



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Agrarian Change in Uttar Pradesh: A Review of Village Studies

Kunal Munjal* and Madhura Swaminathan[†]

Abstract: This paper has two broad objectives. First, it provides a comprehensive list of all village studies undertaken in eastern and western Uttar Pradesh to date, and draws on those undertaken between 2000 and 2023 to describe features of production conditions, labour relations, and income and employment diversification in the early 21st century. Secondly, it describes agrarian conditions in two villages surveyed by the Project on Agrarian Relations in India (PARI), in 2006, one each in eastern and western Uttar Pradesh, and uses this to highlight aspects of the development of capitalism in agriculture in the two regions.

Keywords: Village studies, land, labour, capitalism, caste, class, technology, agrarian relations, tenancy, agricultural production, crop incomes, Uttar Pradesh, eastern UP, western UP, PARI, 21st century.

<https://doi.org/10.25003/RAS.15.02.0003>

INTRODUCTION

Studies of individual villages and longitudinal village studies are an important means of understanding agrarian transformation, agrarian distress, and socio-economic conditions in the countryside. In this paper, we first draw on available village studies in Uttar Pradesh to understand key features of agrarian change in the early 21st century, including changes in production, incomes, occupational diversification, and agrarian relations. Secondly, we draw on detailed evidence from Project on Agrarian Relations in India (PARI) village studies of 2006 to try and capture features of capitalist development in agriculture in two regions of the State. The most recent village surveys undertaken by PARI in 2023 have not been included in this discussion; they form the subject matter of papers elsewhere in this issue (*RAS* 15,2).

* Senior Research Fellow, Economic Analysis Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Bengaluru, and PhD scholar, Department of Liberal Arts, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Hyderabad, kunal.munjal17@gmail.com

[†] Professor, Indian Statistical Institute, Bengaluru

The agricultural sector of Uttar Pradesh employs one-half of the rural workforce and accounts for 27.5 per cent of the state domestic product (SDP) (A. K. Singh 2023). More than 23 million agricultural households, about one-fifth of all agricultural households in India, live in Uttar Pradesh. In 2018–19, the average monthly household income of an agricultural household was Rs 8,061, the fourth lowest in the country (National Statistical Office [NSO] 2021). Agriculture in Uttar Pradesh grew rapidly during the Green Revolution years, but stagnated in the 1990s, with regional disparities rising (A. K. Singh 2023). Between 2000–15, growth in agriculture averaged 2.5 per cent a year, with livestock contributing the highest share (39 per cent), followed by sugar cultivation (14 per cent), forestry (11 per cent), cereal cultivation (10 per cent), and fruit and vegetable cultivation (8 per cent) (Verma *et al.* 2017). Land distribution is highly skewed, with 80 per cent of holdings now marginal (less than 1 ha), covering 42 per cent of land, while medium and semi-medium farms (7 per cent) account for one-third of the area (Government of Uttar Pradesh 2021).

Uttar Pradesh is a large, diverse state and its agricultural landscape reflects this. It is divided into four broad regions: western (*Paschim*), eastern (*Purvanchal*), central (*Avadh*), and southern (*Bundelkhand*), each with a distinct path of agricultural development. Our focus is on two regions, western and eastern Uttar Pradesh. Regional disparities are stark, and these two regions present a contrast in several respects. The cropping pattern in western Uttar Pradesh typically comprises cultivation of sugarcane, rice, and wheat, whereas in eastern Uttar Pradesh, the main crops are rice and wheat (Jose *et al.* 2022). While 78 per cent of net sown area in Uttar Pradesh is irrigated, much above the national average, western Uttar Pradesh has the highest irrigation ratio (97.2 per cent) and fertilizer use among the four regions. Studies have consistently shown western Uttar Pradesh as the best performer in indicators of agricultural development whereas eastern Uttar Pradesh lags behind (Bajpai and Volavka 2005; Raman and Kumari 2012; Kumari 2016; Mamgain and Verick 2017; Jose *et al.* 2022).

In 2011–12, 29.4 per cent of the population of Uttar Pradesh was below the poverty line. The head-count ratio of poverty was highest in eastern Uttar Pradesh (41 per cent) and lowest in western Uttar Pradesh (19.5 per cent) (A. K. Singh 2023; Mamgain and Verick 2017). In western Uttar Pradesh, families from the Jat, Gujjar, Tyagi, Thakur, and Brahmin castes dominate landownership. Meanwhile, in eastern Uttar Pradesh, which was under the Zamindari system during the colonial period, land was historically controlled by Thakur and Brahmin landlords; more recently, households of the so-called “middle castes,” especially Yadav and Kurmi households have gained ownership of land (A. K. Singh 1992; Patnaik and Hasan 1995). Scheduled Castes, particularly Jatava, and Muslims remain among the poorest in both regions and have experienced slow progress in respect of income and human development (Mamgain and Verick 2017).

Sections 2 and 3 of the paper list village studies undertaken to date in western and eastern Uttar Pradesh, respectively, and use this material selectively to describe broad features of agrarian change in the two regions in the period 2000–2023. In Section 4, we identify key features of production and production relations in two villages, Mahatwar in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Harevli in western Uttar Pradesh, surveyed by PARI in 2006. Based on these two villages, Section 5 highlights aspects of the development of capitalism in agriculture in the two regions of Uttar Pradesh.¹

AGRARIAN CHANGE IN WESTERN UTTAR PRADESH: EVIDENCE FROM VILLAGE STUDIES

Table 1 lists all village studies undertaken in western Uttar Pradesh, spanning the years 1925–2023. For each village study, we have documented the name of the village, district, year of study, methods of data collection, names of key researchers, and their main publications.

There are 39 villages in this list, drawn from nine districts. The earliest village study, published as *Behind Mud Walls* by Charlotte Wiser and William Wiser, was of Karimpur village (Mainpuri district) in 1925–30; the village was restudied 60 years later (Wadley 1994). Palanpur village, in Moradabad district, has the distinction of being studied, largely by economists, for seven decades, from 1957–58 to 2015. Another longitudinal study, spanning five decades, is of Parhil (alias Kishangarhi) village in Aligarh: first, by McKim Marriott in 1950 and 1968, and later by Saith and Tankha in 1970 and 1987. Nangal village in Bijnor district has been studied in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s by Roger Jeffery, Patricia Jeffery, and Craig Jeffrey. In Muzaffarnagar district, Jens Lerche studied Mirpur village in the early 1990s and again in 2018. In Bulandshahr district, Khandoi village was studied by Gilbert Etienne in the 1960s, 1970s, and 2010s. There have been only a handful of village studies after 2010. The most recent longitudinal study is the PARI survey of Harevli village, Bijnor district, in 2006 and 2023.

Before we turn to evidence from the last few decades, note that the focus of many village studies till the 1990s was to understand how the Green Revolution (1965–95) transformed western Uttar Pradesh's agricultural economy. Scholars showed that middle castes like Jat, Gujjar, and Tyagi benefited the most from the Green Revolution (Étienne 1968; Marriot 1972; Saith and Tankha 1992; Siddiqui 1997). They leveraged medium-sized holdings, state subsidies, and extensive irrigation networks to commercialise farming, aligning their agricultural practices with those of the capitalist farmers of Punjab and Haryana (J. Singh 1992; Sharma and Poleman 1993; Lerche 1999). They dominated land, labour, and credit markets (Srivastava 1989b; Siddiqui 1999). At the other end of the spectrum were Dalit agricultural workers, who were often tied in interlinked arrangements to landlords, with poor economic

¹ Articles in this issue (*Review of Agrarian Studies* 15, 2) are based on the Project on Agrarian Relations in India (PARI) surveys in the same two villages, Mahatwar and Harevli, conducted in 2023.

Table 1 *List of village studies in western Uttar Pradesh, 1925–2023*

Village	District	Year of study	Method	Researchers	Key publications
Karimpur	Mainpuri	1925–30; 1962–71; 1974–75; 1983–84	Ethnography, historical analysis	William Wiser; Charlotte Wiser; S. S. Wadley	Wiser and Wiser (1971); Wadley (1994)
Parhil (Kishangarh*)	Aligarh	1950–52; 1968	Ethnography, historical analysis	McKim Marriot	Marriot (1952; 1972)
Parhil	Aligarh	1969–70; 1987	Household survey and interviews	Ashwani Saith and Ajay Tankha	Saith and Tankha (1972; 1987)
Rajpur	<i>n.a.</i>	1960	Legal analysis; household survey and interviews	J. W. Elder	Elder (1962)
Sunari	Agra	1965; 1985	Household survey and interviews	Friedrich W. Fuhs	Fuhs (1988)
Chaukra*	Muzaffarnagar	1985–87	Household survey and interviews	Ravi Srivastava	Srivastava (1989a; 1989b)
Rampur, Izarpur, and Walidpur	Meerut	1988–89	Household survey and interviews	Rita Sharma, Thomas T. Poleman	Sharma and Poleman (1993)
Eight villages	Meerut	1984–85, 1988–1990, 1991	Household survey and ethnography	Jagpal Singh	Singh (1992)
Village 1, Village 2	Muzaffarnagar	1981; 1991; 1996	Household survey and interviews	Karim Siddiqui	Siddiqui (1997; 1999)
Nangal	Bijnor	1982–83, 1985, 1990–91, 2000–02	Ethnography	Roger Jeffery, Patricia Jeffery, Craig Jeffrey	Jeffrey (1997; 2001; 2003); Jeffery (2016); Jeffery <i>et al.</i> (2011)
Mirpur* Sabdalpur, Chirchita, and Kurwal Banaras	Muzaffarnagar Bulandshahr	1994–96, 2018 1972; 2001–05	Ethnography Survey (1972); interviews, direct observation and participatory appraisal (2001–05)	Jens Lerche Kathleen Baker, Sarah Jewitt	Lerche (1998; 1999; 2023) Baker (1975); Jewitt and Baker (2007)
Nagli Issa and Moodkalan	Meerut	1981; 2002	Household survey and interviews	Niranjan Pant	Pant (1984; 2004)

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued) *List of village studies in western Uttar Pradesh, 1925–2023*

Village	District	Year of study	Method	Researchers	Key publications
Siswa and Newa	Muzaffarnagar	1993–95	Household survey and interviews	Ravi Srivastava	Srivastava (1999)
Dulhera Chauhan and Dhanju	Meerut	1999–2000	Household survey	Vijaya Rajni	Rajni (2007)
Khanpur*	Meerut	2003–05; 2010; 2015	Household survey and ethnography	Satendra Kumar	Kumar (2016; 2021)
Bijrol, Sirsali, Mukarrabpur Kandra, Bachhor, and Gaidabra	Baghpat	2004–10	Household survey and interviews; ethnography	Gaurang Sahay	Sahay (2015)
Khandoi	Bulandshahr	1965–79; 2000–12	Household survey and ethnography	Gilbert Étienne	Étienne (1968; 2014)
Palanpur	Moradabad	1957–58; 1962–63; 1974–75; 1983–84; 1993; 2008–10; 2015	Household survey and interviews	Narain Ansari, Christopher Bliss, Nicholas Stern, Jean Drèze, Peter Lanjouw, Himanshu	Ansari (1964); Bliss and Stern (1982); Drèze and Sharma (1998); Lanjouw and Stern (1998); Himanshu <i>et al.</i> (2018)
Seemli	Muzaffarnagar	2011–13	Household survey and interviews	Giri Institute of Development Studies (GIDS)	Goli <i>et al.</i> (2015); Mehta and Goli (2014); Awasthi and Shrivastav (2017)
Harevli	Bijnor	2006; 2023	Household survey and interviews	Foundation for Agrarian Studies	Ramachandran and Swaminathan (2014); Singh (2014); Rawal and Osmani (2009); Swaminathan and Baksi (2017)

Notes: *Pseudonym.

n.a.: Not available.

outcomes and limited mobility (Srivastava 1989a, 1989b, 1999; Wadley 1994; Lerche 1998).

We review the literature on the contemporary period under two broad categories: changes within agriculture focusing on production conditions (cropping pattern, irrigation, crop production) and agrarian relations (tenancy and labour), and changes outside agriculture focusing on diversification to non-farm employment and incomes.

Changes Within Agriculture

Western Uttar Pradesh's agricultural success relied on extensive irrigation, facilitated by extensive canal networks and groundwater extraction via public tube wells (Rao 1976). In the 2000s, however, public irrigation was being replaced by private irrigation. Drawing on a longitudinal study of Nagli Issa and Modkalan villages, Meerut district, Pant (2004) found that irrigation infrastructure was largely based on canals and state-owned tube wells in 1981. By 2002, there was an expansion of diesel-powered private tube wells and emergence of groundwater markets.

Palanpur, a small multi-caste village, located in the Gangetic Plain, in Moradabad district is probably the most studied village in India. The most recent book on Palanpur, *How Lives Change* (Himanshu *et al.* 2018), provides an overview of change in the village over six decades, linking the village-level findings to major features of economic development in the region. The village had about 100 resident households in 1957, which grew to 233 households in 2010. The main landowning castes were Thakur and Murao. Jatava households were largely casual workers though some engaged in small-scale tenancies, but most remained at the bottom of the village hierarchy till around 2005 after which their position in the village showed relative improvement. Dhivar, Gadaria, Dhobi, Teli (Muslims), and Passi were the other caste groups in the village, though less significant in absolute numbers.

Himanshu *et al.* (2018) showed that the weight of agriculture in the economy continues to decline, as non-farm employment, particularly jobs outside the village, gain importance. The relative importance of agriculture has fallen in a context of decline in per capita owned and operational landholding and a rise in capital intensity (including mechanisation) of crop production. Interestingly, sugarcane cultivation has declined in Palanpur, and been replaced by mentha or mint, a crop used for producing mentha oil, an important industrial input. Thakur households moved out of agriculture early, and at the other end of the caste hierarchy, Scheduled Caste households gained upward mobility via non-farm jobs. Murao households remained in agriculture. With regard to developments related to agriculture within the village, an interesting feature of agrarian relations in Palanpur was that tenancy expanded, though marginally, and took new forms with the expansion of fixed rent contracts. The lessors were mainly absentee or outsider landlords whereas the lessees were

better-off households belonging to Thakur and Murao castes. Poorer households (Scheduled Castes and Dhobis) leased in land on *batai* (50:50 share cropping) or *chauthai* (one-fourth output to the tenant wherein all inputs are paid for by the landowner) arrangements.

Studies of Seemli village in Muzaffarnagar's sugarcane belt, surveyed by scholars from the Giri Institute of Development Studies (GIDS) in 2013–14, found that farming was largely undertaken by Other Backward Class and Scheduled Caste households with small or marginal landholdings, accounting for 93 per cent of cultivated land. Economic inequality remained high, with disparities across and within caste groups (Goli *et al.* 2015; Mehta and Goli 2014).

While the composition of cultivators changed, control of land and labour remained in the hands of the rural rich belonging to dominant caste groups. In Khanpur, Muzaffarnagar, S. Kumar (2016) observed that the land ownership pattern was largely unchanged with land concentrated with Caste Hindu and Other Backward Class households. However, farming was reported as a primary occupation only by one-fourth of the households, mainly Other Backward Class households. Jeffrey *et al.* (2011), in their revisits in 2001 to Nangal village in Bijnor district, described how certain Jat households that they characterised as “seriously rich” owned significant amount of crop land as well as housing infrastructure, employed at least one attached labourer each for farm and household work, and never did manual work on their farm. Even among rich peasants, major manual operations were done by attached or hired labour or contracting out on a piece-rated or sharecropping basis.

At the same time, power dynamics between the dominant landowning castes, typically Jat, and the principal labouring Dalit caste, the Jatava, changed over time. Rajni (2007) surveyed Dulhera Chauhan and Dhanju villages in Meerut district in 1999–2000 and found declining evidence of interlinked transactions between land-poor labouring households and others. However, she did find interlinkages emerging in the dairy market, related to access to credit. In the early 2000s, mechanisation and migrant labour gradually started replacing local workers, as noted by Rajni (2007). She found that migrants working in “gangs,” comprising exclusively of men from Bihar, were employed for paddy cultivation in these villages. While there was a shift from annual to seasonal land lease contracts for specific crops in the 1980s and 1990s, she observed that “these seasonal leases are now being replaced by the self-cultivation with the help of migrant labour” (*ibid.*).

In a longitudinal study conducted between 1993 and 2018 in Mirpur village, Muzaffarnagar district, Lerche (2023) found that while poverty had declined and housing amenities had improved for Dalits over the past two to three decades, inequalities had intensified in several dimensions. He argued that neoliberalism has restructured the labour market along lines of power, resulting in new forms of structural labour discrimination. This, he contended, has replaced earlier agrarian

hierarchies rooted in notions of purity, pollution, and general caste-based exclusion. By 2018, people belonging to the Jatava caste in this village were increasingly working in the non-farm economy, reducing their reliance on Jat landowners for work and livelihoods. At the same time, the dominant landowning capitalist class developed new strategies to secure a cheap and compliant workforce for their sugarcane harvesting operations such as hiring migrant Scheduled Tribe workers from central and eastern India on seasonal contracts. The use of migrant labour for farming, observed by Rajni (2007) as a new phenomenon, appears to have solidified (Lerche 2023).

Changes Outside Agriculture

Several scholars have documented the growing involvement of rural households in the non-farm sector, although the specific features of change differ across socio-economic classes.

Capitalist farmers in western Uttar Pradesh have accumulated wealth and diversified into real estate, non-farm business and invested in children's education for professional careers (government and private salaried jobs) and setting up businesses. Jewitt and Baker's (2007) study of three villages of Bulandshahr showed that diversification into land sales and development was the fastest growing non-agricultural business among those belonging to the Jat community. The dominance of rich farmers, especially Jat farmers, continued across the region. Sahay (2015) studied five villages in Meerut in the 2000s and found the dominance of the Jat community "unabated" through: (i) concentrated ownership of land and agricultural machinery, (ii) investment in children's higher education, and (iii) khap-based solidarity. Kumar (2016) found that the big and rich farmers were either running non-farm enterprises or became builders and contractors along with investing in land markets in nearby towns.

The expansion of sugarcane cultivation brought higher revenues wherein rich Jats consolidated sugarcane sales via collusion with State and mill officials, diversifying into cane-crushing units, brick kilns, potato cold storage, and similar avenues for businesses (Jeffrey 2001; Jeffery *et al.* 2011). These Jat households were increasingly investing in education for younger men to help shift from farming to jobs in the rural non-farm sector and urban occupations. They invested in real estate, education, and marriage alliances for social mobility (Jeffery *et al.* 2011).

The economic ascent of rich capitalist farmers often hinged on close ties with local State officials, which enabled them to channel resources for personal benefit. Many rich farmers became political brokers, leveraging their connections with members of Parliament or members of the legislative assembly, and participation in farmers' unions like the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) (Jeffrey and Lerche 2000; Jeffrey 2003). These big capitalist farmers also maintained dominance in villages through unpaid

labour (*begar*) relations, backed by support from farmer unions (Lerche 1999). There has been a long tradition of agrarian mobilisation by rich capitalist farmers in the region to assert demands such as those for remunerative prices and lower costs of production. Largely under the banner of BKU, the rich farmers' movement has been influential in bargaining for changes in agricultural policies, shaping rural electoral politics, reinforcing caste and class hierarchies, and at times, aligning with Right-wing nationalist forces (Brass 1980; Hasan 1994; Lindberg 1995; Bentall and Corbridge 1996; Singh 2016; Ramakumar 2016; S. Kumar 2021).

For the landless worker household, diversification of employment and incomes takes a different form. In Bulandshahr district, Jewitt and Baker (2007) found a growing number of casual workers in construction and brick-making. Members of a section of Muslim households out-migrated to the Gulf region, and their remittances played a huge role in the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of resident households (*ibid.*). In another study of Bulandshahr district (Khandoi village) from 1965 onwards, Étienne (2014) showed that by 2012, persons from landless labour and small or marginal farmer households were commuting to nearby towns and faraway cities for work. Some men belonging to Jatava (Scheduled Caste) caste gained bachelor's degrees and obtained administrative jobs. Dhobis and Nais had given up their traditional work under the Jajmani system and were either self-employed in petty work such as transport using horse-cart or combining livestock rearing with farm labour. In Khanpur, Muzaffarnagar (2004–05, 2014–15), S. Kumar (2016) also documented the weakening of Jajmani ties, with the elder members of artisan households shifting to cash wages and younger members changing occupations.

In the sugarcane belt, Sahay (2015) observed that Scheduled Castes and other marginalised communities were dependent on members of the Jat community for employment, credit, and resources and unable to challenge this dominance. Jeffrey *et al.* (2011) also showed that smallholder and labourers, from Jatava and other marginalised castes, remained in subordinate labour roles, excluded from the economic benefits of sugarcane commercialisation, and worked primarily as labourers either in the farms or the industrial units owned by the Jat community of Nangal.

Longitudinal studies in Palanpur have found non-farm activity to be the major driver of employment and livelihoods in the contemporary period (Himanshu *et al.* 2018). From the 1990s onward, rising non-farm employment reduced Jatava households' agricultural dependency, as people from Thakur and Murao castes turned to urban jobs and leasing out land, and those belonging to Jatava caste gained land through sharecropping (Drèze and Sharma 1998; Lanjouw and Stern 1998). Residents were commuting to jobs in nearby towns, though there has also been an expansion of small businesses in the village. Teli (Muslims) have also witnessed economic

mobility through entrepreneurial activities via non-farm diversification since the 2000s.

AGRARIAN CHANGE IN EASTERN UTTAR PRADESH: EVIDENCE FROM VILLAGE STUDIES

As listed in Table 2, 19 villages from seven districts were studied in eastern Uttar Pradesh between 1950 and 2018.² The earliest study was of Senapur village, conducted by anthropologists Morris Opler, Bernard Cohn, and R. D. Singh, who examined the social, economic, and political aspects of the village.³ The village was resurveyed in 2013 by scholars from GIDS. Other studies in Jaunpur included that of Deogaon village by Jens Lerche in 1990s and 2018, and Belapur by Ravi Srivastava and G. K. Lieten in 1993–94 and 2009. Nahiyān village in Varanasi district was studied by Gilbert Étienne through several visits between 1962 and 2002. The most recent study is of Shivpur and Rampur villages of Varanasi district, conducted in 2015–16 by Shinu Varkey.

In the early to mid-1980s, eastern Uttar Pradesh was characterised as a backward region with “semi-feudal” production relations acting as a barrier to technological adoption, commercialisation, and the development of capitalism in agriculture (Bhaduri 1985; Bardhan and Rudra 1978). There was a spurt in village studies, in 1980s and 1990s, which challenged the narrative of agricultural stagnation, showing dynamism in agriculture via expansion of irrigation infrastructure and growing commercialisation of agriculture, even if at a different pace than in the western region (Ballabh and Pandey 1999; Lerche 1999; Pant 2004).

Changes Within Agriculture

The earliest study, in the 1950s, was of Senapur (Jaunpur district), a Thakur-dominated village with a traditional caste order. Land was concentrated in the hands of Thakur households and agriculture was their mainstay (with the cultivation of rice, sugarcane, and maize), and landless households, mostly Scheduled Caste (Jatava), provided agricultural labour (Opler and Singh 1952; Opler 1956). More than 60 years later, a revisit by GIDS researchers showed that around 45 per cent of agricultural households were landless, of which three-fourth were Scheduled Caste households (Trivedi 2017). However, there was a rise in tenancy, with Thakur households leasing out land to land-poor Dalit households, often with labour obligations. Almost all of the barren land in the village was owned by Dalits. Wheat and rice were the two main crops in the village. Other Caste Hindu households sold three-fourths of their produce whereas Dalit households kept three-fourths for home consumption.

² A part of this section is from Das *et al.* (2024).

³ For American anthropologists, the research on Senapur was important in the scholarship on caste (Prashad 2010).

Table 2 *Village Studies in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, 1950–2023*

Village	District	Year of study	Methods	Authors	Publications
Senapur	Jaunpur	1950; 1952–53; 1955	Census household survey, interviews, ethnography, historical analysis, document analysis	Morriss Opler; Rudra Datt Singh; Bernard Cohn	Opler and Singh (1952); Opler (1956) Cohn (1958)
Senapur	Jaunpur	2013	Household survey (only Thakur and Jatava households)	Prashant K. Trivedi	Trivedi (2017)
Ikauna, Tewari-ka-Tarkulawa	Deoria and Maharajganj	1982; 1996	Household survey (1982); KII, FGD, and RRA (1996)	Vishwa Ballabh and Sushil Pandey	Ballabh (1983); Ballabh and Pandey (1999)
Mangalpur,* Chamaon	Alipurjeeta* Allahabad Varanasi	1985–87 1977; 1994; 1996; 1999; 2004	Household survey Household survey	Ravi Srivastava Gerhard Gustafsson, Rana P. B. Singh, Kristina Lejonhud and Karl Ivar Vålvik	Srivastava (1989a; 1989b) Singh and Singh (1997); Gustafsson <i>et al.</i> (2000)
Bharauli and Baghauna	Ballia	1999–2000	Household survey	Vijaya Rajni	Rajni (2007)
Kusmauni and Pakri Babu	Deoria	1981; 2002	Household survey	Niranjan Pant	Pant (1984; 2004)
Nahiyan	Varanasi	1964–2002 (several visits)	Household survey, interviews, observation	Gilbert Étienne	Étienne (1968; 2014)
Belapur*	Jaunpur	1993–94; 2009	Household survey (sample, interviews) in 1993–94 and FGDs in 2009	Ravi Srivastava and G. K. Lieten	Srivastava (1999; 2016); Lieten and Srivastava (1999)
Deogaon*	Jaunpur	1992–93; 1995–96; 2018	Ethnography	Jens Lerche	Lerche (1998; 1999; 2023)

Three villages	Kushinagar	2009–10	Household survey, ethnographic methods	Ishita Mehrotra	Mehrotra (2022)
Shivpur and Rampur*	Varanasi	2015–16	Household surveys and interviews	Shinu Varkey	Varkey (2022; 2023)
Mahatwar	Ballia	2006; 2023	Household surveys and interviews	Foundation for Agrarian Studies	Swaminathan and Ramachandran (2014); Singh (2014); Rawal and Osmani (2009); Swaminathan and Baksi (2017); Das <i>et al.</i> (2024)

Notes: *Pseudonym/fictitious name.

KII: key informant interview; FGD: focus group discussion; and RRA: rapid rural appraisal.

Table 3 Selected features of the agrarian economy, Harevli and Mahatwar villages, 2006

Indicator	Harevli		Mahatwar		
Average size of ownership holding	4.8 acres		1.07 acres		
Gini coefficient for ownership holdings of land	0.77		0.76		
Average size of operational holding	5.16 acres		1.2 acres		
Gini coefficient for operational holdings of land	0.72		0.67		
Irrigation ratio (in per cent)	98.5		98.7		
Average value of crop land (in Rupees)	623947		348494		
Average value of machinery (in Rupees)	40817		5930		
Gini coefficient for assets	0.755		0.737		
Crop cycle	Sugarcane (commercial), wheat and paddy (consumption + sale)		Wheat and paddy (mainly own consumption, minimal sale)		
Share of agriculture in aggregate incomes (in per cent)	81		24		
Average days of employment per hired manual worker	Male		146	Male	185
	Female		107	Female	66
	All		130	All	136
Average days of employment in farm and non-farm work	Male	Farm	113	Farm	10
		Non-farm	33	Non-farm	175
		All	146	All	185
	Female	Farm	95	Farm	38
		Non-farm	13	Non-farm	28
		All	106	All	66
All	Farm	106	Farm	22	
	Non-farm	24	Non-farm	114	

Similarly, in Belapur village, surveyed in 1993–94 and 2012, Srivastava (2016) found that land ownership was concentrated in the hand of Other Caste Hindu (Brahmins) households. There were a few land sales to Other Backward Class households. Tenancy was on the rise with Other Caste Hindu households increasingly leasing out land to Other Backward Class and Scheduled Caste households, with lessors preferring sharecropping arrangements and lessees bargaining for cash rent arrangements.

Another longitudinal village study, covering a period of 40 years, was undertaken by Gilbert Étienne and colleagues in Nahiyān village of Varanasi district. In the 1960s, Brahmin, Thakur, and Kayasth castes were the dominant castes in terms of land ownership and political power, and Dalits were landless labourers. Rice was the main crop, followed by sugarcane that was sold to jaggery-making units (*kolhu*).

Table 4 *Distinctive features of the agrarian economy, Harevli and Mahatwar, Uttar Pradesh, 2006*

Characteristic	Harevli, western Uttar Pradesh	Mahatwar, eastern Uttar Pradesh
Agricultural dynamism	High: Commercialised, use of modern inputs	Low: Limited market sale, low mechanisation and modernisation
Productivity and profitability	Profit-making; food crops for market and own consumption	Low productivity and returns; mainly for own consumption
Landlordism and capitalist farming	Big capitalist farmers emerging from dominant castes, typically landlord families	Landlords, largely Brahmin, not engaged in direct cultivation
Rich peasantry and means of production	Significant rich peasantry with ownership of machinery	Small section of rich peasants, less ownership of productive assets
Proletarianisation of peasantry	Low	High
Tenancy	Complex: Linked to control over labour, through leasing tiny plots for paddy	Fixed rent and share cropping; Dalit households leased in for grain cultivation
Farm and non-farm labour	Manual workers, with significant participation in agricultural labour	Manual workers, dependent on non-agricultural jobs, especially among men
Labour contracts	Long-term attached labour, piece-rated, daily wage labour	Daily wage labour, few piece-rated contracts
Unfree labour	Forms of attached labour/unfree labour	Long-term or attached labour minimal
Interlinkages of markets and contracts	High, especially between land, labour and credit markets	Low, most workers employed in non-farm work
Migration	Low, often commuting to nearby places	High, to distant places, for several months at a stretch

“Not only is there greater poverty than in the west, but the region is also backward in agricultural techniques, including methods of irrigation” (Étienne 1968, p. 153). Changes occurred in the 1980s with increasing adoption of high-yielding varieties (HYVs), mechanisation and diversification of activities. By 2001, the living conditions of most social groups improved, except those of Musahars who faced abject poverty (Étienne 2014).

Longitudinal studies by Pant (2004) in Kusmauni and Pakri Babu villages of Deoria district noted that irrigation systems had evolved with a rise in private diesel-run tube wells. He also observed a rise in tenancy, compared to 1981, with marginal farmers leasing in more land. Rajni (2007) also found rising incidence of tenancy in her study of Bharauli and Baghauna villages of Ballia district in 1999–2000, with

labour households leasing in land for foodgrain production on fixed-rent cash tenancy contracts. The tenorial arrangements involved the lessee providing labour for the landowner and even rearing their calves.

There have also been social and political changes in eastern Uttar Pradesh in recent times. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), for example, mobilised Dalit households, encouraging them to move out of bonded and caste-based agricultural labour and shift to sharecropping. Many Dalit men refused to play traditional roles during public rituals or perform traditional labour such as removal of carcasses (Jaffrelot 2003). In Senapur, Dalits boycotted two caste-based roles: to remove the skin of dead animals and to assist in the delivery of babies (Trivedi 2017). This resulted in Other Caste Hindu households imposing sanctions linked to land leases. Srivastava (2016) also noted that Dalit mobilisation in Belapur village reconfigured agrarian relations. Though changes in agrarian structures appear limited, politicisation has led to resistance, and challenged dominant caste and Yadav dominance and control over land and labour (Lerche 1999).

In the last two decades, only one study examined the crop economy of eastern Uttar Pradesh, that of Shivpur and Rampur villages of Varanasi district (see Varkey 2022, 2023). In Shivpur, long-term tenancies, crop diversification (to vegetables), and high yields gave high returns to dominant classes, while poor peasants obtained lower returns because of higher input costs and exploitative labour-credit ties. In Rampur, productivity and profits were modest: high asset inequality, minimal sharing of input costs, and labour interlinkages constrained poorer cultivators. Varkey argued that the nature of agrarian relations limited productivity and profitability for poor peasants, resulting in high indebtedness and, in turn, driving out-migration (Varkey 2023).

Changes Outside Agriculture

Diversification towards non-farm work as a crucial livelihood strategy has been a common finding across all studies conducted in the last two decades. Lerche (1998, 1999) observed a high degree of non-farm diversification across class and caste groups in Deogaon, with people of Thakur caste turning to salaried jobs and businesses and those of Jatava caste to non-farm wage work. In a revisit to Deogaon in 2018, Lerche (2023) noted that livelihood patterns across caste groups were evolving, with Dalit men concentrated in poorly paid, non-agricultural employment. At the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy, there was growing evidence of seasonal migration in search of non-agricultural employment by landless labour households across the region. Varkey (2022) found a substantial shift towards employment in the construction and service sectors among land-poor households. Driven by agrarian distress, there was increasing out-migration and a shift to non-farm employment, particularly construction work, in Senapur (Trivedi 2017). Studies by GIDS in four villages across different regions of Uttar Pradesh found educational

outcomes to be the most unequal and unemployment to be highest in an eastern Uttar Pradesh village (Senapur) (Awasthi and Shrivastav 2017). Caste remained a critical factor in accessing non-farm employment, with Scheduled Castes facing significant disadvantages in landholding, education, and job opportunities (Goli *et al.* 2015).

Analysis from a gender perspective has been provided by Mehrotra (2022). Her study of three villages in Kushinagar showed that capitalist modernity was reinforcing traditional hierarchies and perpetuating gender and caste inequalities, with men from all castes diversifying occupations while Dalit women workers were “concentrated in the least-paying and low-status tasks that often feature unfree labour relations” (Mehrotra 2022, p. 124).

PROJECT ON AGRARIAN RELATIONS IN INDIA (PARI): UTTAR PRADESH ROUND

Only a handful of village studies have been conducted in the 21st century. It was in this context that the Project on Agrarian Relations in India (PARI), initiated by the Foundation for Agrarian Studies, selected two villages in Uttar Pradesh, one each in western and eastern Uttar Pradesh, for study in 2006. In this section, we provide a snapshot of agrarian relations in the two villages based on the surveys of 2006 (Table 3).⁴ In 2023, both villages were resurveyed using the same PARI methodology; results from the recent surveys have been discussed elsewhere in this journal (*RAS*, vol. 15, no. 1–2, 2025).

Harevli Village

Harevli, in Najibabad block of Bijnor district, is a small village (it had 109 households and 566 persons in 2006), located in a region that is relatively advanced in terms of irrigation and agricultural productivity. Harevli is a multi-caste village: Dalit or Scheduled Caste (Jatava and Valmiki) households accounted for 37 per cent of the population, Muslim for 12 per cent, Other Backward Class (mainly Dhivar) for 22 per cent, and Other Caste Hindu (Tyagi) for the remaining 29 per cent. A visible feature of the village was the clear demarcation of settlements by caste. In particular, Jatava and Valmiki households were clustered and concentrated in a relatively small area, distinctly poorer in the quality of housing and social infrastructure compared to other households (S. Singh 2014).

Around 82 per cent of crop land was irrigated, both from public canals and private tube wells, and the main crops grown were sugarcane (52 per cent of gross cropped area) and wheat (22 per cent), followed by rice (11 per cent) and some fodder crops (13 per cent). Ownership of milch cattle was widespread. In 2006, incomes from crop production comprised 43 per cent of aggregate income of all resident households, and the

⁴ This section draws on studies published based on the 2006 round of the Project on Agrarian Relations in India’s village surveys in Uttar Pradesh including: Rawal and Osmani (2009), S. Singh (2014), Saha (2014), Swaminathan and Ramachandran (2014), Swaminathan and Baksi (2017), among others.

primary sector (including livestock rearing, agricultural wages, and rent) accounted for 80 per cent of household incomes. While households were diversifying to non-agricultural employment and business, agriculture clearly remained the mainstay of those resident in the village.

Ownership of land was highly unequal: the Gini coefficient for land owned was 0.77 and that for operational holdings was only a little lower at 0.72. The bottom 50 per cent of households, ranked by land owned, held 2 per cent of all land (and 3 per cent of all assets), while the top 5 per cent of households accounted for 45 per cent of land owned (and 43 per cent of all assets). Around a third of all households in the village were landless. Tyagi households owned 83 per cent of agricultural land. The average size of operational holdings was 5 acres.

At the top of the socio-economic hierarchy were three Tyagi landlord households (2.7 per cent of all households), controlling 29 per cent of crop land (34 per cent of all assets). Landlords and rich peasant households (12 per cent of the village, from Tyagi castes, owning 61 per cent of assets) had invested in sugarcane cultivation and reaped correspondingly higher returns. Sugarcane was the most profitable crop grown in the village. There was a significant section of poor peasants (26 per cent of households and 42 per cent of all peasant households). While family labour accounted for 44 per cent of all labour used on crop production (50 per cent came from hired labour and the remaining 6 per cent from exchange labour), the ratio of family labour to hired labour was (by definition) much higher among poor peasants as compared to rich peasants.

Manual workers comprised 24 per cent of all households. Men and women from Scheduled Caste households comprised the core of this labour force (70 per cent of manual worker households were Dalit). And agriculture was the primary source of employment for manual workers. A male worker obtained 146 days of employment on average in a year (of which 113 days were in agriculture and only 33 days in non-agricultural activities). Women workers were almost entirely engaged in agricultural labour (of 108 days of employment obtained on average each year, 95 days were in agriculture). Of aggregate household income of manual worker households, 42 per cent was contributed by agricultural wages and 32 per cent by non-agricultural wages (Dhar and Kaur 2013).

An important feature of agrarian relations in Harevli was the prevalence of tenancy, and “the tenorial relationship was closely associated with other relations of dependence, through unfree labour relations and indebtedness” (Rawal and Osmani 2009, p. 14). While land preparation was mechanised, other operations, particularly harvesting sugarcane, were undertaken manually. Tyagi landlord and rich peasant households typically leased out land on seasonal share contracts for paddy cultivation to Dalit households, charging a rent that was almost 60 per cent of the gross value of output. Members of tenant households provided labour to Tyagi

households, as casual workers or attached labour, and as lessees, they had to provide labour services to the landowner (such as collecting fodder or caring for livestock). Land was not leased out for cultivation of sugarcane (the most profitable crop) or wheat (produced for own consumption).

Mahatwar Village

Mahatwar is located in Rasra tehsil of Ballia district in eastern Uttar Pradesh, a village that was under the Zamindari system of land tenure during the colonial period. The village had 156 resident households and a population of 1,122 in 2006. Mahatwar is a Dalit-majority village with persons of the Scheduled Castes (from Jatava and Dusadh castes) comprising 61 per cent of the population. The remaining were largely Other Backward Class (Yadavs and Koiris) with a few Other Caste Hindu (Rajput and Brahmin) households. Households from the three caste groups lived in distinct parts of the village.

In 2006, the main crops grown were paddy in the kharif and wheat in the rabi season; some sugarcane, fodder crops, and vegetables were grown too. While officially, almost the entire village area was irrigated, irrigation was largely from groundwater sources, and there was a water shortage during the survey year. Economic inequality was high, though a little lower than in Harevli. The Gini coefficient for land ownership was 0.76 (and 0.67 for operational landholdings). The top 5 per cent of landowning households held 40 per cent of agricultural land while the bottom 50 per cent held 6 per cent of the crop land. In aggregate, the primary sector (agriculture and livestock) contributed less than a quarter (24 per cent) of household incomes.

At the top of the class hierarchy were four Brahmin landlord households (though one of the big landlord families owning land in the village lived in Rasulpur, a nearby village), which did not cultivate the land themselves. Operational holdings in the village were relatively small: the average for the village was less than an acre; 93 per cent of cultivators operated less than 2 ha; and the largest holding was 10 acres. Peasants tilled their own land; additionally, Dalit and Other Backward Class households gained access to agricultural land by means of tenancy, largely through fixed rent contracts. One-third of the cultivators were tenants and among them, Dalits comprised 63 per cent of households.

The peasantry comprised 44 per cent of all households but only one household was classified as a rich peasant household (that is, with no member of the family working on others' fields). Lower middle and poor peasants were numerically dominant, comprising 39 per cent of all households. While the middle peasantry comprised Other Backward Class households, poor peasants were typically Scheduled Caste households. Workers from the poorer end of the peasantry, equivalent in number to manual workers, contributed significantly to wage labour in agriculture.

About two-fifths of the village (38 per cent) comprised manual worker households, that is, those dependent largely on incomes from wage labour. And 87 per cent of manual worker households were Dalit. An important feature of Mahatwar village was the role played by non-agricultural employment in the incomes of manual workers: on average, a male Dalit worker gained 5 days of employment in agriculture and 148 days of employment outside agriculture. Around 77 per cent of manual worker households' income came from non-agricultural wage earnings. Workers from Mahatwar specialised in digging borewells, and undertook this task in Ballia and neighbouring districts. The picture was different for women, who gained more days of employment in agriculture (largely in paddy cultivation) than in non-agricultural work (though there was a section engaged in bidi making). Of Dalit women workers in manual worker households, 95 per cent engaged only in agricultural tasks; the proportion was 5 per cent for men.

Dalit households were at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy in terms of a range of variables including ownership of land and other assets, income, quality of housing, and education. The part of the village where Dalit households resided was distinctly worse off as revealed by waterlogged mud paths, *katcha* houses, and congestion. Mahatwar was selected twice for infrastructural improvement under the Dr Ambedkar Gram Vikas Yojana. Yet, 90 per cent of Dalit households comprised single rooms without a separate kitchen and only 3 per cent had toilets (S. Singh 2014).

REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN DEVELOPMENT OF CAPITALISM: WHAT THE PARI VILLAGES TELL US

Drawing on the previous section, we suggest that key features of the agrarian regime of Harevli and Mahatwar villages may help in identifying regional trajectories of development.

We begin by reiterating that the development of capitalism in the Indian countryside is uneven. As noted by Ramachandran (2011),

India is a vast and living example of the rule that capitalism penetrates agriculture and rural society in a myriad ways. If the development of capitalist relations in agriculture is clearly the major trend, it is equally clear that agrarian relations are marked by national, regional and local diversity, and by extreme unevenness in the development of capitalist relations of production and exchange. (p. 56)

Identifying agrarian relations in relation to local or regional diversity implies sensitivity

to agronomic and ecological conditions, to farming systems, to local social relations, to the history of land tenures, and to what Lenin called the “scale and type of agriculture” on individual farms (Ramachandran 2011, p. 57).

In the specific context of Uttar Pradesh, drawing on two village studies, Lerche (1998) argued that eastern and western Uttar Pradesh can be viewed as “different capitalist

development trajectories . . . instead of conceptualising the east–west differences as ‘capitalist agrarian development’ versus ‘semi-feudal stagnation’” (p. A-29).

There are many similarities between the two PARI villages, notably the high degree of inequality in the ownership of land and other assets, concentration of crop land and productive assets, and high inequality in incomes. In both villages, there is close correlation between caste and socio-economic class, with Other Caste Hindu and some Other Backward Class households at the top of the hierarchy and Dalit households at the bottom. Nevertheless, the two villages experienced distinct agrarian trajectories, reflected in different levels of productive forces and distinct production relations (Table 4).

Mahatwar is a village with low levels of agricultural commercialisation. Households in Mahatwar had, on average, much lower absolute levels of crop incomes, household incomes, and wealth than those in Harevli. Mahatwar is a Dalit-majority village: 60 per cent of households in Mahatwar were deprived of land under the Zamindari system. Today, the biggest landlord of the region resides outside the village. High levels of inequality characterise the agrarian economy, notably the unequal distribution of land and other productive assets. This is accompanied by low levels of surplus generation from agriculture (the primary sector contributed less than a quarter of household incomes). This agrarian regime has the following distinctive features of agrarian relations.

First, there was a substantial section of the population that was landless or owned tiny plots of land and was dependent on incomes from manual labour. Households belonging to this class of hired manual workers had diversified sources of employment and incomes and high dependence on non-agricultural earnings, a pattern observed in village studies of eastern Uttar Pradesh since the 1990s (Lerche 1998; Rajni 2007; Trivedi 2017; Varkey 2022). Income from non-agricultural wage employment accounted for 77 per cent of the income of manual worker households in 2006. An important source of employment and earnings was outside the village, and accessed by male workers either by commuting or migrating to places for work. There were important gender differentials in patterns of employment. For men from manual worker households, 95 per cent of days of employment came from non-agricultural jobs. For women, however, agricultural tasks dominated the work calendar. This reflects the fact that unlike men, women seek work within the village or in nearby locations, as also noted by Mehrotra (2022) in her study of work participation of Dalit women. Eastern Uttar Pradesh shares this feature with Bihar where “the big story of change in agrarian social relations and in the agrarian economy of Bihar . . . has to do with (male) migration outside the villages” (Harriss 2022, p. 34).

Secondly, the proletarianisation of the peasantry is more pronounced in Mahatwar as compared to Harevli. Almost 40 per cent of households in the village (equivalent in

number to manual worker households) were characterised as lower middle and poor peasants (the lower middle peasants belonged to Other Backward Classes and the poor peasants belonged to Scheduled Castes). A substantial share of incomes of this section of the peasantry came from wage labour (both in agriculture and outside agriculture among men). This trend is in consonance with broader changes in other parts of India as well (Ramachandran 2019, 2025).

Thirdly, and related to the previous point, the extent of tenancy and forms of tenancy are very different in the two villages. A recent characterisation by V. K. Ramachandran of the processes of proletarianisation of the peasantry in the Indian countryside provides a useful framework (Ramachandran 2025). He observed that the “peasantry is increasingly a part of the proletariat. All poor peasants, many middle peasants and some rich peasants are participants in wage labour.” And, “the market for hired labour has spread across the peasantry,” that is, members of different sections of the peasantry make a significant contribution to the total wage labour deployed in agriculture. The counter-tendency, he notes, is that “manual workers and poor peasants have obtained control over (acquired) small operational holdings, especially those who migrate to other parts of India . . .” as reflected in “leasing in by poor peasants and landless households, including Dalits, the semi-proletariat.” This phenomenon of “leasing in land for basic subsistence” is “a counter tendency to the pure sort [of proletarianisation] people losing land.” The latter observation can be validated from data on Mahatwar, where a significant number of landless and land-poor worker and peasant households leased in land and were engaged in small-scale production to meet basic subsistence (grain) needs. The cost of the lease was often met with remittances from migrant workers. The lessees were predominantly Dalit households and the lessors were Brahmin and Thakur landlords.

By contrast, Harevli village was characterised by commercial agricultural production, with cultivation of sugarcane accounting for more than one-half of the gross cropped area. The village was part of the Green Revolution belt, with good irrigation facilities, use of modern seeds and inputs, and growing mechanisation and intensification of agriculture. Surpluses from agriculture were invested in agriculture (in machinery, for example) as well as outside agriculture (real estate, business and trade, children’s education, marriages).⁵ Levels of income, including crop incomes, and wealth per household were higher in Harevli as compared to Mahatwar, as was the value of crop land. The primary sector (crop and livestock production) was the mainstay of the village economy (accounting for 81 per cent of aggregate household income).

These developments are reflected in the emergence of a class of capitalist farmers and consolidation of rich peasants. Landlords, big capitalist farmers and rich and upper middle peasants, entirely from the Tyagi caste, constituted 24 per cent of all households in the village, with an average household operational holding of 5 ha.

⁵ This has been observed by several scholars including Jeffery *et al.* (2011), S. Kumar (2016), and Lerche (2023).

These households made significant investments in sugarcane, accounting for a disproportionately high share of total area under sugarcane in the village (80 per cent) and reaped higher returns as a consequence.

The expansion of capitalist agricultural development has transpired hand in hand with the persistence of unfree production relations in Harevli. In particular, there are forms of “old style tenancy” where land lease is linked to control over labour (Ramachandran 2025). The labour process in sugarcane cultivation, with the absence of mechanisation of harvesting, resulted in high demand for labour for harvesting sugarcane. To ensure the availability of workers at harvest time, landlords, capitalist farmers, and rich peasants employed attached labour or leased out land to Dalit manual workers for subsistence production. Complex interlinked transactions were visible: land was leased out on seasonal share crop arrangements to landless Dalit worker households for paddy cultivation.

The central feature of this tenancy . . . was its association with other relations of dependence, through unfree labour relations and indebtedness . . . Most of these tenants worked for the landlord either as attached farm servants or as casual-workers working mostly with a single employer. (Rawal and Osmani 2009, p. 14)

They also provided unpaid labour services (Rawal and Osmani 2009). Crop land was rarely leased out for sugarcane cultivation.

Lastly, among those dependent on wage labour – manual workers and poor peasants – there was less diversification of employment as compared to Mahatwar. Wage workers still depended largely on employment in agriculture within the village. And the forms of labour tying associated with land lease helped keep a section of the workforce, particularly the older generation, in the village, reducing the extent of migration.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There has been a rich tradition of village studies in Uttar Pradesh in the last century, although this has waned in the last 25 years. In this paper, we listed all village studies in western and eastern Uttar Pradesh, but reported only on those that dealt with changes in production conditions in agriculture and agrarian relations in the last few decades. Two village studies, one each in western and eastern Uttar Pradesh, conducted under the Project on Agrarian Relations in India (PARI) in 2006, were used to identify key features of the agrarian economy. The two villages had distinct features in respect of the dynamism of crop production, in terms of the nature of tenancy, types of labour relations, and diversification out of agriculture among workers. Although the characterisation was based on only one village in each region, we argued that it provides insights into the agrarian regimes of eastern and western Uttar Pradesh at the beginning of this century, and their respective trajectories of capitalist development.

Acknowledgement: We thank Jens Lerche and V. K. Ramachandran for their comments on the paper.

REFERENCES

- Ansari, N. (1964), "Palanpur: A Study of Its Economic Resources and Economic Activities," *Continuous Village Survey*, vol. 41, Agricultural Economics Research Centre (AERC), University of Delhi.
- Awasthi, I. C., and Shrivastav, P. K. (2017), "Inequalities in Economic and Educational Status among Social Groups in India: Evidences from a Village-based Study in Uttar Pradesh," *International Journal of Social Economics*, vol. 44, no. 6, pp. 774–96.
- Bajpai, N., and Volavka, N. (2005), "Agricultural Performance in Uttar Pradesh: A Historical Account," CGSD working paper no. 23, Centre for Globalization and Sustainable Development, The Earth Institute, University of Columbia, available at doi: 10.7916/D8PKOFF9, viewed on May 27, 2025.
- Baker, Kathleen M. (1975), *Changes in Patterns and Practices of Wheat Farming Since the Introduction of the New High Yielding Varieties: A Study in Six Villages of the Bulandshahr District, Uttar Pradesh, Northern India*, PhD thesis, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies (United Kingdom), available at <https://doi.org/10.25501/SOAS.00029406>, viewed on May 27, 2025.
- Ballabh, V. (1983), *Determinants of Adoption of Improved Technology and Production Adjustment Mechanisms in Flood-Prone Areas of Uttar Pradesh*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi.
- Ballabh, V., and Pandey, S. (1999), "Transitions in Rice Production Systems in Eastern India: Evidence from Two Villages in Uttar Pradesh," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 34, no. 13, pp. A11–A16.
- Bardhan, P., and Rudra, A. (1978), "Interlinkage of Land, Labour and Credit Relations: An Analysis of Village Survey Data in East India," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 13, no. 6/7, pp. 367–84.
- Bhaduri, A. (1985), "Class Relations and Commercialization in Indian Agriculture: A Study in the Post-independence Agrarian Reforms of Uttar Pradesh," in Raj, K. N., Bhattacharya, Neeladri, Guha, Sumit, and Padhi, Sakti (eds.), *Essays on the Commercialization of Indian Agriculture*, Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- Bentall, Jim, and Corbridge, Stuart (1996), "Urban-rural Relations, Demand Politics and the 'New Agrarianism' in Northwest India: The Bharatiya Kisan Union," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 27–48.
- Bliss, Christopher, and Stern, Nicholas (1982), *Palanpur: The Economy of an Indian Village*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Brass, P. R. (1980), "The Politicization of the Peasantry in a North Indian State: I," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 395–426.
- Cohn, B. S. (1958), "Changing Traditions of a Low Caste," *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 71, no. 281, pp. 413–21.

- Das, A., Dhar, N. S., Munjal, K., and Swaminathan, M. (2024), "Patterns of Income Growth in an Eastern Uttar Pradesh Village, 2006–23," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 59, no. 43.
- Dhar, N. S., and Kaur, N. (2013), "Features of Rural Underemployment in India: Evidence from Nine Villages," *Review of Agrarian Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 14–54.
- Drèze, Jean, and Sharma, Naresh (1998), "Palanpur: Population, Society, Economy," in Lanjouw, P., and Stern, N. H. (eds.), *Economic Development in Palanpur Over Five Decades*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi and Oxford.
- Elder, J. W. (1962), "Land Consolidation in an Indian Village: A Case Study of the Consolidation of Holdings Act in Uttar Pradesh," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 16–40.
- Étienne, G. (1968), *Studies in Indian Agriculture: The Art of the Possible*, University of California Press.
- Étienne, G. (2014), *Indian Villages: Achievements and Alarm Bells, 1952–2012*, Graduate Institute Publications.
- Fuhs, F. W. (1988), *Agrarian Economy of Sunari: Stability and Change*, Saarbrücken, Germany: Breitenbach.
- Gustafsson, G., Singh, R. P., Lejonhüd, K., and Valvik, K. I. (2000), "Change and Continuity in Village India: Crisis and Prospects in Chamaon," *Fennia*, no. 2, pp. 203–14.
- Goli, S., Maurya, N. K., and Sharma, M. K. (2015), "Continuing Caste Inequalities in Rural Uttar Pradesh," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, vol. 35, no. 252–72, pp. 3–4.
- Government of Uttar Pradesh (2021), *Statistical Abstract of Uttar Pradesh 2021*, Economics and Statistics Division, State Planning Institute, Uttar Pradesh.
- Harriss, J. (2022), "The PARI Studies in Bihar: An Introduction," *Review of Agrarian Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 31–8.
- Hasan, Z. (1994), "Shifting Ground: Hindutva Politics and the Farmers' Movement in Uttar Pradesh," in Brass, Tom (ed.), *New Farmers' Movements in India*, Routledge, pp. 165–94.
- Himanshu, Lanjouw, Peter, and Stern, Nicholas (2018), *How Lives Change: Palanpur, India, and Development Economics*, Oxford University Press.
- Jaffrelot, C. (2003), *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India*, Orient Blackswan.
- Jeffrey, C. (1997), "Richer Farmers and Agrarian Change in Meerut District, Uttar Pradesh, India," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, vol. 29, no. 12, pp. 2113–27.
- Jeffrey, C. (2001), "'A Fist Is Stronger than Five Fingers': Caste and Dominance in Rural North India," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 217–36.
- Jeffrey, C. (2003), "Soft States, Hard Bargains: Rich Farmers, Class Reproduction and the Local State in Rural North India," in Jeffery, Roger, and Lerche, Jens, *Social and Political Change in Uttar Pradesh: European Perspectives*, Manohar, New Delhi, pp. 225–46.
- Jeffery, P. (2016), "Plain Tales from the Plains: A Personal Account of Researching in Rural Bijnor over Three Decades," in Himanshu, Jha, Praveen, and Rodgers, Gerry (eds.), *The Changing Village in India: Insights from Longitudinal Research*, Oxford University Press, p. 3.

Jeffrey, C., and Lerche, J. (2000), "Stating the Difference: State, Discourse and Class Reproduction in Uttar Pradesh, India," *Development and Change*, vol. 31, no. 4, pp. 857–78.

Jeffery, R., Jeffery, P., and Jeffrey, C. (2011), "Are Rich Rural Jats Middle-class?" in Baviskar, Amita, and Ray, Raka (eds.), *Elite and Everyman*, Routledge India, pp. 140–63.

Jewitt, S., and Baker, K. (2007), "The Green Revolution Re-assessed: Insider Perspectives on Agrarian Change in Bulandshahr District, Western Uttar Pradesh, India," *Geoforum*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 73–89, available at doi: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2006.06.002, viewed on May 27, 2025.

Jose, S., Hussain, S., and Gulati, A. (2022), *Performance of Agriculture in Uttar Pradesh: Region-Wise Analysis* (No. 22-r-05), Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), New Delhi, India.

Kumar, S. (2016), "Agrarian Transformation and the New Rurality in Western Uttar Pradesh," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 51, no. 26/27, pp. 61–71.

Kumar, S. (2021), "Agrarian Transformation, Emergence of New Sociality and Communal Violence in Rural Western Uttar Pradesh," in *Companion to Indian Democracy: Resilience, Fragility, Ambivalence*, Routledge, pp. 39–52.

Kumari, R. (2016), "Regional Disparity in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar: A Disaggregated Level Analysis," *Journal of Social and Economic Development*, vol. 18, no. 1–2, pp. 121–46.

Lanjouw, P., and Stern, N. (1998), *Economic Development in Palanpur over Five Decades*, Oxford University Press.

Lerche, J. (1998), "Agricultural Labourers, the State and Agrarian Transition in Uttar Pradesh," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 33, no. 13, pp. A29–A35.

Lerche, J. (1999), "Politics of the Poor: Agricultural Labourers and Political Transformations in Uttar Pradesh," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2–3, pp. 182–241.

Lerche, J. (2023), "Caste from Field to Factory: 100 Years of Accumulation, Exploitation and Caste Oppression in Rural Uttar Pradesh, India," "Agrarian Change Seminar," *Journal of Agrarian Change*, March 9, available at <https://youtu.be/P1rrZ-V4mFk?si=DirFQd4p3QS5vw2z>, viewed on May 27, 2025.

Lieten, G. K., and Srivastava, R. (1999), *Unequal Partners: Power Relations, Devolution and Development in Uttar Pradesh (Alternatives in Development)*, SAGE Publications Pvt. Ltd.

Lindberg, S. (1995), "Farmers' Movements and Cultural Nationalism in India: An Ambiguous Relationship," *Theory and Society*, vol. 24, pp. 837–68, available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00994067>, viewed on May 25, 2025.

Mamgain, R. P., and Verick, S. (2017), *The State of Employment in Uttar Pradesh: Unleashing the Potential for Inclusive Growth*, International Labour Organization.

Marriott, M. (1952), "Social Change in an Indian Village," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 145–55.

Marriott, M. (1972), "Kishan Garhi Village, a Generation of Change: Technology, Society, and Culture" (ED073980), National Council of Associations for International Studies and New York State Education Department, Foreign Area Materials Center, Education Resources Information Centre, available at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED073980.pdf>, viewed on May 27, 2025.

- Mehrotra, I. (2022), *Political Economy of Class, Caste and Gender: A Study of Rural Dalit Labourers in India*, Routledge India.
- Mehta, G. S., and Goli, S. (2014), "Rural Transformation in Uttar Pradesh: A Longitudinal Study of Village Seemli, Muzaffarnagar," Working paper, Giri Institute of Development Studies (GIDS).
- National Statistical Office (2021), "Situation Assessment of Agricultural Households and Landholdings of Households in Rural India," National Sample Survey 77th Round, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.
- Opler, M. E., and Singh, R. D. (1952), "Economic, Political and Social Change in a Village of North Central India," *Human Organization*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 5–12.
- Opler, M. E. (1956), "The Extensions of an Indian Village," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 5–10.
- Pant, N. (1984), "Organisation, Technology and Performance of Irrigation Systems in Uttar Pradesh," [mimeo], GIDS, Lucknow.
- Pant, N. (2004), "Trends in Groundwater Irrigation in Eastern and Western UP," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 39, no. 31, pp. 3463–68.
- Patnaik, U., and Hasan, Z. (1995), "Aspects of the Farmers' Movement in Uttar Pradesh in the Context of Uneven Capitalist Development in Indian Agriculture," in Sathyamurthy, T. V. (ed.), *Industry and Agriculture in India Since Independence: Social Change and Political Discourse in India, Structure of Power, Movements and Resistance*, vol. 2, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Prashad, V. (2010), "How Caste Came to America," *Himal Southasian*, Apr 1, available at <https://www.himalmag.com/cover/how-caste-came-to-america>, viewed on May 27, 2025.
- Raman, R., and Kumari, R. (2012), "Regional Disparity in Agricultural Development: A District Level Analysis for Uttar Pradesh," *Journal of Regional Development and Planning*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 71–90.
- Rajni, V. (2007), "Casual Labour Contracts of Agricultural Labourers in East and West Uttar Pradesh," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 42, no. 2, pp. 154–60.
- Ramachandran, V. K. (2011), "The State of Agrarian Relations in India Today," *The Marxist*, vol. 27, no. 1–2, pp. 51–89.
- Ramachandran, V. K., and Swaminathan, M. (eds.) (2014), *Dalit Households in Village Economies*, Tulika Books, New Delhi.
- Ramachandran, V. K. (2019), "Aspects of the Proletarianization of the Peasantry in India," in Narayanamoorthy, A., Bhavani, R. V., and Sujatha, R. (eds.), *Whither Rural India? Political Economy of Agrarian Transformation in Contemporary India*, Tulika Books, pp. 69–83.
- Ramachandran, V. K. (2020), "Proletarianisation and Women's Work," in Ramachandran, V. K., Swaminathan, M., and Nagbhushan, S. (eds.), *Women and Work in Rural India*, Tulika Books, pp. 67–84.
- Ramachandran, V. K. (2025), "Peasants and Rural Wage Workers in Contemporary India," M.S. Swaminathan Centenary Lecture Series, available at <https://youtu.be/9RhjsOAlqAE>, viewed on May 27, 2025.

- Ramakumar, R. (2016), "Jats, Khaps and Riots: Communal Politics and the Bharatiya Kisan Union in Northern India," *Journal of Agrarian Change*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 22–42.
- Rao, C. H. (1976), "Factor Endowments, Technology and Farm Employment: Comparison of East Uttar Pradesh with West Uttar Pradesh and Punjab," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 11, no. 39, pp. A117– A123.
- Rawal, V., and Osmani, S. (2009), "Economic Policies, Tenancy Relations and Household Incomes: Insights from Three Selected Villages in India," Social and Policy Research Institute, University of Ulster, Indian Council of Social Science Research-Eastern Regional Centre (ICSSR-ESRC) Bilateral Collaboration Programme.
- Saha, P. (2014), "Asset Ownership and Terms of Tenancy Contracts: Caste and Class in a Village in Western Uttar Pradesh," in Singh, A. K., and Mehrotra, S. (eds.), *Land Policies for Equity and Growth*, Sage Publications.
- Sahay, G. R. (2015), "Dominance of Jats Is Unabated: Caste and Dominance in the Villages of Western Uttar Pradesh," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 216–49.
- Saith, A., and Tankha, A. (1972), "Agrarian Transition and the Differentiation of the Peasantry: A Study of a West UP Village," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 57, no. 14, pp. 707–23.
- Saith, A., and Tankha, A. (1992), "Longitudinal Analysis of Structural Change in a North Indian Village, 1970–1987: Some Preliminary Findings," Institute of Social Studies *Working Paper Series/General Series*, vol. 128, pp. 1–47.
- Sharma, R., and Poleman, T. T. (1993), *The New Economics of India's Green Revolution: Income and Employment Diffusion in Uttar Pradesh*, Cornell University Press.
- Siddiqui, K. (1997), "Credit and Marketing of Sugarcane: A Field Study of Two Villages in Western Uttar Pradesh," *Social Scientist*, vol. 25, no. 1/2, pp. 62–93.
- Siddiqui, K. (1999), "New Technology and Process of Differentiation: Two Sugarcane Cultivating Villages in UP," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 34, no. 52, pp. A139–A152.
- Singh, S. (2014), *Access to Basic Amenities: A Sociological Study of Villages in Selected States of India*, unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Sociology, Calcutta University, Kolkata.
- Singh, S. (2015), "Residential Segregation and Access to Basic Amenities: A Village-level Case Study," *Review of Agrarian Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 126–42.
- Singh, A. K. (1992), "Land Reforms and Agricultural Growth in Uttar Pradesh," *Indian Association of Social Science Institutions Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 3/4.
- Singh, A. K. (2023), "Seventy-five Years of Uttar Pradesh Economy," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 58, no. 21, pp. 56–63.
- Singh, Jagpal (1992), *Capitalism and Dependence: Agrarian Politics in Western Uttar Pradesh 1951–1991*, Manohar, Delhi.
- Singh, Jagpal (2016), "Communal Violence in Muzaffarnagar: Agrarian Transformation and Politics," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 51, no. 31, pp. 94–101.
- Singh, R. L., and Singh, Rana P. B. (1977), *Rural Development in Indian Environment: Assessment and Prospect. A Case Study of Chamaon Gram Sabha near Varanasi City, U. P.*, National Geographical Society of India publication no. 29, U. N. O. Centre for Housing,

Building, and Planning, International Geographical Union, Working Group, Transformation of Rural Habitat in Developing Countries, and National Geographical Society of India.

Srivastava, R. (1989a), "Tenancy Contracts During Transition: A Study Based on Fieldwork in Uttar Pradesh (India)," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 339–95.

Srivastava, R. (1989b), "Interlinked Modes of Exploitation in Indian Agriculture During Transition: A Case Study," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 493–522.

Srivastava, R. (1999), "Rural Labour in Uttar Pradesh: Emerging Features of Subsistence, Contradiction and Resistance," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2–3, pp. 263–315.

Srivastava, R. (2016), "Assessing Change: Land, Labour and Employment in an Eastern UP Village, 1994–2012," in Himanshu, Jha, Praveen, and Rodgers, Gerry (eds.), *The Changing Village in India: Insights from Longitudinal Research*, Oxford Academic, New Delhi.

Swaminathan, M., and Baksi, S. (eds.) (2017), *How Do Small Farmers Fare? Evidence from Village Studies in India*, Tulika Books.

Trivedi, P. K. (2017), "Revisiting Senapur: Reflections on Agrarian Changes in North India," *Social Change*, vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 509–25.

Varkey, S. (2022), "Agricultural Indebtedness and Livelihood Diversification in Uttar Pradesh: A Study of the Eastern and Bundelkhand Regions," *Review of Development and Change*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 190–213.

Varkey, S. (2023), "The Role of Prevailing Agrarian Relations in Lower Crop Productivity and Profitability: Evidence from Uttar Pradesh, India," *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 455–87.

Verma, S., Gulati, A., and Hussain, S. (2017), "Doubling Agricultural Growth in Uttar Pradesh: Sources and Drivers of Agricultural Growth and Policy Lessons," Working paper no. 335, ICRIER, New Delhi.

Wadley, S. S. (1994), *Struggling with Destiny in Karimpur, 1925–1984*, University of California Press.

Wiser, C. V., and Wiser, W. H. (1971), *Behind Mud Walls, 1930–1960*, University of California Press.

Date of submission of manuscript: March 15, 2025

Date of acceptance for publication: May 31, 2025