hindu nationalist populism expanding its base in India (Baviskar, 2020).

Building from Banerjee's (2006a) seminal essay that makes a similar point for adivasis from a historical perspective, I therefore argue that contemporary Adivasi politics of resistance (like Adivasi livelihood) covers struggles for land rights, labour rights, cultural rights, demands of social welfare. These resistances comprise both class and tribe-based inequalities, have diverse tactics, strategies and build on different kinds of solidarities that are regionally specific and historically contingent. Banerjee (2006a) speaks of the 'burden' of the Adivasi who emerged as 'the ultimate radical critic in our contemporary politics' (p. 107) where they created alliances with Communist politics as coal mine workers, with the then Left-front government in Bengal negotiating for recognition of their language, with environmental movements rejecting 'industrial modernity.'

While sharply critical of the 'culturisation' of tribes (Ibid, p. 116), her documentation of Adivasi struggles points towards the heterogeneity in Adivasi demands and political alliances under contemporary capitalism. Contrary to both homogenising tendencies of Adivasi politics among many scholars and activists, and in opposition to conclusions like 'Adivasi agency is slippery' whose 'revolutionary potential can dissipate rather quickly' (Chandra, 2015, p. 302), I argue for contextualising the alliance and strategies of *different and differentiated Adivasi groups* within contours of agrarian change under contemporary capitalism.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained the conceptual framework of the *Adivasi Agrarian Question* that I will use to enquire into the reproductive conditions, dispossession, and Adivasi politics in Chhattisgarh and West Bengal in this thesis. The framework will allow for a comparative study of these three aspects of dynamics of agrarian change in Adivasi areas, to draw out tendencies and differences of how capitalism shapes Adivasi livelihood and politics unevenly and unequally. To conclude the framework, I will emphasise upon the relational nature of all these three aspects of AQL, dispossession, and politics within the AAQ, where these are not discrete parts of the agrarian question but co-constitutive. The dynamics of the AQL are both constituted by and reflected in impacts of dispossession and struggles for land, labour, social welfare benefits etc. In turn, processes of dispossession comprising accumulation by dispossession and dispossession via differentiation, interact with agrarian inequalities, shaping AQL and reproductive struggles. The politics of Adivasi classes too are not conceptualised as simply a reaction to AQL and dispossession, but rather such politics shape these aspects, and are in turn shaped by them in regionally specific and historically contingent ways.

In the next chapter, I outline the methodological approach and the tools used to conduct the research, which is an exercise in comparative political economy in two states to study the AAQ.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The conceptual framing of the thesis within Agrarian Marxism provides the analytical tools for the empirical enquiry to explore the 'rich totality of many determinations and relations' (Marx, 1857, p. 100) that comprise the Adivasi Agrarian Question (AAQ). To unpack the *concrete* and *particular* nature of the AAQ (Campling et al., 2016, p. 1746), I conducted a *comparative qualitative study* which is 'sensitive both to diversity and historical contingency' (Fine, 1994, p. 2). This empirical enquiry is carried out with a conjunctural approach, which through understanding dynamics at one point in time and space, explores accumulation and exploitation 'with an emphasis on emergence, contradiction, contestation, agency, and struggle- in short, the specific features of a conjuncture and the many relations that form it' (Li, 2014, p. 17).

I selected one village in one district in each of the two states for my study. These sites were Ranipalli village, Jhargram district, WB, and Birampalli village, Raigarh district, Chhattisgarh. The tools of data collection were participant observation and semi and unstructured in-depth qualitative interviews with all households in each village, preceded and supplemented by interviews with other respondents in the region.

I discuss the methodological decisions and concerns of the thesis in this chapter. Section 3.2 discusses the comparative framing at the sub-national level, selection of the sites, and why I focused on one village for the in-depth enquiry. Section 3.3 lays out the research design and tools of data collection. Section 3.4 delves into ethical considerations for the work, particularly the seeking of consent in the field, maintaining anonymity of participants and the responsibilities of data management. Section 3.5 discusses my positionality as a researcher with reference to my own caste and gender positions in the field, and reflections on solidarity as a scholar of Agrarian Marxism. Section 3.6 concludes the chapter.

3.2 Comparative approach, selecting field-sites and 'studying the village'

In a recent appraisal of Agrarian Marxism as a theoretical paradigm to study agrarian change and politics, Levien and others write that further exploring the links between fragmented agrarian class formation, 'non-class' forms of oppression and politics remains a 'terrain for theoretically sophisticated, empirically rigorous, and (hopefully) comparative work – a large door for young scholars to walk through' (Levien et al., 2018, p. 877). In hindsight, this thesis pays heed to this call. The research questions which seek to understand variations in capitalist agrarian transitions among adivasis led me to develop a comparative

approach to study such transitions in two states in India. A comparative study that pays attention to history, theory and empirics was also crucial to 'prevent analytical closure' (T. J. Byres, 1995, p. 572) while responding to the questions.

The comparison is set at the subnational level as agrarian changes in India vary widely among states, with possibilities to trace 'a plurality of agrarian questions in India' with 'a set of regionally specific agrarian questions' (Lerche et al., 2013, p. 339). The sub-national specificities of political economy of agrarian change, and the governance of adivasi people and Adivasi-inhabited territories form the basis of this comparative analysis. States differ in agricultural productivity, procurement and state support for agricultural produce, pursuit of industrialisation, land reforms and land acquisitions, all of which provide useful basis to draw out the different trajectories of change. Moreover, categorisation of specific social groups as scheduled tribes, the decision to adapt the Fifth Schedule and demarcate scheduled areas are executed at the state level.

The selection of the states and districts were guided by analytical anticipations (discussed in Chapter 1) and pragmatic considerations of access to the field. My post-graduate dissertation was situated in Jhargram, where I was researching a recently curbed left-wing insurgency in 2013. I had been in touch with a few of my key respondents and had revisited the district later in 2016-17 for shorter research visits on delivery of social welfare schemes. A few of them, local farmers and workers' union activists provided me with contacts for access to multiple villages in the district in the initial days of this fieldwork. I had also worked in Raigarh in the past while working as a researcher with a Delhi-based NGO, where we had ongoing projects mapping land grabbing among adivasis in different parts of India. Though I had not conducted primary research in Raigarh, I had worked here on dissemination of our research findings and training workshops for village-level land rights activists. My contacts here, local farmers and land rights activists in the district, also provided me access to multiple villages while I conducted broad-based interviews before finalising the village. My familiarity with the research sites, prior contacts in the site, and my fluency in speaking, reading, and writing Hindi and Bengali, the commonly spoken languages in the two states, were helpful with data collection for the research.

The choice of the village as the primary site of enquiry, like other sites, is 'neither privileged nor particularly flawed' (van Schendel & Rahman, 1997, p. 237). It is 'one of the tools of their [researchers'] trade' (Ibid, p. 238) that is useful for some investigations more than others. Scholars have warned about the inadequacy of the village, which is a residential unit or territory, to enquire into production relations (Harriss-White & Harriss, 2007, pp. 15–16). However, in my empirical work I have treated the village as 'a methodological

entry point' (Jodhka & Simpson, 2019, p. 12) that did not have to encompass all aspects of production, reproduction or politics, but was useful to explore dynamics of agrarian changes and politics. Concentrating on the village (not limiting myself within its confines) provided the main territorial boundary for the empirical enquiry, providing for 'a richer and more reliable picture of the functioning of the rural economy, which is also critical for conceptual framing of larger economic processes' (Ibid). While the village was the primary site of data collection, my research design will show in the following section, both traveling with village residents outside the village and interviewing respondents in nearby towns and other villages was essential to my fieldwork. Stepping outside the village is not meant to confirm the 'inadequacy' of the village as a site of enquiry; but rather reflects that the 'village' is not a static entity. The fluidity, fragmentation and complexities of social relations and politics of its households can only be captured both within and beyond its territorial boundaries.

I selected one village in each state to allow for in-depth fieldwork in complex and sensitive settings, where understanding relations of domination/exploitation and dispossession required time to establish trust and confidence of respondents. Participant observation, one of the primary methods of data collection as I will elaborate below, required familiarising myself with the places and building trust with the respondents, and reacting and responding to a dynamic conjuncture (Musante & DeWalt, 2010, pp. 2–5). With the limitations of time within a doctoral study program, I decided to spend a minimum of five months in each state, with opportunities to focus and substantiate findings from a single village. The single village provided both a 'considerable degree of diversity', differentiation and 'complex structure of social relationships' (Jodhka, 1998, p. 317) to be analytically rigorous and practically manageable as a site of study. The depth in data collection suitable to the questions was prioritised over territorial expanse of the field.

3.3 Research design and methods of data collection

After initial scoping visits to several villages in the district, I selected the block (the sub-division within a district) for the research. In Raigarh, Tamnar block had multiple ongoing coal mining and allied industrial projects, while being entirely covered by the Fifth Schedule; therefore, I had a broader base of villages to select from. In WB, I selected Jhargram block in the immediate proximity to the expanding town, as I decided to explore the processes of expansion of urban frontiers on adivasi villages. I used two criteria to make a shortlist of villages in the block.

One, I shortlisted revenue villages (the unit of revenue collection and public record keeping, including government surveys) that had household count of less than 150. This would allow me to refer to Census data and documents related to land acquisitions which are maintained at revenue village level. The household count was capped at 150 for practical considerations of completing fieldwork on time, since I planned to interview every household at least once.

Two, at least 50 percent of the village population would comprise of adivasis. This would provide a good sample size of adivasi respondents, and the demographic preponderance would potentially ensure possession of some cultivable landholdings. With the shortlist, I visited multiple villages based on the access I could gain via my contacts and finalised one after assessing the support I would get to complete fieldwork safely.

After the village selection, I based myself in and/or near the village for the duration of the fieldwork. Since Birampalli was not well connected by public transport, I lived with a Dalit host family in the village, and occasionally in Raigarh town and Tamnar block headquarter. Except for a couple of well-off households, no one had any bathrooms in the house. The toilets were outside the households while daily baths were taken in a designated open courtyard like area in the the house (also used for washing dishes and clothes). As a female researcher, it was only socially acceptable that I stayed in a household with no adult male members. Durgawati, a Dalit widow with no adult male member in the households, generously offered to host me through my fieldwork, including at nights, which allowed me to conduct this research safely. In Jhargram, I lived in the town, commuting to Ranipalli and all adjoining area via public transport every day.

The fieldwork was spread over 10 months. In Chhattisgarh it was conducted from August-December 2019. In WB, I collected data in two phases, January-March 2020, and November 2020- January 2021. The gap between the two phases was due to the nation-wide lockdown during Covid pandemic when I stayed put in WB and was in touch with few respondents in Ranipalli. The pandemic was yet to spread into these areas till later in 2021. Soon after the lockdown was lifted in September 2020, my contacts in the village told me that villagers had begun commuting to the town for work, and I could return to Ranipalli for the remaining work. Given the altered conditions where participant observation had become difficult due to curbs of gatherings, mobility, and any social events, I adapted my methods to depend more on individual interviews (than, participant observation) in the village and in the town, to complete the data collection.

In each village, I conducted semi-structured interviews with *all* households, along with multiple recurrent interviews of selected key respondents within the village. I determined households for interviews based on

the *Chulha principle* in accordance with the Census in India which defines a household as a group of people who would normally live together and share their meal together. Though more than one household might live in one housing structure, the separation of cooking, indicative of separation of income and expenditure was used as a general thumb rule for interviews. I decided to speak to at least one member of every household in the village, and spoke with men and women in households separately, when possible, to account for every social group and understand the class positions of these households relationally.

Though I have used data from the qualitative interviews to draw quantitative inferences, these interviews were not done in a 'rushed' or 'quick' survey format. Birampalli was already undergoing processes of land acquisition which use 'surveys' as a tool of displacement, conducted by both companies and bureaucrats to compute project-affected households, prepare compensation and rehabilitation plans, and thereby as a tool of exclusion as well. In WB too, there was an ongoing debate and fear of the central government's plans to draw up a citizen's register that would identify 'illegal residents' in the country, through household surveys. People's perception of surveys as tools of dispossession and disenfranchisement was key to not conducting them for my research, both as a pragmatic and political choice.

Along with village level interviews I spoke with multiple respondents across the block during fieldwork. In Raigarh this included land rights activists, farmers and farmer-activists from other impacted villages, union activists in the industrial sector, company officials and contractors from the coal mining sector. In Jhargram, this included Lodha adivasis in an adjacent hamlet and a neighbouring village, construction work contractors, politicians, and political party cadres from TMC and Left parties, workers' union activists, and farmer-workers in other villages.

I also built my understanding of the issues studied through participant observation (when possible, as lockdowns in the later part of my fieldwork made this method more difficult to use), unstructured conversations with respondents, and maintained a fieldwork diary to document main findings through these methods. Participant observation was particularly used in Chhattisgarh where I attended village meetings, rallies, protests, public hearings in the region connected to land acquisition, allowing me to understand participation and narratives of the resistance, and speak to more affected people from across the region who had or were to lose land in near future. In WB, I attended party rallies, government sponsored events and fairs for local people in the first part of the fieldwork, and temporary local government camps for delivery of welfare schemes in the second part.

3.4 Seeking consent and other ethical considerations

Who provides access to the 'field' is of significance, as fieldwork is 'embroiled in the political economy it is trying to understand' (Cramer et al., 2016, p. 147). This goes beyond seeking informed consent at every stage of fieldwork and also requires careful consideration of who among the dominant classes or groups act as gatekeepers to the field (Breman, 1985). Despite previous contacts in the field, anticipating issues of access or gatekeeping at the village level is difficult and involved negotiating complex power relations in the site (Chaudhuri, 2017, p. 132). Individual consent in such cases are preceded by the consent from formal gatekeepers (Reeves, 2010), who vary between settings, and are the first glimpse of power relations within the village.

In Birampalli, I first gained access to the village through my contact at *Jan Chetna Manch*, a local land rights campaign organization (See chapter 4), which had active participation from the village for more than a decade. A woman activist from *Jan Chetna*, who had worked with Birampalli's residents for at least a decade visited the village with me to assure them that I did not pose any threat to them within the sensitive context of the impending acquisition. Once she took me around to several Dalit and adivasi households to introduce me and I explained my research purpose, I received a broad-based initial consent to approach the village head. In my first meeting with the village head, he was hesitant to allow me for my work given the complex conditions, but in a subsequent meeting, few local women from the village accompanied me to make a stronger case. He agreed after I offered to interview him first for him to understand the kind of information I was interested in; after the interview, he consented to my prolonged data collection with all households.

In Ranipalli, I was first introduced to two Santhal men who were party cadres of the Trinamool Congress (TMC), the party in power in WB, by a former workers' rights activist who had become friends with them during the insurgency in the region before TMC came to power. One of these young men was an elected Panchayat member and a primary school teacher. Given WB's political economic context of stronghold of political parties in rural life, which I was conscious of, the consent of TMC party cadres was crucial to access the village, and realised they looked for two kinds of assurances. If my household interviews were not linked to the central government program to create a citizens' register and I did not profess any allegiance to the right-wing opposition, the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), they had no problems with my research work. This shows how the researcher-respondent relationship is dynamic through the course of fieldwork, with positionality also conferred by the respondents (Reeves, 2010, p. 323). In Ranipalli, they perceived my data

collection as a professional requirement for completing my degree, and both these educated Santhal men in turn helped me through introducing me to several villagers before beginning data collection.

Gaining permission is the first step to access, while both consent and accessibility to respondents are continuously pursued through the fieldwork process, both of which require what Kawulich (2011, p. 63) has called 'crafting an acceptable position.' Assurance of not posing a threat and not insisting on information that the respondents did not want to divulge, for instance, exact landholding sizes or income in some cases, and mutual respect for limits of sharing personal information aided me in building relationships of trust with village respondents. I also realised that those who gave initial permissions might not be gatekeepers of information with building of trust, as one of the two TMC cadres became a key respondent, who divulged details of their frustrations with the ruling party and its mediation on behalf of capital.

I sought individual consent from each interviewee verbally explaining to them the purpose for the interviews, which was research on Adivasi livelihood for my PhD thesis. I also provided a timeline of six months for each household respondent, within which they could withdraw their interviews. They could do this either by keeping my phone number, or by contacting two respondents in each village who agreed to pass me on any such withdrawal requests. I did not receive any withdrawal requests.

The interviews were not all recorded, and where they were not, I took notes with their consent in their presence to capture the main points they made. I read, write, and speak Hindi and Bengali fluently, which allowed me to converse and take notes of what respondents said in both the sites in the corresponding regional language. A separate dialect of Hindi is spoken in most parts of Chhattisgarh, called Chhattisgarhi, but I always requested my respondents to speak in Hindi for better comprehension and clarity which is a widely spoken language in the state.

I accessed other respondents outside the village through snowballing methods, directly reaching out to political leaders, contractors, company officials, as required for each site, requesting them for interviews. All these interviews had elements of gatekeeping to them, as they spoke on behalf of a party, a company, or were closely tied to political power (Clark, 2011; De Laine, 2000). These interviews were more structured where I approached the respondents with specific questions or clarifications; however, the outcome, particularly for contractors was often more detailed frank conversations than I anticipated, though all contractors only spoke on the condition of anonymity.

All the fieldwork data, including transcriptions and translations, were only accessible to and handled by me. They are stored in password protected cloud storage, and separately from a master sheet that mentions the original names of respondents with corresponding interview numbers. The transcriptions only carry the interview numbers. I also transcribed my fieldwork diary notes stored to digitally store them. All names of respondents, villages and companies (Chhattisgarh) have been changed to protect the anonymity of respondents. Only the names of blocks and districts have remained the same. Any data collected from document analysis of publicly available documents and media reports related to the land acquisition case discussed for Chhattisgarh have not been referenced in the thesis for the protection of respondents' identities as well. I have pointed these out in the thesis where applicable.

3.5 Positionality and politics of solidarity

My positionality as a researcher was and continues to be shaped by multiplicity of identities that I carried into the field (caste, gender, ethnicity), perception of my work and outcome of my interactions with several respondents. While both my empirical investigation and analysis cannot be decoupled from these complexities, I reflect here on my positionality as a researcher and solidarity as the basis of my engagement with the respondents.

'I am not your data, nor am I your vote bank,
I am not your project, or any exotic museum object,
I am not the soul waiting to be harvested,
Nor am I the lab where your theories are tested'

These words of late Adivasi activist and sociologist Abhay Xaxa (2016) castigates the extractive nature of knowledge production on Adivasi lives, resists such research, and implores researchers like me to reflect upon the purpose and methods of researching on marginalised communities.

Alpa Shah in her interpretation of participant observation as a 'revolutionary praxis' writes that the fieldworker must 'be ever clearer about what we do, why we do it, and why it is important' (A. Shah, 2017, p. 47). In my fieldwork in both states, I saw that the transparency of communicating the primary purpose of the research as requirement for a higher education degree simplified expectations with the respondents. That this will benefit me to secure employment was a common aspiration and a common language that interviewees responded to, without creating any obligations in return. In India, in high

school examinations, science subjects mandate a 'lab' or 'practical' portion in the syllabus. While interviewing a middle-aged adivasi woman in WB, she explained my purpose in the simplest terms: 'So, this is your lab work for your course? Do it well, like my daughter does in her school.' Approaching the research from a functional perspective by the respondent can impact the 'tenor and outcome' of such interviews (Chacko, 2004), could produce limited engagement, but was mitigated through sustained repeated encounters.

My gender and ethnic identities also played significant role in terms of access to spaces, people, and the quality of conversations, not independent of the political economy of the field. My own fieldwork experience, in conformity with literature, has shown that women in adivasi households are not relegated to working within homes or own fields as in caste Hindu society, and access wage work outside their villages and frequent public spaces like markets quite freely. In Chhattisgarh, women attended rallies, protests, and village meetings unaccompanied by male partners, and allowed me into their lives while they worked, or went to markets, protest meetings and other public spaces. In WB, women worked mostly in fields and at home, ate at tea shops and frequented public spaces like fairs, sports events, etc where I was welcome as well. The conversations with women were always more intimate, covering both socio-economic concerns and private lives, and included much more mutual sharing of aspects of our lives. However, not all conversations imply consent; I have used discretion to not treat information or feelings shared during cooking a meal together or walking to a shop together as 'data' to be analysed for research.

Being a woman, interviewing men was governed by social norms, with young adults between 16-25 years interviewed mostly in presence of an older member of the household. Older men spoke privately in both sites, often without presence of women and they in many cases spoke freely for both trust gained over multiple interviews or because they did not perceive a threat from me, the latter perception could result from my being a woman (Raju & Lahiri-Dutt, 2011).

In a segmented hierarchical society like India, being a non-adivasi researcher in primarily Adivasi villages had its own implications on data collection and unavoidably on its outcome. While rural cosmopolitanism had changed forms of caste discrimination, offering of food and hospitality remain determined by caste inequalities, practiced even among adivasi households in both villages. My living with a Dalit household in Birampalli might have established my willingness to not conform to my caste position in the village, however, it was an outcome of my caste privilege that it did not deter receiving hospitality and food from all households that I visited. Regarding offering of food at all households, a young OBC woman pointed this

out to me as I sat for lunch with her parents. 'Had you been from a Dalit or Adivasi community, it would be different.'

In Bengal, where I am originally from, my non-adivasi 'Bengali' ethnicity positioned me more as an 'insider' who was expected to know the complex socio-political history of the state, but I was conscious of belonging to the dominant ethnic group that was directly responsible for historical exploitation and appropriation of land from adivasis in South-western Bengal where I conducted my fieldwork. I do not want to imply that adivasis in this region perceived me as reduced simply to my ethnic identity, but it implied that I had more complex conversations on solidarity, my own ethnic positionality, and my 'work' as a researcher with my respondents at various points of the fieldwork.

My engagement with the field was thus a complex interaction between my gender and caste positions, and the history and inequalities entrenched in the agrarian structure. To navigate these sensitive settings, I have tried to understand my research and my 'methodological praxis' as one of solidarity (Ross et al., 2022). This is rooted in my theoretical framework as well, where the agrarian question is primarily a question about politics, political alliances, and strategies for progressive and emancipatory causes. This has bearing in both sites, where understanding relations of domination and exploitation formed the core of my questions and empirical enquiry. My personal politics of solidarity comprises creating sustained engagement with marginalized communities, divided along lines of class and non-class forms of oppression, committed to understanding inequalities and resistance. My reflection on my positionality as a researcher can neither lead to represent adivasi voice(s) neither does the act of such reflection create claims of better research outcomes (Pillow, 2003). Picking up from Raju's (2002) important commentary on positionality and politics of knowledge production, what it allows me to attempt is to negotiate the multiplicity of identities of myself and my respondents in taking consent, sustaining consent, building solidarities, and continuing conversations, by asking: 'We are different, but can we talk?'

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the research design, the methodological decisions, and reflected upon considerations of ethics, positionality, and politics of solidarity as a researcher. Many of these processes and reflections are not limited to fieldwork, but carry through the life cycle of research, publications, and the attempt to build a career as a researcher based on such scholarship. The following chapters are both an outcome and a part of these processes, a journey guided by the analytical framework and queries laid out in the preceding two chapters to move from 'a chaotic conception of the whole' of agrarian change to

‘a rich totality of many determinations and relations’ within it (Marx, 1857, p. 101). I hope the following chapters resemble the latter rather than the former.

4. Contextualising the Field Sites: Political Economy of Jhargram, West Bengal and Raigarh, Chhattisgarh

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I lay out the regional, historical, and political economic context within which I will locate the empirical findings for the two sites, the South-western district of Jhargram in West Bengal (WB) and the Northern district of Raigarh in Chhattisgarh. I will discuss the two sites separately and draw out the key trends and historical trajectories of livelihood, income, dispossession, and politics pertinent to the empirical findings discussed in the next four chapters of the thesis. While briefly prefacing each section with the changes in adivasi livelihood in the colonial era, I will concentrate on aspects of agrarian change and politics in the post-colonial times with particular focus on the last two decades of increasing liberalisation of the economy. For both states, the themes of continuing patterns of socio-economic differentiation, regional inequality within the states, the fragmentation of bases of reproduction among adivasis and their politics of resistance and co-option within state politics are discussed. This chapter is divided into three sections. Sections 4.2 and 4.3 discuss the sites in WB and Chhattisgarh respectively. Section 4.4 draws out the salient conclusions on the political economic contexts for the comparative analysis.

In WB, adivasis are primarily clustered in two parts of the state: in the North in the tea plantations where the colonial legacy of their migration as plantation workers severed any previous ties with settled agriculture; the adivasis in the South and Southwestern parts of the state were dependent on subsistence cultivation, wage labour work in settled agriculture and on forest produce collection during the colonial times. In Midnapore region in South-west Bengal, of which Jhargram district is a part, the colonial period reconfigured land tenures and agrarian relations among Santhal adivasis by dispossessing them from cultivable land via extraction of rent and high indebtedness pushing them to seasonal and permanent migrations to plantations or more fertile Deltaic plains across Bengal. The land reforms of the late 1970s and 1980s worked in favour of adivasis, through imposition of land ceilings, distribution of government land, and tenancy reforms, leading to high agricultural growth, hike in rural wages and improved yields in the following two decades. Since the 1990s, agricultural growth in Bengal has been stunted, with little corresponding industrial growth in the Jhargram region causing acute poverty, unemployment and pushing adivasis to depend on manual casual wage labour work for sustenance. Despite the legal prohibitions on transfer of adivasi land and land received via land reforms, adivasi dispossession has continued unabated in the state.

The reproductive squeeze, exacerbated by regional backwardness and failure to deliver welfare benefits, contributed to a Maoist-backed insurgency in the region in 2008-10, corresponding with the final term of the 34 years of Left regime in the state. In contrast to the Naxalite movement in the 1970s, the recent insurgency exclusively focused on targeting the Left front regime, demanding a halt to police atrocities, better welfare delivery and freeing of political prisoners in the region. The Trinamool Congress (TMC) government led by Mamata Bannerjee that came to power continued the previous regime's military suppression of the insurgency, along with implementation of counterinsurgency measures, most prominently a subsidised and almost universal public distribution of rice. The curving out of the district of Jhargram is a direct outcome of this counterinsurgency, which came with the promise of better delivery of government services and welfare. The uneven outcome of the land reforms, continuing dispossessions, the recent memory of the insurgency, the change of the regime and poor industrial growth incapable of producing adequate employment in the non-agrarian sector encapsulate the political economy context within which I will situate my empirical findings in Chapters 5 and 6.

In Chhattisgarh, adivasis are spread in clusters in the North and in the South, with different political economic conditions shaping their material conditions and politics. My research is situated in the Northern district of Raigarh, in the context of expansion of extractive industries and the marginalisation of Adivasi interests both in processes of industrialization and state politics. I discuss how the formation of a separate state of Chhattisgarh did not emerge out of an adivasi demand for statehood, as was the case for its neighbour state Jharkhand established at the same time. The demand for statehood was rather pursued by a more powerful class belonging to Other backward classes in the state but was rooted none the less in regional backwardness of Chhattisgarh region within Madhya Pradesh (MP). It also was articulated within workers' movements among Dalit and Adivasi coal mine labourers, who were exploited within the extractive political economy of the state due to rising displacement and precarious labour conditions. It reflected the aspirations of the Chhattisgarhi labouring class, who were marginalized by the continuous immigration of outside labour and capital into the region.

The new state competed with other states to attract more investment and capital intensifying processes of displacement (in what is a key rice producing and procuring state) amidst rising casualisation of the workforce in Chhattisgarh's expanding mining sector. Adivasis continue to be excluded from dominant state politics, their dispossession pushed forth via coercive state-led acquisitions and individualised alienation triggered by demand for land for industrial and real estate purposes. But this plays out in a different context compared to WB, as landlessness is much lower and centrality of cultivation is much higher for livelihood

among adivasis here. While the Southern part of Chhattisgarh (Bastar, for instance) has received considerable attention for sustained Maoist-led armed insurgencies among the forested territories, the Northern districts of Korba, Raigarh and Surguja that face greater onslaught of mining have not been covered adequately by media and academic research. In the Northern belts of Chhattisgarh, including in Raigarh, processes of expulsion and casualisation of workforces continue to push adivasis out of land-based occupations. In response, resistance to dispossessions has shunned violent armed struggles and relied upon broad based negotiations through peaceful demonstrations and legal routes, though with limited success. The processes of coercive displacements, poverty and forest depletion which have been often reasoned as the primary cause of the Maoist-backed movements in Chhattisgarh, have produced a different trajectory of Adivasi politics in the North. The marginalisation and differentiation among adivasis both via expulsion as cultivators and exploitation as labourers form the overarching political economic context within which I will explore the Adivasi Agrarian Question in Chhattisgarh in Chapters 7 and 8.

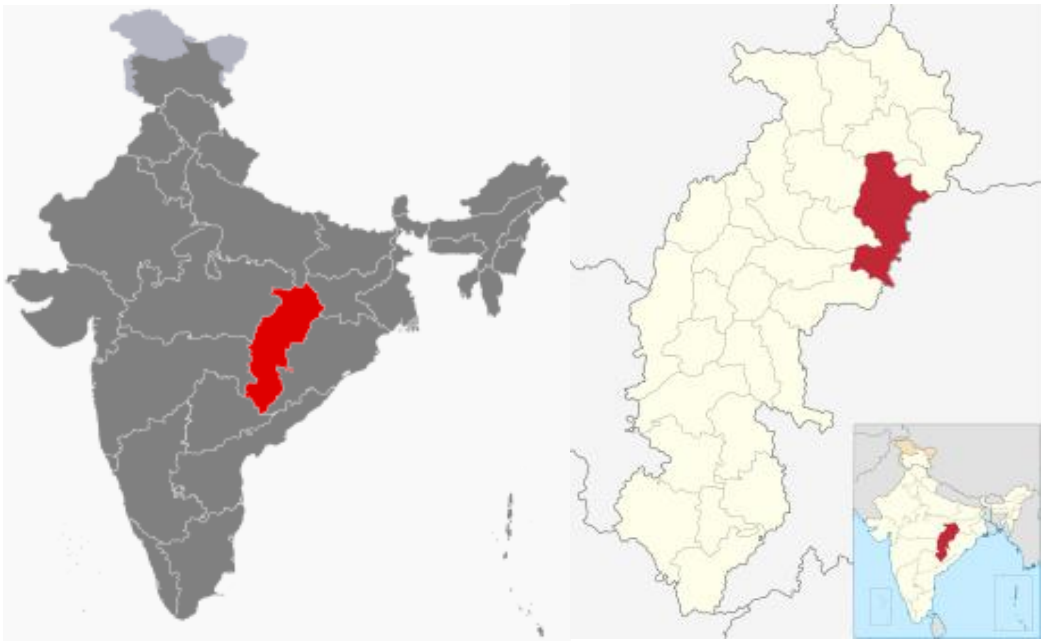
Figure 1 West Bengal

Figure 2 Jhagram district, West Bengal

Source: Wikipedia

Figure 3 Chhattisgarh

Figure 4 Raigarh district, Chhattisgarh



Source: Wikipedia

4.2 Land, labour and adivasi politics in post-colonial Jhargram, West Bengal

WB is the second most densely populated and the fourth most populous state of India with 61.83 percent of its population residing in rural areas (Bakshi & Modak, 2021, p. 24). At almost 5.3 million people (*Census*, 2011), adivasis form 5.8 percent of the state's population and comprise 5 percent of India's adivasi population (K. Rana et al., 2020, p. 8). 40 ethnic groups have been identified as scheduled tribes in the state, out of which 3 ethnic groups (Toto, Birhor and Lodhas) are classified as particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTG) (Adibasikalyan, n.d.). Adivasis in WB are concentrated in the Northern and South-western districts. The Santhals form more than half of the adivasi population in the state spread over the districts of Jhargram, East and West Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia (Chowdhury et al., 2008) and have been traditionally associated with settled agriculture along with Bhumij adivasis also settled in these regions

(Mazumdar, 2016). The Lodha Savar[12] tribe, classified in the colonial period as a 'criminal tribe' and presently categorised as a PVTG is a largely landless adivasi group in the West Midnapore and Jhargram region. Jhargram district is also a part of what is locally known as the 'Junglemahal' region, literally meaning forest tracts, spread across the Adivasi inhabited districts in South-west Bengal, a name that has survived long after it is part of no government official documentation (Dasgupta, 1985). The Santhals and Bhumij adivasis are also found in mixed villages with a non-tribal OBC group, the Kudmi Mahatos[13].

British colonial rule in the region, notwithstanding several tribal insurgencies, led to both mass alienation of adivasis from their land as well as differentiation among them. Colonial rule since the late 18th century put new revenue systems (Permanent Settlement in this region) in motion whereby 'heritable, rentable, and alienable proprietary rights' were granted to the *Zamindar* or the landlord class who exacted rent from unprotected tenant cultivators (Mazumdar, 2016, p. 183). Scholarship on colonial revenue and tenure models have pointed out the heterogeneity of local agrarian structures across Bengal in the colonial period as well as the importance of the *Jotedar*, the de-facto village landlords and direct tenants of the *Zamindar* in actual control of the land in many parts of Bengal (Abdullah, 1980; S. Bose, 1994; Ray, 1975), with power conflicts between *Zamindars* and *Jotedars* often noted (Bhaduri, 1973).

Two important features of the agrarian changes in the Junglemahal region in the colonial period is noted here: the break-down of the tribal traditional hierarchy for revenue collection replaced by non-tribal landlords, traders and moneylenders; second, the predominance of rural wage labour among Santhals by the end of the colonial rule. By the beginning of the 20th century, the colonial rule resulted in the disintegration of traditional landholding structure among Santhals, Bhumij and Mahatos that was headed by tribal chiefs or *Mandal* who collected and paid rent to the *Zamindar* (S. Bose, 1994, pp. 282–283; Dasgupta, 1985, pp. 101–106). This was primarily due to entry of middle and upper caste traders from East Bengal and Orissa, engaging in usury and dislodging of the Mandal to become the tenure-holder for villages. The situation was worsened by introduction of cash rents, arbitrary increases in rent and high interest rates on loans, displacing both tribal chiefs and Santhal and Mahato peasantry struggling against the new revenue and settlement systems (Chattopadhyay, 2014, p. 69; Samaddar, 2013). By the end of the colonial

[12] There is a discrepancy between local and the Census classification of Lodhas. The Census classifies Lodhas in two categories: Lodha/Kheria and Savar. Locally, Lodhas are classified differently as Lodha Savar and Kheria Savar. The socio-economic conditions of the two groups are similar. Lodha Savars are predominant in West Midnapore and Jhargram (K. Rana et al., 2020, p. 1).

[13] The Kudmi Mahatos were classified as scheduled tribes in the 1931 census and were later incorporated in the OBC list. There is a resurgent demand to reclassify them as tribes in Jharkhand and WB, a demand that has received support from various political parties at different times.

rule, in the Junglemahal region, Dalits (Bagdis and Bauris) and adivasis (Santhals, Bhumij) 'supplied much of the labour on the agricultural lands, invisible to settlement statistics' as sharecroppers, tied labourers, day labourers and farm servants (S. Bose, 1994, p. 296). The prevailing landlessness among Santhals and their work status as farm labourers is thus documented by the end of the colonial period, a tendency that was arrested and partially reversed by the Left Extremism in the 1960s and 1970s, corresponded by the land reforms, which I discuss next.

4.2.1 Agrarian change, land reforms and Left extremism in post-colonial Bengal

The agrarian changes in post-colonial Bengal among adivasis do not conform to a linear trajectory of proletarianisation of adivasis as gains from land reforms will indicate. However, adivasis reproduced themselves within the broader dynamics of fragmentation of landholdings, low employment generation in formal industrial economy, primary dependence on wage labour in the informal economy for sustenance and a consolidation of a 'party society' in Bengal. These dynamics, it will reflect in empirical findings later, continue to determine the Adivasi Agrarian Question in Jhargram and have been historically shaped by the 34 years of Left front regime in the state.

The Naxalite movement, a Maoist-backed armed insurgency in India which gained its name from a small village in North Bengal that clashed with the police and military forces in summer of 1967, spread across Junglemahal in 1960s and 1970s. In Midnapore region, it began in April 1968 with the demand for hike in rural wages in a road construction site by Dalit workers in the region (Sengupta, 2018, p. 179). Typically associated with the demand for distribution of land, the mobilisation in Midnapore reflected the dependence of rural poor on farm labour work and sharecropping, rather than just subsistence cultivation. It involved participation of Dalit groups like Mal, Bagdi, Bauri, and adivasis like Santhals and Mundas, demanding better share of produce for tenants, distribution of cultivable land and higher farm labour rates in the area (S. Rana, 2018, pp. 115–117)[14]. Santosh Rana, arguably the most popular Naxal leader in the region writes of bonded workers and farm servants (*Mulia)* and child labour for cattle grazing (*Bagal)* who were employed from Dalit and Adivasi households by middle and upper caste *Jotedars* (landlord moneylender) across the region (Ibid). The adivasi and low caste tenants farmed the *jotedar*'s land at high rent. The *jotedars* also derived substantial profits from lending out paddy during the lean season where 1.5

[14] 'Rajnitir ak jibon' translated as 'A life in politics' was published in Bengali in 2018. Translation is mine.

times the paddy had to be repaid in seven months, keeping households in perpetual indebtedness (Ibid, p. 150-155).

The mobilisation in Midnapore was led by rural and urban activists associated with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) in the beginning, and later by the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI-ML) that had split from CPM. Though the CPM brutally crushed the rebellion across the state in the late 1970s after coming to power, it delivered on the demands for land distribution challenging traditional feudal powers in the state (Bandyopadhyay, 2000, 2003a; S. Banerjee, 1980).

The Left front, which was an alliance of socialist and communist parties, remained in power from 1977-2011 for most of which period it 'maintained its superiority in every local, regional or national election by garnering almost half of popular votes and an overwhelming number of constituencies' (Bhattacharyya, 2016, p. 1). The CPM-led government carried out one of the most successful programs of land reforms among Indian states in the 1970s (Bandyopadhyay, 2003a; Rogaly et al., 1999). There were three aspects of the land reforms program: tenancy reforms, imposition of land ceilings, and distribution of state-owned non-agricultural land for homestead and cultivation (Rawal, 2001).

The registration of sharecroppers and redistribution of land, followed by a decade of high agricultural growth in Bengal, increased the significance of land-based occupations for Adivasi reproduction. It also reduced the dependence on the middle and upper caste landlords/moneylenders, the implications of which are still visible in Jhargram, as I will show later in the thesis. While Dalits comprise about 23 percent of the state's population and adivasis comprise about 6 percent, they respectively comprised 37 percent and 19 percent of the new title holders after redistribution of land (Bakshi, 2008). Distribution of homestead land aided both household nutrition and income by providing space for garden kitchens and the rearing of poultry (Ibid). Between 1982 and 1992, the proportion of landowning households in fact increased among scheduled tribes along with increase in their share in landholdings in Bengal (Singharoy, 2004, p. 32). This was also accompanied by tenancy reforms, which mainly comprised of the highly popular registration of tenant cultivators, known as Operation Barga. The West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1979, changed the onus of disproving cultivator status on the landowner rather than keeping it on the tenant to prove it. Between late 1978 and December 1990, more than 1.4 million *bargadars* or tenants were registered out of around 2.3 million estimated in the state, with a significant proportion belonging to Dalit and adivasi groups (Ibid, p. 35).

The debates regarding the implementation of land reforms and its implications cannot be treated in detail here (Bandyopadhyay, 2003a, 2003b; D. Bhattacharyya, 2004; Lieten, 1990; Rawal, 2001; Singharoy, 2004). Two main implications for adivasi livelihood strategies are discussed here: first, the adivasis continued to depend heavily on wage labour work due to very small landholdings being distributed per household; second, the electoral considerations of the CPM left the task of reforms 'unfinished' as it consolidated its base among the small and middle peasantry, often at the cost of agricultural labourers (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2003; S. Bose, 1993, p. 78; Rogaly, 1998, p. 2731).

The demographic pressure, high ceiling bar for landholdings, legal conflicts around distribution of ceiling vested land and a commitment to 'unity' of *all* peasant classes restricted the distribution of arable land in the state to about 8 percent of total arable land (D. Bhattacharyya, 2016, p. 62; Harriss-White, 2008, p. 6; Khasnabis, 2008). While the proportion of landholding among adivasi households increased, by 1992, the average landholding of the state was 1.1 acre and 96.5 percent of adivasi farming households belonged to landless, small and marginal categories of farmers (Singharoy, 2004, p. 32). The fragmented landholdings and seasonal nature of agriculture continued to keep them dependent on agricultural wage labour and increased their seasonal migration for farm work to the more fertile districts in the East of Bengal with high agricultural growth. This seasonal migration locally called '*Nabal*' in Jhargram was practised by most adivasi households. The CPM and its peasant union closely controlled the labour relations and wages at local levels, and mediated negotiations between the medium and small peasantry and the agricultural labourers often in favour of the former (Rogaly, 1998; Rogaly et al., 2001). Though a separate agricultural workers' organisation was formed within the All India Kisan Sabha, the peasant union affiliated to CPM, no such organisation was allowed to be formed in Bengal. Despite the high agricultural growth in the 1980s, real rise in wages remained at par with the India average and socio-economic differentiation continued to favour the middle castes and classes against the interests of dalit and adivasi agricultural workers (Harriss-White, 2008, p. 9; Ruud, 1999; A. Sarkar, 2006).

Before moving on to trajectories of agrarian change post liberalisation since the 1990s, a final point I make here is regarding the consolidation of 'party society' (Bhattacharyya, 2009, 2010, 2016), by which Bhattacharya refers to 'the ubiquitous presence and prominence of political parties and their supreme mediatory role in rural West Bengal' (2016, p. 126). This consolidation of the 'party society', as I will show in the later chapters, have continued under the current regime with reliance on a politics of patronage between the party and the people. The decentralisation of rural governance by the CPM, which delivered on the land reforms and the regulation of rural labour discussed above, also led to the positioning of the

party ‘as the central figure of West Bengal’s rural society’ which in turn consolidated the position of the rural middle classes in the rural power structure (Ibid, p. 15). Both women and scheduled tribes had little representation in the leadership in the initial years, though this changed after the reservations for Dalits, adivasis and women from early 1990s (Bardhan et al., 2005). The CPM or ‘the party’ stood at the centre of all social transactions as well as disbursement of welfare benefits; ‘the party and its local functionaries are the principal arbitrators in all social, family and personal disputes and the principal facilitators when individual villagers need help in matters of health, education, finances employment or travel’ (P. Chatterjee, 2009, p. 43). The distribution of state welfare schemes was perceived as a ‘help’ from the party, often discriminating against those who participated in oppositional politics, and assured electoral gains of the party over a sustained period (Ruud, 1999; Singharoy, 2004; Williams, 1999).

4.2.2 Agrarian impasse, land alienation and wage labour under neoliberal reforms

After a decade of high agricultural growth in 1980s, the WB economy faltered in 1990s, with slowdown in agricultural growth, manufacturing sector growth concentrated in the informal economy, and very low growth rate of employment (A. Sarkar, 2006, pp. 344–345). I first argue in this section that the low rate of agricultural growth and fall in summer rice cultivation rates reduced participation in seasonal labour migration among adivasis even as they struggled to find adequate alternative employment. The low growth in industrialisation, particularly away from the state capital of Kolkata, for instance in the Jhargram area, failed to employ adivasis in the manufacturing sector. Adivasis were increasingly incorporated as casual wage labourers in the construction sector and other informal sector work, though with inter-tribal variations in the dependence on agricultural and non-agricultural work. The agrarian distress and alternative employment in the informal economy, my empirical findings will later show, continue to be salient factors shaping the reproductive conditions of adivasis at my fieldsites. In the second part of this section, I will briefly discuss the reluctance of the CPM government to adopt the provisions of the two seminal protective legal frameworks for tribal governance in India: PESA and FRA. The government’s refusal to adapt PESA guidelines and its outright hostility to the FRA have likely contributed to alienation of adivasis from cultivable land and denied them rights to forest produce, marginalising them further.

Following a decade of high growth in 1980s, a trend break in agricultural growth was noticed since early 1990s corresponding to the adaptation of neoliberal reforms in India that led to withdrawal of input subsidies and low development of irrigation across the state (M. Bhattacharyya & Bhattacharyya, 2007; Harriss-White, 2008, p. 10). Much of the increase in the work participation rate in the 1990s in WB is due

to rise in marginal workers, those without regular employment; the shift from agricultural to the industrial sector is primarily a shift into the unorganised sector (Khasnabis, 2008, p. 109). As noted in the case of agricultural farm work, the CPM government mediated labour relations and conflicts even within non-agrarian informal sector via party affiliated trade union units without much scope for independent mobilisations (Agarwala, 2013).

The WB Human Development report pointed out that a sharp decline in ratio of male workers to male population in 1990s reflects 'the inadequacy of productive employment opportunities' and the shift to marginal work shows increasing 'less secure forms' of employment (Government of West Bengal, 2004, p. 90). Among scheduled tribes, while rural women's work participation rates were higher than other social groups reflecting the lower social stigma associated with women's work outside households, the unemployment rates by daily status were highest for adivasi men across all social categories (ibid, 9. 96). With decline in employment opportunities, the rising dependence on political parties for public subsidies have been noted in WB (A. Sarkar, 2006, p. 346). A survey by Bardhan and Mookherjee (2012) also showed that the continuing subsidies and welfare benefits were key to maintaining electoral support of the Left front rather than just the one-time benefits of homestead or other forms of land rights.

Displacement through both state-led acquisitions and individual transfer of land continued in the postcolonial period and were intensified in 1990s, leading to a government commissioned report on land governance in Bengal concluding that tribal land alienation was one of the key land-related concerns in the state (Landesa, 2014). Between 1947 and 2000, estimates suggest 1.6 million people were displaced by state led development projects, and adivasis formed 19 percent of those displaced, four times their share in the state population (Government of India, 2014, p. 275). In line with laws in other states restricting sale of tribal land to non-tribals, Section 14A-14I of the WBLR Act, 1995, allows such transfers only with the permission of a revenue officer, except for purposes of improvement or investment in land (Biswas & Pal, 2021). It also allows the state to restore land if it decides such land has been unlawfully alienated. Despite these restrictions, adivasi land alienation has continued in the state, and has, at least partially, reversed gains from the land reforms in the past two decades. In the post liberalisation period, between 1992-93 and 2004-05, the increase in share of households without access to cultivable land in WB is highest among adivasi households (11.6 percent) compared to all other social groups in the state.

While data for Jhargram is not available separately on economic parameters as the new district was formed only in 2017, the West Midnapore district's human development report shows that the percentage of main workers among adivasis here were much lower than for adivasis across the state while marginal worker

share remained much higher (Government of West Bengal, 2011, p. 12)[15]. Within the Jhargram sub-division, which corresponds to the rural blocks of the Jhargram district at present, the 'occupational structure was less diversified, and percentage of non-agricultural workers' still low compared to the district (Ibid). A household survey conducted by the state government in 2005 also found that 43 percent of rural Adivasi families lived below poverty line, against 35 percent for the state (Government of West Bengal, 2011, p. 16). With low industrialisation in the Jhargram region and low income from cultivation, Jhargram ranked 25th among 29 blocks of the West Midnapore district in human development index (Ibid p. 17). These trends indicate high levels of poverty, marginalisation, poor human development indicator and high dependence on irregular unsecure employment in the agricultural and non-agricultural sector for the Jhargram region and its adivasis.

Table 1 to Table 4 below show the latest available status of income and livelihood for scheduled tribes in India, WB and Jhargram. Table 1 and Table 2 show very high preponderance of landless households deriving most of their income from manual casual work in WB compared to the Indian average, and among adivasis in WB compared to adivasis nationally. Though the data for Jhargram is derived from a small sample, it shows that half of adivasi households in WB and Jhargram are landless deriving a major part of income from manual casual work.

Table 3 and Table 4 show only 16 percent of Adivasi households in WB and Jhargram report cultivation as their primary source of income, while 72 percent of Adivasi households in WB and 78 percent in Jhargram depend primarily on manual casual labour work. More than three quarters of adivasi households here thus are mainly dependent on casual wage work, constituting classes of labour.

[15] Main workers are defined as those who get employment for more than 183 days in a year, and marginal workers as those employed for less than 183 days in a year.

Table 1 Household Level data on land and livelihood in rural WB and India

Categories	All India all households	WB all households	All India Scheduled Tribes	WB Scheduled Tribes
Landless households deriving major part of their income from manual casual labour	38.36%	48.02%	35.65%	54.46%
Households with non-agricultural enterprises registered with Govt	2.72%	1.6%	2.05%	1.2%
Households paying income tax	4.57%	5.99%	3.35%	4.78%
Households with destitutes/living on alms	0.37%	1.26%	0.23%	0.62%
Households with salaried job in Govt	4.98%	4.33%	4.36%	3.62%
Households owning irrigated land	25.52%	17.13%	18.05%	9.52%
Households owning unirrigated land	29.6%	18.12%	42.05%	23.62%

Source: Socio-economic Caste Census, 2011.

Table 2 Household level data on land and livelihood in rural Jhargram

Categories	Jhargram All HHs	Jhargram ST HHs
Landless households deriving major part of their income from manual casual labour	36.75%	45.33%
Households with non-agricultural enterprises registered with Govt	0.61%	0.37%
Households paying income tax	3.49%	2.64%
Households with destitutes/living on alms	0.01%	0.01%
Households with salaried job in Govt	5.85%	4.15%
Households owning irrigated land	8.8%	6.5%
Households owning unirrigated land	40.4%	39.09%

Source: Socio-economic Caste Census, 2011.

Table 3 Source of household income for all and adivasi households rural in WB and India

Categories	All India all households	WB all households	All India ST	WB ST
Cultivation	30.1%	18.87%	38%	16.05%
Manual Casual Labour	51.18%	58.38%	51.3%	71.65%
Domestic Service	2.5%	1.89%	2%	1.54%
Foraging Rag picking	0.23%	0.23%	0.22%	0.35%
Non-agricultural own account enterprise	1.61%	3.31%	0.63%	0.51%
Begging/charity/alms	0.37%	1.26%	0.23%	0.62%
Others	13.97%	16.05%	7.60%	9.28%

Source: Calculated from Socio-economic Caste Census, 2011

Table 4 Source of household income for all and adivasi households in rural Jhargram

Categories	Jhargram All HHs	Jhargram ST HHs
Cultivation	23.35%	16%
Manual Casual Labour	64.32%	77.76%
Domestic Service	0.12%	0.18%
Foraging Rag picking	0%	0%
Non-agricultural own account enterprise	1.35%	0.26%
Begging/charity/alms	0.01%	0.01%
Others	10.85%	5.75%

Source: Calculated from Socio-economic Caste Census, 2011

A final point regarding the legacy of the Left front government in shaping material conditions of adivasis in WB relates to their non-implementation of PESA and FRA in the state. Despite a sizeable scheduled tribe population, WB never declared any part of the state as protected under the Fifth schedule of the constitution and by extension did not frame regulations to implement PESA after it was enacted in 1996. In not adopting the Fifth schedule provisions, the WB government has ignored recommendations of multiple government appointed committees to bring areas with high tribal population under Pesa (Government of India, 2014; Ministry of Tribal Affairs & UNDP, n.d.). The CPM's policy document on Tribal Question (2002) espouses the need to implement the provisions under the Fifth schedule of the

constitution, but fails to discuss its own reluctance to do so during its 34-year governance in the state. Both WB and Kerala, the other southern Indian state where CPM has been in power consistently have not adopted the PESA provisions despite territorial pockets of high tribal population. In addition to this, the state government through executive orders in 2008 violated the spirit of the FRA, by refusing to allow village level councils or *Gram Sabha* as the presiding body over governance of forest resources (S. Jha, 2010). It instead put the Gram *sansad*, its unit of decentralised governance delivery through *Panchayat* system, in charge of FRA implementation, retaining control over the process by the party hierarchy (A. Banerjee et al., 2010). It included forest officials as permanent members of the committees, and continued to implement the Joint Forest Management program from the past, which retains the powers of the forest officials and denies forest rights to adivasis in forest adjacent areas (A. Banerjee et al., 2010; S. Ghosh et al., 2017; S. Jha, 2010). The non-implementation of PESA and FRA, along with high alienation of adivasis from land, challenge an uniform narrative of empowerment of marginalised social groups via land reforms in the state.

4.2.3 Maoist-backed insurgency, regime change and politics of welfarism: Jhargram at present

Declining gains of land reforms, low industrial growth and high unemployment and underemployment pushed the Left front government in its last two terms to campaign for private investment and industrialisation in the run up to the 2006 elections to tackle high unemployment (Nielsen, 2010). However, the government's aggressive measures for acquiring cultivable land in the state from farmers who often formed their primary support base backfired. The years leading to the 2009 general elections and 2011 state assembly elections saw multiple social movements in the state challenging the CPM regime including the anti-land grab movements in Nandigram and Singur (Banerjee, 2006; P. S. Banerjee & Roy, 2007; Ghosh, 2012; Nielsen, 2010).

In parallel to the mobilisations in Singur and Nandigram, and within the context of marginalisation of adivasis in Jhargram region, a Maoist-backed insurgency erupted in the West Midnapore region in Bengal in 2008-10. The Lalgarh insurgency, named after a small village panchayat in the Jhargram district, was led by People's Committee against Police Atrocities (PCPA) which was perceived as a front organization of the CPI (Maoist), with huge popular support of local adivasis and Mahato men and women. The unity between the Santhal, Bhumij and Mahato communities in the movement was a throwback to the popularity of the Jharkhand movement in the region in 1980s (which did not have much electoral success but was an oppositional force in the region), and forces of tribal cultural revivalism within the area (Kamra, 2016, p. 134). Unlike the Naxalite movement in 1970s in Jhargram, the demand of the Lalgarh insurgency was not

related to wages, land reforms, or a challenge to the agrarian class relations. It was rather representative of political aspirations of the people, who doubted the legitimacy of the CPM government and the capability of its party rulers to deliver anymore in favour of the marginalised sections (Samaddar, 2013, p. 280). This was reflected in the demands made by the PCPA in posters and letters written to the public where they focused on the release of political prisoners in the area, delivery of health and education needs of the region, withdrawal of military and police engagement from the region and recognition of the Santhali Ol-chiki script and its usage in school and higher education in the state (Bose, 2021). The movement saw massive popular rallies, boycotting and complete breakdown of the government in the region, armed violence, and killings of those perceived as political 'enemies', and proximity to the then opposition leaders. The opposition in the state led by Mamata Bannerjee and her party, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) publicly supported what was an anti-CPM insurgency, like it did for the other mobilisations in the state and reaped electoral benefits in the state elections in 2011 to form government ending 34 years of CPM regime.

Her government continued with the military engagement of the state in the Midnapore region, brutally crushing the movement, and killing and imprisoning the Maoist leaders she had once even held public meetings with. The TMC regime responded to the movement's key 'demands related to welfare and development, and making claims on political parties' (Kamra, 2016, p. 172). As Kamra shows in her thesis, the government after coming to power followed an agenda of 'development as counterinsurgency' with increased focus on delivery of government schemes and welfare programs in the region. The legacies of the long Left front regime, recent experience of the insurgency and the violence it entailed, the counter-insurgency mechanisms that have further consolidated the position of the TMC as the primary benefactor of people, within the context of impoverishment of the Adivasi classes of labour, encapsulate the political-economic conditions within which the empirical findings of this research are situated.

4.3 Land, labour and adivasi politics in post-colonial Raigarh, Chhattisgarh

The mineral-rich state of Chhattisgarh was carved from MP in November 2000 comprising of 16 of its eastern districts. Chhattisgarh roughly covered the pre-independence provinces of Central Provinces and Berar extending to the Odisha border. The central plains of the new state which grew some its best paddy were under direct British rule, while the hills and plateaus on all sides came under one of the princely states (I. Sen, 2014). Scheduled tribes comprise 30.62 percent of the population in Chhattisgarh (Census, 2011). 7.5 percent of India's tribal population belong to Chhattisgarh that has 42 recognised tribal groups (Government of India, 2014, pp. 42–44). According to government classifications, the tribes in Chhattisgarh

can be seen as spread around three geographical regions: the Surguja division in the North and the Bastar division in the South comprising largely of hilly and forested terrain, and the central division comprising of plains, forests and hills. Raigarh district has both plains and hilly and forested terrain. Tamnar block in Raigarh was the main site of enquiry which is the only block classified as completely rural in the district and is entirely covered under PESA. The following sections provide the historical and socio-economic context of the ongoing agrarian changes, tracing the key developments in the state since the colonial times. Since localised academic research on Raigarh has been very limited, this part of the chapter also relies upon state level literature and media reports.

Nandini Sundar, in her seminal historical-anthropological work on Bastar, clarifies that the Adivasi populated regions in Chhattisgarh were not isolated even in pre-colonial times. The kingdoms competed between themselves, and conflicts between indigenous hill people and the people from the plains were not uncommon, Sundar writes, citing raids by the former on the latter. The tribes were looked down upon as 'savages' but such prejudices 'did not have the material force they were to achieve in colonial times' (N. Sundar, 1997, p. 5). The migration and settlement of caste groups from other areas, including upper caste Brahmins, had continued at least since the 15th century, and by the time colonial rule began, many pockets of Chhattisgarh were not geographically 'isolated' tribal regions. While historicising these movements of adivasis and non-tribals in the region is useful to challenge the post-colonial state's imagination of tribes as socially isolated groups, the implications of the continuing arrival of the exploitative 'outsider' is significant in understanding agrarian change and adivasi politics in the state.

Raigarh district was an amalgamation of five colonial states of Raigarh, Sarangarh, Udaipur, Jashpur and Sakti. Situated near the Odisha border, Raigarh state comprised of those speaking in both Chhattisgarhi and Oriya, and the Imperial district Gazetteer notes it comprising of mainly 'aboriginal' people belonging to Kawar and Gond tribes (*The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, n.d., p. 46). Under the British colonial rule, Chhattisgarh had mixed revenue systems, with tax collected directly from cultivators or at the village level, and landlord based systems, like the *Malguzari* system, though it resembled village based revenue systems closely (Baden-Powell, 1892; Iversen et al., 2013). Tiny parts of the district also had the 'Gaontia' system where a traditional village head collected revenue, controlled the terms of tenancy of farmers and held 20-30 percent of village assets rent free as remuneration, thereby creating a class structure among adivasis from precolonial times also witnessed elsewhere in Chhattisgarh (N. Sundar, 1997). There is evidence of land parcels being redistributed periodically among villagers in the early colonial period, through a system

of *Lakha-Bata* (Mishra, 1970), which shows private rights tied to individual land plots only developed during the colonial period.

Similar to what I discussed for Bengal, the colonial rule introduced new revenue models that changed the land ownership structures in the region undermining tribal hierarchies. In the second half of the 19th century the British began to allocate proprietary rights for land through its survey and settlement processes, and the revenues were fixed high enough to 'ruin' many erstwhile Patels or revenue collectors and replace them with new (often absentee) landlords (Harnetty, 1976). This also brought in usurious moneylenders who were now advancing seeds and money to cultivators and often used the profits to outbid the older revenue collectors (Ibid). By the time the British introduced legal measures to protect traditional cultivators and revenue collectors, in many villages proprietary rights had been extended to a new class of non-tribal landlords and a hierarchy of six kinds of cultivators with differentiated tenancy and ownership rights had been introduced within the agrarian structure. By the end of the 19th century, there were substantial changes in the ethnic and caste composition of the landowning groups, in which agricultural castes/tribes like Kawars, Gonds, Kurmis lost their proprietorship to moneylending castes, including Banias and Brahmins (Ibid, p. 25). Both cultivators and tenants were also heavily indebted in many of those districts which created a class of 'outsider' speculators who invested in the moneylending business in return for heavy profits. The adivasi population struggled with the newly imposed land governance, titling and revenue systems, complicated and alien court proceedings that could be used to impoverish them (Bhengra et al., 1999, p. 18). In some parts of Chhattisgarh, historians have also noted the exploitation of Adivasi labour via the system of coerced unpaid labour perpetrated by most British officials (Prasad, 2006). Due to growing landlessness, loss of socio-economic status for Adivasi chiefs, and low output from cultivation, Bates (1985) has also documented the heavy reliance of adivasis from central India on periodic migrations for agricultural work to other parts of Central India since colonial times.

4.3.1 Post-colonial political economy, industrialisation and demand for statehood in Chhattisgarh

In this section I show two parallel and connected trends in the post-colonial political economy of Chhattisgarh when it was a part of MP. The first was the pursuit of industrialisation, mainly heavy industries and capital goods sector after independence, reliant upon the abundance of minerals in the state that continued to displace adivasi population, which also provided a basis for labour struggles at the mines. The development of public sector units also continued to trigger immigration of middle and upper caste population from other parts of the country, as workers, traders, and investors in land that (alongside

creating a Chhattisgarhi middle class) intensified processes of adivasi marginalisation in the economy and polity. The second feature relates to the first, in the development of a demand for statehood for Chhattisgarh that primarily came from the local OBC elites who formed almost half of Chhattisgarh's population, which felt alienated from the decision-making processes that continued to be based in what is currently the MP state. The demand for statehood however was also articulated in the Chhattisgarhi workers' movements who were losing access to land and being marginalised in the labour market. The dominance of the OBCs, the exclusion and dispossession of adivasis, and a terrain of struggles that built solidarities between workers' and farmers' movements are historical specificities that continue to shape Chhattisgarh's political economy, which I will discuss in the next section.

Chhattisgarh has remained a major mineral producer for India, as it accounts for 16 percent of India's coal reserves, 19 percent of iron ore (with very high quality iron ore available in the Baliadila mines, 28 percent of its diamonds, 11 percent of the dolomite and 38 percent of the tin ore (Tillin, 2013). The mining and industrial production has led to the creation of two major hubs, the Bhilai-Raipur conurbation and the Korba-Bilaspur conurbation in the postcolonial decades comprising of iron and steel plants, thermal power plants, and aluminum plants (Kumar, 2012). The Bhilai steel plant in the Durg district of Chhattisgarh was one of the first heavy industries in India established in 1957 along with a thermal power plant in Korba in 1954 (D. Kumar, 2012). The raw materials for the plants were made available from coal and iron ore mines in the region. This was followed by the development of the cement industry in the state with plants in Jamul, Raigarh, Bhatapara, Tilda and several other locations, as well as the setting up of an aluminum factory in 1965 in Bilaspur (Ibid). Between 1982 and 1990, most of the land acquisition was driven by water resources (96.05 per cent), industry (0.55 percent) and mines (0.12 percent), with Raipur and Bilaspur being the most impacted for land grabs (Government of India, 2014, p. 271). But between 1991 and 2007, this pattern changed with a major portion of the land acquisition driven by demands for transport, industry, non-hydel power projects, mines, and defense sector (Government of India, 2014, p. 272). This was accompanied by depletion of forest resources, where 67 percent of forest land diverted between 1980 and 2003 was for mining purposes (Ibid, p. 263).

The state-led displacement process, coupled with diversion of forestland and reduced access to forest resources, turned a vast majority of tribals into landless labourers (George, 2017; Prasad, 2010). The development of the industrial hubs also led to migration of a large number of workers from neighbouring states (Kumar, 2012). The growth and expansion of the industrial hubs and public sector units also contributed to the creation of a 'Chhattisgarhi middle class', that comprised upper-caste arrivals from other

states who also joined the management of the public sector enterprises while locals (especially adivasis and Dalits) continued to concentrate among the contractual and manual labourers (Adhikari & Chhotray, 2020; Parry, 1999). The conditions of the manual workers in contrast to the 'outsider' elite contributed to a deepening narrative of self-determination and Chhattisgarhi identity among workers' movements at mines in 1970s and 1980s, though the main demand for statehood arose out of the elite OBC groups in the state.

The Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh (CMSS), a union for the contractual workers at the Dalli Rajhara Mines was formed in 1977, which provided raw materials for the Bhilai Steel plant (Tillin, 2013). Founded by contractual workers at the Dalli Rajhara mines and later led by activist Shankar Guha Niyogi, the CMSS struggled for contractual miners who mostly belonged to Dalit and adivasi groups, for better working conditions, raising minimum wages, opposing retrenchment of workers due to mechanization in mines and other related issues (I. Sen, 2014). Niyogi's vision for the union, represented by the slogan *Sangharsh aur nirman* (Struggle and construction) and a red-green flag (denoting unity of workers and peasants), sought to push CMSS beyond the boundaries of economic demands for workers. It envisioned a unified struggle for peasants and workers, built and ran schools and hospitals and participated actively in anti-dispossession movements in the region (Dogra, 1997; I. Sen, 2014). Niyogi used the history of Adivasi freedom fighter Veer Narayan Singh, to embed the movement within a part of the history that the mostly Adivasi and Dalit miners could feel connected to (I. Sen, 2014, pp. 137–139). CMSS's movement while building solidarities between miners and farmers struggling for land, acknowledged the aspirations of separate statehood and Chhattisgarhi identity among the Dalits and adivasis rooted in a vision to make decisions on their own natural resources (Tillin, 2013, pp. 125–126). Though both CMSS and its sister wing, the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM) did not actively campaign for a separate state, their engagement with the question of statehood played out in the context of industrialisation of Chhattisgarh which resulted into mass displacement of adivasis and the growing popularity of a 'sons of the soil' discourse due to fierce competition of the local population and the 'outsiders' over employment in the public sector enterprises (Parry, 1999; Tillin, 2013).

Politically though, the most prominent campaigns for statehood, unlike its neighbouring state Jharkhand, did not emerge from the Adivasis in the area and emerged out of the political calculations of the two rival parties, Congress and the BJP, to ally themselves with the OBC groups in the state (Chhotray et al., 2020; Pai, 2020; Tillin, 2020, p. 114). It was among the OBC landowning castes, including the Kurmis and Patels that the participation in farmers' movements and demand of a separate state was the strongest (Tillin,

2020, p. 115). The local elite, the upper castes and OBCs sought this reorganisation of the state to get access to privileges of being close to political administrative unit for their own benefits (Berthet, 2012; D. Kumar, 2012, p. 90). BJP and Congress, biding for electoral benefits, promised a separate state in their election manifestos by early 1990s. This stronghold over state politics and benefits within the development trajectory of Chhattisgarh which played out as a struggle among the upper caste/class leaders for 'power and patronage' (Pai, 2020, p. 101) continued after the formation of the state. As I will show later in my empirical findings, the prominence of large, landed middle caste interests in the agrarian structure of Chhattisgarh still forms a significant factor controlling resources and politics at my field sites as well.

4.3.2 Uneven development, 'extractive regime' and resistance: two decades of the 'Adivasi' state

Chhattisgarh has aggressively pursued extraction, mining, and industrialisation despite concerns regarding loss of adivasi livelihood and environmental pollution and deforestation since 2000. In this section, I will focus on four key aspects of Chhattisgarh's 'extractive regime' (Adhikari & Chhotray, 2020) that are most relevant to analyse the agrarian question in Raigarh. By extractive regime, following Adhikari and Chhotray (2020), I refer to uneven success of the sub-national state apparatus that continues mineral extraction, despite resistance, with unequal impacts across the agrarian milieu. In Chhattisgarh, the regime has led to continuing coercive displacement with blatant disregard for the PESA provisions under the Constitution, Adivasi dispossession through private land transfers despite the regulations prohibiting such transfer in Chattisgarh's laws, the ongoing casualisation of work in the industrial sector under proliferation of private sector mining, and the development of a nonviolent politics of protests and struggles in Northern parts of the state in stark contrast to its Southern districts. However, in contrast to Bengal, Chhattisgarh's data shows both better land ownership numbers for its adivasis, indicating greater role of cultivation as the basis of their reproduction. The political economy of extraction and the trends of displacement point towards a shift from this dependence, but still shows adivasis in WB participate in casual wage work far more for sustenance.

Displacement of tribals has continued unabated despite almost 61 percent of Chhattisgarh's geographical area being covered under the Fifth schedule of the constitution, which makes the Pesa Act, 1996 applicable to these regions (S. Bharadwaj, 2019). The intent of the new state is reflected in the 'Vision' documents produced by industrial lobbies periodically, the latest one being for 2022. The 2022 Vision document admits that 80 percent of its population depends of agriculture, but goes on to proclaim that due to lower population density, 'free land is available for industrialisation' and 'lot of land' is available for the industrial

set-ups at lower costs than other states (Confideration of Indian Industry, n.d., p. 6). The 'extractive regime' of Chhattisgarh, since its inception and under a pursuit of liberalisation policies by the Indian state, has effectively pushed for mining industries through its bureaucracy, repression of dissent and resistance to mining. A Center for Science and Environment report notes, 'Pollution of water resources and degradation of forests topped by large scale land acquisition have badly affected the state's large tribal population. Almost 40 percent of Chhattisgarh's tribals have been displaced by mining and industrial projects' (Bhushan & Hazra, 2008).

Chhattisgarh government continued to follow the demarcation of the Fifth Schedule areas as was originally followed while being a part of Madhya Pradesh, with poor implementation of protection of adivasis under constitutional framework. When PESA was enacted in 1996, the states were expected to amend their own state laws and introduce rules or laws consistent with PESA for the scheduled areas. The state only notified PESA rules in 2022, which concerned itself with control over minor forest produce, minor minerals and minor water bodies, still empowering the district magistrate[16] to 'consult' the village councils but retain the final decision-making power for land acquisitions (Hindustan Times, 2022). Also mining related acquisitions are governed by Mines and Minerals (Development & Regulation) Amendment Act, 2015 (MMDRA) and the Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development) Act, 1957, which override the control of adivasis over minerals and natural resource governance in the state, giving ultimate power to the state to allocate and mine coal (Adhikari & Chhotray, 2020, p. 851; Veeresha, 2022, p. 41).

The Tribes Advisory Council, which under PESA, has a prominent role in aiding the Governor to govern the Fifth schedule areas, is also weakened in Chhattisgarh. The council is headed by the chief minister and the meetings often discuss welfare schemes and avoid discussing issues like displacement (Government of India, 2014, p. 74). The Chhattisgarh government has further curbed the powers of the council where the rules state that the council cannot take up any issue for discussion apart from what the Governor has referred and cannot pass any proposal unless they were mentioned in the notice for the meeting. And the state governments often avoid putting any contentious issues as part of discussion points for the council (Ibid).

Apart from non-implementation of PESA and coercive displacement, displacement of adivasis continue through private transfer of land despite legal prohibitions on it. Section 170B of the Chhattisgarh Land Revenue Code does not allow for transfer of Adivasi land to non-adivasis in the state without the consent

[16] The executive head of the government at the district level responsible for land revenue, water (canal) revenue and law and order in the district.

of the *Gram Sabha*. The aggrieved party could put an application to the sub-divisional magistrate, and if the case is decided in their favour, the land must be restored back to the applicant. Even money lending is prohibited in the Fifth schedule regions to protect Adivasi land and assets. But such rules are flouted with impunity. As my empirical findings will also later indicate, such alienation on a piecemeal basis is linked to the broader patterns of dispossession and rooted in the socio-economic differentiation within adivasi and non-tribal communities. With the increasing demand for land and its commodification within the state economy, demand for land is propelled by private companies, demand for housing and other needs from those migrating into industry and mine-adjacent villages, and speculative capital. Such alienation can also be triggered by socio-economic differentiation within villages, where land if captured at a low rate could lead to speculative gains in the context of impending mining projects as my findings will later show. Tactics of coercion, cheating, violence and arm twisting are common with both state-led and private grabbing of land, that undermines consent of village councils and adivasis (Dandekar & Choudhury, 2010; Lahiri-Dutt et al., 2012).

In districts like Raigarh, where demand for land is high for needs of the industrial sector and mining and allied activities, there is anecdotal evidence where adivasis have been cheated or forced to transfer their land via mortgages, signing over more land than they might have agreed to sell under duress etc (R. Kumar, 2017). Land is also transferred from Adivasis via *Benami* routes as well, which bypasses the regulations, where tribal people are used by companies or interested nontribal parties as fronts to take over Adivasi land. In one of the rare cases of restoration of land after transferring it via such *Benami* route, an Indian corporate organization, Videocon was found guilty of using the then home minister's son (who was an Adivasi) as a front to buy land from other tribals, while setting up a power project. Videocon was paying a third of the government's rates for land acquisition, and the land was eventually restored to the original owners after an investigation found the company guilty (S. Sharma, 2011). However, Chhattisgarh has a poor record in restoration of tribal land if such an appeal is made. According to the data available from 2007-08, Chhattisgarh has settled less than 45 percent of the cases in favour of the tribals which puts the rate of rejection at more than 50 percent (Government of India, 2014, p. 281; Veeresha, 2022, p. 37).

Alienation from land has led to a decline in average size of landholdings in the state by 8 percent between 2010-11 and 2015-16 (Veeresha, 2022, p. 40). While the average landholding size in Chhattisgarh for scheduled tribes at 1.83 hectare is better than the Indian average of 1.59 hectare, 60 percent of adivasi farmers belonged to small and marginal category of farmers in 2011 (Ibid, p. 44-45). Between 2001 and 2011, census data also shows a 13.7 percent decline in cultivator status among main tribal workers in

Chhattisgarh, much higher than the Indian average of 10.31 percent. This decline is gendered in character with women farmers facing greater decline than male adivasi farmers. The corresponding rise in agricultural labourers and 'other workers' is also higher than the Indian average for adivasis. This is accompanied by a steady increase in marginal worker status for rural tribals in Chhattisgarh indicating the 'larger rural crisis that has fundamentally impacted tribal livelihoods' (Prasad, 2014).

Significantly, while marginal holdings below 2.5 acre (1 hectare) has increased in Chhattisgarh for adivasis, in line with the same trends across India, medium landholdings have risen between 2004-05 and 2009-10, the only two sets of NSSO data available for the state. Prasad (2014) interprets these as processes of complete displacement for small and medium farmers, while large landowners might not be losing all their land. These tendencies of socio-economic differentiation among adivasis, and regional specificities are important for understanding the agrarian question for adivasis at the sub-national level and uneven impact of capitalism within it.

With regard to wage work, liberalisation policies have also brought in shrinking of formal sector employment and casualisation of the workforce in the industrial sector in Chhattisgarh, reducing spaces of class mobility possible via permanent employment in the public sector as was possible in the early decades of industrial development in MP (Parry & Ajay, 2020). This casualisation and contractualisaton of workforce, likely to be intensified in the context of the Indian government's allowing for commercial mining for private profits in the coal sector, is central to framing the agrarian question of labour in Raigarh, as my findings will later indicate. In Bhilai steel plant, for example, the initial permanent workforce count was 96,000 which has now been reduced to 10,000 with about 40,000 more contractual workers (S. Bharadwaj, 2022). Ancillary industries have also closed down due to cheaper supply of products from the foreign markets, and privatisation of companies like BALCO have further led to loss of jobs and insecure employment (D. Kumar, 2012). In a response to Parry and Ajay's (2020) distinction between more secured 'kaam' and the more precarious 'naukri' in the industrial sector in Chhattisgarh, Breman proposes, building on Bernstein's theorisation, that differentiation is not limited to those in salaried employment vis-à-vis the casual/contractual workers, but processes of 'accumulation and dispossession' is ongoing within the latter (Breman, 2021, p. 145). This is especially important as I will explore in my findings later as farmer-worker households shift into non-agrarian economy via processes of dispossession. Parallel to decline in secured employment, processes of differentiation and mobility is noticed within the contractual and casual labour force as well, linked to the inequalities within the agrarian structures (Levien, 2018).

The tables below show that land is much more significant for adivasi reproduction in Chhattisgarh, based upon the SECC census data, than all households in the state or adivasis in India, a significant contrast from WB. In Raigarh, the category of landless households deriving income from manual labour is much higher than the state average for adivasis but is again lower than the average for all households in the district (Table 5 and Table 6).

Table 7 indicates more than half of adivasis in Chhattisgarh depend on cultivation as the main source of income, in sharp contrast to WB where this percentage stands at 16 percent. In Raigarh, the deriving of income from cultivation among adivasis at 40 percent is lower than state level numbers (Table 8), but it is 2.5 times higher than Jhargram's case.

Table 5 Household Level data on land and livelihood in rural Chhattisgarh and India

Categories	All India all households	Chhattisgarh all households	All India Scheduled Tribes	Chhattisgarh Scheduled Tribes
Landless households deriving major part of their income from manual casual labour	38.36%	37.4%	35.65%	28.47%
Households with non-agricultural enterprises registered with Govt	2.72%	0.57%	2.05%	0.55%
Households paying income tax	4.57%	1.8%	3.35%	1.54%
Households with destitutes/living on alms	0.37%	0.56%	0.23%	0.35%
Households with salaried job in Govt	4.98%	4.37%	4.36%	4.19%
Households owning irrigated land	25.52%	6.09%	18.05%	4.56%
Households owning unirrigated land	29.6%	44.2%	42.05%	57.44%

Source: Socio-economic Caste Census, 2011.

Table 6 Household level data on land and livelihood in rural Raigarh

Categories	Raigarh All HHs	Raigarh ST HHs
Landless households deriving major part of their income from manual casual labour	43.37%	38.57%
Households with non-agricultural enterprises registered with Govt	0.32%	0.23%
Households paying income tax	1.92%	1.18%
Households with destitutes/living on alms	0.85%	0.55%
Households with salaried job in Govt	4.69%	3.84%
Households owning irrigated land	4.14%	3.61%
Households owning unirrigated land	41.06%	49.63%

Source: Socio-economic Caste Census, 2011.

Table 7 Source of household income for all and adivasi households in rural Chhattisgarh and India

Categories	All India all households	Chhattisgarh all households	All India ST	Chhattisgarh ST
Cultivation	30.1%	40.15%	38%	51.98%
Manual Casual Labour	51.18%	52.13%	51.3%	42.56%
Domestic Service	2.5%	1.66%	2%	1.19%
Foraging Rag picking	0.23%	0.09%	0.22%	0.05%
Non-agricultural own account enterprise	1.61%	0.34%	0.63%	0.13%
Begging/charity/alms	0.37%	0.56%	0.23%	0.35%
Others	13.97%	4.99%	7.60%	3.65%

Source: Calculated from Socio-economic Caste Census, 2011

Table 8 Source of household income for all and adivasi households in rural Raigarh

Categories	Raigarh All HHs	Raigarh ST HHs
Cultivation	34.38%	40.83%
Manual Casual Labour	55.25%	52.49%
Domestic Service	2.72%	1.55%
Foraging Rag picking	0.06%	0.02%
Non-agricultural own account enterprise	0.27%	0.11%
Begging/charity/alms	0.85%	0.55%
Others	6.26%	4.25%

Source: Calculated from Socio-economic Caste Census, 2011

Finally, the agrarian question of politics, that considers the strategies and solidarities within the struggles of reproduction for adivasis has been historically uneven particularly between the North and South of the state. There are two major conflicts in the state: while the Maoist-led armed conflict is more intensified in the southern parts of the state, the resource conflicts play out more prominently in the Northern parts of the state, without directly overlapping with each other (S. Sharma, 2012b). In popular imagination and in mainstream media portraits, adivasi politics in Chhattisgarh has often been conflated with the former, or at the very least given more prominence, where an armed insurgency led by the Communist Party of India (Maoist) has led to direct violent conflicts with the state. The violent confrontation between the Adivasi-backed Maoists and the state are explained as reflective of their inability to 'effectively articulate their grievances through the democratic and electoral process' (Guha, 2007, p. 3305). The success of the Maoists in building a protracted armed struggle within forested adivasi inhabited areas is well established, though ethnographic research is inconclusive on how much adivasi marginalisation, the appropriation of resources by capital or the geographical terrain conducive for guerilla tactics contribute to the overlap of such territories with armed struggles (Kennedy & King, 2013).[17]

[17] The political economy of the Maoist movement and state repression in the armed conflict zones of the state are beyond the scope of this research.

The armed conflict shares concerns of resource management and forest rights with the anti-dispossession movements that are stronger in the Northern districts of Korba, Raigarh, Chhattisgarh, but the appropriation of adivasi land and their exploitation as labourers have resulted in regionally specific and diverse forms of the mobilisations and alliances (Prasad, 2010; S. Sharma, 2012b). This might be partially a legacy of the Ekta Parishad, a Gandhian social movement based in Madhya Pradesh with organisational base in Northern and Central Chhattisgarh that mobilised landless adivasis and Dalits to make demands for land and labour rights with non-violent strategies since the 1970s (Pai, 2007). Their tactics of conducting long marches, rallies, sit-ins, road blockages, and *Satyagraha* (Gandhian expression of dissent through breaking laws) (Ibid, p. 11) are strategies reflected within Raigarh's farmers' resistance to defend their land. Northern Chhattisgarh, following Ekta Parishad's campaigns, have also formed state-level alliances of peasants' and workers' movements, under multiple NGOs and umbrella organisations including *Chhattisgarh Bachao Andolan* (Save Chhattisgarh Movement), *Jana-Abhivyakti* (People's Expression), *Jan Chetna Manch* (Platform for people's awareness) etc (D. Ghosh, 2016b; P. Gupta & Roy-Chowdhury, 2017). Strategies that focus on implementation of legislative frameworks, including PESA, petition to the executive powers of the state, participation in local elections through fielding own candidates and seeking legal redressals through governance bodies, like the National Green Tribunal, appeal to the state for better outcomes from adivasi governance than confronting the state. These different trajectories within Adivasi politics of land and labour under contemporary capitalism, that are historically and regionally specific will be crucial for analysing empirical findings on adivasi politics in Chapter 8.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the agrarian question of labour and politics at the sub-national levels in WB and Chhattisgarh, drawing out the structures of agrarian inequalities, historical processes of marginalisation and mobility among adivasis, and transformations in their politics, all of which are regionally specific and historically contingent. I have shown how the two main aspects of agrarian question of labour, land and wage labour work as bases of reproduction, considered for this thesis vary between the two states at present. In WB, the landholdings are more fragmented and capacity of cultivation to support simple reproduction appears low. In Chhattisgarh, despite landlessness in Raigarh being higher than Chhattisgarh, cultivation and manual wage labour are almost equally reported as the main source of income in the district. Large and medium farmers are almost absent among adivasis in Bengal; in Chhattisgarh, there are trends of large farmers holding on to some land within processes of dispossession and some consolidation among adivasis is noticed in medium landholding, pointing to continuing differentiation within the agrarian among adivasis. In WB while adivasis are increasingly joining the informal economy pushed by trade and

construction sectors, in Chhattisgarh, the industrial and mining sectors appear to be the primary employers in the non-agrarian economy within processes of casualization of workforce pushed by private capital.

With regards to politics, a longer history of insurgencies in the Jhargram region have shifted demands from land redistribution and decent conditions of wage work (both controlled strongly by CPM) to negotiating with the ruling party through electoral processes for better provisioning of welfare with regard to health, education, infrastructure and cultural rights. In Raigarh, Adivasi politics have taken a divergent path from the Maoist-led politics in the South, forming more broad-based mobilisations, reliant upon appeals to the state for stricter implementation of legal frameworks and processes for both land and labour rights. These differences are not simply empirical variations and heterogeneities within agrarian transition among adivasi areas under capitalism, but as I explore in the following chapters, encapsulate specific complexities in understanding the Adivasi Agrarian Question in India.

5. The Agrarian Question of Labour in Jhargram, West Bengal

5.1 Introduction

If you ask Subir Murmu, a young, educated adivasi man, who runs a tea shop in Ranipalli village, six kilometres away from Jhargram town, whether adivasi households from these drier areas continue to seasonally migrate in groups to the low-lying fertile plains of the state to work as agricultural labourers, he will say no. He says if they do, *'Ora shobhabe jaye, obhabe noye' (*they go out of habit, not out of scarcity). With an expanding town nearby, Santhal men in Ranipalli rather go to construction sites on their cycles or on foot every morning, often after a few hours of early morning toil in their own cultivable plots, or at their neighbours', and return home in the evening. For the first couple of weeks of my daily visits to the village, this narrative of '*Poribartan*', which literally means change in Bengali was ubiquitous among the respondents. *Poribartan* was the catchword of the campaign of the now ruling party, Trinamool Congress, which came to power in the region in 2011 amidst widespread mobilisations in the state against the ruling Left front alliance that had been in power for 34 years. As weeks passed, this narrative of change was rendered complex. Concerns of dispossession with the expanding urban frontiers of the Jhargram town, high costs and low income from cultivation, insecure employment in the informal economy in the town, high dependence on government welfare for food security, changes in patterns of seasonal migration for farm labour work among Santhal adivasis while Lodha adivasis continued to still migrate for farm labour work, and dependence on political patronage of the ruling party for access to decent employment, captured the changing dynamics of basis of simple reproduction for Adivasi classes of labour (CoL) in WB.

The Adivasi Agrarian Question (AAQ) framed for this thesis explores both the bases of simple reproduction and political struggles of Adivasi classes interplaying with varying processes of dispossession. This chapter focuses on the agrarian question (AQ) of labour that refers to the conditions and strategies of simple reproduction of adivasis. Enquiring into the AQ of labour and the related production problematic goes to the core of the AAQ and answers the first research question of the thesis: the conditions and nature of cultivation (and more broadly all land-based resources) and wage labour for Adivasi reproduction. The next chapter covers the forces and processes of dispossession amidst capitalist development, and the nature of class struggle negotiating the class dynamics of ongoing agrarian transformations and dispossessions as it shapes Adivasi politics in the sites of enquiry.

In West Bengal, the fieldsite is the village of Ranipalli in Jhargram district, inhabited by adivasi Santhals and the OBC Mahatos. I conducted additional interviews in the Jhargram town, in villages across the block and a hamlet next to Ranipalli inhabited by Lodha adivasis who are classified as a PVTG.

The empirical data discussed in this chapter shows that all Santhal households can be categorised as classes of labour in Ranipalli, depending on wage labour work and non-agricultural petty commodity production (PCP) partially combined with cultivation for sustenance. 95 percent of the Santhal households are landless or own less than an acre of land; poor fertility and no source of public irrigation do not allow for substantial dependence on cultivation for income. The Mahato households are also marginal landholders, but in general, in possession of more fertile land plots with some limited access to irrigation, who manage to grow vegetables as a second crop apart from paddy in portions of their land. This raises their cash income from cultivation, but they do not necessarily accumulate within it (Lerche, 2009, p. 67), thereby being also categorised as part of classes of labour.

I will elaborate the differences in conditions of cultivation between Santhals and Mahato classes of labour later in the chapter. I will show that though cultivation provides for greater needs of simple reproduction than was the case a few decades back due to land reforms and improvement in yields, the unremunerative prices as a result of tied debts with agricultural traders and no access to the public procurement of paddy have stunted agricultural income (K. Bharadwaj, 1985; Harriss-White, 2008). Labour work for the Santhal and Mahato classes of labour are mostly limited to casual manual construction work, though access to such work through commuting to the town is differentiated along gender line, with work more easily available and better paid for men. For Santhal households, relationships with the state form a basis of differentiation: affirmative action leading to better access to higher education and salaried employment, and gains from patronage from political affiliations with political parties have formed some limited opportunities of accumulation and differentiation.

Finally, I will show that the socio-economic and socio-political positions of different adivasi groups are themselves differentiated due both to historical processes and contemporary political economic factors. This chapter uses the example of Lodhas, a landless tribal community in West Bengal, who continue to face stigma and discrimination by both caste ethnic groups and other adivasi groups like Santhals. Having gained little from the land reforms in 1970s, and with no access to salaried employment and limited access to higher education, the Lodhas continue to be exploited in the farm and non-farm economy by employers including adivasi members of classes of labour. The differences between Santhals and Mahatos and the discussion on their bases of reproduction highlight the intensification of the social and spatial

fragmentation of classes of labour (Bernstein, 2006, p. 455; Pattenden, 2018); the inter-tribal differences between Lodhas and Santhals demonstrate inequalities and the relations of exploitation within adivasi classes of labour, with political implications on building progressive politics, a point I will take up further in the next chapter. The empirical enquiry into such inter-tribal difference nuances the literature (Guha, 2007; Lerche & Shah, 2018; Munshi, 2012; Nathan & Xaxa, 2012; Prasad, 2010) which in their focus on oppression between adivasi and non-adivasi groups, can overlook inequalities, relations of domination and exploitation between Adivasi groups.

The rest of the chapter will explore the Adivasi agrarian question of labour which forms the first component of AAQ in depth. Section 5.2 introduces the field site and situates Ranipalli within Jhargram and summarises the variations in bases of reproduction among households. Section 5.3 discusses the dependence of Santhals and Mahatos on cultivation, shaped by differences in land possession, quality of land, access to debt and public procurement, with varying capacities to generate surplus and provide subsistence, differentiated along lines of class, caste/tribe, and gender. Section 5.4 provides an overview of the wage labour work available for households in Ranipalli, mainly, casual labour work in construction and agricultural wage work. Section 5.5 discusses the role of non-agrarian PCP and secured wage employment in reproductive needs of Adivasi households, where both access to capital and public sector employment are mediated by the state and the political party in power. It also enquires if such PCP creates opportunities for accumulation and how it might create contradictions within the classes of labour. Section 5.6 focusses on the Lodha tribe to draw out inter-tribal differences in basis for simple reproduction and demonstrate how different Adivasi groups have different class positions within Adivasi classes of labour, shaped by relations of exploitation between them.

5.2 Situating Ranipalli in Jhargram, West Bengal

Jhargram district was carved out of the West Midnapore district in 2017 with the promise of ease of administration and delivery of welfare for the Adivasi population seven years after it was in the epicenter of an armed insurgency against the Indian state (see Chapter 4). Situated in the South-western part of the state bordering Jharkhand, Adivasis constitute 29.37 percent of Jhargram's population. Ranipalli is about six kilometres away from Jhargram town, the eponymous district headquarters, and the only municipality in the district.

Ranipalli has 76 households (2011 Census count is 71) and is geographically fragmented in two parts - locally called the *Boro* Ranipalli (big Ranipalli) and *Chhoto* Ranipalli (small Ranipalli), separated by an expanse of

cultivable land belonging to the village households. In Chhoto Ranipalli the houses are laid in a single row beginning from the side of a pitched road that connects Jhargram town to another market town which further connects to a national highway. The row of houses from the roadside slopes down as one walks across them to the low-lying paddy lands on the far end of the village. In Boro Ranipalli, the houses are bundled up together, and is also connected to the pitched road but via a short muddy stretch built over an almost defunct irrigation canal. The geographical laying out of the village is important for how land is evaluated by outsiders, to which I will return in the next chapter.

17 (22 percent) of the village households belong to Mahato caste and 59 households belong to the Santhal tribe (See Table 9). The Mahato households all live in a row of homesteads away from the pitched road, beginning from the side of the low-lying paddy land, while Santhals are divided between *Boro* and *Chhoto* Ranipalli, possessing land parcels adjacent to the pitched road.

Table 9 Demographics of scheduled tribes in Ranipalli, Jhargram and West Bengal

ST population as part of total population in WB	5.8 percent
ST population in WB as part of total ST population in India	5.2 percent
ST population as part of total population in Jhargram district	29.37 percent
ST households as part of total households in Ranipalli village	77.6 percent

Source: Census 2011, Jhargram district's official website and my field data

Overall, the interviews in Ranipalli confirm the state level trends and general pattern in adivasi livelihood indicating declining role of cultivation (both PCP and farm labour) and rising centrality of casual wage work in non-agricultural sector for reproduction of most adivasi households, with very limited access to non-agrarian PCP and salaried employment (Biswas & Pal, 2021; Kannan, 2018; Mazumdar, 2016; K. Rana et al., 2020; A. Shah et al., 2017). 95 percent of all Santhal households and 77 percent of Mahato households depend primarily on sale of wage labour for reproduction (See Table 10). Among these, 75 percent of Santhal households depend on wage work in the non-agrarian sector, comprising casual labourers, contractual workers with private or public sector, and salaried employees. Considering three Santhal

households have secured public sector employment, 89 percent of all Santhal households are dependent on casual or contractual work, higher than the state level figure of 62 percent for rural Adivasi households (NSSO Survey, 2011-12).

19 percent of Santhal households and 11 percent of Mahato households depend on labour work in agrarian sector, which includes work in cultivation, bamboo depots and orchards near Ranipalli. The dependence on agricultural wage work is much lower than the state average of 58 percent of adivasis working as agricultural labourers (*Census*, 2011). This, I will explain is both a result of proximity to the town and better availability of non-agricultural wage work, and reversal of trends of seasonal migration for farm labour work in the past two decades. The three Santhal households categorized as PCP in Table 10 are all self-employed in the non-agrarian sector, while the four Mahato households in the same category are the only households drawing their main income from cultivation.

Table 10 Source of Income from Agricultural and Non-agricultural sectors among households in Ranipalli

Social Groups	Mahatos	Santhals
HHs primarily earning from non-agrarian PCP/ Cultivation	4	3
HHs primarily earning from wage work in agrarian sector	2	11
HHs primarily earning fro, wage work in non-agrarian sector	11	45
Total	17	59

5.3 Cultivation as basis for reproduction for petty commodity producers and classes of labour

In this section, I will discuss the factors determining the nature of dependence on cultivation for simple reproduction needs in Ranipalli, differentiated in extent between Mahatos and Sathals, including small landholding size, low fertility, poor irrigation, no access to public procurement of paddy, and interlocking of the credit and paddy market that leads to surplus being appropriated by commercial capital. I argue that in agreement with broader literature, while gains from agricultural income and land reforms have strengthened the role of paddy cultivation as a basis of reproduction in Ranipalli (Bakshi, 2008; Bakshi &

Modak, 2021; D. Bhattacharyya, 2016), dependence on non-adivasi local petty traders for agricultural credit leads to surplus appropriation by the latter. Marginal farmers cannot access the public procurement system due to low marketable surplus and collusions between the petty traders, Mandi officials and the party leaders.

5.3.1 Land holding status and yield differentials in paddy production

Land in West Bengal is measured in *Bigha* and *Katha*, which are the measures used by respondents to keep track of land holdings. 3 bigha equals 1 acre, and 20 kathas make 1 bigha. The village has no medium or large farmers; except for one Mahato household, every household has marginal landholding, cultivating less than 2.5 acres of land. The landholdings data is based on operational holdings, rather than ownership: there was hesitance to discuss the actual paperwork on land, given the incompleteness of the land reforms in the region, the implications of which I will discuss in the next chapter. However, the land acreage shown here are based on ownership or long-term inheritable tenancy rights secured under the land reforms program, and the cultivators do not pay rent to the absentee landlords.

Table 11 Land Possession among households in Ranipalli

Social Group	Mahato	Santhal
Landless	2	18
0-0.5 acre	7	22
0.51-1 acre	2	16
1.01-2 acre	1	2
More than 2 acre	2	0
Did not disclose[18]	3	1
Total	17	59

Table 11 shows the land holding distribution in Ranipalli. It shows here that 30 percent of the Santhal households are landless, 93 percent of the landed households (38 of 41 households) own less than an acre of land. This is in line with the Land and Livestock NSSO Survey in 2013 that puts the average landholding in the state at 0.243 hectare, less than an acre (Biswas & Pal, 2021). 15 out of 17 Mahato households own

[18] None of the households who did not want to disclose exact land ownership own more than 1-1.5 acre of land and will not make significant difference to the analysis.

some land, with 60 percent of landed households owning less than an acre. Landowning households are also PCPs that combine class places of both capital and labour, as they own some means of production like land, plough, threshing machines, tillers etc and farm mainly by using household labour (Bernstein, 2001; Pattenden, 2023, p. 6). PCP-labour households combine cultivation with wage labour work to reproduce themselves; even among the four Mahato households in Table 10 categorised as being primarily dependent on cultivation, three also work as wage labourers for reproductive needs.

Land fertility and yield comprise key differentiating factors between Santhals and Mahatos for earning income from cultivation. Mahatos typically live closer to and possess the more fertile low-lying paddy land in the village. For at least half of the landed Santhal households, the land is more dry and semi-fertile locally known as '*danga*' or '*dahi*' land. The *Dahi* land grows 2-3 quintal of paddy per bigha while the low-lying land mostly held by Mahatos can grow upto 7-8 quintal. The unequal yield based on fertility differentiated subsistence between Santhals and Mahatos drawn from even marginal landholdings. When I asked how this distinction had come about, answers varied between people. One old Santhal told me, 'We do not like to get so much covered in mud like the Mahatos'; another said that this has traditionally been the case as Mahatos might have been keener for settled agriculture, and the adivasis remained closer to forested land. Scholars have documented that the Mahatos who were later entrants into the region than the Santhals, had spent much effort in the 19th century to settle closer to the low lying inundated areas, and by becoming village headmen and watchmen, had gained special access to timber in the forests consolidating their positions in settled agriculture (Sivaramakrishnan, 2000, p. 436).

Paddy is the main crop grown in monsoon using store-bought seeds, fertilisers and pesticides, sometimes with the aid of canal water though the release of water has become increasingly unreliable especially in the past 3-4 years. When I was staying in the area, the canal had been broken for months and people were not sure if it would be mended before the next season. Tractor use is not common, due to fragmented holdings, but when used, are rented from non-tribal farmers in neighbouring villages as no household in Ranipalli owns one. The Santhals who own the drier land find it more difficult to farm resulting in sometimes keeping a part of their land fallow as costs of cultivation continue to rise for inputs like seeds, fertilisers and pesticides, further reducing income sourced from cultivation.

Adivasi farmer Babu Murmu farms only half of his 3 bigha land to cut costs and his son rather does construction work through the whole year. He said not farming the entire land for even marginal landholders is not uncommon for the neighbouring villages, especially in dry lands. Adivasi woman Mamoni Murmu has 1 bigha of their own *dahi* land where she grows some paddy once a year. She tried leasing in

1.5 bigha land once few years back on a sharecropping basis from a neighbour to grow more paddy. But monsoons were inadequate, and the canal water was not released on time. The seeds got old and dry, and the cultivation was a failure, and she gave up on sharecropping. Gopinath Soren who had leased out 10 katha to a neighbour a year back got nothing at the end of the harvest season, as those who leased in were not able to till the land. He has now taken back this portion and has tilled it himself this year. Sharecropping arrangements within Ranipalli are often for tiny parcels (0.5-1 bigha), temporary and could be between marginal farmers, without the surety of growing much paddy. In two cases, I found more longer-term lease arrangements between neighbours in the village, where a cash payment is made upfront for healthcare costs or social rituals (funeral, weddings) and the household giving the cash can till the land until the borrower can pay back the sum.

Both Santhal and Mahato farmers agree that the paddy yield has improved in the longer term for both low lying and dry land, which is borne out by high growth in yield for *Aman* paddy[19] in the West Midnapore district (of which Jhargram was a part) between 1993-95 to 2011-13 (R. Samanta & Bajpai, 2022). The growth was the highest for Jhargram block (now district) between 1999 and 2004, largely due to usage of HYV seeds and other inputs resulting in increased cost of cultivation as well. This has improved the subsistence drawn from cultivation. Babulal, an adivasi government schoolteacher and farmer explained, 20-25 years back, people did not even have enough to eat through the whole year, and many would take loans in the lean season and work as agricultural labourers in the rest of the year in an unending debt cycle to repay the loans. Babulal says, 'The yield has grown in 10 years; we used to grow *desi* (indigenous) seeds before. We would just scatter the seeds in the field, not plant saplings as we do now. The paddy was taller and more pretty but would yield far less rice.' People's income from cultivation has also improved as the farmers' share of produce has improved due to land reforms which mainly led to tenancy reforms in Ranipalli, ending exploitative rent collection by absentee landlords (Also see Chapter 4 and 6).

5.3.2 Surplus appropriation by commercial capital in Ranipalli

Despite yield improvements and gains from land reforms, producing profit from paddy cultivation in marginal holdings is impossible because of low fertility and 'stressed' sale tied to debt and no access to the public procurement system or credit. Except for one Mahato household, no one sells to the government procurement centres (*Mandi*), and all households report selling paddy to local traders, from whom they would also receive cash advances during the sowing period to spend for the inputs, like seeds, fertilisers

[19] The main paddy crop in WB, which is sown in June-July, and harvested in November-December.

etc, which in return ties them to the trader during the harvest period (K. Bharadwaj, 1985). The 'organisation of exchange' is 'embedded in the organisation of production' (Harriss-White, 1996, p. 52), with credit from private sources (and non-agricultural income) being invested into cultivation, for low returns.

Table 12 shows the number of households selling a portion of their paddy after harvest categorised by landholding sizes. 40 percent of all cultivating households sell some portion of their paddy; but this does not indicate having output surpluses after keeping the paddy for the whole year's consumption. The interlocked credit and output market indicates marginal farmers might sell paddy right after harvest even if that means returning to the market as food buyers later in the year. However, the special package of food grain allocation in the region by the state government since 2011, that provides for 35kg of rice for each family at Rs 2/kg has come as a relief for the villagers and has brought down the dependence on open market for buying rice. This in turn might have also pushed up marketable surpluses for some farming households in Ranipalli.

Table 12 Sale of paddy in Ranipalli

Acreage	Santhal		Mahato	
	Landed households	Sells Paddy	Landed households	Sells Paddy
0-0.5 acre	22	4	7	5
0.51-1 acre	16	6	2	2
1.01-2 acre	2	2	1	1
More than 2 acre	0	0	2	2
Total	40	12	12	10

Note: I have excluded the four households who did not disclose acreage information from this table, one of which sells paddy to the private trader.

Adivasi farmer Madhu Murmu cultivates one bigha of his semi-fertile land once a year, has his own plough, and estimated the costs of cultivating paddy. He spends Rs 500-600 in seeds, Rs 600 in fertilisers, Rs 200 for medicines/pesticides, and Rs 1200-1500 on labour cost (3 labourers for sowing and 3 for harvesting). He owns a bullock plough, which otherwise one has to rent at Rs 500/day and he and his wife do all other farm work required. Even without controlling for the household labour, the cost comes to Rs 3000 per bigha, with a yield of 3 quintal at best. But he sells 80 percent of his produce immediately after harvest

keeping the rest at home for emergencies. Santhal farmer Jasoda Soren who cultivates 3.5 bigha land using both household and hired labour (at 1.3 acre, the largest landholding cultivated by a single household here), sells 5 quintal of paddy immediately after harvest which is about half of her produce. She says if she needs a loan for cultivation for input costs, she approaches a local trader from the next village, who 'does not charge interest' for the money. But the produce is acquired at Rs 1000-1200 per quintal and can even drop to Rs 900/quintal against the state declared minimum support price of Rs 1800/quintal. This resonates with scholarship on West Bengal paddy and potato cultivation that shows that a large part of the marketable surplus produced is siphoned away by traders (Harriss-White, 2008; Rakshit, 2014). Harriss-White (2008, p. 30) in her seminal work on agricultural markets in Bengal has noted that except for the pettiest of trades, people belonging to scheduled castes and tribes face 'massive barriers of entry' into such accumulation via trading, and in line with her findings, my respondents said no trader or rice mill owner in the region were adivasis.

A rugged system of public procurement of paddy have further rendered farmers dependent on petty traders even if they do not receive credit from them (Ibid, p. 37). The government procurement centre or *Mandi* is out of bounds for Ranipalli farmers for low marketable surplus and high costs of selling to the Mandi, the nearest centre for which is in Jhargram town. Farmers must sell at least a quintal at one go, and arrange for sacks, transport, labour, to take the paddy to the Mandi, which adds to the cost of production. As a farmer pointed out, it is worthwhile to take the paddy to the mandi if one had at least 5 quintals to give; with only two Mahato households with more than 2 acre land, no one could manage such surpluses. Multiple respondents also confirmed that the mandi deducts 8-10kg paddy per quintal sold, when one goes there, citing bad paddy quality or simply claiming some paddy was wet.

The access to public procurement system is also undermined by political influence of the petty traders; many farmers in Ranipalli and other villages said their *Mandi* registration papers were kept all year round with the Mahato trader in a neighbouring village who bought their paddy, and appropriated surplus through selling it to the Mandi himself. The system works in the following manner- say, 50 farmers sell 200 quintal paddy to such traders (locally called *Foretdar*) at Rs 1000/quintal. He would use these farmers' registrations to sell the paddy to the mandi, each of whom is legally allowed to sell upto 30 quintal paddy under their names. Once the money is transferred to the attached bank account, he withdraws the money from each of their accounts. He pays a minimal fee to the farmers whose papers were used either in form of a single one-time payment of Rs 2000-5000, or by paying slightly higher rates for the paddy bought from them. While these malpractices are well known in the region, the *Foretdars* have support from the Mandi officials

and political party leaders, the respondents say; the appropriation of surplus from farming through working of commercial capital forms the basis of accumulation among a small base of politically influential non-adivasi people.

5.3.3 A second crop: the risks and opportunities in vegetable cultivation in Ranipalli

In the first parts of this section, I have shown how paddy cultivation is significant for food security for adivasi households who have land, though low prices, low fertility, no formal sources of credit, and marginal landholdings make it increasingly difficult to rely on it. In this section, I will argue how vegetable cultivation primarily practised by Mahatos in summer is a source of cash income for them, in contrast to adivasis. Both lower fertility and inability to sustain risks of volatile vegetable prices in absence of government intervention in the produce market largely keep Santhals away from vegetable production. Table 13 shows while more than half of Mahato households grow some vegetables, only 17 percent of Santhal households grow them. The vegetables commonly grown are cucumber, gourd, bitter gourd and pumpkin, partially for self-consumption, but mostly for sale, and is usually grown in a small part of cultivable land, between 0.25-1 bigha. Going back to Table 10, the four Mahato households that depend primarily on cultivation for sustenance all grow vegetables in upto a bigha of their land and say the cash income from cultivation is mainly generated through vegetable farming. The Santhal households that grow vegetables on very small portions of their land, continue to depend mainly on wage work for reproductive needs.

Table 13 Vegetable farming in Ranipalli

Social Group	Cultivating Households	Grows Vegetables
Santhals	40	7
Mahatos	17	9
Total	57	16

Note: While 15 Mahato households own land, 2 landless Mahato households lease in 10-15 katha of land only during summer to grow vegetables and are included in this table

The land for vegetables is irrigated through buying water from a couple of shallow pumps near the low-lying tracts of Ranipalli, owned by a couple of families from a neighbouring village, which is perhaps a primary reason why Santhals lose out on vegetable cultivation as their dry land cannot access even private irrigation sources. Such market interventions for water pumps are common in this region, where contracts are verbal and are based mostly on time basis rather than acreage since plots of land are fragmented and extremely small (Rawal, 2002). Vegetables are grown mostly using household labour as farmers are apprehensive of the volatility of vegetable prices in the open market and risk losses when prices crash with the poor marketing infrastructure of such crops (Pramanik, 2022).

For example, bitter gourd is perceived as one of the more lucrative vegetables to grow. Popular as an ingredient in the medicine industry, trucks come from North India to pick up bitter gourd from this region, at times, and prices can be pushed upto Rs 40-50 per kg. However, the villagers note that the amount of bitter gourd grown cannot be consumed locally entirely, making the pricing volatile. Tapan Mahato explains, "In 2018 there was so much bitter gourd production that prices crashed. People got together on the road and threw their entire production to block roads. In 2019 on the other hand people got good price for their production." The ability to earn wage income from the non-agrarian market and cash income from selling of paddy become important factors to withstand such crash in prices and ability to invest again next year. Because of lower paddy yields, many Santhal households find it difficult to manage the investment in the next production cycle when prices crash. Adivasi farmer Maina Murmu grew some bitter gourd a few years back. She says the same year the price crashed to Rs 2/kg for over supply. She has not grown vegetables since then. Once she made a loss, she said it is not possible for her to invest anymore. The year I visited, cucumber prices had crashed to less than Rs 5/kg in the wholesale market, and 4-5 households that had grown it were unwilling to even harvest cucumbers to minimise losses. Therefore, while in a good year, vegetable cultivation can become an important source of cash income (and even, windfall profit) for farming households that can afford to grow them, it is unlikely that marginal farmers growing them in 5-10 katha of land can successfully accumulate from it without price guarantee interventions by the state that do not exist.

5.4 Agrarian Wage labour: gendered discrimination and discontinued seasonal migration for farm work

13 out of 76 households in Ranipalli, and 20 per cent (11) of Santhal households, depend on agrarian wage work as their primary basis of simple reproduction (See Table 10). This includes seasonal farm work (mainly,

sowing and harvesting), cutting and bundling of bamboo in bamboo depots and work as guards in orchards near the town. The Mahatos work as farm labourers only on an exchange basis within their own caste group, and Mahato women do not travel outside the village for farm labour work unlike Santhals who do not differentiate as much between hiring out of male and female labour (Rogaly, 1997, p. 66). In this section I will show that drawing income from farm labour wage work remains gendered, along with wage disparities between men and women, and there are some initial signs of the edging out of women from some aspects of farm work like harvest and carrying of produce through contractualisation of such work. Overall, the dependence on farm labour work has gone down with the cessation of seasonal migration to low lying high productivity fertile plains of the state. Also, unlike what I will show for Chhattisgarh, the dependence on minor forest produce collection for subsistence is very low for Santhals in Ranipalli.

In contrast with the 2011 Census figures which puts the proportion of agricultural labourers among adivasis at 68 percent, I found that Santhal households participated in agricultural wage labour work only seasonally, prioritising cultivation in their own land and non-agricultural work in the town. My findings are congruent with a more recent report which conducted a state-wide sample survey among adivasi households reporting only 22 percent of adivasi workers were agricultural labourers, indicating lower availability of agricultural work due to predominance of small holdings in villages with high concentration of tribal population (K. Rana et al., 2020, pp. 106–107).

Confirming findings from number of other studies, women participate more in farm labour work than men, both in their own fields and for others, while men stick to cultivating their own fields and have more successfully diversified income to non-farm activities with better pay (Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999; Garikipati, 2008; Pattnaik et al., 2018). Where the households are dependent primarily on farm wage work, for both Mahatos and adivasis, they are either women headed households or where the male member of the household is out of the labour market for ill health or old age. Women also put most of the labour work in their own farms including sowing, weeding and harvesting, along with being responsible for social reproduction work. While this means their workday at the field is typically a couple of hours less than men in Ranipalli, their workdays are longer with the double burden of cultivation and reproductive activities (Pattnaik & Lahiri-Dutt, 2020; N. Rao, 2011). In line with the trends in agricultural wages in India (Chavan & Bedamatta, 2006; N. Srivastava & Srivastava, 2010; Sundari, 2020), the gender pay gap is significant in

Ranipalli for agricultural work. Women get Rs 120 per day and men get Rs 200 per day, along with one meal which is usually rice for men but puffed rice for women.[20]

The availability of farm work for women has further gone down in the past couple of years in Ranipalli as part of the cultivation work, especially harvesting and carrying back of produce after harvest is getting contractualised (Harriss-White & Gooptu, 2001, p. 95) and paid on a piece rate basis. Small landholdings and the low requirement of labour has meant contractualisation of agricultural work is not yet widespread here as in other areas that are more intensely cultivated in WB (Rogaly, 1997). Adivasi farmer Gopinath Soren has hired someone on a contractual basis this year to harvest paddy in his 2 bigha land, instead of six women he would hire on a daily wage basis each year. He has agreed to pay Rs 1000 for it and engaged a bullock cart with a male labourer to bring in the paddy. Adivasi men take contractual agricultural work in groups for few hours early in the morning for extra income during harvest season, before going to town during the day, without sacrificing the income from nonfarm work. Such de-feminisation processes can put marginal landholding or landless women in further disadvantage who are not easily absorbed by the non-agrarian sector.

Finally, while availability of farm labour work in the area is reducing with gendered implications, in the past decade, better yield from cultivation and availability of construction work in the town within commuting distance of Ranipalli have contributed directly to reversal of trends of seasonal migration to the more fertile parts of the block and district by Santhal men and women for farm labour (Mazumdar, 2016; Rogaly et al., 2001). Improved food security for adivasis reduces dependence on tied labour debts during the lean season with larger farmers, in turn stopping seasonal migration for farm work, which is what Subir Murmu was referring to at the beginning of this chapter to explain how 'scarcity' has reduced for Santhals in the region. I will show later that this has happened only for Santhals and not for Lodha adivasis, who did not gain from land reforms. It has also led to the end of the '*Bhatua*' system (See Chapter 4) where adivasi boys and girls from a very young age would work as annual tied labour grazing cattle and doing other household work at upper and middle caste farming households.

Even till a decade back, Santhal workers would migrate to work at farms and houses of big peasants in the more fertile plains from a very young age, locally known as '*Nabal*'. Adivasis from Ranipalli went to fertile plains of Debra and Balichak, about 80 kms away, and respondents say when entire families would travel together, it was not uncommon to see small villages completely empty during these times. Adivasis also

[20] Singharoy (2004) points out that the shorter working hours of tribal women farm labourers since 1990s was a resistance against the wages which were typically half of what was paid to their male counterparts

went to *Nabal* because the harvest season came just before Makar, the biggest festival in South-western Bengal and the savings from both cash and kind components from their migration helped them celebrate it. Durgarani Murmu had gone to *Nabal* for two consecutive years, first for 20 days and then for two weeks. Her son was five years old, but she left him at home and went with relatives on her mother's side and lived at an extension of the farmer's house for whom she worked. 'At that time, the wage rate in and around the village was Rs 20-30. But in *Nabal*, it was Rs 80 per day. Apart from wages, they would pay for rice, salt, oil, food, and stay. They were all very big farmers. You could stay in their houses. There were a lot of people who were working, cooking and staying together.' Villagers say there was more dry ration given than one could consume, so when they came back home, they would bring back left over supply of rice, puffed rice, salt etc in small sacks, along with the cash income they earned which was paid at the end of the working period (For conditions and negotiations at *Nabal*, see Rafique et al., 2006; Rogaly et al., 2001). This payment of the cash component meant workers could not change employers or leave if they wanted to, and workers would also be tied to employers from whom they would take advances during the lean season in return for pledging labour services during peak agricultural season. The proximity of Ranipalli to the town has been key in reversing the trends of seasonal migration, though poor Santhal households in more remote areas of the district might still continue such seasonal migration.

Other income sources in the agrarian sector for adivasis in Ranipalli are casual work in the bamboo depots in the periphery of the town and jobs as security guards in orchards available year-round, both generally owned by erstwhile absentee landlords from the state capital of Kolkata and other urban centres. Three Santhal households in Ranipalli derive a major part of their income from working in the bamboo depot. Kanailal Soren says he and his brothers had learnt cutting and bundling of bamboo from a young age while frequenting depots with extended family members as their land could never provide sustenance for the whole year. The depots are run by private owners who buy the bamboo from traders or individual sellers and sort them out at the depot to sell in bulk. Gorachand Soren, who has now worked in a nearby depot for 5-6 years, says the bamboo must be cut in planks of 11 ft by 12 ft or 20 ft by 22 ft and bundled, which is then sent to other states. The payment is on a piecemeal basis at 25 paise (Rs 0.25) for piece of bamboo sliced. He said, 'We must sharpen the pieces as well. You can earn Rs 150- 250 depending on how much you work through the day. But there is no fixed time to go or return. I work for 6-8 hours when I go but there is no fixed timing and no holidays.' While wages are similar across depots, these wages are revised periodically, usually on an annual basis. Work available in the orchards are typically as security guards, involving 12-hour duties, earning Rs 120 per day in similarly casualised conditions. Both bamboo depot and orchard work are limited in availability and are increasingly difficult to find.

Before discussing non-agrarian wage work, I will conclude this section by reflecting on the role of collection of non-timber forest produce (NTFP) as source of income in Ranipalli which in the Jhargram district mainly includes fuelwood (for consumption and sale) and Saal leaves to make plates and bowls for sale. In sharp contrast to what I found in Chhattisgarh, no Santhal household in Ranipalli depended on NTFP for income; they did not collect Saal leaves from the forest and only a few collected dried woods in nearby forested areas for consumption. This number is much lower than the recent survey in Bengal that found 51 percent of Santhals and 45 percent of all adivasis depend on forests 'in some way or another for their survival' (K. Rana et al., 2020, p. 93). But this dependence also varied by having forests in the vicinity of the village and other income sources available. A few Santhal women said they went to forested areas within a kilometre or so from the village, and always went in groups in the afternoons once in a week to collect dried wood for use as fuelwood. But they usually bought the wood from Lodhas living in a nearby hamlet who still depended more on forest resources for their livelihood (See Section 5.7). This indicates further commodification of the subsistence of the Santhals and the ability to pass on the more laborious work of procuring low-cost fuelwood to the Lodhas. My respondents said that the collection and stitching of Saal leaves, which is done typically by adivasi women, is not remunerative. While the local Panchayat body had arranged for training for machine stitching of plates for women, Santhal women in Ranipalli could not reach arrangements between themselves to collectively gather, stich and sell Saal leaf plates as the government programs suggested. I will clarify here that the low dependence of Santhals on NTFP in Ranipalli is likely to change in villages further away from the town, particularly those in vicinity of forests with lower access to wage work in town; but the trends are indicative of the consistent diminishing of forest-based livelihood opportunities for adivasis in WB (A. Banerjee et al., 2010; K. Rana et al., 2020, p. 97).

5.5 Non-agrarian casual wage work: construction work, precarity, and low out-migration

The geographical location of Ranipalli, merely six kilometres away from the Jhargram town, is the primary factor for determining access to wage work and as I will argue in the next chapter, for the changing dynamics of land relations. The expansion of the town, especially from around 2017 when the formation of the new district was declared, has seen heightened demand for construction of real estate for government offices, expansion of healthcare, schools, housing, banks, and other infrastructure. My field data in Ranipalli confirms that adivasis remain at the bottom of manual work in the informal economy, with social differentiation possible through public sector employment via affirmative action programs of the government (Lerche & Shah, 2018, p. 935). While the availability of construction work has gone up in the past decade, the construction sector has also attracted migrant workers from nearby blocks and districts, which has led to replacing of local workers, who work under harsher conditions. Apart from construction

work, there are some jobs available as labourers in shops, medical centres, as security guards in apartment buildings etc where daily wages are less than construction work and cannot provide employment in large numbers but is preferred for security of work and less physical fatigue. Workers in Ranipalli find it impossible to get work in secured employment in the industrial and agro-processing sector in the town, which includes a paper mill, couple of oil and rice mills, and a printing press. However, in contrast to reports from villages that were further away from the town, circular or permanent migration to other states from Ranipalli was very low due to accessible casual work.

76 percent of Santhal households and 53 percent of Mahato households in Ranipalli depend primarily on non-agricultural wage work (see Table 10), making a living mainly as construction workers in Jhargram town. Adivasi men (women from only 4-5 Santhal households) commute to the town on cycles or buses every morning, and the workday is from 9am to 5pm with a half hour lunch break in between. For the poor Mahato and Santhal households, I did not see differences in conditions of casual work, though with better access to higher education, at least three Mahato men worked in contractual private jobs, which Santhals did not have access to. The average daily wage is Rs 200-400, depending on the skill sets of the *Mistry*, a word loosely used to address any construction workers (also, a skilled craftsman who supervises manual workers).

Biram Murmu, a landless adivasi worker, commutes every day to the town with his wife and son and work as unskilled labourers at the construction sites at Rs 200 per day. They carry their own food, because the food in the town is expensive and will leave them with little if they had to spend on lunch and transport. Their son also joined similar labour work in construction sites six months back after he dropped out of school as his parents were unable to provide for books or extra tuitions. Most of the work is under individual contractors, and at the bottom of skill hierarchy are those called *'Jogari'* (literally, the arranger) who prepare the cement mixes or do the back-breaking work of carrying heavy material earning Rs 200-220 per day. For skilled workers, the wages were aligned to the state's stipulated minimum wage of Rs 340 per day in 2020, but for unskilled workers were 25 percent less than the stipulated minimum wage of Rs 281 per day. While men can slowly gain skills to become eligible for work earning Rs 350-400 per day, women only get work as *'jogari'* and earn 10-15 percent less than men for same work. Ranipalli's workers work in building private houses, smaller parts of big real estate projects that are sub-contracted to local petty contractors, and with petty contractors who hire out labourers with big machinery. No one has access to social security or reported as registered with the state's Construction Workers' Welfare Board. In cases of

injury at work, workers said the contractors would pay for first aid; in cases where they saw their colleagues to be more grievously injured, hospital expenses were not borne by the contractors.

For unskilled or semi-skilled labourers, the work can be irregular, with seasonal dips in peak summer and monsoon. Sukumar Murmu, an adivasi construction workers, says there is no guarantee of getting work throughout the month; sometimes when he enquires for work, contractors ask him to come back after two or three days. While cultivation is not enough as a basis of reproduction for adivasi households, even very small landholdings can be crucial for sustenance in periods of under-employment or unemployment. Malati Murmu pointed out, her husband sometimes would go a week or two without work in the city, which is why she prefers to till her 4 katha (0.07 acre) of land every year to get any rice they can which is essential for her food security.

Despite the expansion of the town and steady rise in construction work in the town, two contractors and several workers in Ranipalli pointed out that increased migration of contractors and workers, particularly from the nearby district of Murshidabad, have begun to edge out local men[21]. For big residential projects that have proliferated across the town, construction takes place almost round the clock while local workers only work in 9-5 shifts. Big contractors who take up these projects hire sub-contractors from outside who bring labourers with them, working 12-18 hours shifts. The labourers stay on the site of the construction, and often work on a fixed monthly wage working every day of the month. So the big projects which are finished under tighter timelines use migrant workers who form the 'highly flexible, docile, and disciplined workforce by processes of fragmentation and segmentation' maintained at the worksites (Srivastava & Jha, 2016, p. 13).

Other than construction work, casual work as security guards or shop helpers are coveted in the town, though more difficult to find. Security guards are paid Rs 100-120 for 9–12-hour shifts but are less laborious and work is guaranteed for the entire month. Bahamoni Soren's husband is a security guard at the water supply office. He is on a night duty from 10pm to 6pm each night. He found the job two years back and gets paid monthly at Rs 100/day. She said, 'It is a good job. It is not laborious, and he does not have to plead around for work every month. He goes every night. Two guards take turn through the night to stay up.' Sukanto Mahato, similarly was relieved to find work as an apartment security guard after his health suffered

[21] Murshidabad, one of the most backward districts in the state, has seen massive outmigration of workers and masons who work in building of roads, houses, pipe etc across the country and even abroad. Some estimates suggest out of total population of 7.1 million, about 1.4 million live outside the district for work. For more details on migration from Murshidabad, see (Basu, 2019)

after a snake bite few years back. The contractor who employed him in construction work, in fact, helped him get this job. He has no leaves or social security; he leaves home at 5am in the morning by cycle, working from 6am-6pm in the town and earns Rs 5000 per month. He knows the contractor must be deducting his commission from the salary that is owed to him. But the stable income provides sustenance for his family and provides for hiring of labour to till his 15 katha land which cannot farm himself due to his ill health.

Finding regular employment in the limited industrial and agro-processing sectors is out of reach for Ranipalli's residents, except for one adivasi man who has a low paid regular job as a semi-skilled worker at a printing press nearby. Even when such employment is available, albeit sporadically, the employment is mediated by the influential political party leaders in the town. Rice mills, as other recent research have shown (Harriss-White, 2008; Roesch et al., 2009), are being increasingly mechanised, cutting down mostly women labourers who were employed in drying of paddy. Biplab Soren says the paper mill in Jhargram, one of the few places which provides more stable regular employment, has been consistently reducing staff over the years. Biplab went to look for work at the mill several years back, when a politically influential leader asked for a substantial bribe which he could not afford. This was not for a permanent job at the factory, but a temporary job, but coveted due to regularity of income. An adivasi TMC party member agreed that job openings in mills or factories are rare and often filled by the people from the town under the 'supervision' of the urban party leaders. He said the paper mill took six people in 2019, but the local rural party cadres did not know of it till much later. I will elaborate on the party's mediation and control over the land and labour markets in the next chapter, but here I make a limited point that any regular employment beyond casual construction work has remained out of reach of rural adivasis at urban frontiers.

A final point for conditions of non-agrarian casual wage work is with regards to the low outmigration to other states for labour work in Ranipalli, which is not reflective of adivasis across the district, who are further away from the town and cannot commute to town everyday due to the distance and costs. According to a recent survey, 20 percent of Adivasi working population in Bengal migrated for a part of the year for work, and 59 percent work as non-agricultural wage labourers (K. Rana et al., 2020, p. 114). In contrast to these high numbers, six Santhal households in Ranipalli reported they either migrate for work or have done so in the past. These workers have migrated for temporary casual work to other states, mainly through contractor networks, or in three cases, posted in contractual or permanent government jobs elsewhere (See Section 5.6 for the latter).

Circular migration was mainly to the southern Indian states through 'cascading networks of informal labour contractors' (Lerche et al., 2017, p. 7) where daily wage rates were double of that in Jhargram, and men

worked in construction, agro-based industries, road construction and other casual work. No woman in Ranipalli had migrated to other states for work. Most men went only with neighbours or friends from the region they already knew and trusted, and one way railway tickets were paid by the employer only if they stayed and worked for at least a month or two. If workers wanted to come back earlier, they could, but employers would deduct the rail ticket costs from their wages. Even within the small sample of migrant workers, I found a variety of reasons for travel: a way to fund any specific plans (mending the roof, marrying off a sister), to earn more due to a health crisis or sudden demise of an earning family member, or as a 'bit of an adventure' to the big cities (Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan, 2003).

It indicated that migration was also a way to ensure social reproduction in a broader sense, where lump sum costs like marriage, funeral, housing repairs, coping with sudden loss of income due to bereavement required better income (Mosse et al., 2005; S. Sarkar & Mishra, 2021; A. Shah & Lerche, 2020). Salma Tudu, an adivasi landless construction worker lost her husband at a young age. When she was widowed her elder son who was in 9th standard, left school and joined the construction sector. Once his younger brother left school after few years to work in the town, the elder one went to Coimbatore, a city in South India, with a cousin. He stayed for six months and earned Rs 400 per day working in an auto parts manufacturing factory. They were in a village close to Coimbatore, and the village was very sparsely populated. He cooked on his own and told me he liked living there, for it paid more and gave him regular employment. He had returned to Jhargram recently to attend a family wedding, was looking to return to South India when he got a chance again. Similarly, Pani Murmu, an adivasi woman farmer cultivated her 2 bigha land with the help of money sent by her son every month from the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, where he was working in a coconut factory. The son had lived and worked there for two years, with a pay rise from Rs 7000 to Rs 9000 per month in the meantime. For Santhal residents in Ranipalli, who migrated only rarely for the availability of casual wage work in the town, I did not hear experiences of 'super exploitation' as migrant workers like the kind reported by recent studies on adivasi wage workers (P. Jain & Sharma, 2019; A. Shah et al., 2017), neither did any woman migrate to other states for income. However, migrant work almost always meant working longer hours, with little social support with no access to subsidized food grains, medical services or freedom to change employers at will.

5.6 Salaried employment and non-agrarian petty commodity Producers

In the context of heavy dependence on cultivation in tiny land parcels and casualised wage work, I here argue, that very limited access to salaried employment in the public sector and non-agrarian sector can provide stable income, some basis of differentiation and mobility within adivasi classes of labour. Access to

both such employment and capital for PCP are mediated by the political party in power (CPM in the past, and TMC now), and are riddled with gender bias partially as an outcome of gap in literacy and education between adivasi men and women. The potential for class mobility however remains limited by adivasis being entrenched at the lower ranks of bureaucracy and rising contractualisation of the public sector workforce. But even at lower ranks, these are coveted jobs for security of income and ability to spend on higher education of subsequent generations for enduring mobility (Higham & Shah, 2013).

A recent state-wide survey found only 5.3 percent of adivasi households have regular salaried employment (public and private) in WB with the proportion much lower among Santhals at just 1.3 percent. Non-agrarian PCP is even less common; the survey categorised 4.3 percent of adivasi households and 1.6 percent of Santhal households under the category of 'Self-employment other than cultivation and crafts' (K. Rana et al., 2020, p. 108). The low rates of literacy among adivasis in rural Bengal compared to all other social groups (much worse for women than men) create further barriers to get formal sector employment, despite the affirmative action policies of the state (V. Ramachandran & Reddy, 2023). In Ranipalli, one Santhal man was employed as a primary school teacher; and two other Adivasi men had government jobs in the Indian army and as a clerk in a public sector telecom company. Three households in Ranipalli earned from non-agrarian PCP, which included a tea shop, a government allocated Saal leaves shop in the Adivasi *Bazaa*r (market) in the town, and a petty business of hiring out audio equipment in local events and functions.

The most coveted public sector employment is of primary school teachers, which researchers have shown to command high social standing, and appointments to be firmly controlled by the political party in power in the erstwhile Left-wing regime and used to strengthen political hold over the rural population (D. Bhattacharyya, 2010). With an average salary of about Rs 35,000 per month, these appointments continue to remain controlled by the ruling party. In Bengal, adivasis in general and adivasi women in particular remain grossly underrepresented in school teaching jobs (K. Rana, 2010).

Babulal, a Santhal primary school teacher, worked as a daily wage labourer in construction sites after completing his education till he secured the government job. He was active in politics from a young age and got elected to the local Panchayat body couple years after he got the job. Most respondents, including Babulal agree, government jobs were extremely difficult to get and required political patronage (increasingly also involved bribes), which most Adivasi households cannot afford. A portion of his 2 bigha land is *Dahi* but he plans to invest in private pumpset to grow vegetables in summer, thus investing his salaried income in agriculture. He has also bought a piece of land closer to the town from an extended

family member to build a house; both his children are visually impaired, and he wants to shift to the town to give them better access to private education. Any surplus generated from his well-paid job is used to increase gains from agriculture, maintaining and expanding his position as capital and for improving his own conditions of reproduction, for instance, by shifting to the city.

Landless adivasi Pannalal Soren is employed as a clerk in the state-owned telecom office in the town. His father died in 1993 when he was just 15 years old; being the eldest son he applied for the job when he turned 18 under compassionate grounds and received it. His job had social security benefits till early 2000s, after which they were casualised by the state government. With his secured income, Pannalal constructed a two-storey house, and bought a car which he hires out for commercial purposes when not using within the family. He sends both his kids to private schools in the town and wants them to get 'proper' jobs when they grow up. Lakshmi Murmu works in the army, and is posted in the Northeastern state of Tripura, and comes home for two months in a year on leave. His wife entirely takes care of farming their 1.5 bigha land by hiring in labour; the cultivation is crucial to them, they say, since the government job makes them ineligible for subsidised rice under the PDS. Lakshmi's father also had a low-ranking police job when he was alive, and only one of his four children managed to secure a government employment. The other brothers work as casual labourers in the construction sector. They all live within a single compound but with starkly different conditions of houses, reflecting there is neither sharing of income nor status among the households, showing signs of differentiation and inequality within families shaped by access to public sector employment. Two more adivasi men have recently found jobs in the West Bengal National Volunteer force which was expanded as part of government's counter-insurgency mechanism in the district (Kamra, 2016): both jobs are temporary, with no social security benefits, and postings might be anywhere within one's own district. The salary is around Rs 14,000 per month, needs no higher education qualifications, and are a stable source of income for the two men.

Access to non-agrarian PCP or self-employment formed the primary basis of reproduction for three adivasi households in Ranipalli (Harriss-White, 2023), access to which was mediated by political patronage and rarely available for adivasis. As a Santhal man in Ranipalli pointed out, the main pitched road that connects Jhargram town with the national highway (adjacent to Ranipalli) extends for about 20 kms. 'There might be 500 shops selling multiple things; but only 5 of them would belong to an adivasi.' The three households engaging in PCP draw all or most of their income from it, do not work as wage labour for others, and have been able to expand showing some capacity to emerge as petty capital.

Subir, a young adivasi runs his tea and snack shop at the end of the village adjacent to the pitched road. He is also an active member of the local party, a connection that aided his loan application for his initial funding to begin the business as well as to secure the land for the shop for which he has no legal title. Subir worked alone till recently when he hired a Santhal cook to prepare fresh sweets and snacks. In the past five years, Subir has mended his shop structure, expanded his offerings from tea to biscuits, snacks and breakfast options, gaining mainly from the expansion of the town and increased commute from rural to the urban frontiers. Fagu Murmu also gained from political patronage in late 1970s when he received a space for a shop in a market set up in the Jhargram town by the government. He admits that income from the shop remains unstable, but he sells not just products made of Saal leaves that he sources from local petty traders but other local knickknacks and employs no labourer in the shop. It is through extensive usage of household labour, that he maintains both his cultivation of 4 bigha land and the business with both his son and daughter working in the shop and seasonally on land. Chaitan Mandi, another young Santhal man, worked as a labourer in a local event management company, and began investing in audio equipment to rent out in social functions and events. His parents still cultivate their three bigha land with hired labour to which he has no claim till his parents can work, and Chaitan had to work as a labourer from a young age. He gained from political patronage of the CPM, when he worked for a few years as a commission agent for a chit fund company that has now gone bankrupt which aided his accumulation of the initial capital for the business. Chaitan now recruits local adivasi boys along with putting in his own labour for the business. Since the handling of equipment requires some skill training, he prefers to work with a fixed set of 5-6 boys who accompany him for shows across the block. In all the above cases, PCP, pursued by a small section of adivasis and mediated by political patronage, has shown possibilities of expansion, propensity for hiring in of labour at a small scale and created opportunities for limited class mobility within adivasis.

5.7 The Lodha tribe: exploitation and stigma among Adivasi classes of labour

Till now, I have focused on the Santhal and Mahato households in Ranipalli to explore the agrarian question of labour for adivasis. I covered the diversification of their bases of reproduction where land distribution is unequal, small landholdings and differentiated access to irrigation diminishes the dependence of Santhals on cultivation for subsistence and makes them primarily dependent on non-agricultural wage work, with

poor access to such work for Santhal women. In this section, I turn attention to the Lodhas, a tribal group classified as 'criminal tribe'[22] during the colonial period, categorised presently as PVTG.

I show how adivasi groups within geographical proximity under same political conditions can have very different outcomes from processes of agrarian change, in this case from the process of land reforms, urbanisation and an expanding construction sector. Unlike Santhals, the Lodhas did not benefit from the CPM's land reform program, continue to remain largely landless and dependent on agricultural wage labour and forest produce collection and are socially shunned by both Santhals and non-adivasi groups. The conditions of their participation in casual wage labour work are harsher than for Santhals, they have not gained at all from affirmative action in education or employment for adivasis, and find it impossible to overcome the narrative of being 'lazy' or 'incompetent' which aggravates the stigma and exploitation they face from adivasi and non-adivasi classes of labour.

Right across the pitched road from the last house of Ranipalli the muddy *Kachcha* road goes into the peripheries of a nearby forest. About 2 kms inside the forest live 11 landless families in a small hamlet of LodhaKhash. The houses are built on what is classified as forest land, with no papers with any household and no one has heard of the Forest Rights Act, let alone making any applications for land under its ambit. Half the housing structures are dilapidated, made of bamboo, plastic sheets, clothes etc. while the other half a dozen houses are made of brick and concrete through receipt of a government welfare scheme; they however are incomplete with no concrete flooring, windows, or doors. One household has leased in 2 bigha land from a Mahato household in a neighbouring village. They paid Rs 3,000 per bigha upfront for the lease for paddy season, which was almost three times the normal leasing rate. A woman from the household told me, they knew they were short changed as they had already spent about Rs 4,500 on cultivating, and it is better to crop on a sharecropping basis. But she said, Santhals or Mahatos would not trust Lodhas to farm properly and generate good yield to agree to sharecropping arrangements, and they had 'learnt their lesson' and would not cultivate from next year.

A Lodha family I interviewed in another hamlet who had leased in some land for farming said, they got the land in lieu of cash rent as the landowners were in desperate need of money; the reluctance to lease out land to Lodhas remained despite them working for generations as farm labourers. The assumption that

[22] The Criminal Tribes Act, 1871, passed by the British colonial rule branded nomadic and semi-nomadic communities as 'criminals' and put them under surveillance. These tribes were de-notified by the Indian government and are not homogenous themselves as social groups. For more details, see Criminal Tribes Act | Economic and Political Weekly (epw.in)

Lodhas have always been forest dwellers with little link with or aspirations for settled agriculture is challenged by such narratives. Sivaramakrishnan (2000) in his work on Midnapore (of which Jhargram was a part) critiques the government's failure to make Lodhas beneficiaries of the land reforms program of the Left front government. Treating Lodhas as only forest dwellers has meant the development planning for the group provisions only for employment schemes or forest regeneration schemes, none of which has improved their conditions (Sivaramakrishnan, 2000). 'At an earlier time, Lodhas may have been cultivators. Now, they wish to regain a prior social condition recognizably superior to their later degradation as fugitive forest dwellers, itinerant traders, and nomadic laborers. From their perspective, treating them as the quintessential hunter-gatherers of anthropological theory is ahistorical' (Sivaramakrishnan, 2000, p. 437).

With decreasing employment in agricultural workforce and no access to cultivable land, Lodhas remain substantially dependent on hunting of small game (illegal) and collection of minor forest produce, particularly dry wood to sell in neighbouring areas. In Lodhakhash, most households said they go into the forest at dawn to collect dry wood and other minor forest produce as well as to hunt rabbits occasionally. They say the Santhals do not collect forest produce, especially wood, themselves anymore. The Lodhas sell the collected wood door to door at their neighbouring villages at Rs 70 for each bundle to Mahato and Santhal households (In Ranipalli, I observed such transactions at Santhal households multiple times). Sometimes, they would be called upon by Santhals and Mahatos from neighbouring villages for collecting minor forest produce, like local fruits or herbs, in return for an orally decided cash amount, and this would be typically done by the young or adolescents in the house.

Unlike the experience of Santhals in Ranipalli, Lodha households in Lodhakhash also look for work through seasonal migration to brick kilns and farm work in more fertile plains (Mazumdar, 2016), which I had shown were not common among Santhals anymore, especially at the periphery of the town. Lodha men and women also continue to migrate to brick kilns across the districts to work for fixed period against *Dataan* or money advances taken from labour contractors at their villages few weeks or months ahead of travel (Guérin, 2013; Guérin et al., 2012). I also found instances of loans taken from Mahato farming households, tying themselves to low-paid labour work in their fields, therefore not gaining from any wage increases during cultivation season when labour markets might tighten. These processes of procuring labour, where the advance works as a means of controlling and disciplining labour, ties Lodha workers to specific employers (Breman et al., 2009; Lerche, 2011b), unlike Santhals who did not report to be in tied debts in the labour market.

Within Jhargram, they look for farming jobs whole year round, often not for a full day's wage and include digging soil or making make-shift boundaries for vegetable cultivation. They also go to the houses of *Mahajans* (moneylenders and traders) to work on odd jobs like cutting bamboo, cutting wood etc in their homesteads. Their farm work is only paid on a piece rate basis, one that is also true for their experience in non-agricultural work (to which I will turn next), mainly due to the stigma for being 'lazy' and 'incompetent' and therefore not to be trusted with a full day's wage.

In the non-agrarian sector, unlike Santhals, Lodhas work only in groups on contractual basis, and a Lodha woman pointed out that she was paid partly in cash and partly in rice when going for construction work, a practice no more prevalent for other Adivasi workers. In groups, they worked cleaning houses, cleaning gardens, digging soil for construction work, anything available for a few hours on a given day. A labour contractor in Jhargram confirmed this ethnic segregation of labourers in the town, and even in his own hiring for workers in construction. He said, the Lodha men and women usually worked in groups and would often want cash on the same day. In the construction sector, however, cash wages were paid on a weekly basis, something Santhal workers were ready to wait for. Also, since Lodhas worked in groups, they were not suitable for working under *mistrys* or masons, he said. He only used Lodha men and women for digging, unloading or loading of specific goods, carrying certain quantity of sacks of sand to a worksite and such other work, on a piecerate basis, where the entire group would receive a pre-agreed amount of cash on completion of the said task in a few hours.

At the absolute bottom of the adivasi hierarchy as it were, the Lodhas were found to be one of the most 'hungry' tribes in Bengal, having not received two square meals a day for sometime in the year prior to a recent survey (Rana et al., 2020, p. 185). Unlike any household in Ranipalli, several households in this Lodha hamlet did not have the public distribution system (PDS) card that was mandatory to collect the monthly food distribution made by government centres across India. Most children in LodhaKhash were not in school (they might be enrolled, but did not attend) which is consistent with 26 percent of Lodha children out of elementary school (against adivasi average of 6 percent), by far the highest for any adivasi group in the state (K. Rana et al., 2020, p. 186).

Processes of agrarian change under capitalist development within geographical proximity therefore has produced different trajectories of transitions often further worsening oppression of certain adivasi groups and exacerbating inter-tribal differences. More oppressive forms of wage work continue to exist based on discrimination and racialized stigma, imploring us to understand co-constitution of class and tribe that forms the core of the Adivasi Agrarian Question. Such differentiated outcomes and relations of dominations

between adivasi groups, in turn undermine political alliances possible among adivasi classes of labour, which I will discuss in the following chapter.

5.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the agrarian question of labour in Ranipalli in Jhargram, marked by tiny semi-fertile landholdings unequally distributed between and within adivasi groups insufficient for subsistence as well as casualised low paid unsecure wage work in the urban. The bases of reproduction among the adivasi classes of labour are fragmented across both the rural/urban and agrarian/non agrarian divide, with unequal access to land and labour work differentiated along the axis of tribe and gender. With a third of Santhal households being landless and most cultivating less than an acre of land, cultivation is not enough as basis of reproduction; insecure casual work in the informal economy with low wages, on the other hand, keep such households crucially dependent on land-based occupations for social reproduction. The Lodha adivasis, on the other hand, are both entirely landless, and unable to benefit from access to education, formal sector employment or self-employment, and work under more oppressive forms of casual labour work for adivasi and non-tribal classes of labour.

I want to emphasise a point I made earlier in the chapter and in Chapter 2 of the thesis: that the AQ of labour is not discrete from the other aspects of the Adivasi Agrarian Question (AAQ), which for this thesis also encompasses dispossession and political struggles of adivasis for better land and labour rights. These three aspects of the AAQ that allude to the three sub-questions of the thesis co-constitute each other. Santhals' ownership of even tiny plots resulted from the insurgency against the feudal landlords in the region triggered by their oppression in the post-colonial period; the processes of urbanisation in the last decade have similarly been triggered by the state's formation of the new district in response to the insurgency in 2008-10 which in turn have expanded the construction sector that shapes the conditions of wage labour work for both Santhals and Lodhas in rural peripheries of Jhargram town. The co-constitutive and relational nature between the three agrarian questions, even when addressed separately as done in this thesis, must not be lost sight of.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the processes of dispossession resulting from the expansion of the urban boundaries of the town and key dynamics of adivasi politics that are set off by the regime change at the end of the insurgency. I will show how the agrarian question of labour discussed in this chapter shape the contemporary political response of adivasis in the region.

6. Dispossession, Land Reforms, and 'Party Society': Agrarian Question of Politics in Ranipalli

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, I discussed the adivasi agrarian question of labour (AQL) in Jhargram, WB, which unpacked the changing bases of simple reproduction of Santhals as the gains from land reforms phase out, semi-fertile landholdings continue to fragment and the construction sector in the nearby town employ most men in casual wage work. The cultivation of monsoon paddy in fragmented holdings continues to be important for food security of households that have access to land and limited local agricultural labour work, which I have shown is differentiated along lines of class, gender, and tribe. Surplus is appropriated in the farm economy by trading capital with whom farmers get tied in credit relations, and by contractors in the construction sector, both of which have little to no representation of adivasis. Differentiation among Santhals continue in restricted manner through salaried employment or non-agrarian petty commodity production in which the latter shows low capacities for accumulation and depends on self-exploitation of household labour. The Lodhas in contrast to Santhals remain in the lowest ranks of classes of labour due to no access to cultivable land and racialised 'super-exploitation' (P. Jain & Sharma, 2019) in the labour market.

In this chapter, I first explore the factors and processes of dispossession of adivasis on the borders of the Jhargram town, including in Ranipalli, and its linkages with the AQL. It places Ranipalli on the rural periphery of urbanisation caught up in the processes of dispossession triggered mainly by speculative capital. While the Jhargram municipality was established as an 'urban' entity in 1982, the formation of the new district with the town as the district headquarter has led to a renewed clamour for land driven by real estate demand by an increasing population and speculative capital (Goldman, 2011).

Linking the Adivasi AQL with urbanisation, I show that dispossession of adivasis in Ranipalli is underway on a piecemeal basis at the household level shaped by four factors: the revaluation of land parcels that are adjacent to the pitched road, decoupling such valuation from fertility of land; the reversal of benefits of land reforms in the 1970s with absentee landlords reclaiming land; the declining dependence on land-based occupations in absence of stable employment in the non-farm sector; and by the limits set to adivasis' own participation in the land market due to protective state legislature that prohibits selling of adivasi land to non-tribal people.

Recent scholarship in critical urban studies in the global south have called for more attention to interactions of agrarian change and urbanisation, with the linkages conceptualised as 'planetary urbanisation' (Brenner & Schmid, 2014), 'extended urbanisation' (S. Ghosh & Meer, 2021) and 'agrarian urbanisation' (Balakrishnan & Gururani, 2021). They agree on the constitutive role of the agrarian to form the new urban centres in the global south, often far away from mega cities or metropolises. The class relations in the agrarian, differentiated across the axis of gender, caste and tribe, reflected in the 'historically sedimented relations of land and property co-produce the urban-agrarian complex' (Balakrishnan & Gururani, 2021, p. 7). Scholars of critical agrarian studies, on the other hand, have noted the role of agrarian capital in shaping processes of urbanisation, linked or delinked from processes of industrialisation (Bernstein, 2006; Chari, 2000; Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan, 2003; Harriss-White, 2015; Lerche, 2013).

In Jhargram, processes of dispossession linked to both agrarian and speculative capital interact with the AQL, shaped by unequal agrarian relations in land, the nature of past land reforms and the precarious conditions of available wage work in the urban informal economies. In conversation with scholarship on critical urban studies, Ranipalli's case contributes to the literature on dispossession of adivasis that have generally focused on state-led large-scale acquisitions. Shifting attention away from such state-led acquisition in contrast to what I explore for Chhattisgarh later in the thesis, here, I unpack trends of land alienation at the individual household level in Ranipalli, carried out on a piecemeal basis. I thereby respond to the second research question on the nature and processes of dispossession amidst the class dynamics of agrarian change that continues despite protective laws that prohibit land transfers from adivasis to non-adivasis and reverse the benefits from land reforms.

In the second half of the chapter, I link the AQL and dispossession with the agrarian question of politics, addressing the third question of the thesis. Here, I engage with both struggles for protection of land and labour rights among Santhals, as bases of reproduction remain fragmented between the rural/urban and agarian/non agrarian divide. Regarding land rights, the local adivasi political leaders in Ranipalli insist that the villagers have common concerns of losing land due to the incompleteness of the land reforms and expansion of the town and have tried to form strategies to oppose such dispossession. However, they also admit, that the nature of such dispossession that preys on individual household level distress and/or changing aspirations does not allow for creating broad-based struggles for demanding land rights or land reforms. Regarding labour struggles, Santhal workers, party cadres and contractors all agree that the ruling party, the TMC has withdrawn itself from supporting labour struggles in the unorganised sector, a departure from CPM's strategical positioning of itself as a mediator of labour conditions. This has led to

weakening of unions which though protected employers and contractors, provided a platform for labour negotiations controlled heavily by the party. In response to these changes, adivasi people and the party cadres are struggling to form cohesive demand making strategies beyond making welfare demands from the party in return for electoral support.

The chapter is organised as follows. Section 6.2 elaborates on the processes of dispossession in Ranipalli. Using two case studies from the village it shows that trends of dispossession and accumulation are both underway in how land is traded; households who have stable income from secure employment or non-agrarian PCP are trying to acquire land parcels adjacent to the road within the village. On the other hand, farming households who had given up portions of their land in the past for promises of employment are trying to resist such alienation for not receiving the promised employment and rising value of such land on the urban periphery. Section 6.3 connects these processes of dispossession with the status and impact of land reforms and regulatory framework of land transactions for adivasis in the region. Several adivasis in Ranipalli are slated to gain only a portion of land value in case of any sale of land, for two reasons: often they are registered as tenants and not landowners for the portions they till; and in case they are the landowners, restriction on sale on adivasi land often fetch lower prices on such land for complications of legally registering it. Section 6.4 and 6.5 concern themselves with the political response of adivasis to the processes of dispossession and the ensuing fragmentation to the bases of reproduction. It delves into the party mediation of struggles for both land and labour rights and their transformation across the CPM regime and the last decade of TMC government. The limits to benefit from state welfare and capacity to struggle for these rights are considered separately for the Lodha tribes in the final section, as it remains mediated by hierarchical relationships between the Lodhas and the Santhals. Section 6.6 concludes the empirical findings in WB.

6.2 Dispossession: non-farm employment, accumulation, and hustle for land in Ranipalli

When I first visited Jhargram in early 2013 to explore the causes and trajectory of a recently curbed Maoist-backed insurgency in the region, Jhargram municipality with its population of 60,000 people had a demeanor of quietness about it. The roads that led to rural blocks from the town were manned by a heavy military presence, and people who would trust an outsider for interviews were difficult to find. Movements after nightfall were restricted and there were only a couple of guesthouses that had till recently been largely occupied by journalists from across the state and the country reporting on the insurgency. Just seven years later, the town has expanded on all sides to the extent it is difficult to demarcate its peripheries

as distinct from the villages that surround it. There are many multi-storey buildings, offices for the new district headquarters under construction, supermarkets, cafes, multiple hotels and guest houses, and restaurants serving multi-cuisine food. Construction of shopping centres, apartments and a newly sanctioned university near the town are all underway, rushing to meet the anticipated demands for real estate as more professionals including bureaucrats, teachers, bank officials, healthcare providers look to settle in this expanding district headquarter of Jhargram.

Spread across 21 sqkm (up from 17 sqkm in 1991), the municipality website for Jhargram town says, 'it is very difficult to identify the Panchayat area and Municipal area at the outskirts in three sides' (Government of West Bengal, n.d.). Since the district was formed after the last Census in 2011, district-level data for work status is yet unavailable. However, the Jhargram sub-division was the least urbanised within the West Midnapore district till 2001. The town is still the only urban centre in the district, with 93 percent of its workers categorised as 'Other workers' in 2001, who were not employed in cultivation or as household industry workers, working as wage labourers in the informal economy (Government of West Bengal, 2011, p. 244). In the industrial sector, there is one oil mill and one paper mill in the town, both employing less than 50-60 people according to my respondents; secured salaried employment is limited to the tertiary sector, in banks, schools, hospitals, and government offices which are expanding since the new district was announced.

A World Bank-supported status report on land governance commissioned by the WB government mentioned continuation of tribal land alienation as 'a main cause of concern' in the state (Landesa, 2014, p. 10). It recommended for the state to prepare a data base through fresh surveys on tribal land ownership, in absence of reliable data on the same. Their concern is also supported by analysis of employment/unemployment surveys of NSSO in 1993-94 and 2004-05, between which period the proportion of adivasi households without access to cultivable land grew by 38 percent (Bakshi, 2008, p. 108). This is significantly higher than the state's average for all social groups at 13.9 percent, all India average for all social groups at 10.6 percent and all India average for adivasis at 11.6 percent. Despite the lack of industrial investment in the state outside the peripheries of the state capital of Kolkata, real estate investment and speculative capital investment has been high in WB (Sud, 2014a), which is likely reflected in the land alienation conditions for adivasis in the state. The unpacking of the ongoing processes of alienation, in this case triggered by urbanisation, is therefore crucial to comprehend the changing bases of simple reproduction of adivasis in the state.

Urbanisation far away from Kolkata is common in WB, as a number of statutory and census towns have grown in the last decade through investment into the commerce-based tertiary sector, with growth coming from small markets and service centres (Chakravorty & Dasgupta, 2011; M. Chatterjee, 2013; G. Samanta, 2017). The state ranked first in 2011 Census for addition of new census towns which were defined on the basis of population, population density and at least 75 percent of the male workers engaged in non-agricultural activities (Guin & Das, 2015, p. 68). The growing urbanisation has been connected with increased agrarian distress, increase in unorganised and informal manufacturing activities, rise in rural non-farm labour force, and increase in commuting to urban centres for work due to improved transport (Guin & Das, 2015, p. 71; Khasnabis, 2008).

Jhargram has been classified as a municipality for four decades now and its urban status (unlike Census towns) is not precarious. However, many respondents said it got a new lease of life from around 2015 when people started anticipating the formation of a new district. As a resident of Jhargram put to me, 'They (the government) had to announce the district, so much money had already been invested by then.' He was referring to active speculative capital, presumably from agrarian, agro-commerce and non-agricultural sources that had already begun to buy land in the town and its neighbouring areas in anticipation of increasing valuations.

As mentioned above, it is difficult to demarcate the urban boundaries of the town anymore; its peripheries are hardly 3 kms from Ranipalli. Ranipalli is located adjacent to a pitched road connecting Jhargram with a national highway, and therefore is one of the most lucrative routes in which the town can now expand. While potential land transfers are discussed secretively, I discuss here two cases of land transfers within the village which show that adivasi households that possess land are integrated into capital in diverse ways, with unequal outcomes within processes of urbanisation. These cases show that the demand for land is also emerging from the inequalities in agrarian relations in the region and accumulation among a tiny percentage of adivasis possible through access to secured better-paid employment.

Property brokers and residential builders, colloquially referred to as 'promoters' frequent the village and Subir's tea shop at the far end of Ranipalli on the roadside, to enquire about 'available' land. Tensions are palpable about who might be approached for their plots and if someone was making a deal already. Fagu, an old Adivasi man confirmed that everyone knew Ranipalli was on the radar of investors. 'In few years, there will be houses all around us. Already people have bought land till Durbapur (2 kms from Ranipalli). They are all rich parties. They are all from outside.' A political worker elected at the Panchayat level from the TMC also confirmed that he had personally received enquiries about land in the village. He said, 'We

know it has already begun; this is so close to the town, on the main road. This is the right (sic) land to be sold. Couple of brokers came here to ask if there are plots which anyone could be looking to sell. They offered us (village-based party cadres) good commission for it as well.'

The nature of capital that is investing into land in Jhargram is the subject for a more in-depth investigation; but within Ranipalli, the current demand for land is from Mahato and adivasi households who have stable sources of non-farm employment or income; this includes two Mahato households that have male members retired from the police force who receive monthly pension and an adivasi household with a public sector job. On one hand, permanent employment has created the basis for mobility and accumulation among adivasis, leading to a tendency of formation of an adivasi 'middle class' that has been noticed in other parts of the country (V. Xaxa, 2005), adding to appetite for accumulation in land. One the other hand, Mahato households who have traditionally gained from low lying more fertile land on the other side of the village, further away from the main road, are now trying to exchange land with semi fertile Adivasi land closer to the road. Both the Mahato households told me about 'exchanges' they have made with adivasis, where they have given up more acreage of fertile paddy land in exchange of much smaller but road-adjacent drier *dahi* land for building houses. It must be kept in mind though, that data from a recent state-wide survey discussed in the previous chapter showed, only 1.3 percent of Santhals hold regular salaried employment. So, the appetite for land from adivasi elite and nontribal agrarian elite rooted in existing unequal agrarian relations are in no way comparable in their impact on the scale of dispossessions as I will show.

Suren Mahato, who farms 6.5 bigha of fertile low-lying paddy land and grows sesame and vegetables on it in summer, has educated both sons till college. Both his sons are now in non-farm employment in the private sector. One of them works in the panchayat office on a contractual job as a computer operator for five years. The younger son stays and works in a nearby town in a contractual low rank public sector job. While Suren has only worked as a farmer all his life, his sons are not interested in farming. He says his small holding is not of interest to his sons. 'My sons do not even know all the location of the land parcels. Yesterday, one boy came home at 11.30 at night. Even at 2 am he was on his phone. Of course, he will sleep till 11 am. It is our habit to get up at dawn and go to the field to oversee the cultivation. They will not do that. People who have other jobs will not get back to cultivation.' He said, as he and his wife get older and farm labour costs continue to rise, he will move out of farming. His younger son told me, he has also begun a small business of hiring out technical equipment for conferences and meetings in the town and wants to move closer to the town. He was already looking for *dahi* land among adivasi households adjacent to the

pitched road, in exchange for a part of his fertile land. He knew of others in the adjacent villages who had done the same. Changing aspirations among the younger generations for non-farm employment and the existing inequalities in landholdings might trigger processes of redistribution of land through negotiating such exchanges (D. Gupta, 2005; Majumder & Nielsen, 2016).

These processes are reenforced by re-evaluation of land adjacent to the road that has decoupled value of land with its fertility, similar to what Gururani (2020, p. 978) observed for infertile land of Gujars in Gurgaon, Haryana. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, *dahi* land could grow 2-3 quintal of paddy against the 8-9 quintal of paddy in fertile low-lying land. But the rise in dry land prices when adjacent to the road in context of an expanding urban makes adivasi land parcels targets for dispossession. That such exchanges between fertile and semi-fertile land adjacent to the pitched road was underway was confirmed by Babulal Murmu, the Santhal government schoolteacher. He tried a couple of years back for a similar exchange with another adivasi household who had land adjacent to the main road. He offered money or 8 katha of his agricultural paddy land in lieu of 3 katha drier land on the main road. But he said, the family refused then, though they have finalised an exchange with a Mahato household since then. These exchanges potentially create possibilities for land poor adivasis to gain more fertile land in settled cultivation or accumulate through sale of land, though the gains are diminished by the protective legislation for transfer of adivasi land which I will discuss in the next section. It also implies that 30 percent of Ranipalli's Santhals who do not have any cultivable land to trade are left out of the gains from developing land markets unless they trade in their homestead land and get entirely displaced.

Speculation and the impact of the physical position of land in the context of industrialisation or urbanisation can introduce 'an element of randomness into social trajectories' within the processes of dispossession (Levien, 2012, p. 959). True for Ranipalli, land parcels adjacent to roads are distributed randomly among landed Santhal households, irrespective of their class status which leads to the hustle among the Mahatos and adivasis like Babulal who are trying to 'exchange' land based on their own evaluation of land values. In absence of access to higher education among most adivasis, poorer households who depend primarily on precarious manual labour work in possession of such land might exchange it for more fertile plots for prospects of food security. In contrast to Suren Mahato's son who aspires to exit cultivation, getting access to fertile paddy land might improve conditions of reproduction for such households. Roy's (2007) ethnographic work among small and marginal farmers from Dalit and adivasi groups in other parts of Bengal revealed similar interest in cultivation in the context of unavailability of viable alternatives. The agrarian question of labour, manifested in reproduction squeeze among most adivasis and mobility among a few,

therefore plays out as a determining factor of who makes demand on what kind of land and how agrarian properties will be redistributed in such shuffling.

Mobility among a small section of adivasis can also lead to unequal transactions on land between members of adivasi classes of labour. As land markets are mediated by social relations, and land continue to be 'transacted through ties of friendship, class networks, family and kin bonding, gender and caste' (Sud, 2020, p. 11), poorer adivasi households get alienated from land without being adequately compensated for it. The terms of transfer of land between adivasis under market forces have received little attention within processes of differentiation among adivasis. But anecdotal evidence in adivasi areas in Jharkhand have shown that such exchanges fetch lower rates that market value (Brahmbhatt, 2019), possibly because of restrictions on private sale of tribal land to non-tribals. In Ranipalli, once Babulal's bid for exchange of plots with an adivasi household fell through, he made another deal with a distant relative in the periphery of the Jhargram town who has 6 kattha homestead land. Babulal bought half the land few years back at a price lower than the market rate with the assurance that if the owner ever sold the other half, he would offer Babulal the first opportunity to buy at the same rate. A year back, Babulal bought the other half as well, though he was miffed for being asked to pay a price more aligned with the market rate this time. His permanent employment has created both aspirations for the city but also the basis for unequal exchanges of land worsening inequalities among adivasi classes of labour.

The next case of individual dispossession in Ranipalli points to another possibility, where adivasis sourcing much of their non-farm income from precarious casual wage employment, had already made deals on land parcels they were cultivating (as owners or tenants) in exchange for false promise of regular employment. They were therefore already alienated from their land before they could assess the revaluation of their land. The accumulation from such dispossession because of urbanisation is not shared by the adivasi farmers and are split between the real estate investors and the absentee non-adivasi landlords who still have legal titles to land in the region.

During the second phase of my fieldwork in Ranipalli, I began hearing about an incident of dispossession that had impacted almost 10-12 adivasi farmer households from this village and the next. The data on sale of land by individual adivasi households remained difficult to confirm as they were not typically reported during the household-level interviews.[23] I put together the details of this case through multiple interviews

[23] I concurred this was for two reasons. One, the social value of land is not reducible to its economic value, and the stigma attached to admitting land sale makes it difficult for people to reveal them. Two, despite the consent

with four key respondents in the village and cross-checked the details across them. A group of farming households from Ranipalli and the adjoining village together gave up about 30 bigha of land (about 10 acres) about 15 years back to a forward caste Bengali businessman from Kolkata. This was a big plot of *dahi* land which would grow some paddy in the summer. There is no way of confirming the ownership status of the entire plot, but a part of this land was cultivated by adivasis under tenancy arrangement with the erstwhile landowner (*Bargadars*) and a part was owned by adivasis (*Rayati* land) for which the new owners signed 99-year leases.

The farmers gave up the land because the buyers promised that a biscuit factory would be made in the land and each household that 'sold' land would get a job. This is extremely similar to what Bhattacharya (2009, p. 67) saw in a place proximate to Kolkata in the North 24 Parganas district in late 2000s, where politically influential party cadres from the then ruling CPM were pursuing the absentee landlords to sell 20 bigha of land next to a highway, while also pushing the 11 *bargadars* on the land to give it up through financial incentive as well as manipulation of the bureaucratic procedures. The alienation of land in Ranipalli was a part of similar processes of reversal of benefits from land reforms that led to eviction of farmers and sharecroppers under neoliberal reforms. In line with Bhattacharya's observation on two similar cases in two districts in Bengal, in Ranipalli too, a 'growing number of people carrying nominal skills and capabilities are desperately seeking entry into the informal economy…. (and) agricultural land conducive for real estate or industrial development is being devoured by cash rich entrepreneurs' (2009, p. 69).

In Ranipalli, though the cultivators gave up land, there was no factory made, and the land was cordoned off with a boundary wall and turned into an orchard. Two people got work in the garden for a bit and then there was no work anymore. Two respondents said no money had been paid to farmers at the time, while one said a few thousand rupees might have been paid, but it was a fraction of the land value. Secure full-time employment so close to the village was a persuasive offer for most for households that were struggling with low yield of paddy and food insecurity.

15 years on, the shift in the land markets and the expansion of the town has led to a 'transition' in how the land is valued (Sud, 2020, p. 106). The first buyer is now selling the land to a new investor, and this has led to renewed conflict and negotiation over the dispossession. The original farmers are now opposing further transfer of the property without involving them- either they need proper monetary compensation or their land back. The new owners have had a few meetings with the farmers reaching no consensus on the issue.

provided by the farmers initially for the transfer, they were challenging it now on valid grounds. A respondent said that challenging a sale they had consented to earlier also makes households hesitant to discuss it.

The new owners have also allegedly tried to pay off a *Panchayat* leader of the TMC in the village to obtain a No-Objection Certificate (NOC) for nonagricultural use of the plot and a couple of younger boys who are viewed as the 'troublemakers' among the farmers. A prominent TMC leader also made a call to a local panchayat member from the party recently to sort it out and hand over the NOC, but the local leader told me he did not want to intervene given he had known the farmers all his life and did not want to accept a deal they did not consent to. Since then, the status quo is being maintained. However, there is some suspicion that the second buyer might have already taken a big advance from a builder to have a real estate project on the land, and there is a sense of tension that every stakeholder would want to settle it as soon as possible.

This second case study shows that individual alienation of adivasi land, though intensified in the past 5-6 years, has a longer trajectory in the region under capitalist development, and might have already excluded many adivasis from gains of the revaluation of their land. In parallel to those holding road adjacent properties who might settle for more fertile land away from the road to bolster agricultural produce, adivasi households, in this case, had been lured by the promise of secured non-farm employment in absence of sufficient decent wage work in the town.

The agrarian impasse in Bengal because of low public investment in agriculture and fragmented holdings combined with neither industrial growth nor the capacity of the informal economy to produce decent employment opportunities (M. Bhattacharyya & Bhattacharyya, 2007; Khasnabis, 2008) are alienating adivasis from their land. These contemporary processes of alienation under capitalism worsens access to land among the land-poor adivasis who via historical processes are already in possession of poor-quality land. The nature of land reforms by the erstwhile CPM government and the protective legislative framework for adivasis prohibiting sale of land to non-tribals have complicated these ongoing dispossessions, by rendering adivasis vulnerable in a developing land market and by providing opportunities to make renewed claims on their lost land, to which I turn next.

6.3 Impact of land reforms and protective legislation on dispossession

In the second case study discussed above, I mentioned how the farmers (both owners and sharecroppers) who had agreed to give up their land are now opposing further transfer of the land to the new buyers, which leads to the question of transfer of land titles in the first instance of alienation. Three respondents confirmed that the paperwork on changing the land titles were not pursued in the first instance presumably for three reasons. Firstly, the *Rayati* or ownership title in the names of adivasis are difficult to register in

the name of nontribal people because of the Section 14A-14I of the WBLR Act, 1995, which allows such transfer or sale only with the permission of a revenue officer. Two, where adivasis are registered as sharecroppers or *Bargadars* on the land, any change in documentation of the sharecropping status can be costly; in case of removal of the *Bargadar*'s name, the 'surrender' must be certified by a state-appointed officer and necessitates a new *Bargadar* to be assigned to the land (Hanstad & Nielsen, 2004, pp. 854–855). Three, in case any part of this alienated land was distributed as 'Patta' land, which is the land redistributed by the government after imposing land ceilings, such land cannot be sold. Both *Barga* and *Patta* rights are inheritable secured rights for cultivation but at the same time prohibit sale or transfer of such land (Hanstad & Nielsen, 2004; Majumdar, 2003) (Also see Chapter 4).

The land reform program had redistributed some government land and recorded tenancies in the area (district or block level distribution by social groups unavailable) since 1980s. The residents of Ranipalli, for understandable reasons about their insecurities regarding the future of their landholdings are hesitant to discuss if the holdings they cultivate are under *Barga* rights or secured *Rayati* ownership. In many cases adivasi households do not have the paperwork which confirms the status of their landholding, and it is difficult to confirm the status given cultivators do not pay rent to absentee landlords on *Barga* land anymore. Respondents confirmed that adivasis and Mahatos in Ranipalli and its surrounding villages had gained (albeit unequally) from the redistribution of land and registration of *Bargadars*. A Bengali upper caste landowner, Chaudhury, had owned 190 Bigha (63 acre) of land in the area. An old man in the village cautioned that if one looks back further in the history, it is possible that the land originally belonged to adivasis who had lost it to the Chaudhurys through debt, mortgage, and coercion over time.

Under the land reforms program, the last *Barga* registration in the village was around 1998 though there are households in Ranipalli and surrounding villages who do not even possess the paperwork for it. Moreover, no person with tenancy registrations were given the Record of Rights, which is the legal document registering the possession of the land, also documented in the Landesa report as a prevalent situation in the state (Landesa, 2014, p. 34).

The restrictions are likely to impact any exchange of land between Mahatos and adivasis in the village as well, which are being done through verbal contracts, sometimes with corresponding lease documents. Two Santhal respondents also told me that transfer of actual land titles is avoided even when Mahatos 'buy' adivasi land, which has a longer history in the region from before the urbanisation-led transfers. I heard of cases where adivasi households who were landless now, cultivated land even a generation back, and had lost land to Mahato households from this village and the next through mortgage, often for paltry sums. As

Subir, a Santhal young man told me, 'Mahatos have so much land compared to us. You cannot explain this without admitting that they took over our land.' But because such transfers require complicated bureaucratic processes, many of these transfers might not have been registered with the government.

A mix of these factors render land transfers messy both by the land reforms process in the state and the restrictions on transfer of Adivasi land. In contrast to Nikita Sud's observation of 'an obsession with paperwork' (2020, p. 91) when it came to make land transactable, akin to other adivasi areas that have similar prohibitions on individual sale of privately owned land (Government of India, 2014, p. 279), the exchanges around Ranipalli are not always preoccupied with legal transfer of land. The Landesa report on land governance in WB points out that difficulties to register sale of tribal land leads to 'clandestine arrangements' in rural areas across the state leading to tribal land alienation (2014, p. 286). Respondents in Ranipalli mention that long leases of 70 years or above have been the norm in cases adivasis are owners of the land on paper; those who are interested in buying land are also using members from the bureaucracy or local contacts to find out parcels where adivasis are in possession but *bargadars* on paper to approach the non-tribal absentee owner. A respondent said while traveling from Jhargram to Ranipalli, bamboo poles stuck to the ground on either side of the road were markers of land that had transferred hands and were thus 'plotted.' He said, 'They have occupied the land and plotted, they will make constructions later. Those who are buying land have no dearth of money; they know paperwork can be done later. They just need to manage the occupiers.'

Another adivasi respondent said employees in the expanding tertiary sector who were shifting to the town with its expansion were also capturing land for investment purposes, while real estate builders were grabbing small plots for nonagricultural commercial use other than real estate as well, pointing to different forms of capital that was interested in agricultural land on urban peripheries. He said, 'I know a place where seven people together have taken a massive plot of land for orchards. There are schoolteachers and bank managers in this buyer group. They might employ people to plant trees and other work; but once the work is complete, they will throw the workers out. But the land deals would be sealed by then.' Mentioning a tiny agricultural plot near the town that was now used by a contractor to store stone chips and other construction material, he said, 'Someone I know has leased out that land for 19 years. His kids are still small. Who knows who will live for 19 years? And by then the son may not know the land belonged to him. It will be lost.'

The class based (as *Bargadars*) and identity based (as adivasis) legal safeguards restricting sale and transfer of land in WB have provided the platform to renegotiate the terms of alienation from land as we saw in the above case study. Apart from the incomplete task of land records (no record of rights), the poor implementation of laws and the silence of the law on the rights of sharecroppers during sale of land have rendered adivasis in Ranipalli vulnerable to market forces. There are two legal provisions in WB's land reform legislation to turn *Bargadars* to landowners: one, via giving them priority rights to purchase land if the owners want to sell; two, creation of a government fund that would allow the *Bargadars* to borrow from to make the purchases. The second provision was never operationalised by the CPM government (Hanstad & Nielsen, 2004, p. 853). The first provision is difficult to implement as poor adivasi households cannot pay the market rates to buy the land from the owners without financial support, especially with rising land prices.

Though the tenants in Ranipalli have not been paying rent to the landowners for decades now, respondents said the erstwhile owners who still have legal titles to the land are showing renewed interest in the area, as the land is valued higher if the parcels are not fragmented among multiple sharecroppers but can be offered in big parcels to real estate capital. One local political leader in Ranipalli associated with the TMC said, without paperwork with the adivasi households, land could be sold without knowledge of the occupier. He said, 'Two years back, we were also exploring if some money can be paid to Chaudhury to sort out paperwork in the village. If names of adivasis could be registered, land could be protected.' But the owners were not interested. A couple of months into my fieldwork, he told me in a separate interview he had been in touch with an Adivasi officer in the land reforms department in Jhargram and was figuring out if the records of rights could be processed and distributed among the households in the village. Since there is no legal clarity on the share of a tenant in case of a cash sale of land, absence of proper paperwork with the Adivasi tenants can also cause them to accept a small portion of the sale proceedings and be dispossessed of their holdings.

In such a situation of precarity and vulnerability in the land market, adivasis depend on the patronage of the party in power and local bureaucracy to protect cultivable land which is an important basis of their reproduction. Ensuring the implementation of the legal frameworks of non-transferability of adivasi land and the security of tenancies can act as strategies to avoid further alienation from land. However, with the piecemeal nature of alienation, individualised secretive negotiations, and the political and financial clout of the capital within the ruling party have prevented from forming broad based resistance in contrast to what I will discuss in Chhattisgarh. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the dynamics of political

allegiances and strategies followed by adivasis to secure better conditions of reproduction in Ranipalli in the context of developing land markets, marginalisation of cultivation within reproduction strategies, insecurities of employment, and the strengthening of the ruling party through populist welfare measures.

6.4 From opposing to negotiating power amidst regime change: Ranipalli's politics in a 'party society'

During my stay in Jhargram in January 2021, India was witnessing one of the largest farmers' protests in its recent history as thousands of farmers blockaded roads around the national capital of Delhi, opposing three new farm laws enacted by the Central government to liberalise agricultural markets (Baviskar & Levien, 2021). In Ranipalli, at the same time, all that was discussed was the upcoming state elections, especially rumors of chief minister Mamata Banerjee's chief aide Suvendhu Adhikary, a prominent leader of the undivided Midnapore region[24], leaving the party for the opposition. Babulal, a TMC party cadre and an ex-panchayat member told me one day, 'Look at our Bengali media, all they talk about is Suvendhu. Every day they have a new rumor and ask what will happen tomorrow. It is like watching a new episode of a TV soap every day. We know nothing of the (farming) bills. They have no opinion about it, we are getting to know nothing.' Babulal's observation points to how the electoral battles and the ruling party formed the fulcrum of local politics and demand making among adivasis in Ranipalli. Multiple scholars have demonstrated the central role of the political party (specifically CPM) in social, economic and political lives in rural Bengal, which maintained control and electoral victory for three decades in the state through local 'Comrades' or cadres (M. Banerjee, 2012; D. Bhattacharyya, 2004, 2009; P. Chatterjee, 2009; Ruud, 2015). Banerjee (2012, p. 21) says the word Party in Bengal only referred to CPM and its left allies in the state and not to political parties in opposition, which reflected their complete hold over rural political life, while Bhattacharya conceptualised the state as a 'party society' (D. Bhattacharyya, 2009).

In this section I argue that 10 years after a change in power in the state and weakening of the CPM in state politics, Ranipalli demonstrates a continuation of the centrality of the ruling party, the TMC in determining the material conditions of its residents. However, unlike the CPM that maintained its power in longer term through 'resolving disputes, making consensus and maintaining social peace' in the rural areas via its control of cadres at the village level (P. Chatterjee, 2009, p. 44), TMC has aligned itself more strongly with the interests of capital. For Ranipalli, this has manifested in the party's support to both capital's interest in

[24] Jhargram is a part of the undivided Midnapore region, now divided into three districts: East Midnapore, West Midnapore and Jhargram.

its land, and the employers (contractors, shopkeepers etc) in the town, without playing a public role in mitigating the conflicts in land transfers or mediating labour conditions of the town. Rather the entire effort of the party machinery at the block and district levels are to ensure the delivery of multiple welfare schemes announced in the region to keep people 'away from conflict' and the 'Maoists.'

In response, the allegiance to the ruling party, declining income from cultivation and the individualised nature of dispossession have made it increasingly difficult for Ranipalli's villagers to create broad based mobilisations to resist displacement or make demands for completing land reforms. The fragmentation of workplace and bases of reproduction with weakening of informal sector unionisation also do not allow for effective claim making on the employers to improve work conditions (Lerche, 2009; K. R. S. Sundar, 2006). Even Santhal party workers find it difficult to make direct claims of the party for better employment opportunities or land rights. The fragmented adivasi classes of labour in Ranipalli now increasingly concentrate on negotiating better delivery of welfare benefits spearheaded by a populist government that control disbursal of benefits in return for political allegiance (U. Das, 2015; R. Roy, 2016). I will also show that Lodhas find themselves at a more disadvantaged position than Santhals in making claims for even state welfare as their access to such benefits remain mediated by Santhal and middle caste party workers.

These dynamics of Adivasi politics shaped within particular conditions of reproduction nuances the literature on the agrarian question that claims that land struggles are the most salient form of class struggle for the 'classes of labour' or the 'working people' (Moyo et al., 2013). It also contributes to understanding unevenness in Adivasi responses against processes of dispossession, marked by specific political economic conditions, challenging the exceptionalism in scholarship that expects adivasis to defend their land against all external forces (D'Costa & Chakraborty, 2017; Levien, 2013; Padel, 2018).

6.4.1 'We can give you work to dig some soil, don't ask for more': party mediation of labouring class struggles in Ranipalli

Ranipalli villagers had been historically aligned with the local opposition in the Jhargram region led by the Jharkhand party at least since the 1980s which had managed to gain power in few *Panchayats* in the region though without electoral success in the assembly or general elections (A. Ghosh, 1993). The demand for separate state of Jharkhand supported by many Mahato and Santhals in the region had created some basis of unified identity-based oppositional politics in the southwestern parts of WB. After the decline of the Jharkhand politics in WB through 1990s, Ranipalli had also sided with the Maoist insurgency in 2008-10

against the CPM (Bora & Das, 2009; R. Bose, 2021), which protested against the regional backwardness and police atrocities in the region, and made demands for better infrastructure, healthcare, education and poverty alleviation. With the regime change in 2011 that ended the CPM rule, many engaged in oppositional politics in the region, including Ranipalli's residents, pledged allegiance to the TMC. The allegiance to the ruling party, rather than a disempowered and fractured local opposition force is now perceived as essential to get better access to the benefits of state welfare schemes for the poor and secured employment for the party workers.

In the aftermath of the Maoist-backed insurgency in the Jhargram region in 2008-10, one of the first jobs of the TMC government was to 'restore peace' in the region (Indian Express, 2012). In parallel to the policing aspects of counter-insurgency measures that included both jailing and killing of rebels, the TMC government headed by Mamata Bannerjee also announced welfare schemes including universal public distribution scheme of distributing rice at Rs 2 per kg and recruitment of 10,000 local youth in the National Voluntary Force (D. Bhattacharyya & Rana, 2013, p. 12). The scheme of subsidised rice and recruitment of local youth amidst 'perpetual conditions of acute poverty' have been deemed responsible for a 'comprehensive' victory of the party in the 2013 local elections in the region (Ibid). Along with this, the announcement of the district of Jhargram also raised expectations of employment vacancies at the lower ranks of the new district administrative offices that would have to be set up.

In Ranipalli the promised public sector recruitment has brought little benefits. Two men have found jobs at very low ranks in the volunteer force on a contractual basis I mentioned in the last chapter. TMC, like CPM, continues to tightly control all secured employment in the public sector, which unlike in the past, is not earmarked for cadres working year round for the party; stories of bribing and scams in recruitment are ubiquitous (S. Bhattacharya, 2023). Respondents, who expected the new district to benefit 'local people' said jobs in the town had been given to people from East Midnapore, because of the influence of Suvendhu Adhikary, who belongs from there and was the top leader of the party across the Midnapore region. Public sector employment even at the lowest ranks remained out of reach for even local party cadres who had worked their entire lives in managing elections and popular support.

Deepok, a Santhal leader from Ranipalli who had worked for the Jharkhand Party for a decade and moved to TMC since 2010, said, 'There are 10-12 *anchal* (localities) within a state assembly election seat. If the party had given secured job to even one boy from each *anchal*, we would not be in this situation.' Deepok had spoken to an elected representative from the TMC higher up the party ladder for a job of an Asha (health) worker for his niece. However, when the results came out, she had not received it. When he went

to meet his leader to ask about it, he was told that his candidate's marks were a little lower than the one who had received the job. 'I would not ask him for the job if the marks were the only criterion. What is the point of working for the party if one could not even arrange for a job with a pittance of a salary of Rs 4,000 a month for one family member'? Deepok's frustration was telling of the shrinking space for village level cadres to make claims of employments from the party for their personal benefits or within the community.

In another example, an adivasi ex-member of the panchayat who had a job as a schoolteacher was posted in another block. With both his children physically disabled who need extra care at home, he was requesting the party for two years for a transfer. He had even visited the Kolkata headquarters of the party, but not been able to get the required paperwork done. Respondents said any applications or requests for work were followed up by suggestions to contribute to the party fund. Even low paid public sector jobs were still mediated by the party but often went to those who could fill the party's coffers. With regards to recruitment of civic volunteers, even the Calcutta High Court noted that the process seemed 'not only illegal, it seems to be a scam' (R. Roy, 2016, p. 25). Such scams were also uncovered in the recruitment of teachers in the state, where party affiliations were secondary to payment of bribes to state-level party leaders to secure employment (S. Bhattacharya, 2023). The stronghold of the party in recruitment added with the requirement to pay high 'cuts' to the party kept adivasi households with very low assets away from even applying for public sector recruitment, and at the regional level is likely to further strengthen the 'middle class' among adivasis by providing jobs to those who could already afford to get them.

To worsen the situation of even low paid public sector employment seeming out of reach for most Santhal households, adivasi adolescents, particularly boys, were dropping out of school at an early age. Along with the inability to afford additional spending for tuition and books for children in school, an older respondent says, boys leave school 'because it does not generate any income. If someone passes high school and gets some income, it will help the situation. But now you need undergraduate degrees for all jobs. If the father earns Rs 200 in the town and spends Rs 50 on food and commute, the rest of the money is spent on essentials. So even 14–15-year-old boys are dropping out to start earning in the town.'

The crisis of shrinking of decent regular work is exacerbated by the withdrawal of the party's support for informal sector mobilisations, particularly a construction workers' union in the town. The Centre of Indian Trade Unions' (CITU) office, affiliated with CPM and locally called the 'labour board' was in the main town market with labour rates for all kinds of construction work pasted outside the office. My respondents said the office worked more as a contractors' union, with local petty and government contractors for civil construction work reigning over the office and its activities. Two labour contractors who were affiliated

with the union in the past told me that the union's wage rates were always at least 20 percent less than the state's minimum wages, but it also meant strict conditions of payment and work mediated by the party. The contractors, they said, met every Sunday in the party office, and rates were maintained for labourers, skilled workers, and petty contractors, including per square feet charges for building houses. People could not undercut each other in the construction sector, and the contractors also heard complaints from labourers for non-payment of dues on Sundays.

With the weakening of the union after TMC came to power, the migration of contractors from other districts with tied labour force working 12-14 hours a day has become widespread in the town, putting both local petty contractors and casual labourers at a disadvantage. The attitude of the union as a negotiator rather than a challenger of either capital or the state is similar to Agarawala's (2013, p. 139) findings in the state about CPM affiliated construction workers' union who admitted that they supported disruptions only if the employers refused to negotiate. This avoidance of direct conflict with employers reflected changing labour organsiations in many unions in the country, rather choosing to follow everyday negotiations than outright opposition (Lerche, 2009, pp. 78–79). But it also provided important security for casual labour working in construction at the local level.

The TMC has retained control over the unions in the organised sector in the oil mill and the paper mill in the town but has refused to patronise any unionisation in the informal economy in the town to avoid 'disruptions' they might cause. A contractor close to the TMC's town president confirmed the change in the ruling party's attitude about organisation in the informal economy. He said there are some construction worker or transport worker unions, but they are not active anymore. 'In CPM regime the party would flex its muscle so much in favour of local labour, it would be difficult (for businesses). Durga Puja (the main festival season of Bengalis in the state) is the best season for businesses in the town market. So, the month leading upto the festivities is crucial. But every year there would be some disruptions by workers demanding for higher bonus, overtime pay, fixing number of hours in the shop. Now if the market is shut, no one makes any money. They did not understand only if the owner makes Rs 10, will they give the labour Rs 4.' He said TMC did not stand for disruptions and did not support such unionisation. He also claimed that withdrawing support from the labour board had led to a more 'free' and 'transparent' working of contractors who did not need affiliation to the party to get jobs, a claim refuted by growing evidence of corruption in government contracts (Samaddar, 2016, p. 25).

In Ranipalli, one worker said he was part of a labour union in the town, while no one else had heard of any. Fullu Murmu said he paid Rs 60 to a union every month and was assured that they would take care of

payments if some contractor did not pay on time, and the money was to create an accident fund for injuries of workers on duty. He said he had a friend who had used the union for payment of dues by a contractor. 'You don't even have to go yourself; you call the union people, and they go and get your money. They will of course take extra for their own payment but give you your share.' I could not independently confirm any political affiliation or workings of the union, neither could other workers confirm it, though it could be party-affiliated middlemen making 'cuts' by settling petty labour disputes. Mamoni Murmu, an adivasi woman construction worker, said, there is no protection even for local workers in the town. 'If a contractor cheats and you don't get the weekly payment, you just change the contractor. There is nothing much else one can do. Every worker goes together to tell the contractor. If they don't clear the dues, what can one do. He could negotiate sometimes- may be, pay for five days and not pay for two.'

With casualisation and fragmentation of workspaces, village level TMC workers Deepok and Babulal said they found it impossible to mediate conditions of employment of their villagers. Deepok said, to worsen the urban bias in recruitment in the limited formal sector jobs in the town, the party leaders at the block or district level or elected representatives at all levels of governance did not welcome any discussion of unemployment, or fixing contractor rates for construction work. He approached an elected TMC Adivasi MLA once for employment opportunities for the local people. 'He said don't ask me about jobs; I don't care about it.' While work under NREGA[25] remained low in the village (no household had got more than 20 days of work in the last year), the leader in question had added he could allocate some money for road repairing or similar work in the village for few days. He had said, 'We can give you funds to dig some soil, don't ask for more.' Lakhai Murmu, an adivasi young man who was affiliated to TMC and worked odd manual labour jobs said, even when such repairs are held, contractors come from outside with machines, and might pay one or two workers for a couple of days for them.

As TMC recedes from controlling labour conditions in the area, it has strengthened its perpetuation of the 'party society' by expanding welfare schemes in the region. Along with the increased distribution of food grains, the government has multiple cash transfer schemes including for tribal folk artists (Rs 1000/month), old age pensions for all adivasis (Rs 1000/month), cash support to women's bank accounts (Rs 1000/month for adivasis), conditional cash transfer for girls in school once they turn 18 (annual grants of Rs 1000 and one-time grant of Rs 25,000) etc.[26] The government even experimented with continually run camps called

[25] An employment guarantee law and program of the Indian government that promises 100 days of labour work for each household in rural India.
[26] See Duare Sarkar (wb.gov.in) for a list of all cash transfer schemes.

'*Duare Sarkar*', literally meaning government at the doorstep to manage disbursal of the schemes, with specially targeted schemes for girls, women, Dalits and adivasis (R. Sen, 2021). Adivasis in Ranipalli increasingly concentrate on ensuring access to these delivery of welfare schemes, common among poor households within fragmenting bases of reproduction in many parts of India (Agarwala, 2013; S. K. Bhowmik, 2008; Lerche, 2009; K. R. S. Sundar, 2006).

With no power of local level Santhal party workers to mediate labour conditions, both Babulal and Deepok drew their legitimacy from mediating access to these increasing welfare schemes, in turn ensuring electoral support and participation of village residents in government-sponsored social events, that had also seen an increase in recent times. It was common for Babulal and his wife to meet and assist villagers on weekend mornings to fill up the myriad of paperwork for enrollment or payment of the schemes and accompanying them to the government camps for submitting such paperwork. The interaction with the 'patron' state is mediated by these local actors, and the gains from such schemes are crucial for reproduction of poor adivasi classes of labour (Carswell & De Neve, 2020; P. Chatterjee, 2004; Lerche, 2009).

The party workers were in-charge of ensuring the village's participation in myriad community-based fairs, festivals, and public events that the party holds regularly in the region, further emphasising on its role as the chief benefactor of the people. Kamra (2016) in her research on another part of Jhargram also notes the significance of public celebrations and launches of government welfare schemes and community based fairs and social programs as a proclamation of peace in a post-insurgency setting. She writes, 'In a counterinsurgency context, in which performances of power are designed to assert authority as much as seek legitimacy, spectacles became even more important' (2016, p. 209). In and around Ranipalli too, the party organised such 'spectacles' of power, as a declaration of restoration of peace in a conflict zone. Party cadres were responsible for these spectacles, including organising sports events on Republic Day, attending the Jungelamahal *Mela* (fair) showcasing tribal art in the town in winter, attending the commemoration of a mass violence by CPM leaders in another block, traveling to Kolkata for party events and such.

Despite reaping electoral benefits at the local level, the Santhal party workers recognised the limitations of the welfare schemes in improving conditions of the poor and acknowledged the clientelism in such politics that were secured only through allegiance to the party. As a local Santhal TMC worker said, 'The party thinks like the *Zamindar* (feudal landlord) now. If people earn well, they will not depend on us. I work for the party but just the politics of free rice empowers no one. If you give rice for Rs 2, you should also empower people to be able to buy rice for Rs 50.' However, they also continued to support the party and garner support for it as they feared that electoral loss in the region could result in reversal of these welfare

schemes in the region. As an adivasi farmer pointed out, 'They would not give rice forever; they would have to stop at some point.' Remaining publicly loyal to TMC when it controlled the state government, in a 'party society' where hamlets and villages openly professed electoral support and loyalty for specific parties, was deemed crucial for continuing access to welfare benefits for securing reproduction of households. But this form of allegiance to the TMC and the increasing powerlessness of local cadres to improve working conditions of the people had added to difficulties of mobilising Ranipalli's adivasis against land loss, which is what I discuss in the following section.

6.4.2 'There is no party without promoter's money': frail resistance against dispossession

I mentioned in the first part of the chapter that a combination of several factors including incomplete land reforms, expansion of urban frontiers, poor implementation of prohibitive laws on transfer of adivasi land had triggered processes of dispossession in Ranipalli. The absentee landed elite who lost political clout under the CPM regime that was keen to align itself more with the small and middle peasantry, was now returning to claim profits on their land they had been evicted from during reforms (M. Bhattacharya, 2012). The Bengal government's promotion of Jhargram as a tourism destination with financial incentives given for building resorts and 'homestays' are also likely to attract more erstwhile landowners at the cost of adivasi households who are unlikely to be employed in the hospitality sector (M. Chatterjee, 2022; D. Ghosh, 2016a). Despite the insecurity regarding land rights, no broad-based mobilisation to secure land rights have been possible within the village or among the adivasi villagers.

The village level party cadres say they are fighting a losing battle against the network and might of the ruling party and its tacit support of those that want to grab the land, which include erstwhile landowners and new investors looking to invest in real estate. The linkages between the 'promoters', the land market, the supply chain of raw material for construction, the real estate industry, providing funding for the party's activities have been termed as the 'Syndicate Raj' in Bengal in recent times (Mahaprashasta, 2016; Sud, 2014b). A legacy of the last decade of CPM regime which was more prominent in Kolkata and its adjoining areas, the current ruling party's gains from the profitability within the real estate expansion is an open secret in Ranipalli and its adjoining villages. The speculative capital and capital from the contractors' lobbies is significant in these regions farther away from Kolkata which does not attract domestic industrial capital. Babulal said, 'You cannot deny it that the party is run on promoter's money; there is no party without the promoters here. The big industry does not exist here which can fill the party's coffers.' The party's interests in accumulation of the landed elite were also evident from the phone call from a prominent state-level

TMC leader to a *panchayat* member asking him to find a 'resolution' to allow the second investor to take over the disputed land I discussed previously in this chapter (Section 6.2), though the village party worker declined to intervene.

While the party workers within the village are not directly confronting the powers of TMC allied with the syndicate, they have held meetings with villagers to resist further alienation of land creating hyper local resistance strategies against land grabbing. Deepok said, 'We have had discussions for political strategies within the village. We have told everyone don't sell land out of distress. If you need money bring it up within the village and we will see if we can find the money or the solution. If we cannot, if land must be sold, we will know to whom and what the terms of the sale are.'

While most respondents said that the party leaders higher in party hierarchy and the landed capital was almost always upper or middle caste, a local network of petty local adivasi brokers have also begun their own enquiries in the area for financial gains and leverage within TMC. One respondent explained many young adivasi boys who earn pittance from the construction sector, now have taken up brokering for quick money to be made if they can facilitate arrangements between buyers and sellers. Given the very small and fragmented landholdings, these petty brokers negotiate at the household level and work with chains of brokers and investors higher up, as they themselves cannot afford to buy land in pieces and park their money till aggregated plots of land could be offered to buyers (Levien, 2013, p. 363; Sud, 2014b, 2020). They keep an eye out for financial distress in poor families, including healthcare crisis, sudden deaths etc, and can accumulate a small portion of the land value. Speaking of the position of the adivasi brokers, Deepok said, 'They don't go much up the chain. But they have begun misbehaving with us (more senior local Santhal party cadres). We don't get in conflict with them, because elections are up, and the infighting won't look good. But they are looking up to (non-adivasi) outsiders, thinking they can make quick cash and be like them.' The dependence on the party for the welfare benefits, directly pitted against the party-backed aggressive real estate syndicates looking to grab land, often facilitated by local adivasi youth at the lowest rank of brokering hierarchy, have made it difficult for ordinary villagers and village level party cadres to mount a coherent opposition to the processes of land alienation.

6.5 Lodhas amidst 'Adivasi' Santhals: politics of patronage and exclusions

Scholar-activist Kumar Rana, who headed a statewide survey on conditions of living and working of adivasis in WB, told me in an interview in Kolkata, that Lodhas and Santhals cannot be perceived with the same lens on conditions of livelihood and political engagement with the ruling party. In the previous chapter, I had

enumerated how Lodhas continue to depend on the Mahatos and Santhals for work as farm labourers, forest produce (mainly drywood) gatherers and are subjected to 'super-exploitation' in the non agricultural labour market. In this section I will briefly argue the conditions of dependence of Lodha households on the bureaucracy, mediated by Santhal local level party cadres for meagre welfare benefits and often excluded from access to making any demands of the state. I illustrate this with two examples, one regarding their experience of accessing a housing scheme in Lodha Khash, and another regarding their experience of accessing a training scheme for students in the block.

When I first visited LodhaKhash, I noticed half the houses were *kachcha* mud houses, and half of them were made of bricks, without doors and windows, covered with makeshift structures made of bamboo, clothes and dried leaves. I found that Deepok, the Santhal party worker from Ranipalli, who had taken their cash in return for a promise to build their houses, was now saying that aluminum prices had gone up; so, they would have to wait till prices went down for windows and doors to be constructed so that he did not make a loss. A Lodha family said if they went to follow up on the status, they were simply told they were too naïve to understand the ways of the world. Deepok also confirmed me his role in building the Lodha houses. He sensed I might have heard of the allegations after my visits to the Lodha hamlet and brought it up in an interview himself to explain. He said, the Lodhas were 'incapable' of handling large sums of money or supervising procurement of raw materials and building of concrete houses. So, the party entrusted their cadres to 'help' the Lodha families who received money in two tranches under the 'Bangla Awas Yojana' scheme to build houses. When Lodha families received the money, they handed it over to the party cadres for construction. He repeated what I had heard from the Lodhas: that doors and windows had indeed become more expensive due to rising aluminum prices and will be installed as soon as the prices came down.

The housing scheme that allotted Rs 1,20,000 to each beneficiary was embroiled in controversies across the state for 'cut money' that had to be paid ranging between Rs 10,000-25,000 for enrollment into the scheme, mediated by the local party workers and panchayat members (Gupta, 2019). Since the adivasi representatives contesting panchayat elections belonged to the politically dominant Santhal group, this resulted into a relationship of patronage, dependence, and exploitation between the Santhals and the Lodhas. The abject poverty in which Lodhas live across the state is reflected in a state-wide survey that found no Lodha households had access to latrines, mostly drank water from uncovered dug wells, and ranked the highest in reporting hunger (K. Rana et al., 2020). Their acute dependence on the Santhal party members for access to any welfare schemes, including subsidised rice, provided them no mechanism to

complain against their benefactors, the party, but mediated by the party cadres. As Deepok and Babulal felt weakening of their powers against the middle and upper caste leaders higher up the party leadership, the Lodhas in turn depended on the patronage of these two Santhal cadres to secure meagre benefits.

In the second case, a Lodha family in another village in the block told me, that the state government had sent a notification to block officers a few years back to submit the names of Lodha children who had passed secondary examination (Class 10). This was to prepare a list of names of children from PVTG groups for further training and vocational education. When they got to know of the new scheme, it had been two years since the notification and not a single Lodha child was named in the list. The block members had reported to the district authorities they could not find them, but the family said it was common for Lodhas to be left out of government schemes like this, where Santhal or Mahato elected members would not even enquire into Lodha hamlets while making beneficiary list (unless, like we saw in the previous case, it involved a commission). Access to even PDS cards for rice, pensions and other government benefits remained out of their reach, as starvation deaths continue to be reported among Lodha adivasis from the state (S. Chakraborty, 2022b; M. Chatterjee, 2022). As other studies on clientelism and poverty have shown, the stigmatised exclusion of Lodha adivasis in land reforms, in the labour market and in access to state welfare demonstrate clientelist exchanges can worsen inequalities (Carswell & De Neve, 2020; Martin, 2014; Veron et al., 2003) reenforcing differentiations among adivasi classes of labour.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the patterns and possibilities of dispossession of adivasis in Birampalli, and their political response to struggle for securing land, labour and social welfare rights in the village and the town where they regularly commute to for work. I have shown how the expansion of the town provides both labour opportunities (mostly for men) and pose threats to the land possessions of the Santhal households in Ranipalli. The accumulation of capital within Santhals and Mahatos, the erstwhile landed interests, and speculative capital linked to real estate are dispossessing land poor Santhals in a very gradual almost imperceptible process. The land poor Santhals struggle to hold on to their fragmented semi-fertile holdings due to poor implementation of laws and changing class alliances of the ruling regime, while not being able to accumulate from the developing land markets due to complex legal frameworks and an incomplete land reforms program.

I have also discussed the politics of the adivasi classes of labour, which has become fragmented and ridden with exploitation and inequalities within adivasis, reflecting segmentation and dominations seen in the

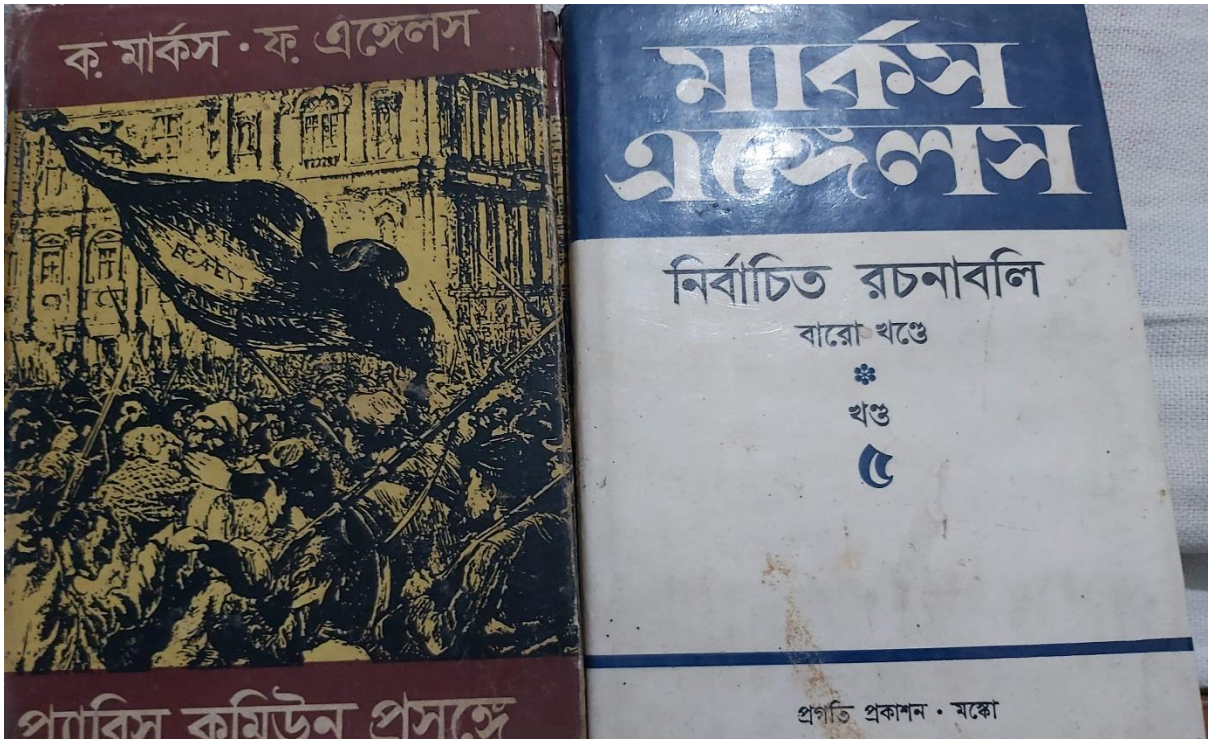
agrarian question of labour in Chapter 5. As adivasis face conditions of 'reproduction squeeze', differentiated by tribe and gender inequalities, they have aligned themselves, at least for the time being, with the political party in power to negotiate for better benefits from a populist government than challenging it outright for land and labour rights. Its negotiations for both land and labour rights have also become more individualised seeking the party's patronage in lieu of electoral support, often worsening the 'super exploitation' of adivasi groups like Lodhas, who remain socially, economically, and politically entrenched at the bottom of adivasi classes.

In the next two chapters, I shift sites to the mining belts of Northern Chhattisgarh. I will discuss how adivasis here reproduce under conditions of better land productivity and possession, face a more coercive, large scale and imminent danger of expulsion from land and respond differently politically to the interplays between AQ of labour and dispossession.

Jhargram District, West Bengal

A Lodha house built under state welfare scheme, without doors or windows.

Bamboo being transported to local depots, for sorting, cutting and bundling by Adivasi labourers.



Bengali translations of 'Marx- Engels Omnibus' and 'On the Paris Commune', at the home of a woman rebel active in the Naxalite movement in Jhargram in the 1970s.

The annual Junglemahal Fair organised by the Trinamool Congress government in Jhargram to showcase tribal folk artist groups who receive monthly allowance from the State.

7. Agrarian Question of Labour in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh

7.1 Introduction

Having discussed the class dynamics of agrarian change and reproduction, dispossession, and political response among adivasis in WB, I now turn to the second field site in Chhattisgarh. This chapter explores the adivasi agrarian question of labour in Birampalli village, Tamnar block, Raigarh district, Chhattisgarh. As discussed, the AQ of labour refers broadly to adivasis' reproductive conditions and strategies and is not discrete from other elements of the agrarian question. It is also directly linked with the 'production problematic' of the agrarian question as the adivasis' conditions of reproduction are bound up with the development of capitalism in agriculture through processes of differentiation, the structuring of the rural labour force and access to land and land-based resources. Enquiring into the AQ of labour in Chhattisgarh, like Chapter 5 did for WB, answers the first research question of the thesis, that is, the nature of dependence of adivasis on land-based resources and wage labour for their reproduction. I discuss how processes of accumulation, class formation and differentiation continue in agriculture in Birampalli, and how the inequality in the agrarian is likely to be reproduced in the non-agrarian economy as expansion of mining and industrialisation continues in Chhattisgarh. In the next chapter, I will discuss the experience of dispossession in Birampalli in the past, its impending displacement due to further expansion of mining, and the mobilisation in the village characterised by agrarian inequalities, people's assessment of the loss in agrarian assets in the past and experiences of nonfarm wage employment.

Birampalli is one of the 14 villages due to be completely or partially displaced by a coal mine allocated as a captive mine to a public sector power company from another state, which is the second time that Birampalli faces dispossession. In 2006, about half of the households in the village had lost portions of their cultivable land which fell in the periphery of another coal mine allocated to a private steel and alloys company. In 2019 when I stayed here, the public hearing for the new mine was completed, and a broad-based mobilisation across the affected villages was resisting the acquisition. The first mine was functional for a few years before shutting down due to change in management and the Supreme Court ruling deallocating coal mines in 2014. Those who received employment at the company in lieu of land had been rendered jobless, and they were negotiating with multiple stakeholders for years for payment of wages due to them for the closure of the mines. I will discuss the details of both the acquisitions, negotiations, and the mobilisations in Birampalli for land and labour rights in the next chapter. It is within this context of industrialisation, coal mining and staggered dispossessions that the agrarian changes in Birampalli are studied.

In contrast to the findings in Bengal, this chapter shows that many adivasis in Birampalli substantially depend on land-based income due to five main factors: bigger landholding sizes, technological advancement in cultivation, a greater share of food requirements met through cultivation due to soil fertility and better yield, better price of produce due to a robust public procurement mechanism, and suitable conditions to collect and sell minor forest produce. Accumulation within agriculture also continues unlike WB where surplus generation was impossible mainly due to the appropriation by commercial capital. Unlike WB where all Santhal households were categorised as classes of labour, Birampalli has conditions for reproduction for classes of farmers and labourers, with many households not dependent on wage work for reproduction. On the other hand, like experiences of non-agrarian wage work in Bengal, Birampalli's wage workers are primarily employed in scarce, precarious, casualised work in construction and mining sector; but such employment is often interrupted by longer periods of under-employment and unemployment.

The chapter is divided into four parts. Section 7.2 situates Birampalli within Raigarh, introduces its demographic characteristics and provides a summary of the sources of livelihood that form the basis of reproduction in the village. Section 7.3 provides the details of cultivation and forest produce collection as sources of income and accumulation among the households, differentiated along the axis of class, tribe, caste, and gender. It shows how inequalities in land ownership, uneven access to mechanisation and public paddy procurement, shape the degrees to which agriculture provides the basis for adivasi households' (simple and expanded) reproduction. These inequalities, both among the village's adivasis and between adivasis and non-adivasis, are exacerbated by unequal access to collecting and trading minor forest products, which depends in part on private land ownership. Sections 7.4 and 7.5 turn to the conditions of agrarian and non-agrarian wage work in and around Birampalli. In contrast to WB, the availability and income from agricultural wage work is higher but seasonal and wage rates are low. Non-agrarian work is available in the mines, power plants and rural construction, with most of the work in the industrial sector, precarious, casualised and only available for short periods. The conditions of employment are differentiated along the axes of class, tribe/caste, gender, and age and relates to inequalities in landholdings and the preponderance of landlessness among different groups. Access to even small holdings of cultivable land (2 acres or more) reduces households' need to accept the harshest forms of wage-labour. Section 7.6 concludes with the main findings on the agrarian question of labour in Birampalli.

7.2 Situating Birampalli in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh

In this section, I will introduce the site of enquiry, Birampalli village in Raigarh, discussing its geographical location and spatial and demographic characteristics. More than half of adivasi households continue to depend entirely on land as the basis of reproduction, both via cultivation and wage work. In contrast, only two out of 77 adivasi households depend entirely on non-agrarian wage work for their reproduction.

The 30 km road from Raigarh town, the district headquarters of Raigarh district, to Tamnar, a small industrial township-like area, can take two hours in privately run buses that run hourly. The poor-quality road is dusty, polluted and congested with dumpers, heavy vehicles, buses and two wheelers. Tamnar is still considered a village, and the eponymous block is the only one completely designated as 'rural' in the district. 48.8 percent of the block's population is classified as belonging to scheduled tribes. The classification as 'rural' is important as it implies the entire block is protected by the Fifth Schedule provisions of the constitution and PESA, the latter not being applicable for urban areas in India. Birampalli is 13 kms beyond the Tamnar junction, two kilometres from the nearest bus stand, with buses plying once or twice a day from the block and *Tehsil* headquarter.[27] The Tamnar block is a part of the Mand-Raigarh coalfield which has coal reserves spread over 3500 sqkm; it comprises of 72 coal blocks, 11 of which are currently being mined (A. Shah, 2022, p. 7).

The Socio-economic Caste Census of India (SECC), 2011, puts the household count in Birampalli at 139 while the Census puts it at 138 (Census, 2011). I interviewed 122 households in the village, spread over four *para* or hamlet. The three hamlets named after Adivasi, Agharia and Dalit households continue to be referred to by their ethnic segregations and are spatially next to each other. But the decades of informal exchange of homestead plots and arrival and settlement of relatives and acquaintances of existing villagers, have not retained the segregation in practice. The fourth hamlet, named Awas para, refers to those who settled in the village in the past one or two decades, locally called 'Sukhvasis', through allocation of homestead land by the panchayat under government housing schemes.

[27] Districts are further divided for administrative and revenue purposes, the former is called a block and the latter, a *Tehsil*. There are overlaps between block and *tehsil* and Birampalli is now both part of the Tamnar block and *tehsil*.

Table 14 Demographics of scheduled tribes for Birampalli, Raigarh, Chhattisgarh

ST population as part of total population in Chhattisgarh	30.62 per cent
ST population in Chhattisgarh as part of ST population in India	7.5 per cent
ST population as part of total population in Raigarh	33.84 per cent
ST households as part of total households in Birampalli	63.1 per cent

Source: Census 2011, Jhargram district's official website and my field data

77 or 63.1 percent of households in Birampalli belong to scheduled tribes (Rathias, Agarias and Majhis), 22 households or 18 per cent belong to the Ganda and Sahi scheduled castes (using Chauhan and Sarthi surnames), and 4 per cent or 17 households belong to the OBCs (Agharias using surnames Patel and Nayak, and Srivas) (See Table 15). There are five upper caste households and one household whose caste position could not be identified.

Table 15 Household Composition in Birampalli

Caste/Tribe Composition	Number of Households
Scheduled Tribe	77
Scheduled Caste	22
Other Backward Class	17
General Caste	5
Not Disclosed	1
Total	122

Table 16 Composition of ST households in Birampalli

Tribe	Number of Households
Rathia	65
Majhi	7
Agaria	5
Total	77

Among the adivasi households, 65 households or 84 percent belong to the Kawar (Rathia) tribe, traditionally a landowning tribe with historical proximity to settled agriculture. The Agaria tribe[28], of whom there are seven households, traditionally made iron equipment for cultivation. Typically landless, they were settled into the village by tribal chiefs and allotted homestead land to make and repair iron equipment for the

[28] Not to be confused with Aghariyas, who are categorised as OBC.

cultivating groups. The third tribe, Majhis (alternatively Majhwars, and literally meaning boatman), have five households in the village. Originally believed to have come from banks of River Ganga, they are spread across Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (Table 16).

Table 17 and Table 18 below provide a summary of sources of household income for all households and all adivasi households in Birampalli. I highlight three conclusions from the data presented below.

Table 17 Source of household income in Birampalli

Caste/Tribe	Income Only from Agrarian Work	Income from Agrarian and Non-Agrarian Work	Income Only from Non Agrarian Work
Scheduled Tribe	44	31	2
Scheduled Caste	7	9	6
Other Backward Class	6	9	2
General Caste	0	3	2
Not disclosed	1	0	0
Total	58	52	12

Table 18 Source of household income among scheduled tribes in Birampalli

Tribe	Income Only from Agricultural Work	Partial Income from Non-Agricultural Work	Income Only from Non Agricultural Work
Rathia	42	23	0
Majhi	1	4	2
Agaria	1	4	0
Total	44	31	2

One, unlike in WB where dependence on cultivation as primary source of income was very low, 57 percent of adivasi households and 48 percent of all households in Birampalli depend *entirely* on land-based activities for their reproduction. Only two adivasi households work entirely in the non-farm sector as wage labourers, underscoring the significance of both cultivation as PCP and agricultural wage work in securing adivasi livelihood. But access to land and the role of cultivation in simple reproduction are differentiated between adivasi groups; as Table 18 shows a larger proportion of Majhi and Agaria tribes depend on nonagricultural income than for the Rathia tribe.

Two, 90 percent of all households and 97 percent of adivasi households derive some part of their income from land -based activities, which includes cultivation, farm wage labour, collection of minor forest produce, and cattle grazing. Even among Dalit households among whom landlessness is high (details in

Section 7.3) 45 per cent of households draw a part of their income from agricultural wage work and NTFP collection.

Three, again unlike WB, less than 10 percent of all households and 3 percent of adivasi households in Birampalli draw their income only from non-agrarian wage work. Non-agrarian self-employment opportunities are low, with only one adivasi household earning major income from running a grocery shop in the village.

7.3 Land as basis of simple and expanded reproduction: Cultivation, accumulation, and minor forest produce

This section covers the unevenness in the extent to which land-based occupations, particularly cultivation and collection of minor forest produce, can form the basis of simple reproductions across households, between adivasis and non-adivasis and among adivasi groups, both as means of simple and expanded reproduction. The ability to reproduce and accumulate from land-based occupations is largely tied to unequal land distribution between and among adivasi groups, and differentiated along the axis of caste, tribe, and gender. While I cover cultivation and forest produce collection in this section, I will discuss agricultural wage labour in the next section.

Income from paddy cultivation is differentiated based on size of landholdings, mechanisation, access to procurement, and credit via the primary agricultural credit society (PACS) based in the village. Access to hired labour for completing the cultivation process on time and access to mechanisation are differentiated both along class and gender lines; use of machines and irrigation can also be differentiated across different plot locations and sizes even for the same farming households. Alpa Shah, in her paper on exploring the Agrarian Question in adivasi-inhabited hills and forested regions of the neighbouring state of Jharkhand, argues both feudal relations and capitalist transitions in agriculture in adivasi areas are absent. She observes it 'is likely to provide similar results in other such Adivasi dominated areas of central and eastern India in Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Maharashtra' (A. Shah, 2013, p. 445). While feudal relations in agriculture were absent in Birampalli, in contrast to her inferences, my findings show capitalist accumulation and differentiation within agriculture is continuing even amidst tribal farmers. It also challenges characterisation of agriculture in tribal areas as technologically not advanced (V. K. Ramachandran, 2019), as I observed prevalent use of tractors, HYV seeds, harvesters, herbicides and store-bought fertiliser for cultivation.

Table 19 Distribution of Land Ownership in Birampalli for All Households

Land acreage	Scheduled Tribes	Scheduled Caste	OBC	General caste	Total
Landless	9	17	6	2	34
Less than 1	2	0	0	0	2
1-Less than 2.5	22	1	5	1	29
2.5-less than 5	13	1	5	2	21
5 to less than 10	18	2	1	0	21
10 0r more	6	0	0	0	6
Did not disclose	7	1	0	0	8
Total households	77	22	17	5	121

Note: The household whose caste position could not be identified has been excluded from the table.

Unlike WB, landholding sizes are larger in Birampalli for all landed households, though ownership of landholdings are more unequal. As Table 19 shows, 34 or 27.9 percent of households in the village are landless; it follows 88 households own some cultivable land. Among the landowning households, 60 percent households have less than 5 acres of land while 7 percent have more than 10 acres of land. Among the households who did not disclose their exact acreage, the information about selling of surplus paddy can lead to a deduction that none of them own more than 10 acres. Among the households that own more than 10 acre of land, two households (both Rathia adivasis) have more than 25 acres of land, making them the largest landowning households in the village.[29]

Landholdings are unequal along the axis of tribes, and within the Rathia tribe who are socially and numerically dominant in Birampalli. There are just two landless Rathia households in the village, while comprising 53 percent of all households. They also comprise 87.5 percent (21 out of 24) of households that own 5-10 acre of land, and all six households that own more than 10 acres of cultivable land. In contrast to this, 4 out of 7 Majhi households own some land, but no one owns more than 2 acres. Among the five

[29] Three OBC households living within the same housing structure (one elderly couple, and their two sons who are both married with families), did not want to be included in my research. The three households together own 25 acre of land spread across this village and the next, and cultivate using their own tractor and hired labour.

Agaria households, only one has a cultivable plot of 1.5 acre. Therefore, all adivasi households owning and cultivating more than 2 acres land belong to the Rathia community. The dominant ownership of landholdings among an adivasi group in a mixed village, practising technologically advanced cultivation, as compared to the marginal farmers tilling semi-fertile land in WB, nuances the agrarian question of labour among adivasis by not viewing all cultivation by adivasis as subsistence cultivation.

All scheduled caste or Dalit households are landless, except for four households. Three of these own between 1 and 4.5 acre of land. The Dalit household which owns 9 acre of land belongs to the '*Kotwar*' of the village, who was traditionally responsible for settling disputes in the village. This traditional occupation is still 'honoured' by the government, and the male household head or the *Kotwar* still reports weekly to the local police station and gets a small monthly allowance from the government. The *Kotwar* here told me that a small portion of the land was privately held by him, and a major portion was allocated by the local chief generations back, and he is now in the process of getting the paperwork for turning it into revenue land for his family. Such caste-based occupations, few of which I will discuss later in the chapter, while generally being associated with social and economic vulnerabilities, has in this case created a space for class mobility within the Dalit population.

7.3.1 Cultivation in Birampalli: crop pattern, mechanisation, differentiation, and gender

In this section, I will discuss that income and surplus from cultivation impacted most importantly by unequal access to land shapes patterns of reproduction and accumulation in Birampalli, with half of the households depending entirely on land-based occupations. Out of 16 households that own more than 5 acres of land, only 3 households participate in any non-agricultural work, out of whom two are low paid salaried public sector employment. Therefore, in contrast to Bengal, better land holding sizes, advancement in technology and mechanisation, land fertility, improved yield and better public procurement of paddy provide the basis of simple reproduction from cultivation (along with forest produce collection) and accumulation for many households in Birampalli. This is important as it empirically shows variations in the agrarian question of labour among adivasis in India, rooted in differences in agrarian assets and political economic and ecological factors that determine the dependence on land. 20 adivasi households with land ownership of 5 acre or more, do not participate in agrarian or non-agrarian wage work, except for farming work on an exchange basis between households. Unlike in WB where all Santhal households were categorised as classes of labour, a quarter of adivasi households are not dependent on sale of wage labour for their reproductive

needs, creating *classes of farmers and labour* among farming households who reproduce at the same level of labour and capital, sometimes even accumulating surplus. In what follows in this section, I discuss the cropping patterns in Birampalli, the yield, extent of mechanisation and irrigation, and practices of labour hiring and exchange in Birampalli differentiated across the axis of class, tribe, caste, age and gender.

The villagers divide cultivable land into two categories according to the position of land. *Bahra* land referring to low lying paddy land which has water till December/January, and *tikra* land slightly higher on the slope, with the former valued more highly (*The Collector vs Chaturbhuj Panda And Ors*, 1961). Two households reported their entire land to be *tikra*; 86 of 88 households practice rain fed *Kharif* paddy cultivation in their *bahra* land, where the cultivation period is between June/July and December. The public procurement centre for paddy, locally called the *mandi*, begins buying paddy from farmers at a pre-declared minimum support price (MSP) usually in the first week of December. Half of the 88 households own *tikra* land, who use this to grow a shorter paddy of lower quality (called the *Satta dhan* grown in 60 days), peanuts, pulses like green gram, pigeon peas, split black gram, sesame, and vegetables like gourd, pumpkin, chillies, red amaranth leaves. The produce in the *tikra* land is for self-consumption. Most households also grow vegetables in very small quantities for consumption on *Badi* land (homestead) and exchange vegetables or pulses between households. In rare instances, surplus peanuts are sold in small batches to local traders in a nearby village who exchange them for cooking oil. Several households also have mango, jackfruit and guava trees where fruits are shared between households casually without payment; a few families said they sometimes take fruits in small quantities (5-10 kg) in summer to a nearby weekly market to sell.

Cultivation of paddy is dependent on monsoons, though borewell pumpsets have been put privately by few farming households. It is difficult to estimate the total acreage of irrigated land in the village, since each borewell only irrigates a part of the farmer's land, which are usually divided into distinct and not-adjacent parcels, and the capacity of irrigation depends on the depth of the well and the capacity of the pump set. But typically, couple of respondents said, private borewells can irrigate 3-5 acres of land. Eight farming households reported to have at least some portion of their cultivable land (1-3 acres) as irrigated and being able to grow two crops in the year. The two largest landowning households owning 26 acres of land said 3 acres of their land was irrigated, while the other households shared the pump sets between them and had 1-1.5 acres of their land irrigated. the irrigated land is used to grow a second paddy crop by these households, increasing their income from cultivation.

The yield in Birampalli is lower than more fertile parts of the district, according to farmers, and can grow upto 15-18 quintal of paddy in monsoon at best. This is more than twice compared to even the low-lying paddy lands discussed for WB and is a key differentiating factor (along with landholding sizes) for dependence on cultivation between the two cases discussed in the thesis. For the crops grown with private irrigation in summer however, the paddy grown is of indigenous variety, yields upto 3 quintal per acre and is discouraged by the government due to water scarcity (See Section 7.3.2 for details). With half of the landed households owning at least 3 acres (includes *tikra*), growing at least 30 quintals of paddy and half of it is sold to cover costs, it can provide for substantial food security (and simple reproduction) of a household of 4-5 people, supplemented by the state's public distribution of rice. Unlike in WB, this capacity of cultivation to provide a basis of simple reproduction can shield even small farming households from the harshest conditions of wage work, an argument I will come back to later in the chapter (Section 7.5).

Mechanisation of several stages of paddy cultivation is seen among all categories of farmers cultivating above 2-2.5 acre of land, therefore being corelated to the size of the farming households. This includes use of harvester, threshers and hullers among all medium and large farmers, irrespective of availability of family labour. Usage of HYV seeds, pesticides, herbicides and fertiliser, and use of tractors (for ploughing, carrying paddy to the homesteads for cleaning after harvest and for transfer to the Mandi) is ubiquitous among all farmers. Investing in and renting out tractors is seen among medium and large farmers in Birampalli contributing to processes of accumulation within agriculture, possible due to accumulation in cultivation, income from salaried employment, and compensation from the first round of land acquisition. There are 8 tractors in the village, seven of which belong to farming households with more than 7.5 acres of land, sometimes shared between two brothers in two households, all of which are rented out within the village for farming requirements.

Both households owning 25 acres of land had invested surplus from agriculture for buying of tractors; five other households invested from the first round of compensation (sometimes supplemented by income from other sources, like, salaried employment) to buy tractors. Janak Rathia and his brother together have a little more than 10 acre of land and lost 2 acres to the acquisition. They added money with the compensation amount and invested in a tractor together, which they paid off over a few years. They now rent it out within the village and can also earn upto Rs 500-700 per hour in peak cultivation season. However, the capacity to pay off the instalments on tractors after the initial investment from acquisition compensation was mediated by the class position of the households. Two small adivasi farmers who had

invested their compensation together into a tractor could not continue paying installments and when faced with a healthcare crisis at home, had to sell it off after a few years.

Processes of displacement and expansion of mining has led to formation of local agrarian capital among OBC and adivasi large farmers invested in machines partially displacing capital from other regions within cultivation. In other neighbouring villages that has lost land in the past, compensation money by large farmers were also invested in harvesters, which cost five times as much as a tractor. Since land loss was more randomly distributed and occurred only in tiny parcels in the first round of acquisition in Birampalli, this is not yet seen in the village. A large adivasi farmer in Birampalli, Krishna Rathia, told me harvesters even a few years back would usually come from Northern wheat growing regions of Punjab and Haryana, that would come to Chhattisgarh every paddy harvest season and lease out machines and drivers to farmers, but in recent times there are local owners of harvesters and their usage has gone up manifold. So dispossessed large farmers may turn into rent seekers through investment in agrarian capital while small and medium farmers join the classes of labour, a point I will return to in the next chapter while discussing Birampalli's fragmented response and resistance to the impending displacement.

Despite the advancement of productive forces in cultivation, the balance between manual labour and levels of mechanisation for farming plots are a complicated product of size of land parcels, gender, and class (shaped by tribe and caste) positions of the farmer. High landholding size is often indicative of adoption of technology but is not uniform across all plots of a farmer. A 2-acre plot held in one place could allow for use of harvester, while 5 acres of land fragmented physically across multiple locations could hinder use of even tractors. And for most people with 2-3 acres or more, the parcels are fragmented across the village.

On the other hand, even a small or marginal farming household without a male member will hire a tractor to plough the field because of the stigma associated with women ploughing their fields. In such case the woman usually resorts to a male member of the extended family to help. My host household, headed by a widow Durgavati, cultivated 4.5 acre of land spread across 4 locations with her daughter-in-law Sudha. There are no male members in the house, so ploughing manually is not possible. They hire tractors with a driver to plough all their plots. For *Nindai-kudai* (Cleaning of grass from paddy) and *kataai* (harvesting), they depend on exchange of family labour and some hired labour from Birampalli and neighbouring villages. Three of their plots are small and still had water when the harvest period came, and they could not hire harvester machines on time; typically, towards the beginning of harvest periods the harvesters would serve large farmers that could rent them for whole days. After harvest, they hire another machine to clean the paddy because the cost of hiring of a machine includes the charges of 4 labourers required for completing

the process. This is easier for the two women who otherwise struggle to hire male labour on time for cleaning. One of their plots, however, is adjacent to a Krishna Rathias's plot who rents harvester machine for his land every year during the harvest season and is their neighbour. Krishna then, at the end of his own harvest also harvests the crop in Durgavati's small parcel of land adjacent to his plot. The final process of bundling the paddy and bringing it home are again done by the two women themselves, with the help of hired labour (1-2 female workers from the next-door household at Rs 100/day) for 2 days. The decision for use of hired labour and machines and the balance between them is determined by multiple factors and could vary between years.

As the above case shows use of harvesters is dependent on both ecological factors and the class position of the household and vary across years. Manual harvesting is preferred by marginal farmers, for smaller plots or those that can remain wet very late into the year due to erratic rainfall, which was the case in the year I stayed there. The monsoon had extended itself till November, which meant when the harvest season arrived in December, most of the land was still too wet to be harvested by a combine harvester without special tracks fitted with it. The 'water harvester' machine (as it is called locally when fitted with tracks) was more expensive to rent and only the large farmers cultivating more than 7.5-8 acres were planning to rent them. Small and marginal farmers could not afford the differential in rent and decided to harvest manually, with help of some hired labour, but also intensively using household labour.

Having discussed the cropping patterns, the dependence on cultivation and the extent of mechanisation in paddy cultivation, I will conclude this section by briefly discussing the gendered patterns of farm work and its impact on conditions of simple and expanded reproduction. Analogous to Durgavati's experience I discussed above, I argue that women headed households find it more difficult to farm their land due to the absence of a male member, pushing them to cropping arrangements with extended family members or neighbours. This reduces the income or the surplus generation from cultivation compared to male farmers. Within farming households too, women are subjected to more intensive labour work both on and off field, particularly for subsistence crops in tikra land which remains outside the circuits of exchange.

Rao's (2017) work argued that the nature of women's access to land is shaped by their access to labour to work on their field, technology, credit and other inputs for cultivation. In Birampalli too, women farmers complain about not getting labourer on time, not being able to buy and carry inputs back from the town on their own and finding it difficult to get machines on time. While sharecropping practices are not common within Birampalli (3 households reported having land on sharecropping basis at present, all 1-1.5 acre plots), Bhagwati Chauhan, a single widowed woman has leased out her 1 acre land within extended family

and works herself as a farm labourer. Rameela Rathia, another widow with 5-acre land, was childless when her husband died; she adopted a boy from her extended family who lost his mother at a young age. Her son now cultivates her land and takes all decisions regarding farming and gives her the share of the paddy after harvest, while she contributes labour on the farm.

Within farming households, the labour-intensive work of sowing and cleaning of weed continue to be largely done by women, as is sowing and harvesting in cultivation of the *Tikra* land meant for self-consumption. Any vegetables grown within the limits of the homestead land are done with no additional spending on seeds, fertlisers, or hired labour, and again exclusively done by women. Moreover, cooking lunch for hired labour for paddy land are carried out entirely by women even in medium or large farming households; both are an extension of the sphere of social reproduction, providing food for family and workers, which further intensifies women's workload in the cultivation season (Pattnaik et al., 2018; N. Rao, 2005b, p. 4703).

7.3.2 Minimum support price, robust procurement, and accumulation via access to *Mandi*

In the previous section, I discussed the general conditions of farming by landowning households in Birampalli discussing the differentiated reproductive conditions within cultivation among adivasi households constituted along the axis of class and gender. In this section, I focus on the efficient public procurement of paddy in Birampalli, which supports both simple reproduction of small holding farmers and forms the basis of expanded reproduction (accumulation) among medium and larger farmers. Unlike in WB where farming households were entirely dependent on private traders for selling paddy, here I show that even small farmers in Birampalli have access to the Mandi as well, ensuring good prices for their produce. However, marginal farmers do not produce enough surplus to sell paddy to the mandi during harvest period and continue to depend on petty traders who buy paddy at a much lower rate both after harvest and throughout the year with whom they might or might not have credit relations as well. Despite a robust procurement system, the systemic bias against marginal farmers with smaller surplus creates a basis of differentiation based on landholding and class position of the household. A further basis of differentiation is likely to be shaped by the access to institutional credit at the mandi which is only given in kind. Medium and large farmers cover cultivation costs from the income from paddy sale in the previous cycle, and access input credit from the Mandi, while a portion of small and marginal farmers continue to depend on more expensive informal credit for cash costs of cultivation.

Table 20 Pattern of Sale of Paddy in Birampalli

Acreage	Number of HH	Don't Sell	Sell some part of produce	Sell to Mandi
Upto 2.5	35	24	11	5
More than 2.5-5	29	2	27	21
More than 5- 10	13	0	13	13
More than 10	3	0	3	3
Total	80	26	54	42

Note: 8 households that did not disclose their acreage are excluded from this table. Among them, 4 sell paddy to the Mandi.

Table 20 above shows the households gaining from access to the minimum support price of the government in paddy procurement. They show that 67.5 percent of cultivating households sell some part of their produce, and 77 percent of those who sell paddy give to the Mandi. This is biased towards the medium and large farmers, but half of those households cultivating less than one hectare (2.5 acre) who sell paddy, have access to the mandi as well. This is in line with recent scholarship that suggests a robust decentralized procurement of paddy and access to the primary agricultural cooperative societies (PACS) in the state (P. Gupta et al., 2021; Lerche, 2021; Singh & Soni, 2013). The public procurement system, especially of wheat and paddy, is generally perceived as benefitting a small group of farmers, biased towards the large farmers and geographically skewed towards Northern Indian states (Krishnamurthy, 2021). However, at an all-India level 13 percent of agricultural households growing paddy benefit from the support prices, and in Chhattisgarh, where the public procurement system is effective and efficient, this goes up to 38 percent (Gupta et al., 2021) . More than half of beneficiaries of the system are also small and marginal farmers, which forms the basis of the public distribution of subsidised food grains (Gupta et al., 2021; Lerche, 2021).

The robust procurement is achieved via a decentralised system with centres set up within the boundary of the village or a panchayat. For Birampalli and its neighbouring villages, it is located at the border of Birampalli. The farmers get paid directly within 2 weeks of depositing the paddy with the society. The

minimum support price was raised from Rs 1750 to Rs 2500 per quintal after the new Congress government came into power in the state, which formed one of their key election promises, which included input subsidy of Rs 650-700 above the support price announced by the Centre.

The credit at PACS is generally given in kind which includes fertilisers (both urea and DAP). Krishna Rathia informed me, for each acre, the Mandi issues two sacks of urea and one sack of DAP. 'They charged Rs 270-280 per sack last year, but these sacks used to be 50kgs each and now are of 45 kg. And for DAP, the rate is Rs 1300-1400, and what one owes for inputs is settled against the paddy given after harvest.' The access to credit and sale of paddy is linked; the acreage registered for credit must be commensurate with the sale. The procurement is limited to 15 quintal per acre and most farmers register for less than what they cultivate to provide for consumption. The good and assured remuneration for paddy along with low cost of selling in the paddy (most households take tractors within the village to carry it to the mandi costing Rs 500 for a trip and bring back the sacks once they deposit the paddy) have formed a basis for accumulation for the medium and large farmers and further differentiation with landless households and those marginal farming households that can only afford to sell paddy privately in smaller batches.

Access does not imply all households have individual registration for the mandi. As one farmer explained to me, there are bank documentation required for registration, as well as mutations of land records updated to match the name of the farmer as the landowner. Small farmers in Birampalli usually team up or give paddy in someone else's registration who might not fulfil the full quota of 15 quintal for sale. But the systemic bias against small farmers remains as one would have to give a minimum of a quintal to the mandi, to be eligible to sell or get the raw materials from the mandi. Also, the marginal farmers depend on informal sources of credit for cash cultivation costs, for which credit from PACS is not available, and get tied to the traders to sell at the end of harvest. The traders pay Rs 12-13 per kg for Kharif crop, half of the Mandi rate, implying high rate of interest for the credit given for six months. The dependence on such traders continues due to a very strong 'miller's lobby in the state, those who procure paddy to process in the mills both from the government mandi and from the traders, the latter particularly in the summer (S. Das Gupta, 2015, p. 117).

Even when not tied to informal credit, a part of those who sell paddy sell them only in small instalments and treat it as a form of saving for rainy days. Sahodra Rathia, who cultivates 2 acre of paddy land with her husband, says they prefer to sell it in batches, especially on weekly market days to buy what they need at that point, rather than giving it to the mandi at one go. The two shops in Birampalli also pay Rs 11-12 per kg to exchange paddy for any groceries, who have links to petty traders in the region. Ramnarayan Chauhan

works in construction work and opened a small shop in his house to sell school supplies and snacks, but slowly started buying paddy from the villagers and selling to a local trader at a rupee more than he buys at. But he only buys a few kg at a time, just enough for the villagers to exchange it against essential requirements like oil, soap etc.

The trader, or *Seth* (non-tribal, belongs to forward trading castes like Agarwals) procure paddy in bulk both during Kharif and Rabi season, the latter from the large farmers who can afford to grow a second crop in Birampalli. The government procurement of paddy is limited to three months, sometimes even less, beginning in December and only applies to Kharif crop (Das Gupta, 2015, p. 117). Nanhidai Rathia, who has a small portion of her 26 acres cropped twice, says she sells it to the *Seth* for Rs 10-11 per kg, half of what the procurement rate during winter at the mandi is. Not only does the government not procure summer paddy, cultivating summer paddy is discouraged by the government in a state known as the 'rice bowl' of India. Many farmers spoke of government advertisements asking people not to grow a second paddy due to worsening water shortage situation in the state, and just in November 2022, the government cut its target sowing acreage for summer paddy to zero (R. K. Das, 2022). A portion of the summer paddy is also used for self-consumption by farmers with irrigated land which 'frees' up more of the Kharif paddy to sell to the government at higher prices, forming a basis of further accumulation.

7.3.3 Differentiated access to minor forest produce in Birampalli

In this final section on the role of land-based occupations in Birampalli, I turn to collection of non-timber forest produce (NTFP) as a basis of simple reproduction of households in Birampalli. 85-90 percent of households in Birampalli collect minor forest produce from the village, which includes dry fuelwood for cooking, and Mahua flowers and Tendu leaves for sale. Unlike in Bengal where forest produce collection was largely absent among Santhal households (who 'delegated' dry wood collection to the Lodhas), in Birampalli NTFP collection indeed forms a key part of livelihood for both adivasi and non-tribal households. Entire households including children participate in the collection; women particularly depend on cash income from NTFP in absence of farm labour work in summer and due to high entry barriers to the non-agricultural wage work (Details in Section 7.5).

Unlike the indication of the phrase 'forest produce' towards egalitarian access to resources from common land, I show that Mahua flowers are largely collected from private owned individual landholdings. Income from mahua is restricted to landowning households and those households that collect it on 'share-cropping' basis. On the other hand, income from tendu leaves collected from common and forest land in the

periphery of the village which was accessed also by landless households have declined due to pollution from expansion of coal mining activities, differentiating the extent of dependence on NTFP between landowning and landless households.

My findings nuance Prasad's (2021, p. 29) argument that participation of adivasi women in minor forest produce collection slows down their process of 'proletarianisation' for limiting their participation in the labour market. I show that landless households' participation in mahua collection on sharecropping basis is akin to wage work, while the regulatory framework of tendu leaves collection and sale reduces the collectors to wage workers as well. The skewed land distribution among the three adivasi groups in Birampalli, that rendered the Agarias and Majhis almost entirely landless, is a result of historical inequalities inherited by certain adivasi groups, as was the case of the Lodhas in WB. Given the linkages between private landholding and access to forest produce (particularly Mahua), the income from forest produce is differentiated *between* adivasi groups.

The farming season in Birampalli lasts from June to January. The remaining months between February and April/May are spent primarily in collection and sale of forest produce, most significantly *Mahua*, Tendu leaves (required for making indigenous cigarettes) and chaar (a fruit). While Mahua and Chaar are typically sold to 'Seth' or traders who come to the village every year, tendu leaves are procured by the government through its designated agent in the village. Some estimates suggest Mahua can provide upto 22 working days of employment to adivasis annually in the state (Shrey et al., 2018, p. 3596).

Mahua is collected from trees on private paddy and tikra land in Birampalli, as has also been noted in other adivasi areas (Sareen, 2016). There is no direct correlation between land sizes and number of mahua trees which are randomly distributed across the landscape and rates vary from Rs 40-50 per kg. No access to cold storage and perishability of the product make households entirely dependent on private traders but forms a crucial source of cash income in the lean season where no access to public irrigation prevents cultivating whole year. But to give a rough estimate, a small or medium farming household with 7-8 trees could earn between Rs 25,000 and Rs 30,000 in a season. For a household with only tikra land that grows mostly Mahua shurbs, the income could be Rs 3000-5000 during the same season.

But the landless households do not have the same access to Mahua, who can only collect it on sharecropping basis where rents are half of the quantity of mahua collected reducing the income obtained from it. Mahua trees are leased out if the trees are very far away for the family to travel to in dawn, if the members of households have permanent jobs to attend with not enough household labour to collect the

entire produce. Prahad Singh Rathia, a primary school teacher leases out all mahua trees on his 5-acre paddy land. With no cash investment required for such collection, landless families, particularly landless women, take up mahua collection for a month in spring. Parampiyari Chauhan is a single widowed woman who returned to her native village two decades back when her in laws refused to let her stay on. She works as a sweeper in the village school in the mornings; but also collects mahua on a sharecropping basis for a family based in the next village whose trees are too distant for them to travel to at dawn. It has been 10 years since she leased in seven trees; this year, she is collecting mahua from 5 trees and has given away 2 trees to another woman. After paying rent, she earns Rs 1500. Leasing Mahua trees however is difficult for landless households as Seema Sarthi, a landless Dalit woman points out. 'With no other wage work (for women) available in summer, no one wants to share their Mahua trees.' She sticks to collecting tendu leaves, like many other landless women, for which she travels to forested areas in the village periphery.

Tendu plants are seasonal and their leaves which are collected in summer, after the mahua season is over, are independent of individual land rights and are collected from forest land. In Chhattisgarh, 1.3 million households, mostly adivasis, are estimated to collect and sale tendu leaves every year, also known as 'green gold' in the state (Business Standard, 2016). The leaves are collected, bundled, dried and counted by each family in fallow tikra or homestead land. They are picked up by government trucks and the money comes directly to the account of each household. There is a government agent appointed in the village who keeps the accounts and ensures the correct payment. But Amritlal Rathia, an adivasi farmer with 4-acre paddy land, laments the loss of tendu leaves in the past few years. He says his entire family would collect Tendu for 5-6 days in the past (before the coal mines arrived) and often get Rs 800-1000 for tendu leaves each day. Each person could collect leaves for Rs 200-250 in a day. Such kind of money was no more possible as forests had been cut down and shrubs have been destroyed due to pollution from coal.

Along with the impact of the expansion of mining on availability of tendu leaves, the public procurement at much lower prices than market rates have also hit income from tendu, further worsening the income derived from forest produce for landless families. The procurement of tendu leaves was nationalised by the MP government in 1964, the first state to do, and Chhattisgarh adopted the same policy after it was formed in 2000. As a result, the collectors cannot sell it in open market or to contractors even at higher prices (Jitendra, 2017). At present the procurement rate is Rs 4000 for each bag of 1000 bundles of leaves, which many collectors estimate is half the open market prices and the price at which the government auctions them to buyers. Chhattisgarh government officials have been quoted as saying that the state is yet to form state regulations for PESA that provides ownership rights to communities over forest produce. In absence

of such regulations, they could take legal action against those trying to sell or transport tendu leaves on individual basis in the state (Putul, 2022). The government even filed a petition in the Chhattisgarh High Court stating that tendu leaves collected from 'government owned' forest land implied the government was both the producer and owner, and therefore it was paying only 'collector rates' for procurement (Ibid). The political economic processes that have led to the impasse between the government and communities dependent on it for their subsistence imply the reduction of adivasis to wage labourers with the terms of employment unilaterally drawn up by the state.

7.4: 'There are not many *kisaan* here, *sab garib log hai* (people are poor here)': Agrarian wage work, caste/tribe, and gender in Birampalli

Kisaan, which literally means farmer is used synonymously with 'large farmer' in Raigarh. The above quote is from an interview with Lakshmi Chauhan, a landless dalit man in Birampalli who commutes to another village a few kilometres away with his wife to work as a farm labourer as there is never enough work in the village. In absence of many large landowning families, low access to irrigation and rising mechanisation of cultivation, farm work availability is not adequate to sustain landless and land poor households in Birampalli. In this and the following section of the chapter, I will discuss the conditions of wage work in Birampalli in the agrarian and non-agrarian sector, illustrating how the nature of incorporation in such work is co-constituted by differences in class, gender, caste, tribe, and age.

Drawing from Lakshmi's experience and other interviews, I will argue that landless men depend largely on non-agricultural income instead of relying on scarce and low paid farm labour work. But women and older men face massive entry barriers for employment in the construction and industrial sectors, therefore continuing to rely on low paid agricultural work. While small and medium farmers do farm labour work mostly on an exchange basis, the large farmers use mechanisation and other mechanisms like using migrant labour to keep wage rates low in the village. Rising mechanisation has also led to tendencies to hire male workers to operate the machines, further pushing female labour out, a trend towards 'de-feminisation' I noted in Bengal too due to contractualisation of farm work. Finally, Birampalli still has remnants of caste based occupational patterns, which along with producing historical inequalities in access to land, have continued to relegate certain Dalit and adivasi households in specific kinds of low paid wage work within the village.

Out of 34 landless households in Ranipalli, eight households depend entirely on agrarian wage work for their reproductive needs. Seven of these eight households are headed by single women or old people, with

no young male adult person in the family. This is telling of the preference of landless men to work in the non-agrarian sector, while illustrating high dependence of women and old people to draw income from agricultural work. A couple of older women said they cannot meet their reproductive needs due to the shortage of rural farm work and sell part of their 35kg rice allocation from the public distribution system to meet part of their daily needs.

The agricultural wage rate is Rs 100-120 per day, lower than Rs 150 in neighbouring villages with higher number of large farmers where workers like Lakshmi and his wife commute to. Paddy is a labour intensive crop, and the cultivation requires use of multiple labourers within a single plot, usually within the same time period across the village across all categories of farmers (V. K. Ramachandran, 2019, p. 73). The small and medium farmers continue to depend substantially on '*adla-badli*' or exchange of family labour at all stages of cultivation, especially during sowing, weeding and harvest.

The two adivasi large farmers in Birampalli use a mix of machines, intensive use of household labour and migrant workers for their farming. Krishna Rathia who owns and farms 26 acre, brings in 35-40 labourers in his tractor from a forest village 18 kms away for 3-4 days for weeding. Krishna's father was a native of the forest village and still has family here, while Birampalli is his mother's land which he inherited as his mother was an only child. He says he pays Rs 120 per day to the workers from his native village, while in Birampalli workers would ask for higher wages and not work 'as intensively'. Contrary to complaints from large farmers in Birampalli about labour shortage, land poor households point out that practices like these cut down farm work availability within the village and keep wages low.

Women and older men also find themselves disadvantaged due to rising demand for more skilled farm workers who operate heavy machinery that is used in cultivation, who all tend to be men (Chand & Srivastava, 2014; V. K. Ramachandran, 2019, p. 75). Chatur Agaria, an adivasi young man and member of the only landowning Agaria household in Birampalli, is skilled in driving tractor and four wheelers. He works on a monthly salary basis (Rs 7000) for a non-adivasi household in the village. This includes farm labour work and driving his tractor whenever required. In return, he lets Chatur plough his own field with the tractor without charging him for it. Such demand for workers has further suppressed demand for women farm workers.

Birampalli also has remnants of the *Jajmani* system[30] where certain caste and tribal groups were excluded from land ownership and exploited by more dominant landed tribal or caste groups to provide certain services in return for food grains and later, cash. While the adivasis are assumed to exist outside the hierarchical caste system, as I discussed earlier in the chapter, historical processes of division of labour and exclusion from land ownership have existed among adivasi groups as well. I show here that though men from tribes and castes that provided traditional services to the land-owning groups have moved out into construction and mining jobs, the women of certain Dalit households continue to depend on providing caste-based services for income.

The common services rendered by specific adivasi or caste groups who were not allocated cultivable land here in villages include *Nayi* (barber), *Lohar or Agaria* (ironsmith), Majhis (make bamboo baskets), Badhai (constructs walls and doors), Sahis (midwives) and *Kotwar* from the Chauhan caste (Also see Sbriccoli, 2016). In Birampalli, while the landless adivasi groups, Agarias and Majhis do not provide caste/tribe-based services anymore, their older men and women continue to work as agricultural labourers for the landowning groups; the younger generation though has moved into construction or mining jobs. Two older men from Agaria households sometimes repair iron equipment for the landowners, though they say usage of sophisticated machines have rendered their services redundant. The one *Nayi* household has some land and still provides ritualistic services as a barber and gets paid in grains at the end of the harvest period. However, their main source of income comes from a salon they have rented near the Tamnar township.

Unlike the men who have increasingly severed their ties with traditional caste-based occupations, the two women headed Sarthi (Dalit) households still depend on their caste-based occupations of being midwives for all village households, including other Dalits. They go to every household during delivery of a baby, including accompanying them to hospitals and visit the house for 6 days after childbirth to take care of the mother and the infant and leave after cleaning the house. While one of those women also work as agricultural labourer and sometimes in rural construction work in a neighbouring village if she can find it, she did not find such work sufficient to sustain herself. The exploitative caste-based relations continue to be reproduced within uneven capitalist development in Birampalli, where differentiation along the axis of

[30] Jajmani system is a system of social exclusion sanctioned by the Hindu religion and institutionalised by the hierarchical caste system, where the landed forward castes receive services in exchange for kind or cash from the landless or land-poor backward castes and scheduled castes. See (Mayer, 1993; M. S. A. Rao, 1961) for details. For a historical assessment of weakening of Jajmani system see (Srinivasan, 2015). For link between Jajmani system, land inequality, economic inequality and caste see (Deshpande, 2000).

caste/tribe, age and gender shape access to land and non-agricultural wage work. It is to the latter that I turn next.

7.5 Non agrarian employment in Birampalli: Salaried employment, PCP, and precarious wage work

Table 17 and Table 18 showed that 64 (53 percent) of all households and 33 (43 percent) of the adivasi households derived at least a part of their income from the non-agrarian sector, confirming tendencies of non-farm diversification of income and 'pluriactivity' among rural households in India (Basole & Basu, 2011a; Djurfeldt & Sircar, 2016; Himanshu et al., 2013). In Birampalli, this includes income from public sector employment, self-employment outside agriculture and casual wage work in the construction and industrial sector. Table 21 below shows the distribution of income from different forms of non-agrarian wage work and self-employment/PCP in Birampalli. I preface my findings here with a disclaimer, that participation in the nonagricultural work was slightly higher after the loss of land in the first phase of acquisition that provided jobs to 17 men in a mine which was shut about 4 years after it opened. I will discuss the details of the acquisition and employment in the next chapter but a few households which worked in the mines then, have since then withdrawn themselves from the non-agrarian work.

Table 21 Distribution of Non-agricultural income in Birampalli

Type of Jobs	Number of Households
Salaried Job	7
Construction Work	16
Work in power plants/Mines	19
Self-employment/PCP	8
Other Sources	14
Total	64

In this section, I make three main arguments regarding differences in access and conditions of non-agrarian wage work marked by inequalities in land holdings between and within adivasi groups. First, work in the construction and mining is marked with precarity, harsh conditions and under-employment and unemployment for significant periods of time. Workers move between the two sectors, and struggle to

remain employed under single contractors or employers. Women workers are almost entirely excluded from work in the industrial sector, and except for two landless women in Ranipalli in construction, no woman is employed in non-agrarian wage work. Access to cultivable land provides both food security in periods of unemployment and shield workers from accepting harsh employment conditions, thereby differentiating reproductive conditions along the axis of caste and tribe which I have already shown are corelated with land inequalities.

Second, salaried employment in the public sector is scarce, and often extremely low paid. Adivasi men only from the Rathia tribe have gained from affirmative action to access well paid secured government jobs and invested income from employment into cultivation strengthening conditions of class mobility. However, they struggle to retain the mobility in subsequent generations, with declining opportunities for secure employment and poor access to education.

Finally, the non-agrarian petty commodity production in Birampalli is restricted to trading activities, with no hiring in of labour. Unlike in Bengal, non-agrarian PCP in Birampalli did not show capacities for expansion and accumulation, restricting opportunities for mobility and were supplemented with wage work and/or income from land-based resources.

7.5.1 Precarity and uncertainty in wage work: Employment in construction and industrial sectors

Casual wage work in Birampalli comprise of unskilled and semi-skilled work in rural construction, construction within the industrial sector and work in the mines and power plants in neighbouring areas; along with this 3-4 men find seasonal daily wage work to weigh, load and unload paddy in the *Mandi* for 3-4 weeks in a year. Precarity in wage work is interlinked with land inequalities; except for one household no one owning more than five acres of land in employed in casual work in the non-farm sector, with entry barriers for women and old people.

Unskilled and semi-skilled workers in construction accompany skilled masons in rural construction work from 8am to 5 pm. I found only one skilled mason in the village earning Rs 350-450 per day; others earn Rs 200-250 per day for a day's work. These are employment under small contractors building private concrete houses in nearby villages and are irregularly available for unskilled workers.

Work in powerplants and mines include driving trucks and dumpers, manning machines and coal conveyor belts, and working as labourers in underground mines. All these jobs are casual and under contractors and no one in the village have received any direct employment in any company, despite sometimes working for

15 years intermittently for the same company. Sanjuram Chauhan was not even 10 years old when he lost his father, and his mother was a farm wage labourer. He left his studies soon after and started working young. After few years of farm work, he found work at a power plant in Taraimal, where the wage rate was Rs 45 per day, double that of farm wages then. 'I was very happy. I kept asking different contractors for better wage rates and shifted to whoever offered higher wages. I would even go up to the heights that even the most seasoned painters would not.' He now works at the Tamnar power plant owned by a prominent Indian corporate group where he joined in 2007-08 and works as a machine-man. He earns Rs 350 per day now but says this will *never* turn into permanent work. The duty is of 8 hours between 6am and 2 pm with one small snack break in between. He has been with the present contractor for 3 years; he said his wage should be Rs 450/day according to the work he does but does not know how he is paid Rs 350. When I spoke to him, he was due to attend a meeting with the contractor who had summoned all his labourers. He says the 'duty' had already been reduced to 3 days a week, and the contractor would announce layoffs on the meeting day. He said this happens every year while tenders are renewed, and people start looking for work with other contractors.

Interruptions between periods of employment is experienced by all workers in Birampalli, as mines and power plants prefer to employ 'footloose' migrant workers to keep costs low and control over labour force tighter, a point I will also return to in the next chapter (Breman, 1996; M. Chatterjee, 2020; Kale, 2020; Nayak, 2022b). Moreover, availability of work is rendered precarious by 'intermittent termination of whole production units and operations within industries', as Chatterjee (2020, p. 1176) also found in industrial sites in Maharashtra. Janaram Sarthi, a landless Dalit man, cycled 15 kms each way to a coal mine where he would work for 12 hours a day (paid overtime after eight hours) with one weekly unpaid off day, before he lost that work. He has now applied to another contractor in a coal mine, who has promised to employ him after four months.

Even when employment is available, conditions of work are harsh with long working hours and changing time shifts every week. Ramcharan Rathia, an Adivasi man who cultivates 2 acres of land said, he goes to seek employment whenever he hears of a new mine, though most people don't want local workers. He said, 'Compared to labour work in the village, there is *damdaar paisa* (good money) in mining work. But in one of the mines, I had to walk everyday underground for two kilometres to begin work, with a light strapped to my head. We used to get wet half the time before beginning work. So, I don't go to underground mines anymore.' Nutan, another landless young man, now drives dumpers in open cast mines after working as a helper with dumper-trucks for two years. As a helper, he worked for 24 hours at a stretch

with a 24-hour break after. He now works under a contractor who has a 7 year-tender with the mine. He gets Rs 12000-13000 in a month with no days off, and no rest days. The contractor provides breakfast at 9am and lunch at 2pm and deducts Rs 3000 monthly for the food. He said the payment was better than working in cultivation, and if his father managed to cultivate an acre or so on lease, he helped his father with cultivation costs from his income.

The precarity of work is also reflected in fluidity between employment between the construction sector, farming sector and casual work in mines: rural housing construction is seasonal with long breaks during monsoons, and men continue to move across the sectors to get employment. Ajay Agaria used to work in coal mines of an aluminium company at Rs 492/day for two years, but the company shut all its mines. Ajay now works with a mason in the village when he is called for work and keeps looking for work in mines as well. This is the same as Champibai Rathia's son who had worked in a nearby mine for Rs 8000/month for 7-8 months when it shut down. He now works as a mason at Rs 350-400 per day. Most casual labourers in construction work continue to look for industrial work with contractors and even work in farms during monsoons when civil construction is on hold.

As I mentioned above, households with more than 4-5 acres of land, participated in nonagricultural work but were to a significant extent protected from the harshest conditions in mining. Less than a third of those owning 4 acres or more were employed in nonfarm work, and among adivasis this fell to less than a quarter. Only one man owning 4 acres worked in the mining/industrial sector in a construction site as a helper serving food, earning salary monthly. After a year's work, when the worksite shut as construction ended and the company shifted to a new location further away, he withdrew himself from non-farm work and returned to cultivation but did not seek work in the mines. Similarly, Ravi Rathia cultivating 5 acres, was working at a mine manning a conveyor belt for three years between 2016 and 2019. He worked for 8 hours at Rs 350-380 a day and managed his cultivation work with more hired labour. After the mine shut, he too returned to work full time in the field. Landless men like Nutan and Sanjuram move from one contractor to another, endlessly, to secure conditions of their reproduction, while those with at least 2-3 acres of land can draw all reproductive needs from land-based occupations.

While finding continuous employment is difficult for men, women in Birampalli find themselves completely excluded from the industrial sector and their participation is marked by uneven patterns of industrial expansion across the region. I will return to this in the next chapter while discussing the overwhelming participation of women in resisting their impending dispossession. Mines do not employ women, and respondents say some jobs in housekeeping and gardening are available for women; but they are scarce

and in absence of public transport, commuting for daily 8–12-hour shifts make seeking work more difficult. In Birampalli, many women participated in construction work 5-7 years back when staff quarters and other civil construction for a mine happened within commutable distance of the village. Vedkumari Rathia went to work in construction with six other women from the village, where she worked for 2 years. They left home at 7am, worked till 5pm and then returned home. On Sundays they would work half a day till 12 noon and got paid on monthly basis. Couple of these women told me the worksites never had any bathrooms for women; most women even carried their own drinking water, but it was some source of regular income. However, once the major construction was over, women were no more required at the plant or its colonies. While construction work for the industrial sector continues in other parts of the Tamnar block, as the sites of work shifted farther away from Birampalli, its women fell off the non-agricultural labour force.

7.5.2 Salaried employment and non-agrarian PCP in Birampalli: conditions for expanded reproduction?

In line with my findings in Bengal, secured salaried employment forms a basis of expanded reproduction for adivasi households in Birampalli as observed in other adivasi areas in India (Government of India, 2014; Higham & Shah, 2013). Like in Ranipalli, here too access to such employment was as school teachers and was differentiated across men and women[31], and between adivasi groups due to unequal access to education. In Birampalli, three men from the dominant Rathia tribe had jobs as primary school teachers, one of whom had retired and received a pension now. Dhawai Rathia and Prahlad Rathia both received their teaching jobs in 1980s, soon after finishing high school. The households cultivate 3.5-5 acres land and have both invested in tractors from their salaries which they rent out to supplement their earnings. They both said such public sector jobs are not easily available anymore since one needed much higher educational qualifications, the right contacts and often supplementary computer literacy. They expressed concerns about maintaining the income levels in the next generation in absence of salaried income. Dhawai Rathia did not even mention to me that he had two sons, and only mentioned the one who is trying to pass the final year of bachelor's degree for the past two years. The other son had left studies in the 5th standard. Prahlad's son has studied till 12th standard and supervises his father's paddy field. Both teachers agreed that boys in Birampalli often left studies in middle or high school, and it has been difficult for the current generation to either attain jobs through higher education or find desirable employment opportunities in the industrial sector.

[31] 68.2 percent of government schoolteachers in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh were male in 2015-16. (UDISE) Publications-District Information System for Education - Education for all in India

The other salaried jobs in the village are all for part time work, extremely low paid, and contractual, and do not generate income for reproduction of a household by itself. These are for two sweepers in the primary school, an *Anganwadi* worker[32] and a healthcare worker. Sweepers work in two intervals for a total of 4-5 hours and earn just Rs 1500 per month. They are still important as they can generate cash income especially for households unable to find work in farms or the industry; the only physically disabled man in the village works as a sweeper at the village school.

Non agrarian PCP is spread across all caste and adivasi groups in the village and are divided equally between land owning (2-3.5 acre) and landless households. Unlike what I found in Bengal, these are based entirely on household labour and do not provide capacity to accumulate, categorising them as a part of classes of labour. It includes three small grocery shops within Birampalli run from homes, selling essential products like soap, oil, spice, shampoo, biscuits, school supplies etc. Two men buy bangles, soaps, oil etc from Tamnar from specific suppliers and go around selling them the neighbouring villages in weekly markets. Only one OBC household has invested recently in a van which they use for trading and selling vegetables in the market. All these PCP households also cultivate and take up wage work to supplement their income for reproduction. However, unlike wage work, non-agrarian PCP provide more stable and regular income. Also, much of their income remains closely tied to the rural and agrarian economy, selling groceries, bangles, and other knickknacks within and in neighbouring villages. The large-scale impending acquisition that I will discuss in the next chapter will disrupt both agrarian and non-agrarian employment rooted in the village economy, with possibilities of both reproducing and worsening agrarian inequalities.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the AQ of labour for adivasis in Birampalli in Chhattisgarh, showing far stronger capacity for land-based occupations to provide basis of simple and expanded reproduction than was the case in West Bengal. The ownership of land, fertility and yield are much higher than Bengal, along with a robust public procurement of paddy which continues processes of accumulation within farming. This ownership of land is differentiated between adivasi groups due to historical factors, and therefore differentiate the bases of reproduction and accumulation along the lines of tribes and class, co-constituting each other. The expansion of mining along the mineral belts of Chhattisgarh have not produced viable

[32] Anganwadi is a village-based primary child care centre run by the government in rural India.

employment opportunities for the landless and land poor households who work under extremely harsh and precarious conditions. Any access to cultivable land and forest produce shield people from accepting such conditions of labour work. Access to salaried employment is scarce, and self-employment opportunities are not creating conditions of accumulation and are supplemented by cultivation or wage income.

These findings nuance the critical agrarian scholarship on classes of labour that focus on the 'labour' position of rural households and adivasis in India (Bernstein, 2006; Lerche, 2009; Pattenden, 2016a; A. Shah et al., 2017) and unpack how land creates *both* basis of accumulation and security of income differentially across classes and tribes. Birampalli's case emphasises the centrality of land in shaping conditions of reproduction of adivasi classes of farmers and labour and determining of the nature of the precarity they must bear in labour work, both in agricultural and nonagrarian wage work. Along with the findings in WB, it also shows how such centrality of land-based occupations is uneven for different tribal groups within and between geographies due to ecological, historical, and political-economic conditions, demonstrating the co-constitution of class and tribes in the Adivasi Agrarian Question. In discussing the bases of reproduction of adivasis, this chapter has attempted to bring, following (or subversing) Tania Li (2011), land back into the labour debate.

In the following chapter, as I move to the dynamics of dispossession (both large scale and individual alienation) and struggles of adivasis to resist the impending displacement, I will explore the relations and contradictions within these classes of farmers and labour in building alliances and solidarities for political struggles which is the key concern of AQ of politics. Large scale displacements interact with uneven unequal agrarian structures, likely to differentially incorporate adivasi classes of farmers and labour in the nonfarm economy. I will show how politics of resistance depends but not exclusively on land relations, is shaped by people's valuation of agrarian assets, the unevenness in absorption in the labour market and the coercive might of the state which is in alliance with private capital.

8. Dispossession, Resistance and Class: Agrarian Question of Politics in Birampalli

8.1 Introduction

In Chapter 7, I discussed the conditions of reproduction, accumulation, and differentiation in Birampalli village in Chhattisgarh. The income from land-based occupations is more substantial than in Bengal, though uneven between and among adivasi groups (Rathia, Agaria and Majhi) and differentiated along the axis of gender, caste, tribe, and age. Capitalist accumulation continues within agriculture, with mechanisation in farming, usage of hired wage labour by medium and large farmers, and a well-functioning public procurement system. The centrality of access to agricultural assets, including land, is a crucial aspect of AQL in Chhattisgarh's case, which along with inequalities in access to and conditions of wage work, interacts with the processes of land alienation and shapes adivasi politics in resisting and negotiating dispossession.

In this chapter, I will place Birampalli within a continuum of displacement and its impacts, within the paths of mining instigated agrarian changes. The chapter will show how mining related dispossession might be experienced in stages, within the life cycle of a single or two generations. Despite the legal promises of providing jobs in lieu of land, rehabilitation and compensation programs are poorly implemented, further worsened by the increased mechanisation and casualisation of workforce in the mining sector. Compensation is often negotiated at individual household levels, and terms of integration into the industrial sector are intersected along the lines of class, caste, tribe, disability and gender. The first phase of acquisition in Birampalli impacted households rather randomly as a small portion of the village fell within the periphery of the mine; but even then, I show it impacted affected households unevenly, corelated with the agrarian inequalities and created *no space* for the women, disabled and the elderly in non-farm employment. For the young men who received jobs, they lost it to regulatory and business complications shutting down the mine a few years later, expelling them from the job market. This pushed workers in long drawn negotiations with multiple and shifting stakeholders for regaining employment and lost payments, within a context of expansion of mining and anti-dispossession movements across the region.

In the second part of the chapter, I show how the collective memory of past dispossession, the transient nature of the non-farm employment it generated, and the regional experience of continuing displacement and mining have led to a broad-based anti-acquisition mobilisation in Birampalli. The chapter discusses the

resistance within Birampalli at present, critically engaging with the class and social composition of the participants and the class character of the movement. In the previous chapter, I showed how the conditions of non-farm employment was a function of hierarchies and mobilities within adivasi classes of farmers and labour. Building on it, I argue that the nature of access to the post-dispossession labour market, both shaped by and shaping mobility and hierarchies within such classes, frames the demands and tactics that anti-dispossession resistances adopt and may vary over time. I finally show how such resistance uses environmental degradation, livelihood loss and the loss of Adivasi identity and culture in complex and varying combinations to resist the acquisition, particularly engaging with the protective legal framework for adivasis (for instance, PESA) enshrined in the Indian constitution. However, the power inequalities embedded in the laws, the poor implementation of the laws and the sheer force and violence of private capital puts considerable limitations on the resistance.

Returning to the point I made for WB about how agrarian question of labour and politics are in themselves not discrete aspects of the agrarian question, in this chapter too, I draw links between the conditions and strategies of reproduction and politics among adivasis in Birampalli which co-constitute each other, as they interact with dispossession. These linkages when compared to WB show how the agrarian question of labour and politics comprising the Adivasi Agrarian Question, differ across adivasi inhabited territories in India, which are not just empirical variations of non-linear agrarian transition or marginalisation of adivasis. They are historically contingent trajectories of agrarian change shaping and being shaped by specific forms of solidarities and politics by an unequal agrarian milieux under uneven impacts of capitalist development.

The chapter below is organized as follows. Section 8.2 discusses the two stages of acquisition in Birampalli; the first was in 2006 that impacted less than a quarter of the households at that time but provided only 17 jobs in the village. I elaborate on the impact of the dispossession on households, the differences in the distribution and spending of the compensation and the differentiated access to jobs in the mine. It then details the impending acquisition in the current times that is slated to displace the entire village, including from their homesteads, and discusses the individual alienations that continue in Birampalli both because of impending acquisition and differentiation within its households. Section 8.3 moves to an in-depth discussion on the mobilisation in Birampalli, which is contextualised within the fragmented mobilisations across Raigarh with expansion of the industrial and mining sectors. The section takes a bottom-up view of the movement, focusing on exclusions and inclusions within Birampalli, and draws links between the struggle for labour rights ensuing from the closed mine in the past and the struggle for land rights at present. Finally, it briefly discusses how different tactics of foregrounding environmental concerns, loss of

adivasi identity and culture, and livelihood concerns are used in complex variations in what is a daunting battle against a coercive and repressive state allied with capital. Section 8.4 concludes the findings for Raigarh, Chhattisgarh.

8.2 A continuum of dispossession for coal mining in Birampalli

When I asked my host Durgavati since when she had an idea that the land she grew food on had coal beneath it, she said, she knew it since her neighbour Krishna Rathia's kids were still toddlers, which is at least 25 years back. 'We took *marshal*[33] when we would go to forests to get wood, and the men would chase us out. There would be *Sarkaari* (government) men looking for coal. They used to dig massive pits. The water that would come out of the pits would be everywhere. We all knew there is a lot of coal around here.' And the first time she heard of dispossession was for a coal mining project in another village in Tamnar in early 2000s, where a member of her extended family lived. 'We did not even know it was a company. We just knew Jindal was taking it[34]. Everyone just used that one name. Then Jindal made the chimneys (Referring to the huge chimneys of the power plant in Tamnar). We knew *Kalaakar aadmi hai* (must be an artist); he must be a very big man.' Such sense of awe and limited information about coal mining projects and their impacts were common in late 1990s and early 2000s when land acquisition began in the block for the Mand-Raigarh coalfields (A. Shah, 2022, p. 8).

Forcible dispossession from land, which Karl Marx called 'primitive accumulation' and David Harvey reformulated as 'accumulation by dispossession', is now generally accepted as an ongoing process within capitalist development that advances capitalist accumulation rather than just kickstart it (Hall, 2013; Levien, 2015). In the Indian context, such dispossession has been interpreted as being divided into 'regimes' with the post-colonial state displacing people for 'developmental' projects before neoliberal reforms in 1991, while it has worked more exclusively at the behest of private capital since then (Levien, 2018). Dispossession related to coal mining has continued across these regimes, for both public and private capital, with subnational 'extractive regimes' (for example, the state of Chhattisgarh) competing with each other to attract investments to pursue economic growth (Adhikari & Chhotray, 2020). While forcible dispossession from land for extractive purposes continues in the state of Chhattisgarh, dispossession within a specific territory, even at the village level, could be staggered with significant time lapses between how and to what extent people lose access to land. The stakeholders are both private and public capital, often

[33] Wooden sticks with cloth or inflammable material at one end to provide light
[34] This refers to Jindal Steel and Power Ltd, an Indian steel company with a consolidated revenue of INR 57 billion.

indistinguishable from each other, and can change within a specific mining project because of adjudication and executive decision making. In Birampalli, the administrative decisions and changing of stakeholders were crucial factors in shaping the impact on conditions of reproduction of those affected by the dispossession. The interruptions in mining and continuations of exploitative incorporation into the industrial sector were both features of the first acquisition. Even after the acquisition, as the negotiations continued even for labour rights, the bureaucratic complexities rendered it weaker as time passed and the mine continued changing hands.

The first mining project to affect Birampalli was one of the Gare Palma mines (say, GP1) earmarked for non-power sector. This was allotted to Chitpur Company[35], later renamed as CEM in 2000. CEM acquired land in four villages in the Tamnar block, and Birampalli was one of the villages where several households lost land for being on the periphery of the planned mine and coal washery. The land was acquired in 2006 and the production in the mine began in 2009. However, the production stopped in 2014 after the Supreme court announced 214 captive coal block allocations by the union government to be illegal (Rajagopal, 2014). When the mine was put up for auction again, a private company (say C2) that had just lost another mine nearby and had a sponge iron plant in Chhattisgarh, bid aggressively and was allocated the GP1 in August 2015. However, C2 could not begin any production from the mine due to its own financial troubles and the National Company law Tribunal (NCLT) began proceedings against it and declared it insolvent in 2017. Following the insolvency proceedings, a third company (C3) bought majority stake in C2 therefore liable to settle all its pending dues henceforth.

When I stayed in Birampalli, the mine and the washery plant inside had been shut for five years and were under the custodianship of the public sector unit Coal India Ltd (C4), while it awaited reauctioning to the private sector. These multiple changes in the administration and licensing for the coal mines have meant prolonged periods of unemployment for the land losers who were promised work. Mining and factory work had completely stopped within one year of C2 taking possession as had the salaries for those who received jobs as a part of the compensation for the lost land. The project thus had dual impact- loss of land, followed by loss of wage labour opportunities within few years of being dispossessed.

[35] Names of all companies mentioned with reference to the project has been changed to protect anonymity of the village and the respondents. The information on the timelines of the production, auctions and closure of the mine have been compiled from the company briefings to shareholders, news reports and triangulated with respondents' interviews. I have not mentioned all sources in this paragraph to protect the anonymity of Birampalli.

8.2.1 Acquisition of cultivable land in 2006: uneven processes of dispossession

Official documents show about 900 acres were acquired across four villages for GP1 including in Birampalli, though village level specific details are not available in the public forum. 73 households in Birampalli reported during interviews that they lost land during this time, though the count for affected households at that time would have been lower due to the passage of time, and many households would have owned land parcels jointly on paper. 60 of these households were adivasis. The loss of land was uneven and randomly distributed across households since the village fell on the periphery of the mine. Three households reported they had lost most of their land to the acquisition, though no household said they turned landless due to the acquisition. The *Sarpanch*[36] told me 25-30 homes had lost half their land the first time, though without access to any land records, I was unable to triangulate this with the self-reporting by respondents.

Those who lost land in 2006 confirmed that there were no concerted efforts to mobilise against the process then. The Coal Bearings Act, which is used for acquiring land for coal mining, required only monetary compensation and no rehabilitation or resettlement schemes (Srivastav & Singh, 2022, p. 4). But it is common for company officials to negotiate terms of acquiring with specific landowners in advance to avoid delays and minimise resistance. The lure of an influx of cash, brokering efforts by a few from neighbouring villages and multiple visits by company officials promising better roads, healthcare etc together created what one respondent called a 'painless' acquisition of land. Govind Rathia, whose father lost land to CEM along with three of his brothers (all on the same land title), remembers, 'The people from the company would come in cars. They would offer both cash and cheques. They would take villagers to *Tehsil* (land revenue) office in cars and would even drop them home. Most villagers were seeing four wheelers for the first time and were carried away by the cash that was on offer.'

The loss of income is not quantifiable after two decades with splitting of households and fragmentation of holdings and income sources. I discuss the processes of the past dispossession, the distribution and spending of compensation, and how existing agrarian inequalities were reproduced through the dispossession process. These processes become particularly relevant, as we shall later see in this chapter, while building struggles against land acquisition: people base their decisions to oppose, support or

[36] The head of the local village council or *Panchayat* that includes Birampalli and a neighbouring village. The *Sarpanch* here is an adivasi woman, since the seat is reserved for women, though her husband had been in the position for 15 years before her election and is treated as the village head for all practical purposes by all households.

negotiate for better compensation based on their possibilities of mobility within the classes of labour and capital, in turn framed by their evaluation of past losses of agrarian assets (Levien, 2018).

Within the overall process of 'deaccumulation of agrarian assets' as a result of dispossession (Levien, 2018, p. 100), the extent of impact was differentiated across households. In Birampalli, the distribution of land loss was random across households depending on the location of their plots that fell within the mining area. Compensation was divided across multiple households for a single *patta* or land title deed. Because of the fragmented nature of the loss of land, unlike Shah's (2022) recent findings from another case study of displacement in Raigarh, most households who lost land did not reinvest into agricultural land. The rare cases of reinvestment in land were shaped by the class position of the household. Three households bought land with the money they received. Government schoolteacher Maheshram Rathia bought 0.8 acre of cultivable land in another village, but only after supplementing his compensation with his own savings. Dhananjay Rathia, who cultivates 3 acres in Birampalli now jointly bought 3 acres in a neighbouring village with his brother where they still grow paddy with the help of hired labour.

The class position of the household also impacted in negotiating compensation packages. Those with marginal landholdings received money only for the land acquired, while those with small and medium holdings often said they also received additional cash from the company for Mahua trees and mango trees that they had on their land. Mithas Rathia, one of the most active members of the anti-acquisition mobilisation now, told me few households even held out and managed 20-30 percent cash compensation above the government rates for their land but most of these negotiations were individualised and made behind closed doors with company officials who regularly visited the village then. The cash compensation for mahua trees were upwards of Rs 2000 for each tree, but even this depended on individual negotiation, and many received lump sums of Rs 10,000-15,000 irrespective of how many trees they lost.

While compensation itself remained uneven across households, specificities of which are impossible to track so many years later, the decision on how to spend it was also differentiated. After any dispossession, the class inequalities in the agrarian economy (agrarian capital and classes of labour) are likely to be reproduced in the non-agrarian economy, by absorbing the dispossessed differentially as wage labourers and as non-agrarian PCP in the industrial sector. The ability to shift between one form of PCP to another (in this case, cultivation to rent income) could protect a household from the precarity of the labour market but remains differentiated by access to initial agrarian assets. In the first acquisition while marginal land holders spent their compensation in consumption costs, the medium farmers were able to invest into tractors and threshers or even buy land with aid of past savings or other sources of income.

Small and marginal farming households spent much of their compensation on repairing houses, social events like weddings, and in buying two wheelers. Most households cannot account for how they spent the compensation. A common response across many respondents were '*Sab khane peene me chala gaya*' (We used it for basic consumption needs). Another respondent, regarding spending his share of Rs 1,00,000, said, 'I don't know where the money went. I bought a bike.'

This contrasts with medium and large farming households who managed to invest a portion of their compensation in tractors or threshing machines that they could rent out in the future, as I discussed in Chapter 7. In fact, a couple of respondents said that one medium farmer had told others in the village that he had put his down payment on the tractor even before the compensation cheque arrived and did not mean to back out of the decision to give his land to the company. His acceptance of the cheque, the first household reportedly to do so, led to many others accepting their own cheques at the *Tehsil* office. The ability to continue paying installments on big investments like tractors, were further determined by continued surplus generation in cultivation and non-farm sources of income. Two households could not retain their tractor after a few years because of a health crisis in the family.

The reinvestment of compensation sums even for poor households was undermined by predatory speculative capital that took advantage of the influx of cash in the region. I discovered a few weeks into the village, that not all money even for the small and marginal farmers had been spent on consumption. At least 17 households said they put a part of the compensation into the ponzi scheme of Punjab-based Pearl Agrotech Cooperation Ltd (PACL), owned and headed by now jailed Nirmal Singh Bhangoo, which shut down in 2014 with lakhs of depositors losing their life's savings (IANS, 2021). There were two agents within the village, aided by the *Sarpanch* himself, and respondents said they were speaking to everyone from before the disbursal of compensation about doubling their money in 3 years. Vidyasagar Rathia with his entire extended family (now comprising of multiple households) lost a total of 4.5 acre out of which his share of compensation was Rs 25,000. He invested his entire amount in PACL. After few years, the agent said the entire amount was gone. Bhagwati Chauhan, a single widowed woman, was also to receive Rs 25,000 as compensation as her share in a multi-household title deed for the acquisition. The PACL agent went with her to *tehsil* office to collect the money from where he took her to Raigarh to withdraw the cash and took Rs 20,000 from it for the chit fund deposit. A land rights activist from Raigarh told me, the chit fund schemes were widespread in the area. 'When an acquisition is planned, the record of affected households goes to four places: chit fund companies, two-wheeler companies, four-wheeler companies and the local *Tehsil*.' A

part of the capital within processes of dispossession were accumulated by such speculative schemes, with small portions appropriated by local agents.

Processes of dispossession can also provide spaces for accumulation within the local bureaucracy through kickbacks or illegal cash compensations from the involved companies who want to minimise disruptions and fast track paperwork. This nuances Alpa Shah's observations that adivasis are more 'egalitarian societies' where the state and its welfare projects have introduced trends of differentiation, rather than differentiation and accumulation through cultivation (2007a, 2010). Rather, similar to Pattenden's (2011) observations in rural Karnataka, I saw that existing agrarian inequalities worsened by capitalist development in agriculture, were key to getting elected as a public official, who then can accumulate further through disbursal of state benefits and by negotiating processes of dispossession.

Giriram Rathia, the de-facto Sarpanch, is perceived as a pro-company voice in the village, who convinced multiple landowners in the first phase to accept their compensation cheques, and later even mediated access to jobs when the company arrived. Though he consented to my research after a couple of meetings, he refrained from giving away his own opinion of expansion of mining. But he never attended village meetings on the issue of displacement. His increasing properties and aggressive buying of land across neighbouring villages are discussed in hushed tones across many households, a result of gaining from illicit compensation from the industrial sector, according to some. Giriram told me he owned and cultivated 10 acres of land (divided between Birampalli and the next village), and that he had lost 6 acres in the first phase of acquisition. This would mean he had at least 15-16 acre of land in the beginning of the decade. But some respondents estimated he had at least 25 acres land across a few villages now. Ram Rathia, who cultivates 5 acres and is a second cousin of Giriram told me, their families had equal landholdings when they started off, which was one indication of his investments and accumulation in the past two decades that he and his wife have remained in power.

His capacities to accumulate have been underpinned by both gatekeeping of welfare benefits in the decentralised governance structure in the village and brokering on behalf of the company and the chit fund agency. One example of the former is settling of newcomers in Birampalli under governance housing schemes in the *Awas Para* and allocating homesteads there to village residents after households split and require new homesteads. Within the processes of dispossession on the other hand, other than shaping opinions of households and 'manufacturing consent' for giving up land, a *Sarpanch* is valued and even rewarded by the companies for signing the No-Objection Certificates from village councils. The position of the *Sarpanch* is almost always reserved for big farming households as I saw in multiple neighbouring

villages; the only opposition to Giriram in Birampalli has come from Krishna Rathia, who owns 26 acres in the village and is vehemently opposed to mining. Giriram's case challenges Shah's conclusions that 'economic differences between households have been minimal and temporary' not linked to their 'status and power within adivasi society' (2018, p. 229). Rather the economic inequalities in the agrarian created the conditions for both Giriram to claim and consolidate power and accumulate further, and for Krishna to challenge him.

Finally, I briefly discuss the gendered inequalities in utilising the compensation within the households. Even when women have formal titles to land (as wives or daughters of the landowner) they would not control the monetary compensation received from it. Since households are not sites of 'congruent interests' (B. Agarwal, 1994), it is likely that compensation given to and controlled by male members of households were not spent for the needs of the entire household (Dewan, 2008; Levien, 2017). For instance, while mending houses benefit the entire household, spending on daily consumption and buying of two wheelers typically favour male members. Even when married daughters made claims on the shares on their fathers' compensation, the money likely were given to their husbands or in laws. As one respondent pointed out, it was akin to dowries during weddings which are never utilised by the woman. Occasionally it directly went to the husband as families bought bikes for their son-in-laws or gave them the compensation job received for foregoing their share of the money. These unequal gender dynamics of using compensation benefits reflect the intra-household differentiations that processes of dispossession can intensify, further worsened by no employment for women generated in mining, which I will discuss in the next section.

8.2.2 Jobs as compensation for dispossession: agrarian transition, interrupted

In the previous chapter, I showed how adivasis in Birampalli are not an egalitarian society, with 'low' and 'temporary' economic differences between households, contrary to Shah's observations (2018). The entry of the mining company did not produce 'new salient forms of socio-economic and class differentiation' that eroded 'pre-existing features and values of egalitarianism' (Noy, 2020, p. 375). Rather I argue, the access to the compensatory jobs was mediated by the existing differences in landownership status and socio-economic status of households among those who lost land, interacting with axes of class, gender, age, tribe/caste and disability. Chhattisgarh's own acquisition and rehabilitation policies required for the companies to provide one job per household in case of loss of land; however, the policy is poorly implemented in the state and have led to long drawn struggles from local communities to secure any employment (A. Shah, 2022, p. 8). In Birampalli too, only 17 men found jobs as part of their compensation,

which was lower than those who lost land, even accounting for the split in households that would have occurred over the past 12 years.

CEM, which first acquired land remained reluctant to provide jobs to all land losers, though it was promised by the officials who frequented the village before the displacement. Govind Rathia, an adivasi man who had lost land along with three other households on a single patta said, 27-28 households would have lost land then but only half of them got jobs. 'The company kept taking applications. We met the sub-divisional magistrate (SDM) about jobs; he said go to the company. We even went to meet the general manager of CEM at Raigarh once for jobs.' Giriram was mediating access to jobs as well, and Govind said when a few of them approached him, he did not cooperate. As Noy has found in his recent work in another case of mining related displacement in Jharkhand, such brokering with the companies for compensation packages and jobs are done by politically influential local adivasi men and the outcome for each household can be dependent on illicit payments made to such brokers or personal relationships with them (Noy, 2022a, pp. 68–69). The jobs given to men in Birampalli were often low paying (Rs 5,000-7,000 per month), labouring jobs in the coal washery plant or in the mine, and the employment was not always directly under the company but under contractors who worked in the plant. Since the households here lost land in relatively smaller parcels, many respondents thought the better jobs went to men in neighbouring villages where medium and big landowners lost most or all their cultivable land and were therefore able to negotiate better terms of employment. Both practices, that of employing land losers under contractors and differentiated terms of employment based on landholding sizes, were confirmed to me by a few officials from other mining companies I interviewed. One official said that the company would offer better terms of employment or even contractor status to big farming households to ensure minimum resistance, as they would not do manual work in mines nor were they skilled to take up high paying salaried employment in the industrial sector: '*Yeh bade ghar ke log honge jo pade likhe nahi hai*' (These are rich people who are not educated). On the other hand, the land losers from small or marginal landowning households would be accommodated as labourers under contractors.

Where multiple households held land on a single patta, the loss of land gave job to only one member. Households without adult able bodied male members were also not given employment. Shukla Rathia, who lost 3 acres of land between three brothers and one sister on a single patta, divided the compensation money in three parts between the brothers and signed over the job to the sister's husband. Families who could not find someone suitable to take up jobs even sold it for pittance to extended family members; and in one case, the *Sarpanch* mediated such selling of jobs to someone from another village for a few thousand

rupees. In another case, the landowners under one title deed failed to nominate any one person for the job as no one was ready to pay any cash upfront to the others. Considering such situations, a mining company official told me, the Chhattisgarh government was planning to provide a one-time cash compensation to households that cannot take up employment for some reasons; concerns remain though if this will become a further opportunity for companies to get away with not providing compensatory jobs in future.

The Mines Act, 1952, did not allow women to work in open cast or underground mines (amended in 2019), and no women found employment with the company in absence of adult male members to take up jobs. The same was the fate of the only disabled-headed household in the village. Mahetar Majhi, a dalit man with physical disabilities lost 1.5 acre of dry land, which left him with only 0.5 acre of dry land after the displacement. The company initially promised him a job and he reported at the washery plant office for five days, for which he served tea to the employees. After five days, the manager told him they would not be employing him for his disability; he now works as a sweeper at the village school.

I spoke to two human resource officials of private mining companies here, who said that while women were occasionally given housekeeping or gardening jobs, the companies address employability of women via corporate social responsibility activities. Following Sunila Kale's conceptualisation of the 'company villages' in the mining belts of India, the CSR activities are therefore employed to manage employment aspirations, but only by driving them away from the plant and mine gates (Kale, 2020). Both these officials had no response to the employment opportunities for disabled people[37].

Therefore, in the context of the state acquiring land on behalf of private mining interests, unlike in the public sector, there were no permanent employment to be had which can create spaces for class mobility through what Parry calls access to *'Naukri'* (Parry, 2013; Parry & Ajay, 2020). With more uneven loss of land in smaller parcels[38], the only work to be had was low paying, insecure and temporary, further differentiated by class, gender, and disability. However, the households that received the job often held to it as a crucial source of non-farm income, despite the impermanence. The compensatory jobs were mostly perceived as non-hazardous and significant in a scenario where finding regular employment under contractors is more

[37] 2.33 percent of disabled people in India live in Chhattisgarh (Census, 2011). The number of disabled people in Chhattisgarh grew by 48 percent between 2001 and 2011 Census.

[38] I use the term 'small' for land parcels only with reference to actual size of land. As discussed before, this could be most of the landholding for a cultivating household.

difficult. The employment terms included paid leave, annual bonus, and access to a medical centre, all of which are impossible to find in contractual employment.

Birampalli's case also adds another dimension to the precarity of employment in the context of large-scale dispossessions in India: the suffering under long periods of unemployment as the mine changed hands multiple times, and shifting stakeholders rendered any negotiation for payment for lost income weaker. Five years after the mine started work, CEM shut it in early 2015 and C2 bought it over soon after. According to Ram Patel, who lost land in a neighbouring village and took leadership of the labour mobilisation of the displaced workers in the company, said, the workers received salaries from June 2015 to July 2016 and then the money stopped. When I visited in 2019, the workers were negotiating with C3 which was legally responsible for their unpaid dues. The workers had raised money among themselves after the mine closed to fight in the labour court against C3. Ram Patel later told me, they spoke to a lawyer who asked for Rs 40,000 for each hearing that they could not afford while the company lawyer charged Rs 250,000 per hearing. A worker from Birampalli told me he had paid Rs 2000 for the case when the Patels from the neighbouring village had asked for fighting the case. Four workers who had taken leadership of the negotiation would go to hearings in Bilaspur, and once went to Delhi, but lost the case.

I attended a meeting at the SDM office with the workers, where the SDM, representatives of C2, and Coal India (the present custodians), an ex-legislative assembly member and local police officials were all present. More than 100 workers from all four affected villages were present, who all sat on a mattress on the ground while the company representatives, local politicians and bureaucrats sat on tables and chairs set up facing them. At the meeting, the workers raised the issue of not being told about the NCLT case[39] in time, because in that case, they could have approached NCLT for the unpaid dues. The company officials responded that they did put up an announcement in the local newspapers as part of the legal requirement and the workers would have missed it. The workers had been taking turns to sit in front of the mine gate since 19 February 2019, and signed regularly on the registry to provide proof of attendance. The company representatives refused to take direct responsibility and made it clear that any payment made at this point for past dues must be seen as a favour than as a matter of right.

A C2 official I later met at their sponge iron plant told me that when C2 received the land for mining, they realised parts of it was still classified as forest land which would require separate government permission for mining. The land that they bid for did not match the land they received, and they did not mine any coal

[39] The NCLT (National Company Law Tribunal) hears cases for bankruptcy of companies, a part of which is to determine the total amount that the company might owe including banks, employees, suppliers etc.

before the company went into insolvency proceedings. He said, the salaries were pending from July 2016, and the cases have gone through both NCLT and the Labour court. C3, which was now responsible for C2's dues, had to clear dues till October 2018, at which point the mine was handed over to the custodians. By the time I went to meet the official, an agreement had been reached between the union leaders and the company on how much was to be paid. When I asked how the amount due was calculated, the official said, the payment was a lumpsum ex-gratia amount; how the calculations were reached was an internal negotiation matter and he could not reveal it. The payments (a fraction of salaries due to them) were made to the workers in 2020.

There is still no clarity on the payment of the provident funds that were deducted from workers' salaries during the time that the mine was operated by CEM. Ram Patel said they would negotiate it separately when CEM would 'come back' to retrieve their machinery that was inside the washery plant. The separation of the washery and the mines is not legally tenable, and it was unclear whether it was something he had been told or a way to convince all workers to accept what they were getting now. After the dues were settled, the mine remained shut for another year.

After commercial mining was allowed by the Indian government, this mine was auctioned on a revenue sharing basis, where there will be no restrictions on commercial sale of the coal as long as a fixed percentage of the revenue was passed on to the government (Bhaskar, 2020), therefore putting no restrictions on private profiting from a state led acquisition. Curiously when the same mine was put up for reauction in 2020, CEM rewon the mine with the highest revenue-sharing bid with the government. A worker told me over telephone that CEM officials had negotiated a payment of Rs 5000 per month for the earlier employed workers against pumping out the massive reservoir of water in the coal pit and planned to begin operations soon, though no one had been paid yet. The erstwhile land losers had again started to go to the gate every morning and sign on the register to put in their attendance.

These long drawn legal battles and informal negotiations interrupted the incorporation of those dispossessed into the wage labour market which has been interpreted as a 'divergence' from the 'classic Marxian schema of the transition to capitalism' (Adnan, 2015). The constant changing of the stakeholders to negotiate with, and the non-transparency of legal procedures reflect the failure of the state to ensure that the conditions of jobs as compensation for dispossession are fulfilled even as such land allocation changes hands. Even smaller victories against capital in post-dispossession scenarios are lost as the managers change, and each company is more reluctant than the previous one to keep past commitments. After a 7-day long strike right after the mine had just opened, the bureaucracy had intervened and 48

widows across the affected villages were promised Rs 500/month pensions by CEM. The company also said they would consider paying one-time compensations for households that lost land but did not get or take jobs. But the pensions stopped after three months, and the landowners had no opportunity to hold the company accountable for the extra compensations after the mine shut down.

Birampalli's case is not an exception as journalists and scholars have observed similar long drawn struggles for securing labour rights after the loss of access to land in the mining sector in Chhattisgarh (A. Chandrasekhar, 2017; Noy, 2020; A. Shah, 2022). As these negotiations drew on, Birampalli received the notice for another acquisition, one that would displace the entire village this time. The experience of the second phase of acquisition and Birampalli's reaction to it was shaped by its experiences of the first phase, its struggles for labour rights and political mobilisations in the region over the past two decades.

8.2.3 Impending displacement in Birampalli: land loss, compensation, and employment

The second project which affects Birampalli at present is another Gare Palma mine (say, G2) allotted to a public sector utilities company from another state.[40] The mine will cover 25 sqkm of land, 10 percent of which will be forest land. 14 villages will be displaced by the acquisition, eight of which including Birampalli will be enitrely displaced including homestead land. The public sector company that received the mines has already signed a mining development contract with one of India's largest private sector conglomerates for the entire period of mining and mine closure. 95 percent of the mine will be open cast, like 90 percent of India's coal mines, which are more environmentally damaging than underground mining (Ghose & Majee, 2000). As per the Rehabilitation and Resettlement plan of the company, the total project displaced households are above 2200 and 25 percent more will be 'affected households'.[41]

Adivasis comprise 56 percent of the displaced households and about half of the affected households. Therefore, the disproportionate burden on adivasis for displacement due to development projects in post-colonial India, continues to be a major feature of extractive mining projects at present due to what has been called 'a fatal overlap' between mineral deposits, forests and tribal areas (Bhushan & Hazra, 2008, p. 7).

[40] The information for this paragraph is compiled from PSU Watch, public documents for forest clearance, rehabilitation plan and other agreements uploaded by the concerned company for the land acquisition. The links are not provided to protect the anonymity of the village.

[41] Project displaced households: who lose their house for the project, with or without loss of cultivable land. Project affected households: who lose land and are impacted by the project, without losing houses.

The land is acquired under the Coal Bearings Act, 1957, and the compensation package is laid out in the rehabilitation plan in accordance with the new LARR Act, 2013 and Chhattisgarh's own resettlement and rehabilitation policies. The compensation for land includes the market value of land (to be decided by the district collector) and the valuation of assets done by bureaucrats and an equivalent amount of solatium, which is an added compensation if the land is valued higher in the open market. It also includes one-time assistance payment for new house construction and resettlement, a subsistence allowance of Rs 3,000 for a year, transportation cost, special onetime payment for SC/ST families, and compensation for trees, cattle, petty shops etc. The forest clearance form submitted by the company also says that the process for settlement of rights under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, has been completed, though no documentation has been attached to the form to back this up. The concerns of not settling FRA have been raised by the local population in letters to the collector and the governor of the state, including no consent taken from the *Gram Sabha* (village council) before clearing the project. The project received environmental clearance in mid-2022.

According to the company documents about 3000 households will be 'affected' by the project, and there about 3500 direct jobs created. Considering the skilled employment that the mine will generate (employee quarters have been included in the plan presumably for skilled migrant workforce), it seems unlikely that all affected households can be employed by the company. It is in this context of livelihood loss, the shrinking spaces for non-farm employment, and the environmental concerns with expansion of mining that the politics of consent manufacturing and opposition plays out in the region. Before discussing the politics of mobilisation currently in Birampalli, I briefly want to touch upon the individual alienation from land that households face within the region as the extractive industry makes its inroads. This route of dispossession works parallel to the coercive displacement by the state and has implications for both the agrarian questions of labour and politics.

8.2.4 Individual alienation from land: the vulnerability of Dalit households

Within the context of expansion of mining and other ancillary industries, displacement of adivasis also continue on a piecemeal basis alongside state led acquisition. While adivasis continue to lose land despite the legal restrictions on transfer of adivasi land to non-tribals, poor Dalit households find themselves in an equally vulnerable position since legal registration of their land is permissible and easily done.

Section 170-B of Chattisgarh's Land Revenue Code prevents any transfer of tribal land to non-tribals (See Chapter 4). Despite this, Adivasi land continues to be transferred to non-tribal people often with coercion and/or cheating as the land market develops and private capital attempts to grab land in excess of what is acquired by the state (Choudhury, 2020; Faraz et al., 2016; Lahiri-Dutt et al., 2012). Private industries continue buying Adivasi land, often using the *Benami* route where the land is bought fraudulently in names of other adivasis to bypass the law (Putul, 2012). Despite the legal protection, adivasis find it difficult to even register police cases against the perpetrators (Chauhan, 2018). Often the bureaucracy is actively involved in the land dealings, and the landowners do not come to know till much later that the land had already been transferred to another party (Krishna & A, 2018). In cases where adivasis have tried to challenge such fraudulent land grabs, they continue to face violence and threats; following the death of an adivasi leader under suspicious circumstances after he filed a petition in the Chhattisgarh High court against transfer of 300 acres of land in his village, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes ordered action to be taken under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act for such transfers through forgery ('*Prosecute Those*', 2017). Complaints of such land grabbing by non-tribal people who are employees of private companies or large farmers from other parts of the state, or the country are rampant in the villages in Tamnar, but long drawn campaigns in the context of mining-led dispossession have made adivasis more cautious. A land rights activist told me 3000 cases under Section 170-B are pending in Tamnar, though I was not able to confirm the number with any other source.

While in no manner taking away from the alienation of adivasi land in the state, I want to also highlight the vulnerability of Dalit households in Birampalli to land loss through private transfers. Six Dalit households told me they had some portion of their land alienated: four of them had sold them to an OBC landowner in Birampalli, one to an adivasi big farmer from a neighboring village and one to someone who worked in a nearby sponge iron plant and lived in another village. The households had lost their land due to some family emergency when they were unable to pay for healthcare costs or social functions. In two cases, involving the OBC landowner, the payment was much lower than market rates and a mix of coercion and deception were involved. Pyaari Chauhan's husband was an alcoholic and she said he sold his entire land in parcels to the OBC farmer in bits and pieces for small sums of money. She said since they did not have a son, her husband did not want to save anything for the next generation which has now made her completely dependent on wage labour work and Mahua collection on a sharecropping basis for income. She also suspected that the big farmer set his eyes on their land as an easy target and often 'loaned' paltry sums to her husband, which ultimately cost her the land.

My host Durgavati, a Dalit woman, also had a similar story where her son lost 3.5 acre land to the same farmer. Durga's neighbour and extended family member had adopted her younger son as they were childless. It was expected that after their demise, their 3.5 acre plot would be passed over to her son. After the couple died, she said, the OBC farmer found out another distant relative of the couple and brought him to the village and settled him in their house. He paid Rs 20,000 to the relative he found and asked him to take possession of the land. Durgavati said, many villagers cautioned them that fighting a long drawn legal battle against such a big farmer would bring them no benefit. They handed over the land for Rs 20,000 paid separately to them by the OBC farmer who went on to forcibly grab possession of it from the relative he had brought in. 'None of us got to keep the land; the Patel gained 3.5 acres out of our dispute,' Durga said. She said, in recent years, the big farmer was now speaking to her younger son again to sell a portion of their land to him. 'He targeted us because he can take Dalit land, and not adivasi land.' When I was staying in Birampalli, he was also negotiating with another OBC household to buy 1 acre paddy land. When buyers buy Dalit land, they are protected from any future legal complications through cases of restoration of land which are only applicable for transfer of Adivasi land. Several Dalit households, facing threats from large farmers accumulating within agriculture and state-led displacement have joined hands with adivasi households to resist the impending displacement which I will discuss in the remaining sections of this chapter.

8.3 Mobilisation against dispossession in Birampalli: class, caste, tribe, gender and identity

The first phase of acquisition in Birampalli remained largely uncontested despite the implication of the loss of agrarian assets (and the environmental havoc) it would cause. But in 2018-19, village meetings, public rallies, and protests against multiple attempts at holding the environmental public hearing[42] for GP2 reflected a concerted effort across the impacted villages to oppose the impending acquisition. In this section, I discuss the unevenness and complexities of household level participation in Birampalli's resistance, shaped by the interaction between the processes of dispossession with the agrarian question of labour.

[42] The Environmental Protection Act, 1986, makes it mandatory for proponents of 32 'highly polluting' industries to carry out an environmental impact assessment of their projects and submit them to the Environment Ministry to gain approval for the project. In 1997 the Act was amended to include a compulsory public hearing in the project affected area to discuss the findings of EIA and amend them if required before applying for the approval. For details see (Paliwal, 2006).

To clarify at the outset, this is not an evaluation of the anti-dispossession movements in its entirety in the region, as it remains fragmented geographically and in demands they make. Rather what I explore here are three questions: Who in Birampalli participates in actively resisting the dispossession? Who cannot or do not resist the dispossession? What are the demands of the mobilisation, and who makes them? In answering these questions, I will show how the agrarian question of labour, focused on socio-economic inequalities and 'the class dynamics of agrarian change' remains integral to and co-constitutes the agrarian question of politics in uneven, geographically and historically specific ways (Bernstein, 2004, 2010). The agrarian politics in Birampalli has taken a specific form of agrarian populism, where the 'competing and contradictory class and group interests' are brought into a broad alliance (Borras Jr, 2020, p. 5) with partial success due to the inclusions and exclusions in the demands it makes. The contradictions within such 'agrarian populism' in turn create spaces for negotiations with the forces of dispossession, rather than completely opposing them.

Birampalli's mobilisation for land rights began after the first phase of dispossession in 2006. Coal mines, washeries, power plants, sponge iron and aluminum factories were being built around the block and local activists had begun campaigning against the environmental degradation and loss of livelihoods in the region. The bid for expansion of a thermal power plant in Tamnar saw a concerted resistance within the block, in which Birampalli's residents participated. A popular local activist Ramesh Agarwal had floated *Jan Chetna Manch*, a campaigning and community mobilisation platform that would create broad based alliances across the district to resist dispossession. He found his ally in Dr Patel, a well-respected OBC doctor of indigenous medicine and a large farmer in a neighbouring village of Birampalli who along with his wife began making a *Samiti* or committee for campaigning against mining.

Birampalli's villagers first heard of a '*Jan Sunwai'* (public hearing) in another neighbouring village in 2007. Durgavati said she was curious what the phrase meant. Mithas (an adivasi farmer), Durgavati (his Dalit neighbour) and another friend of hers set out early in the morning on the designated date to witness the hearing. Mithas went in his cycle and the women, walking through the forests. She said at the meeting she heard one man speaking excitedly about how much cash they were to receive for the industry. She protested and gave a long rebuttal that Dr Patel overheard. He called her after the meeting and in 2008, Birampalli formed its own branch of the *Samiti*. The members attended meeting at Dr Patel's village once a month and discussed the environmental and economic implications of increased mining in the block. The turning point came at a public hearing in the Khamaria village in 2008 for a coal mine. Many from Birampalli

and its neighbouring villages attended it which ended with police *lathicharge*[43] injuring hundred and arresting of at least 50 local people (*The Top Two*, 2010). Mithas says hundreds of villagers at the hearing blocked the pitched road which was the only way out for the cars of the bureaucrats who were present including the district collector, though they eventually took a route through the forests to leave the spot. While Durgavati fled the scene with others, Dr Patel called them back to a prominent intersection near the highway to block the dumpers and trucks that carried coal in and out of the area. The blockade which saw massive support from the region went on for five days, after which police intervened. Mithas says, 'We were allowing cars to pass but no dumpers. On the fifth night, they arrested 360-380 of us and spread us across police stations all over the block. They ruined all our food. They spit on our food we had cooked. They (police) broke everything.' The detained people were released a day later after several political leaders intervened. But 150 people from Birampalli joined the *Samiti* after this. Savita Rath, a prominent local activist associated with *Jan Chetna* visited them regularly conducting meetings on the protective laws for adivasis under the Fifth Schedule.

The experience in Khamaria showed Birampalli the direct violence of the alliance between state and private capital, but also created the basis on which geographically broad-based mobilisation was possible over the next decade. Many of Birampalli's residents, particularly women, attended rallies and hearings across the state as part of *Jan Chetna Manch* over a decade following the *Samiti* formation. Women speak fondly of times when they got up at dawn and left with their friends on tractors and buses to show up for villages facing displacement in the past. A decade long mobilisation since their first loss of land within the region meant their current opposition to their dispossession did not take emerge 'at the point of enclosure' neither was it 'local' and 'ad-hoc' in nature (Levien, 2013, p. 378), to which I turn next.

8.3.1 Class, caste, gender and tribe in Birampalli's politics of dispossession

Politics around land, in the context of dispossession, has been shown to 'embody contradictory and very ambivalent aspirations' which contain both desire for land and decent off farm employment (Majumder & Nielsen, 2016, p. 79). Scholarly work on dispossession concerning adivasis on the other hand portray adivasi movements as epitomising 'a sense of collective land rooted life as of greater importance than the individual life of a protestor' (Dungdung et al., 2022, p. 1651), de-emphasising the individual aspirations of adivasis and fragmentation of their mobilisations. In Birampalli I witnessed the mobilisation putting up a

[43] Beatings with sticks used as a tactic for crowd control and can cause grievous injuries.

'spectacle' of broad-based resistance against capital, but being also fragmented across households, classes, and tribes. It was also a product of its history which produced inclusions and exclusions based on relations of caste/tribe, class, age and gender, and also feelings of resolve, resignation and exhaustion as I will explore below.

Krishna Rathia's mother is one of the oldest and most active members of the *Samiti* and Krishna too has provided his tractor at rallies and attended meetings and public hearings in neighbouring areas whenever required. He says, 'When CEM came so many people sold their land. But no one bought another piece of land with it. People bought bikes, tractors etc. and now they neither have those nor have the money nor the land.' He points out that if a large farmer lost land and tried to buy other land with the compensation, it will be immensely difficult to get so much land within one village, and no one would want to sell. 'You can buy 2-5 acres at one go. But those who have 30-50-100 acres, you won't get it in one village. You cannot even buy 10 acres in one place. And if you keep the money, you will keep spending it. Land is a permanent asset for generations to come. Money is more '*chanchal*' (restless).' He said, it would also result into the indignity of being an outsider in another village, where no one would respect you. With his 26-acre land and high compensation value from the fruit and mahua trees, Krishna does not see his future in the resettlement colonies which will be built for the displaced, nor is he seeking work in the industrial sector. His fears of losing the socio-economic status are not misplaced. A person from a neighbouring block associated with *Jan Chetna* told me, his native village already had meetings about hiking land prices when so many villages in Tamnar will be displaced to block entry of 'outsiders.' Large farmers like Krishna who still accumulate from agriculture have found common grounds with small holding petty commodity producer farmers to create the main support base for the Samiti. They share a collective memory of loss of land once, which though created differentiated impacts, did not result into long term access to employment in the industrial sector despite legal framework that provides for it. As Vidya Rathia, a small farmer who lost 1 acre before said, 'We don't want to give land to the company. We received money for it once and don't even know where the money went.'

Since 2011, the Samiti in Birampalli has also been part of the annual demonstration of '*Koyla Satyagraha*' based on the Gandhian tactic of political resistance, where hundreds of villagers from more than 50 panchayats come together to dig coal 'illegally' and carry them to their homes (A. Sharma, 2022). In 2019, this demonstration was held in a forest village about 20 kms from Birampalli. Every household brought 1 kg of rice from home and paid Rs 50 for the event. Men and women in the host village had cooked and prepared for the event since the evening before. I reached early in the morning, had lunch with Birampalli's

people and waited while multiple activists and large farmers (all men) gave long speeches on the makeshift stage till late in the afternoon. The crowd that had come from afar got increasingly impatient as they needed to get home, and it was almost after 3 pm that a rally walked from the village to a nearby riverbed from where they brought coal back (dug in advance). This was a symbolic gesture emboldened with the slogan of '*Humara zameen, humara koyla'* (our land, our coal) which demanded that the government hand over mining rights to the local people of the area, who could do it in a more sustainable manner without giving up on cultivation altogether. Many speeches (also evident in my interviews with a few leaders) focused on estimates of coal under each acre of land and how much landowning households could earn by digging the coal themselves. The people would pay royalty to the state, as the private companies did, but would claim the profit from the resource themselves, and not be dispossessed for accumulation of big industries (Hall, 2013; Harvey, 2007). Several landowners associated with the *Samiti* had even registered a company for the same few years back under the leadership of Dr Patel, but as he pointed out to me later in an interview that the directors of the company did not meet regularly and nothing concrete had come out of the registration.

Despite not gaining material success, the idea of *Koyla Satyagraha* challenges the principle of 'eminent domain' without opposing the role of coal mining in the state's developmental agenda, thereby constructing 'resistance through oppositional articulations and appropriations of the postcolonial development project' (Nilsen, 2013, p. 170). However, like most broad-based multi-class alliances within agrarian movements in India, the strategic significance of building a homogenised voice can mask the tendency of such mobilisation to prioritise interests of certain class groups at the cost of others (Brass, 1994; Lerche, 2021; Nielsen, 2016). These 'contradictions' within the movement and its primary advocacy of interests of petty capital had become more apparent over time (the Samiti in Birampalli had been active for a decade now), creating fault lines between the large/medium farmers and landless/land poor households.

The public hearing for GP2 had been postponed due to protests twice in the past, and another was scheduled for late September 2019. Even a week before the hearing, a common meeting in Birampalli was yet to happen, and while emotions about dispossession were strong, several respondents felt betrayed by the mobilisation. The *Samiti* meetings (also, Satyagraha rallies) did not speak of the fate of the landless within the idea of community mining or include them in the share of profits if such mining was to be allowed (for class inequalities in anti-dispossession movements in India, see Baviskar, 1995; Levien, 2013; Nielsen, 2018). Laxmi Chauhan, a landless Dalit in Birampalli said when the notice came out for this acquisition, he

went for a couple of meetings. But he was told not to speak at a meeting because he did not have land. A landless Agaria adivasi also said that they had been blamed for being the brokers for the company (*Jindal ka dalaal*) because his son found job of a guard when CEM set up its mine the first time even while they did not own any land to lose. He said, 'If the farmers here sell land, what can we do? The farmers will not even take us with them, that is why we do not go for public hearings. We used to, but no one calls us. Only farmers can go for them (*Samiti* rallies).' The *Samiti* was perceived as a 'Kisaan's movement' by those who did not own cultivable land, and as Laxmi said, 'It should speak of the poor and not just of the rich.' Suba Rathia, a marginal adivasi farmer, admitted that the *Samiti* was not welcoming of new members, especially landless people who might not have joined in the past but wanted to now that their village was directly under threat. He said sometimes older members were unwelcoming of even marginal farmers who primarily work as farm labourers. 'They would say, you work for someone else, then why come for this meeting?' One of the founding members of *Jan Chetna* said that they knew the movement had become a voice for landed farmers, but it was required for resource mobilisation, as the large farmers would provide tractors, photocopy letters/applications or provide food at meetings. But another activist said that resource mobilisation was often used as an excuse for the class character of the movement. She said, poor families paid Rs 50-100 for rallies as their shares for any applications made to the collector or other state officials, and the financial contributions of the richer farmers were overestimated.

The rift between the landed and the landless, which had become entrenched in the Samiti's functioning was reflected in interviews of farming households and three activists with at least two decades of involvement in the movement. Mithas Rathia (adivasi) said the landless people will adjust elsewhere if the company comes and work for someone else, but 'we have not worked in someone's land, not asked for jobs anywhere.' Another Adivasi farmer, who farms 5 acres (partially irrigated) similarly perceived the landless as those who might make the first compromise with the company, as they might negotiate for jobs. But as I showed earlier in the chapter, contrary to such views of the landed households who used this mistrust to act as vanguards of the mobilisation, the inequalities in the agrarian was rather likely to be reproduced and worsened in the 'non-farm future' (M. Chatterjee, 2020; Levien, 2018; Nayak, 2020). Such inequalities have a strong caste/tribe component to it, that co-constitutes class in Birampalli as elsewhere in India. Cultivable land remains concentrated in the hands of Rathias, who are the dominant tribe and the Nayaks and Patels who belong to OBC groups. In contrast, most Dalit and other adivasi households (Majhis and Agarias) are landless. The class contradictions within the movement also excludes these Dalit and adivasi households. The linkages between class, caste and tribe that were prominent within the AQL, are hence reflected in the agrarian question of politics against dispossession.

The class character of the movement's demands and class character of its participants do not neatly overlap, however. Durgavati, who is among the three landed Dalit households in the village, had been active from the beginning, brought several landless Dalit and adivasi women in the village within the fold of the movement. The expansion of the mining in the region has continued to keep these women (many of whom are older women) active in the movement, who find social and economic security within the village economy. The gendered nature of exclusion from the mining sector have not delinked them from the agrarian economy, which often is the only source of non-farm work near the villages and tied them more strongly with the anti-dispossession movement.

In contrast, two of the four large farmers (one adivasi and one OBC) do not engage with the movement. One of them is the Sarpanch who is perhaps inclined to negotiate directly with the company due to his political influence than take part in collective bargaining. The *Awas Para* residents, several of whom are deemed 'close' to the Sarpanch having been settled by him in the village largely stay out of the mobilisation plausibly relying on his mediation with the company to gain better terms of displacement.

Observing the participation patterns of the households within Birampalli is not meant to draw generic conclusions on caste/tribe composition of 'unwilling farmers' who refuse to give up land, but to acknowledge how politics around dispossession is rooted in existing unequal agrarian milieux and are indicative of the certainly unequal impact of dispossession (S. Agarwal & Levien, 2020; Kabra, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2020). As a local activist who provides legal aid to workers' movements in Raigarh told me, 'The society itself is not coherent; so how can a movement be? The fault lines were always existing but becomes clearer when anti-dispossession movements start.' She said, in her experience, large landowners get incorporated into companies as contractors (something a mining official had also told me). 'So, they do not even allow struggles for minimum wages in the industry.' In another village in Tamnar, when coal mines shut, just like in Birampalli, not only did people lose their jobs but they also lost their provident fund, and no retrenchment allowance was paid. She said that a few activists along with workers put a case in the labour court. 'Contractors were ex-landowners from the same village. When we were putting the case, they got angry. They thought it was a case against them.' In another instance, when the labour court asked for reparations to be paid to workers for loss of social security incomes, the contractors informally took the money back from them.

Rooted within the agrarian populism of Birampalli's politics is the conflict between petty capital and large/medium farmers on one hand, and small/marginal landowners and wage labourers on the other (Borras Jr, 2020; Pattenden, 2023, p. 9). The former might be able to retain its class position even in the

nonfarm future by joining ranks of brokers, contractors, while the latter would join the reserve army of labour with low chances of permanent employment (Li, 2010b). The smaller landowners or the landless face bigger losses, with the landless people unlikely to receive any commitment to employment either from the company or the contractors. Dev Bhagat, an adivasi *Sarpanch* in a village 20 kms from Birampalli where all households had already lost their cultivable land said that even contractors in these mines first ask if the worker had lost any land in the project. Even when they receive jobs, existing scholarship shows that the Dalits and adivasis are likely to be more vulnerable in the labour market, including in the industrial sector (Lerche & Shah, 2018; Sanchez & Strümpell, 2014; Strümpell, 2022).

Finally, the composition and demands of the mobilisations within Birampalli and in Tamnar block points towards the possibility that demands made by agrarian anti-dispossession movements can change over the cycle of the acquisition which is a lengthy process from the stage of serving notice to the clearances received for the project, and the implementation of the project. At the face of imminent displacement, the social base of the mobilisation resisting the acquisition might re-strategise and alter their demands to negotiate terms of compensation rather than completely oppose such displacement. Dileshwar, a landless Dalit man who repairs cycles and works as a farm labourer in Birampalli indicated this shifting nature of alliances and tactics which he said would even then continue to exclude the landless. 'No one calls me. Anyway, the big men will decide everything about our future. And by big men I mean the big farmers, including adivasis. So, when I say big, I am not talking about caste.' Though impacted more adversely than the land-owning households, landless people like Dileshwar were left out of being asked for opinions, both by the state and the mobilisation that aims to resist it.

8.3.2 'Adivasiness' for claims making: does 'politics unlimited' work?

Birampalli, reflective of the demography in Tamnar, is not a geographically isolated territory inhabited only by adivasis. Half of Tamnar's population is adivasi and 10 percent is Dalit. Birampalli, as is true for the region, has a long history of habitation and settlement of non-adivasi groups, all of whom - albeit differentially - face the onslaught of land grabbing for state and private capital. Patels and Nayaks in Birampalli and generally, Sahus in Tamnar, belonging to OBC groups are important landowning groups and are politically influential. The Kawar tribe (Rathias), and dalit groups like Chauhans and Satnamis also own land which they have owned and held on to for generations across Northern Chhattisgarh. In this context, the narrative of opposing dispossession to protect adivasi identity is utilised politically as *one* of the myriad strategies and tactics in the mobilisation against land acquisition which has a broader base of leadership and support.

A strong non-adivasi leadership and participation across multiple villages, including Birampalli, does not allow to interpret the mobilisation as an Adivasi movement; however, the legal protection under the Fifth Schedule of the constitution earmarked for 'adivasi territories' is foregrounded as a primary argument to resist displacement. I also argue that the coercive nature of the alliance between state and private capital (both domestic and foreign) have led to bypassing of these constitutional safeguards. The continuing large-scale displacement in the region is a testament to the weakening of the tactical value of using adivasi identity for political negotiations that are reliant on India's constitutional framework.

Mithas Rathia (adivasi) and Durgavati (dalit) who first attended the public hearing from Birampalli in 2008, have spent two decades in the *Samit*i mobilising households for rallies and protests, keeping in touch with the leaders from other villages and writing applications to submit to the administration to stop the displacements. As part of a large mobilisation, the participation and leadership of which is fragmented and distributed across the region, Mithas said it was difficult to form uniform strategies across the block. 'People can call this an adivasi movement, but everyone is involved.' But he agreed that calling it an Adivasi *kshetra* (territory) aids the claims of protection from displacement in contravention of provisions like Fifth Schedule, PESA, and the Forest Rights Act, 2006. But he did not think the resistance in Birampalli prioritised adivasi interest (which I have shown is not homogenous) or kept away other social groups from participating. This broad based solidarity in the movement is not apparent in media reports and activist narratives that foreground adivasis in resistances across the region (M. Chakraborty, 2018; A. Gupta, 2016; R. Kumar, 2016; Survival International, n.d.).

An OBC leader from another village told me it was useful to foreground adivasis given the legal protection earmarked for Adivasi areas. The slogan of *'Na Lok Sabha na Rajya Sabha, Sabse upar Gram Sabha'* (Neither the Lower House nor the Upper House of the Parliament, the village council is the most significant) which the movement uses is based upon the rights for decentralized governance and decision making at village levels guaranteed under PESA. These provisions are highlighted in all campaigns, including while engaging with the environmental impact assessment and social impact assessments mandatory for public hearings. In absence of one coherent strategising for the movement that was fragmented across a large geographical area and included villages at different stages of dispossession affected by different projects, there was a concerted effort to rather stall projects through claims of bypassing of the constitutional provisions. On the other hand, environmental degradations in the region were also used by the affected groups, especially in campaigns against expansions of existing mines or transfer of mines from underground to open cast mines (S. Sharma, 2012a, p. 22). Examples of past dispossessions in nearby villages which bore the maximum

brunt of pollution, were used as a strong argument against further mining and those displaced by previous projects continued to attend the major rallies and protests for other villages.

The arguments on environmental concerns, livelihood losses and the adivasi identity reflect a long and desperate attempt by the people in the region to halt further mining, reflects the local and national experience of displacement of adivasis in post-colonial India, the demographic prominence of adivasis in the block and learnings from other adivasi movements against displacement in the country (Dungdung et al., 2022). While in the previous section I spoke of the class contradictions of the movement, it is crucial to point out the broad-based alliances that the agrarian struggle has built across castes/tribes and classes, using different strategies of creating solidarities. As Dev Bhagat, the adivasi *Sarpanch* whose village was dispossessed and remains active in anti-mining mobilisations told me, 'The main thing that will be lost is the *kshetra* (territory) and fraternity. Since the territory is here, we can come to one platform and sit to discuss, once the territory is gone, a platform to come and discuss (differences) will be lost.'

Finally, I discuss the limitations of foregrounding of the adivasi identity (even in a multi class/caste/tribe movement) to resist dispossession which has been claimed as an 'instance of claiming citizenship of the nation, out of a history of simultaneous subalternity and priority' (P. Banerjee, 2006a, p. 128). My work is not equipped to capture the cultural values and emotions that ties the Adivasi identity to a 'landscape' (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988), but rather contextualises its utility as a tactic within political economy of coal mining. It enquires into the 'claim-making' process, what Dipesh Chakrabarty famously called 'Politics Unlimited' (Chakrabarty, 2013), where adivasis must use every tactic available to them to oppose the ongoing processes of dispossession.

My experience in Tamnar supports the view that this form of claim-making against the might of the state allied with private capital has been rendered rather powerless in halting 'all-too-frequent dispossession' (Oskarsson & Sareen, 2020, p. 13). At the state level, Chhattisgarh only notified the PESA rules for self-governance in 2022, 25 years after the central Act was passed (Drolia, 2022). Even then, it appointed the district collector as the main authority in charge of the land acquisition process as well as the officer in charge of listening to complaints raised by Gram Sabhas (Hindustan Times, 2022), making a mockery of the limited consultation process. The environmental clearance process is also fraught with corruption and manipulation by project proponents even before the hearings are held. The EIA report is drafted by the proponent company via consultants that it appoints, with no independent assessment by the state. Resistance particularly against coal mining is weakened by the legal framework that does not need people's consent for it, rather must only 'consult' the affected people (Srivastav & Singh, 2022).

For GP2's clearance, the EIA was drafted by a company, which was debarred by the World Bank group soon after for fraudulent practices. Private consulting groups that take up such contracts boast on their websites on the number of projects they have got approval for on behalf of the private sector by preparing the right documents. At the GP2 hearing I attended, thousands of people present at the site boycotted the hearing and refused to enter the enclosure set up by the company in one of the affected villages. The videos of the hearing within the enclosure which I saw, proceedings of which were also broadcasted on loudspeakers showed not more than 50 people had been inside. Despite this, the project received its clearance soon after with the hearing accepted as a legally valid one. Forest rights were never settled in the affected areas for the project, and the forest clearance form of the company does not mention any data source for backing their claim of completed settlements.

Both the framing and implementation of the laws empower the state and capital (public or private) as its allies, which limits the gains that resistance based on Adivasi identity and decentralization of power can achieve (D. Ghosh, 2016b; P. Gupta & Roy-Chowdhury, 2017; N. Sundar, 2004). The political economy of extraction and acquisition also doles out coercion and violence on those who resist it, including imprisonment, false cases or even direct physical attacks on them (Dungdung et al., 2022; Sethi, 2012). It is in this environment of subversion of laws, coercion, intimidation, and direct violence that politics of resistance among adivasis and non-adivasis is contextualized here. The resistance against mining and the negotiations of terms of incorporation into them, and the class contradictions within these, are shown to be inseparably linked with the agrarian question of labour, mining instigated agrarian changes, political economy of extraction and limitations of adivasi identity politics.

8.4 Conclusion

In this final chapter on empirical findings for the thesis, I have shown how the conditions of agriculture and wage work and the threat of imminent dispossession and politics around it are directly shaped by expansion of coal mining in the region. The experience of dispossession and ensuing employment from the first phase of acquisition, the uneven impact against an unequal agrarian backdrop and the general conditions of wage employment in the region, have built Birampalli's broad-based mobilisation against the resistance. The negotiation with the complexities of dispossession has made this resistance the fulcrum of adivasi politics in the village at present. Unlike in WB where the negotiations for land rights were fragmented and

individualised, the scale and mechanism of dispossession affecting all of Birampalli at once have made the space for such resistance.

The broad-based solidarity challenging private domestic capital is a form of class struggle, one that defends the existing control over means of production unequally divided across and within adivasi groups. This resistance having learnt from their experience of land-loss is also already conscious of their non-farm future, within which negotiations for labour rights might take prominence in future. Though the villagers in Birampalli are yet reluctant to directly negotiate or demand for better working conditions in the post-dispossession scenario due to tactical concerns of giving up too soon, but learning from their first experience, they are also speaking of widow pensions, compensations for those unable to take up jobs and insisting on taking up only permanent jobs in the company. The populist character of the movement at present, focused on landed capital interests, is likely to take different forms in future, as its demands, tactics of resistance vs negotiation, and class alliances may push it towards more progressive politics (include landless voices, women's jobs, living conditions in resettlement colonies) or not (for instance, only demand better prices for land). The adivasi agrarian question of politics, in its adaptation or rejection of 'class consciousness' (Borras Jr, 2020; Pattenden, 2023), will in turn shape the agrarian question of labour for adivasis in their nonfarm future. Whether progressive demands are strengthened within the mobilisation creating spaces for emancipatory politics for the landless, women, disabled and other marginalised voices, remain to be seen.

Raigarh District, Chhattisgarh

Women farmers hire machines that come with 3-4 male labourers to complete threshing and sorting of paddy on time, before the *Mandi* begins purchase.

Women farmers preparing paddy bundles to carry them back home, working on *Adla-Badli* or labour exchange basis between households.

Rally from villages in Tamnar block to the Revenue office to demand halting of land acquisition in due consideration of resolutions against mining in the *Gram Sabha.* The chimney of the power plant in Tamnar in the background.

Men and Women carrying coal from the riverbed to their villages to mark the Koyla Satyagraha on 2nd October.

9. Conclusion

Just a month before I wrote this conclusion, Durgawati's daughter-in-law Sudha in Birampalli told me over telephone that a small parcel of land that they legally lost to CEM more than a decade back was finally lost to them. Though formally within the mine's perimeter, the deallocation of mines by the Court and the subsequent mine closure had kept tiny semi-fertile plots of about five adiavsi and dalit households 'safe' where they grew peanuts and pulses for consumption. While her husband was reinstated as a labourer in the washery plant when the mine reopened recently, the coal mine has now engulfed these plots which also had Sudha's all four mahua trees. Spring was around the corner and her only source of income for two months in spring was now lost.

500 kms away from Raigarh, two Santhal party cadres of the TMC used their own money to buy hens for adivasi households in Ranipalli for those who agreed to celebrate a traditional Santhal festival *Khuton*. One of them told me, the festival is typically celebrated in Autumn, but the pandemic regulations did not allow it for the past two years. He said people had also slowly stopped celebrating traditional festivals and the hen was a form of incentive to involve younger people in such rituals. He admitted it might even reap some electoral benefits at the *panchayat* level, but that was not the only outcome they hoped for. As threats to the village land became more imminent, he said, reviving these traditions to build a sense of solidarity within Ranipalli for any collective resistance later was important.

These continuing conversations capture the *dynamism* of reproduction, dispossession, and political struggles among adivasis constituted in relational ways, which I have tried to comprehend and analyse in a specific conjuncture under contemporary capitalism. The thesis has drawn out the *class dynamics of reproduction, accumulation, differentiation, exploitation, and resistance among adivasis in India*, rooted within Marxist political economy, using the 'Agrarian Question' debates as its frame of reference (Levien et al., 2018; Pattenden, 2023; Shattuck et al., 2023). Responding to Byres' case for more comparative research in political economy that 'prevents analytical closure' (T. J. Byres, 1995, p. 572), in this concluding chapter, I draw out the key inferences from a comparative analysis of the empirical findings.

To do this, I consider in succession the two research questions I framed in the introduction of the thesis. To answer the questions, I refer to the conceptual framing of the AAQ, comprising of the three con-constitutive dimensions of AQL, dispossession, and politics. I end this chapter with reflections on the scope for further research through expanding and debating the premise of the Adivasi Agrarian Question.

How can we understand the variations in ongoing processes of capitalist agrarian transitions among adivasis in rural India?

The comparative analysis draws out the tendencies and the differences in reproductive conditions in the two sites with divergent salience of the agrarian and non-agrarian, and processes of agrarian change in social reproduction of adivasis. The two field sites in Chhattisgarh and WB show contrasting extents of drawing reproductive needs from cultivation and generally from land-based occupations, while in the wage labour market, similarities in precarity and informality is noticed, with differences in wage levels, employment opportunities, and gendered exclusion of women in non-agricultural wage work.

Without creating binaries between structural (agrarian to non-agrarian) and spatial changes (rural to urban) within its study of agrarian transformations, in Birampalli in Chhattisgarh, we see agrarian change within processes of rural industrialisation (Nielsen & Oskarsson, 2016) while in Ranipalli in WB, processes of agrarian urbanisation are witnessed (Balakrishnan & Gururani, 2021; Gururani, 2020). The empirical findings show that the deepening of capitalism within rural adivasi-inhabited areas is uneven in four salient aspects within these broader processes: conditions of agriculture, development of capitalism in agriculture, availability and conditions of non-agrarian wage labour work, and nature of dispossession.

Agrarian Question of Labour

Disparity in access to cultivable land, quality of land and relations of production within agriculture are the key differentiating factors in the two sites in drawing reproductive needs from the agrarian. The non-agrarian labour market generally provides insecure, casual and precarious work in both sites illustrating the reproduction of classes of labour 'through insecure and oppressive' means (Bernstein, 2006, p. 454), though the construction sector provides more regular but lower paid work than the mining sector. Both sites provide instances of the 'reproductive squeeze' that was a key concern within AQL for increasing numbers of adivasi classes of labour, as I framed it in Chapter 2. Differentiation and stratification, the second dimension of AQL, is also evident in both sites through different mechanisms. In both sites, access to salaried secure employment through affirmative action policies is scarce but lead to class mobility. In Chhattisgarh, differentiation is still ongoing within cultivation through investment in agrarian capital and hiring of wage workers; in WB, expanded reproduction within cultivation or casual wage work is not possible for even landed adivasis, and differentiation is ongoing in limited manner via non agrarian petty commodity production and salaried employment. The third dimension of AQL, linkages between land and

labour, is discernable in both sites in varying ways. In Chhattisgarh, wage income from non-agricultural work is invested in agrarian capital, like land and tractors, propelling capitalist relations within cultivation. And access to land shields classes of adivasis farmers from the harshest conditions of mining work. In WB, income from construction work is routed to cultivation for paddy for simple reproduction, as cultivation cannot generate enough income to cover all costs.

In both sites, access to land was sharply divided between adivasi groups as well as between adivasis and other social groups (OBCs in WB and Dalit and OBCs in Chhattisgarh) rooted in historical inequalities. In WB, the Lodha households are entirely landless within geographical proximity of Ranipalli, while Santhals had access to some land, and at least, held titles to the homestead land. In Birampalli, while landlessness among Kawar adivasis is rarely seen, less than half of the Agaria and Majhi households have land with no household owning more than 2 acres. These inter-tribal differences in access to land thereby differentiates the salience of land-based occupations between adivasi groups, a point largely lost even within discussions on class differentiation among adivasis.

Inequality in landholding structures is sharper in Chhattisgarh with land ownership ranging between less than an acre to upto 26 acres, but landlessness is much lower among adivasis at 10 percent. In WB, in contrast landlessness is much higher at 30 percent for Santhal households (100 percent for Lodha households); 93 percent of landed Santhal households had less than an acre of land. Therefore, it is evident that cultivation and land-based occupations, including availability of farm labour work, as reproductive basis is greater in Chhattisgarh than in WB. Besides bigger landholding sizes, better land fertility and much higher access to the public procurement system in Chhattisgarh generally allow farmers to get higher prices for paddy. Kawar adivasis in Birampalli were both a numerically and economically dominant group, with more than half of adivasi households owning at least 2.5 acres of land and a couple of households owning even above 25 acres of land. In contrast, though more numerically dominant in Ranipalli, Santhal adivasis were also in possession of generally more infertile land compared to Mahatos in the village who cultivated much of the low-lying paddy land, thereby differentiating income from paddy between the tribal and non-tribal people.

The development of capitalism in agriculture was thus more prominent in Chhattisgarh, with income from agricultural capital and non-agricultural wage work invested in mechanisation of cultivation. In contrast, the development of capitalism is not evident within cultivation in WB, with surplus being extracted almost entirely by commercial capital, along with 'expropriation of a part of necessary consumption of the producer' (Shivji, 2017, p. 11). This is reflected in high marketable surplus of paddy, despite very low yield,

because of interlocked credit and output markets that make adivasi farmers dependent on credit from paddy traders to cover costs of cultivation (K. Bharadwaj, 1985; Harriss-White, 2008). Adivasis are absent from such commercial trading of paddy, even as petty capital, which renders the surplus transfer divided along tribal/non-tribal lines as well.

The findings also show linkages between agrarian and non-agrarian sectors, as Adivasi capital and classes of labour move between them. This pertains to the linkages between the realms of land and labour which I conceptualised as a key aspect of AQL within the AAQ in Chapter 2. Wages from non-agrarian labour are routed into the agricultural sector, for simple and expanded reproduction of agrarian PCP in both sites (Bernstein, 2006, p. 454). Surplus extraction through employment of farm labourers and renting out of tractors is common in Chhattisgarh, especially with those owning above 10 acres of land, with nonagricultural income from salaried employment also invested in purchasing of agricultural equipment. In Ranipalli, in contrast, non-agricultural income is essential to even cover the costs of cultivation, thereby investing wage income into cultivation for simple reproduction and not accumulation purposes. Hiring in of labour is very low, mostly limited to exchange within extended families, with rare instances of contractualisation of farming work visible during peak seasons.

In my conceptualisation of classes of labour in Chapter 2, I included wage labourers, farmers who work as wage labour outside of exchange labour for needs of simple reproduction, and non-agrarian PCP who do not accumulate within its ambit (Bernstein, 2006; Lerche, 2009; Pattenden, 2016a). Net hiring in of farm labour is not used here to differentiate between farmers and farmer-workers within this definition as empirically I have shown that hiring in of farm labour can be non-indicative of class status when it comes to women-headed households, disabled headed households, salaried employees even at the lowest ranks of public employment, and even those (particularly young men) who decide to work as non-agricultural workers at higher wages and substitute household labour for cheaper farm labour within the village. The fragmentation of basis of reproduction thus requires careful qualitative analysis of complexities of class formation, constituted by gender, tribe, caste, disability to create 'unambiguous class categories' (Bernstein, 2006, p. 456).

All Santhals in Ranipalli and Lodhas in the hamlet next to it are categorised as adivasi classes of labour, with a caveat that expansion in non-agrarian PCP conditioned by political patronage is discernible and might turn into petty capital. As a source of cheap wage goods for classes of labour (eg, tea shop providing cheap food), such capital might exist and even expand within capitalism in which case contradictions and exploitation between such adivasi PCP and classes of labour remain a possibility (Harriss-White, 2018;

Harriss-White, 2014). In Birampalli, adivasis comprise both classes of farmers and classes of labour; in the former category, there are capitalist farmers and petty commodity producing farmers, who can reproduce their capital at the same or expanded levels. I have shown how farmers owning more than 8-10 acres of land almost entirely depend on cultivation, mainly due to good remuneration through public procurement of paddy, and those owning above 5 acres can shield themselves from harshest conditions of non-agrarian wage work. Those owning 2-3 acres of land, who might draw their reproductive needs both from land and labour markets in agrarian and non-agrarian sector can be considered as an 'ambiguous' class, where the ambiguity arises from which source of income is 'primary' and whose class alliances might be dynamic, particularly within processes of acquisition like Birampalli faces. But they still form a part of adivasi classes of labour, which allows for understanding and further exploring these ambiguities (therefore, 'classes') for cultivation as PCP do not cover all needs of reproduction, seasonally, and over time.

One instance of an 'ambiguous class category' is reflected in categorising public sector employees who also cultivate land with household and hired labour. Well-paid salaried employment though difficult to access in both sites, create differentiated capacities for class mobility in the two sites. In Ranipalli, it has allowed the Santhal school teacher to invest in a piece of homestead land in the town, primarily influenced by the opportunities of education for his two disabled children who cannot get quality education in the village school. In Birampalli, all the three schoolteachers have invested in agrarian capital (tractors) that generate rent income and form a basis of expanded reproduction. Where material deprivation is high, as among many adivasis in both these sites, higher income from employment can lead to differentiation with only very limited scope for accumulation.

Crisis of labour as a crisis of reproduction also plays out in different ways in the non-agrarian wage market in the two sites. In Birampalli, non-agrarian wage work in construction (rural housing and industrial construction) and mining work is not available easily, mostly employ men with heavy preference for migrant workers that capital can discipline more easily. Even legally mandated compensatory jobs are not guaranteed as the case in Birampalli showed, but when available, pay wage rates of Rs 350-450 per day. This is almost double of Rs 200-250 per day wages in the Jhargram town where Ranipalli's Santhal workers commute to work. The construction work in Jhargram is available more easily, (though with increasing incoming of migrant contractors who bring tied migrant workers from other districts), and women find casual employment in shops and construction work unlike widespread exclusion in Raigarh's mines.

The ties of dependence between dominant and landless/land poor households divided along the lines of tribe have been broken/re-enforced in different ways in the two sites. In Birampalli, the Adivasi classes of

labour, like other land poor households in the village, have been to a large extent able to cut dependence on agrarian capital within the village. This is a gendered experience as women still remain tied to agrarian work for lack of non-agrarian work, but I showed how landless households rely on non-agrarian work reducing dependence on agrarian capital in the village in line with broader literature (Carswell & De Neve, 2013; Heyer, 2012; For instance, see Lerche, 1999). While the literature has focused on interactions between caste and class and shown how Dalit emancipatory politics has led to cutting the ties of patronage and dependence, I have shown, similar ties of dependence between two adivasi groups, the cultivator Kawars and the landless ironsmith Agarias also reduced through access to wage work due to processes of rural industrialisation.

In Ranipalli, the Santhals and Lodhas both are part of adivasi classes of labour, with mobility discernible only among Santhals through salaried employment and expansion in non-agrarian PCP to turn to petty capital. With differentiated outcomes from the land reforms in the 1970s, the landless Lodha adivasis are exploited by both Santhals and other castes in the labour market, due to racialised stigma, and depend on fuelwood gathering and casualised work at the lowest rung of informal economy. The stigmatised oppression of Lodhas in the non-agrarian wage work, where they even struggle to get a day's wages and work in groups on piecerate basis, continue to make them dependent on Santhal classes of labour for income and distribution of welfare schemes that are crucial for their reproductive needs.

The relationships of exploitation and domination between adivasi groups and adivasi classes, have been reenforced or minimised by specific nature of development of capitalist relations in cultivation and non-agrarian sectors in both sites, which are crucial to understand the interactions of these inequalities with processes of dispossession and building of progressive politics.

Dispossession

Elaborating on dispossession as the second key agrarian question for adivasis as part of AAQ, I had argued that the AAQ framework allows for understanding variations in mechanisms of dispossession (accumulation by dispossession and dispossession by differentiation) and differentiated impact on reproductive conditions (AQL) as these mechanisms interact with unequal agrarian structures. The findings have captured both these variations in processes and differentiated impact, stratified along class and tribes (also, gender, age, disability).

Constituting the agrarian changes in both sites, are two varying trajectories of dispossession among adivasis, despite legal provisions meant for 'protecting' adivasi land. Birampalli is a case of accumulation by

dispossession, where dispossession is staggered, led by coercive state acquisition and in both the past and the impending dispossession, carried out at the behest of private capital (Harvey, 2007; Levien, 2015). While the first round of dispossession unevenly affected Birampalli's households, its impacts were mediated by existing agrarian inequalities and marginalization based on class, tribe, disability, age, and gender in the compensatory employment provided, before the mine shut down. I showed how low compensation amounts, spending on consumption expenditure and siphoning of compensation money by speculative capital from a chit fund company had resulted in no investments in land. Investments in agrarian capital like tractors have been mediated by other income sources and class position of land losing households, intensifying processes of differentiation among adivasis.

The current process of dispossession threatens to displace the entire village. The expansion of the extractive economy will replace capitalist relations in farming with a more advanced form of capitalism, through appropriation of adivasi land and resources (Araghi, 2009; Hall, 2013; Levien, 2015; Munshi, 2012; Nathan & Xaxa, 2012; N. Sundar, 2016). Provisions under PESA, the Fifth Schedule or consent provisions under the new LARR Act do not extend any protection when it comes to coal mining (Srivastav & Singh, 2022). My findings have also shown that the protective legislatures regulating individual transfer of land are unable to protect land of poor adivasis from private individual alienation and renders Dalits vulnerable to agrarian capital of adivasis and non-tribals. Following Li (2010b) and drawing from the impact of last round of dispossession, there are no simple linkages to be drawn between dispossession and proletarianisation. This is due to both the likelihood of reinvestment of compensation into land and other agrarian capital as well as the inability of the mining sector to absorb all the workers, particularly the women, elderly and the disabled. While differentiated impact is a certain outcome of dispossession (S. Agarwal & Levien, 2020; Baviskar, 1995; Kabra, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2020; Noy, 2020; A. Shah, 2022), I have shown that its impact here is differentiated between and across adivasi groups: the landless and land poor Majhis and Agarias will be marginalised further compared to Kawar adivasis, who generally have better access to land here.

In Ranipalli, historical processes of dispossession have been interrupted by processes of redistribution through state mediation, but only for Santhals. Santhals have unevenly gained from land reforms, as the high landlessness in Ranipalli show. The already fragmented holdings are under pressure from speculative capital (non-agrarian) and capital from traditional elites (agrarian capital) in the region who have returned to claim their land after decades of no rent seeking after implementation of land reforms. Despite the laws prohibiting such transfer of land from adivasis to non-tribals without regulatory approval, individual

alienation continues due to bypassing of laws or incomplete land reforms program that did not complete registration processes for many Santhal cultivators. With the development of land markets, the fertility of land is delinked from the valuation of land due to proximity to urban centers (Chakravorty, 2016); but Santhals are unlikely to gain from the rise in land values due to the restrictions on sale of land to non-tribals which can depress land prices due to costly and tedious transfer processes. Also, where they are sharecroppers without a record of rights issued for the land and due to the marginalisation of tenants in land transfers (Nielsen, 2018), their gains from developing land markets are likely to be subdued.

Lodhas, who form a tiny percentage of WB's population (about 1,00,000 in total in the state), gained little from the land reforms and are effectively landless, and unlikely to be able to make effective demands of the state for redistributive reforms. Apart from failure of land reforms program to distribute land to them, poor implementation of the FRA in the state has rendered most without even titles to their homesteads (A. Banerjee et al., 2010). When they receive homestead titles, they struggle to hold on to such land due to overactive speculative capital in collusion with those in power (S. Chakraborty, 2022a). Within the context of in-situ urbanisation and expanding urban frontiers into the rural (Gururani, 2020), the interaction between the complex legacies of land reforms, prohibitive laws on transfer of adivasi land and developing land markets are likely to marginalise adivasis further, who might hold on to their tiny plots under increasingly uncertain conditions. Adivasis in WB divided along class and tribal lines are likely to be impacted differentially from dispossession even from fragmented holdings which form the basis of social reproduction.

How do the ensuing changes in class dynamics and reproduction impact Adivasi politics in negotiating or resisting such transformations?

Politics

Under varying trajectories of capitalist transitions in adivasi areas, political struggles in the two villages have taken distinctly different shapes at the current conjuncture. While conceptualising the question of politics within AAQ, I made a case for understanding Adivasi politics with its multiplicities of demands, tactics, strategies, and inequalities of class, gender and other social relations embedded in it, which might or might not be able to create progressive possibilities and broad-based solidarities. The AAQ provided the analytical tools to draw out these heterogeneities and stratifications in both sites of research, where Chhattisgarh was embroiled in an anti-acquisition resistance and WB saw the negotiating tactics with the state to make

demands for social welfare. These political struggles in both villages are neither homogenous nor egalitarian, as are not adivasis who are 'complex mosaics of cultural groups and social classes, products of diverse agrarian histories and interaction with the state' (N. Rao, 2017, p. 30).

In Birampalli, the imminent threat of displacement has created a broad-based solidarity among villagers though the demands of the movement that, as I have shown, foreground interests of landed capital. Despite the unequal landholdings, 'a range of access to a range of land', including homestead land, forms an important basis of reproduction of all villagers (Borras et al., 2022). It is the threat to not just cultivable land that impacts classes of farmers and labour unevenly, but the additional threat of loss of homes, that create the political urgency of a mobilisation aiming to defend land rights. The movement is also a result of long drawn mobilisations in the village over labour rights resulting out of the previous dispossession and contentious politics in the entire region against expansion of mining, causing environmental damage and loss of livelihood. The legal premise of coal mining in India (Srivastav & Singh, 2022), Chhattisgarh state's extractive regime (Adhikari & Chhotray, 2020) and the limited success of Adivasi mobilisations against land grabs (Levien & Upadhyay, 2022, p. 301; Oskarsson & Sareen, 2020) might make it implausible to halt the displacement. This, I have argued, might lead to different alliances for demand making in the non-farm future (Majumder & Nielsen, 2016), as people negotiate the terms of inclusion within the processes of rural industrialisation (Nielsen & Oskarsson, 2016).

In Jhargram, I stayed at a crucial political moment that had recently witnessed a massive armed left-wing insurgency against a Communist party in power followed by the fall of a 34-year long regime. The TMC that came to power, is consolidating its position against the insurgents and rising threats from its main opposition, the right-wing BJP, in the region through increased spending on welfare schemes, cash transfer schemes and a near-universal public distribution of subsidised food grains. Santhals in Ranipalli, who have a history of oppositional politics against the CPM, have aligned themselves with the TMC to gain benefits from a populist regime. But as real estate syndicates (also close to CPM) and traditional landed elites of the region (oppositional to the CPM) both threaten adivasis' possession of land, Santhals find it tenuous to defend their land despite their allegiance to the party. The withdrawal of patronage to any organisation of informal workers, predominance of informal work in the town, little alternative livelihood and threats from incoming of migrant workers who work under worse conditions (Lerche et al., 2017; Pattenden, 2016a; R. Srivastava, 2019; R. Srivastava & Sutradhar, 2016), have provided little space for solidarities for workers' rights among adivasi classes of labour.

Lodhas, reflecting of their relations of domination with Santhal and Mahatos in the agrarian and 'super-exploitation' in the non-agrarian, are also excluded in political claim-making on land, labour and welfare rights. They do not have formal land titles even for their homestead, and the money received for housing infrastructure is mediated and controlled by Santhal party cadres on behalf of Lodhas. Starvation deaths have been reported among Lodhas even last year (S. Chakraborty, 2022b), as availability of wage labour work has gone down due to the pandemic and access to PDS remain uneven. The government has formed a development board for Lodha-Sabar adivasis in 2022, but its proclaimed aims remain limited to cultural aspects of tribal life (Nandi, 2022), instead of also addressing the concerns of material deprivation. The stigmatised marginalisation of Lodhas creates no opportunities of solidarity with Santhals, who also exploit them in the labour market and in disbursal of welfare benefits. The relations of exploitation and domination that are being negotiated with in creating unified struggles threatened with land loss in Birampalli are entrenched further in Ranipalli through mediation of party patronage.

In Chapter 2, I wrote that the AAQ framework asks of Adivasis politics about the class character and contradictions of exclusions and inclusions. Here, I have shown how the class alliances and class characters of demands vary between time and space and worsen inequalities between adivasi groups. While Chhattisgarh moved between labour rights negotiations to resisting land rights, foregrounding interests of petty capital, as the acquisition becomes more imminent, the agrarian movement might make demands for their non-agrarian future. Santhals in WB has moved from an armed left-wing insurgency against a Left-wing government, to negotiating for inclusions a populist regime, exploiting other members of adivasis classes of labour in the process. Both struggles have emancipatory potential via demands of defense of land and distribution of state welfare, but the class inequalities in the struggles face the danger to further worsening conditions of those entrenched at the bottom of adivasi classes of labour.

Land *And* Labour in the Adivasi Agrarian Question

My framing of the AAQ at the beginning of the thesis had foregrounded the co-constitution of reproduction, dispossession, and politics rather than treating them as discrete themes of enquiry. The empirical findings show that binaries between land and labour, and preference for either the future as a farmer or a worker are not the primary questions for Adivasi struggles unless a redistributive land reform is on the agenda. In Birampalli, the first round of loss of land led to a workers' mobilisation for compensatory jobs, which then created a mobilising base in the village strengthened by regional mobilisation in defense of land. But being

a movement for earlier and current land losers, it has undermined the cause of both dalit and adivasi households who are landless and women who are not absorbed within non-agrarian workforce, thus creating class and social contradictions in the demands. The Maoist insurgency in Jhargram more than a decade back directly led to the creation of the new district. The proximity to the town, which is the determining factor of accessing wage work for Santhals in Ranipalli, and low income from such work have in turn, started conversations in the village on strategies to defend their tiny landholdings and ways to participate with informed consent within developing land markets.

Most adivasis are already fragmented in their sources of income, structurally and spatially, which demands new tools of struggle, new organising principles, and broader solidarities not essentially along ethnic lines (Chun & Agarwala, 2016). These issues are complicated by the non-linear aspects of agrarian transition: impact of national and global events, like the demonetisation of the Indian currency and the global pandemic, which has sent back workers in urban India to the rural and the agrarian. We are yet to see the full impact of this reverse migration on systemic changes, but it pushes us to understand land as not simply the site of production but reproduction (T. Bhattacharya, 2017; Borras et al., 2022; A. Shah & Lerche, 2020). It is only through 'a range of access to a range of land' (Borras et al., 2022) and a range of access to a range of labour work that adivasis, increasingly joining classes of labour, can meet their reproductive needs. It is through linking land and labour in AQL, dispossession, and politics, as I have argued through this chapter that the empirical complexities of the *Adivasi Agrarian Question* can be comprehended.

Scope for further research: Expanding the Adivasi Agrarian Question

While studying agrarian transformations in India, Shah and Harriss-White argued that contemporary agrarian changes have created a new circumstance 'which needs new conceptual tools' (2011, p. 17). This thesis has aimed at contributing to the framing of the conceptual tool, the Adivasi Agrarian Question, and empirically investigating it to understand class dynamics of agrarian change among adivasis in India. I propose here three scopes for further research to continue the conversations of the AAQ while welcoming any expansion, alterations, and fresh analysis.

One, the ecological agrarian question is not enquired into this thesis with any depth (McMichael, 2006; Moore, 2008) that can discuss the environmental concerns of extraction, forest management, and loss of common land that continue to impact adivasis (For instance, see Bhushan & Hazra, 2008; Oskarsson, 2017; Padel & Das, 2010; Savyasaachi, 2011).

Two, the gendered agrarian question (T. Bhattacharya, 2017; Naidu & Ossome, 2016; O'Laughlin, 2012) needs more in-depth research as adivasi women have more unequal access to land than men, are witnessing increasing alienation from land while being more reliant on land-based occupations for their reproduction due to high entry barriers in non-farm work (J. Gupta, 2002; Prasad, 2021; N. Rao, 2006, 2017).

Three, the agrarian question of capital which formed the more crucial agrarian question in earlier debates continue to be an important question till now (T. J. Byres, 2016; Moyo et al., 2013; Oya, 2013). The inequality of access to land, ongoing differentiation within and between adivasis and non-tribal people are directly linked to capital formation, whose root might be in the rural, agrarian, urban or non-agrarian sources. The linkages between accumulation of capital in land and labour within adivasi areas remain under-researched and can benefit from more work on ongoing class dynamics.

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Glossary

Adivasi: Scheduled Tribes in India

Adla-Badli: Exchange based farm labour work done between members of cultivating households

Aman paddy: Paddy cultivated in monsoons, between July and December

Bigha: Measure of land size in West Bengal where 3 bigha equals 1 acre

Chulha: Cooking stove

Dahi: Dry land in West Bengal

Dalit: Previously untouchable castes in India, categorised as Scheduled Castes

Gaontia: Traditional village chief in parts of Chhattisgarh responsible for land management and revenue collection

Gram Sabha: Village assembly, the legislative body at the base of decentralised governance structure in India

Jan Sunwaai: Public hearing

Jotedar: Wealthy large peasants in feudal Bengal, who cultivated large tracts of land with tenants, sharecroppers, and farm labourers

Katha: Measure of land size in West Bengal where 20 Katha equals 1 Bigha

Kisaan: Literally farmers, referring to large farmers in Chhattisgarh

Mandi: Literally translated as a market, refers to centres for public procurement of paddy

Mistry: a skilled mason or a construction worker

Nabal : seasonal migration to fertile intensively cultivated plains in West Bengal for farm labour

Panchayat: Village council, the lowest level of rural local governance

Poribartan: Change

Samiti: Organisation or Committee

Sarpanch: President or head of Panchayat

Tikra: semi-fertile land in Chhattisgarh

Zamindar: ex-feudal landlords under British colonial rule