

Productive Forces and Relations of Production in the Countryside

The agrarian question is central to the analysis of the dynamics of both national and global capitalism, particularly because production relations in agriculture and in rural areas are deeply intertwined with class, gender, and – in India and other parts of South Asia – caste and other hierarchies. In many parts of the world, class divisions in agriculture are stark, with a land-owning elite controlling the means of production while the majority -- wage workers, peasant farmers and smallholders -- struggle for subsistence. In south Asia, class relations are inextricably linked with caste oppression and exclusion. Women, despite being the backbone of farming and agricultural work, are often denied land ownership, equal wages, and equality in decision-making. This intersection of class, gender, caste, and other hierarchies is a feature of contemporary rural production systems in India and elsewhere.

Understanding agrarian change requires studying and analysing the interactions between global processes (i.e., the actions of multinational capitalism and corporations); national processes (i.e., changes determined by national governments, national ruling classes, and national political movements); and local processes (i.e., the specific dynamics of the infinite variety of local agrarian regimes, and of different scales of agricultural and rural development that exist in rural areas today).

Eleven years ago, the Foundation held a landmark international conference on agrarian change. Since then, the changes wrought by capitalism, nationally and globally, continue to be rapid, wide and deep. There have been radical advances in the forces and instruments of production available to agriculture, and consequent changes in the relations of production, the characteristics of individual social classes, and the conditions of the lives and livelihoods of the rural masses. A key feature of the present situation, particularly in India, is the emergence of new demands and new forms of struggle among farmers.

For this conference, the Foundation invites papers on rural socio-economic classes; women in the rural labour force; economic conditions of people of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and other victims of sectional social discrimination; incomes from agriculture and related activities; and contemporary agrarian movements.