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# **LAND-POOLING IN ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA:**

## **A study of protracted dispossession and manufactured compliance in Amaravati**

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Department of Development Studies  
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To my parents,  
Ramesh and Suseela Menon,  
for graciously letting me be

## ABSTRACT

After the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh into Telangana and residual Andhra in 2014, the ruling TDP government announced plans to build an ambitious new capital city, christened Amaravati, on the southern banks of the Krishna River in Guntur district. This purported “pioneer smart city of India” and “dream capital” was expected to not only serve as an engine of growth and development for the rest of Andhra, but to also fill the emotional void left behind by the loss of Hyderabad, to Telangana. The government sought to build the city through an alternate method of land assembly called the land pooling scheme, which it claimed would make farmers in the region “shareholders of development.” This was contrasted against the more arduous processes involved under the Central government’s *Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013*. However, through fieldwork conducted in the 25 villages and four hamlets that comprise the capital region, this dissertation demonstrates how land pooling has characteristics of previous episodes of enclosures, whilst also demonstrating new features or variations in the manner in which land is appropriated and used. Specifically, in the context of Amaravati, it amounts to a continuous process of strategizing and negotiation, generating a protracted and continuous *process* of dispossession stretching over years. Furthermore, the announcement of the capital city had intensely differentiated impacts on the residents there as the convergence of an exclusionary economic growth and urbanization plan with pre-existing caste-based agrarian inequalities exacerbated the socio-economic inequalities between dominant landed castes and more marginalized castes. Thus, the large contingent of landless people (mostly *Dalits*), who had previously enjoyed reliable work cultivating rich, multi-cropped and irrigated lands in the ‘rice bowl’ of the State, were made worse off in absolute terms through mass job loss. Even where some *Dalits* had gained access to land (through for example, being assigned ceiling or *lanka* lands), land pooling became a vehicle for the politics of co-option, intimidation and elite-capture. This ultimately amounted to a reversal of historical gains made earlier in Andhra from land distribution policies designed to uplift poorer segments of society.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABD	Accumulation by dispossession
ADC	Amaravati Development Corporation
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AIKS	All India Kisan Sabha
AP	Andhra Pradesh
APCRDA or CRDA	Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CM	Chief Minister
CPI (M)	Community Party of India (Marxist)
FMB	Field measurement book
DBF	<i>Dalit Bahujan Front</i>
DDA	Delhi Development Authority
GofAP	Government of Andhra Pradesh
GofI	Government of India
LAA 1894	Land Acquisition Act, 1894
LARRA 2013 or LARR Act 2013	Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013
LPS	Land Pooling Scheme
MGNREGA, 2015 (or NREGA for short)	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005
MRPS	Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi
MRI	Mandal revenue inspector
MRO	Manda revenue office(r)
NAC	National Advisory Council
NAPM	National Alliance of People's Movements
NCSC	National Commission for Scheduled Castes
NDA (coalition)	National Democratic Alliance
NITI Aayog	National Institute for Transforming India, Government of India
NTR	N.T. Rama Rao
OBC	Other Backward Classes



OC	Other Castes
R&R	Rehabilitation and Resettlement
RDO	Revenue Divisional Office
RSR	Resettlement Registers
SC	Scheduled Caste
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SIA	Social Impact Assessment
SRO	Sub Registrar Office
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TDP	Telugu Desam Party
TPS	Town Planning Scheme
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
VAO	Village administrative office(r)
VGTM	Vijayawada-Guntur-Tenali-Mangalgiri
VRA	Village revenue assistant
YSR-CP	Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party
YSR	Y.S. Rajashekara Reddy
WB	World Bank

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Term	Definition
<i>Adangal</i>	A type of land record maintained by the Village Administrative Officer.
<i>Adivasi</i>	A collective term used to refer to India's indigenous population. They are officially referred to as Scheduled Tribes (STs).
<i>Ahirs</i>	A dominant caste in rural Rajasthan.
<i>Anicut</i>	Dams
<i>Assigned land</i>	Lands distributed to landless poor persons who has no other means of livelihood.
<i>Benami (land)</i>	Made, held, done, or transacted in the name of (another person). With respect to land or property, refers to a transaction, contract or purchase that is made or held under a name that is fictitious or is that of a third party, who is presented as the owner in place of the principal or actual owner. (Definition from Merriam-Webster dictionary).
<i>Bhal Bachao Samiti</i>	A local organization contesting the government's land pooling policy in Dholera.
<i>Bhoomulu</i>	Earth or land
<i>Brahmin (sometimes Brahman)</i>	Caste grouping at the apex of the caste system.
<i>Ceiling land</i>	In this dissertation, refers to the surplus lands that were taken from big landholders after land ceiling laws were implemented after Independence as part of a large land reform policy aimed at raising agricultural production and eliminating forms of exploitation and social injustice in the agrarian system. This surplus land was then (in theory) distributed to landless poor persons using certain criteria.
<i>Circar</i>	Head of affairs; the state or government; a grand division of a province; a headman. Also used by British colonials to refer to indigenous Indian writers and accountants who were self-employed or working in public offices.
<i>Crore</i>	Ten million
<i>Dalaal</i>	Middle-men
<i>Dalit</i>	Another term for people in the Scheduled Castes, who are placed ritually at the bottom of India's caste system.
<i>Dharna</i>	Mode of compelling debt payment by sitting at the debtor's door without eating.
<i>Diwani</i>	Revenue administration of the Mughal empire that served the purpose of a tax-collecting department.
<i>DK(T) patta</i>	Lands granted to landless poor persons for the purpose of cultivation. The beneficiaries were people who were below the poverty line and mostly from the SC/ST or OBC communities. These <i>pattas</i> are granted under a clause that the lands assigned are heritable but not transferable.
<i>Godown</i>	Warehouse
<i>Grama kanttam</i>	Village habitations
<i>Gram(a) Sabha</i>	Meeting of all adult voters in the village, held twice per year.
<i>Gram panchayat</i>	Village council
<i>Hartal</i>	Strike action as form of civil disobedience.
<i>Inam</i>	Land given as a grant or gift until 1956, when the Andhra Pradesh (Andhra Area) Inams (Abolition and Conversion into Ryotwari) Act was passed.
<i>Inamdar</i>	A feudal title during the colonial era. It was bestowed on someone who

Term	Definition
	received lands as <i>Inam</i> (grant or gift).
<i>Jagir</i>	A type of feudal land grant in pre-Independence India. An assignment, to an individual, of the government share of the produce of a portion of land. There were two types of <i>jaghirs</i> – unconditional and conditional: 1) a personal one for the use of the grantee; and 2) in trust, for some public service, most commonly, the maintenance of troops.
<i>Jagirdar</i>	The holder of a <i>jagir</i> . <i>De facto</i> ruler of a territory with the right to extract revenues. Developed during the Islamic era in India (early thirteenth century) and continued throughout colonial rule.
<i>Jagirdari</i>	Office or jurisdiction of the <i>Jagirdar</i>
<i>Jajmani system</i>	An archaic economic system mostly found in villages wherein lower castes performed various functions for upper castes and received grain or other goods in return.
<i>Jareeb</i> (land)	Highly fertile or wet lands.
<i>Jats</i>	Dominant caste in Uttar Pradesh (Haryana) and Punjab.
<i>Jati</i>	Sub-castes or endogenous occupational groups within the caste system.
<i>Joti</i>	Quit-rent or favourable rent.
<i>Kabuliyat</i>	A written agreement that obliged the <i>Zamindar</i> to pay the amount assessed.
<i>Kamma</i>	A dominant agrarian caste, with socio-economic and political prominence, that originated from Guntur and Prakasam districts of coastal Andhra Pradesh.
<i>Kanakapillai</i>	Prior to Indian Independence, a person vested with the responsibility of registering everything connected to a village's cultivation and produce, the shares of the <i>ryot</i> , and the dues and rights of government. Akin to a village accountant.
<i>Kappu/Kapu</i>	A peasant caste that is dominant in the districts of East Godavari and West Godavari in coastal Andhra Pradesh.
<i>Karnam</i>	Same as <i>kanakapillai</i>
<i>Kothur</i>	In this dissertation, refers to the 'new' or newer neighbourhood within a village.
<i>Kutcha</i> (house)	Crude, imperfect or temporary. Refers to a house made from natural or traditional materials – i.e. mud, with a roof of rice straw or other thatching material.
<i>Kowlu</i>	Lease or tenancy
<i>Kowlu raitulu</i>	Tenant farmer
<i>Lakh</i>	One hundred thousand
<i>Lanka</i> (land)	Literally means island. Refers to assigned lands on the islands of the Krishna river and on the waterfront on the mainland.
<i>Madiga</i>	A sub-caste within the Scheduled Caste community in Andhra Pradesh. Historically poorer than <i>Mallas</i> .
<i>Malla</i>	A sub-caste within the Scheduled Caste community in Andhra Pradesh.
<i>Mandal</i>	Sub-district
<i>Metta</i> (land)	Dry (land)
<i>Muchilika</i>	A written obligation or agreement from <i>ryots</i> (cultivators) to the landowner, usually agreeing to the rates of assessment of rent.
<i>Munsiff</i>	Village watchman
<i>Naxalites</i>	Also referred to as Maoists, or Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist). Declared a terrorist organisation by the government.
<i>Nizam-ul-Mulk</i>	Often abbreviated to Nizam. Title given to the sovereigns of Hyderabad State

Term	Definition
	between 1724 and 1948.
<i>Other backward castes (OBC or BC)</i>	One of several official classifications of people in India used by the Government of India to classify castes considered educationally or socially disadvantaged.
<i>Pakka house</i>	A sturdy house made of cement and/or brick.
<i>Panchayat Raj Institutions</i>	Municipal/local level of governance, involving village, <i>mandal</i> and district levels.
<i>Patta</i>	A legal title deed to property or a piece of land. Also a written agreement from landowners to ryots in the pre-Independence era.
<i>Pattadar</i>	Cultivator
<i>Patel</i>	Village headman
<i>Pesh-kush</i>	A present, particularly to government, in return for an appointment or as an acknowledgement for tenure during the pre-Independence era. Could also be a tribute, fine, quit-rent, or advance on stipulated revenues.
<i>Quintal</i>	Unit of volume for cotton. Equivalent to one hundred kilograms.
<i>Rabi</i>	Rabi crops are sown in winter and harvested in spring. They include wheat and grams.
<i>Raitulu</i>	Cultivators or farmers (plural). Singular: <i>raitu</i> .
<i>Reddy</i>	A dominant caste from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Historically, they were the landowning aristocracy of the villages.
<i>Rupee</i>	Indian currency unit. At the time of research, one US dollar was equivalent to approximately 65 rupees.
<i>Ryot</i>	A cultivator or cultivating tenant (farmer)
<i>Ryotwari</i>	One of three main land revenue collection systems used in colonial India to collect revenues from the cultivators of agricultural land.
<i>Sarpanch</i>	Head of the village council
<i>Sarf-e-khas</i>	Crown lands across the former State of Hyderabad which were claimed by the <i>Nizam</i> .
<i>Satyagraha</i>	Form of nonviolent resistance inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. Loosely translated from Sanskrit as 'truth force'.
<i>Scheduled Castes (SCs)</i>	Term recognized in the Constitution of India to historically disadvantaged people who comprise a wide range of the lowest caste group (or those considered entirely outside the caste system – or 'outcastes') in India's complex caste system.
<i>Scheduled Tribes (STs)</i>	Term recognized in the Constitution of India to refer to the historically disadvantaged indigenous people of the country.
<i>Shudras</i>	The lowest of the four varnas of the Hindu social order.
<i>Sivoojamaradar</i>	Defined in Board Standing Order (BSO) 15 (2) (iii) as "one who has been in occupation of the land at the time of consideration for its assignment..."
<i>Swadeshi</i>	Self-sufficiency. Term used by Gandhi to advocate the boycotting of British goods as form of resistance to British rule.
<i>Swaraj</i>	Self-governance or self-rule.
<i>Taluk</i>	Administrative subdivision of a district. Also known as a <i>mandal</i> or <i>tehsil</i> .
<i>Varna</i>	A system of classification that originated in traditional Indian society that divided society into the four broad classes of Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (skilled traders, merchants) and Shudras (unskilled workers).
<i>Vaishya</i>	Third ranked of the four <i>varna</i> categories in the Indian caste system. It includes a large number of distinct castes of similar ranking. They were

Term	Definition
	traditionally known to be merchants, traders and moneylenders.
<i>Vastu Shastra</i>	A traditional Hindu system of architecture.
<i>Zamindar</i>	Revenue collector under Muslim rule and later landowner under the British.
<i>Zamindari</i>	System of land tenure where the <i>Zamindar</i> collected rents from cultivators to pay to the government.

## PREFACE

In May 2019, the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) was voted into power in the State Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh, making its leader, Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy, the new Chief Minister of the state. This was a sea change in the political terrain of the young residual state of Andhra Pradesh after bifurcation. Not only did the YSRCP sweep into power in a landslide victory, winning 151 out of 175 assembly seats, the former ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and its leader, Chandrababu Naidu, suffered a massive defeat.

This had immediate and massive implications for the construction of Naidu's dream capital project in Amaravati as work on various components of the state capital came to a grinding halt. It was clear almost immediately after Reddy assumed office on 30 May 2019 that the development of the capital city would not be a priority. He called the land assembly process for developing the capital a scam and announced a thorough probe to examine irregularities in the acquisition of land. Reddy further claimed that Naidu and other leaders of the TDP had resorted to corruption and insider trading in the weeks and months prior to the announcement of the new capital, purchasing prime tracts of land—including assigned lands that are technically illegal to purchase—for cheaper rates before the start of the speculative bubble. He also accused the previous government of creating hype and speculation without concomitant work on the ground. Finally, in the state budget for 2019-2020, the government only allocated Rs. 500 *crore* for Amaravati, indicating it was no longer a state priority.

These statements in turn, sent real estate prices in the capital region into a tailspin, and many landowners who had given their lands to the land pooling scheme (LPS) were driven to a state of near panic. Many were relying on the speculative market to make money through property development or real estate dealings after surrendering their lands to the government in exchange for a promise of a better return in the future. Shortly thereafter, the construction of the capital hit additional roadblocks: In July 2019, The World Bank (WB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) decided to pull out of the Amaravati project, taking with them USD 500 million in potential loans. The WB stated that it made the decision based on the Government of India (GoI) withdrawing its request to them for financing the proposed 'Amaravati Sustainable Infrastructure and Institutional Development Project.' The AIIB followed

suit as it was not an individual partner but one that operated in tandem with the WB. The pulling out of both WB and AIIB is expected to lead to more investors following suit.

With these developments, the past months have witnessed a blame game between the ruling and opposition parties. While Reddy accuses the TDP of engaging in corruption, which he claims led global agencies to pull out of the capital region, Naidu, the former CM, claims this was the result of uncertainty generated by a continued YSRCP campaign to undermine an environment conducive for investment in the capital region. At the time of writing, the former CM and his son, Nara Lokesh, another prominent member of the TDP, were under house arrest and several party leaders, including MLAs, were taken into custody, in order to stop them from organizing an agitation in the capital region.

In the midst of these political maneuverings, there is an underlying uncertainty over what will happen to Amaravati. Some analysts believe that the new Chief Minister will not be able to altogether abandon the site as the new state capital as it has been functioning for at least three years, with some built infrastructure. They surmise instead that he will complete basic infrastructure and structures for administration in the core capital, but abandon the more grandiose aspects of creating a flashier ‘global capital’ advocated by the former CM. Rumours are rife however that he may pursue a decentralized form of development advocated by K. Sivaramakrishnan, who was against the construction of a single mega capital city in Andhra Pradesh. Thus, Reddy may restrict the size of the core capital within Amaravati, whilst relocating additional institutions—for example the High Courts or certain government departments—in other cities in the state.

Taken together, the events in Amaravati by mid-2019 had come full circle. It had gone from being a grandiose vision for a mega city that would be an engine of growth and investment for the state of Andhra Pradesh and a showpiece of industry for the rest of the world, to potentially a more humble reflection of a decentralized model of development. However, the fate and livelihoods of all the people who live in the region and whose lands are in limbo—somewhere between their hands and those of the government—remain in the balance.

11 September 2019

## 1 INTRODUCTION: THE EMERGENCE OF A SPECULATIVE CITY IN THE FIELDS

In 2014, lush plots of farmland covered thousands of acres on the southern banks of the Krishna river, located approximately 200 kilometers inland of the Bay of Bengal in the Southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.<sup>1</sup> This region around Vijayawada, Guntur, Tenali and Mangalgi (VGTM) is often considered the ‘food bowl’ of the Southern Krishna floodplains, one of the most fertile, well irrigated and highest yielding strips of agrarian land in the country (Government of India, 2014). If the then-ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and its charismatic leader and then Chief Minister (CM) of the state, Chandrababu Naidu, had had its—and his—way, these verdant fields would have been entirely replaced by concrete roads and wide avenues, high-rise residential complexes, a mass rapid transit system, malls, casinos and manicured stretches of green.<sup>2</sup> These developments in turn, the first phase of which was expected to be achieved within 10 years of the start of the project—by 2024—would have represented the successful achievement of India’s biggest experiment in urban development. The resulting world-class ‘greenfield’ capital city, called Amaravati, was expected to then serve as a showpiece for an emergent and triumphant Andhra after the larger state was bifurcated into Telangana and now residual Andhra Pradesh (Ravishankar, 2016).

While these dreams would sour by 2019, when the TDP and Chandrababu Naidu suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the opposition YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) and its leader YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, the sudden and initially spectacular manner in which land was appropriated and reconstructed in this region provides a fascinating example of how rural land continues to be the primary flash point of conflict in India. In fact, in the months leading up to the bifurcation of Andhra in 2014, rumors regarding the location of the new state capital catalyzed skyrocketing land prices in several areas of the state, creating a speculative market that bankrupted some and made others fortunes (Upadhya, 2020). Eventually, when the government announced the location of the new capital (*‘Rajdhani’*) on 217 square kilometres of land in the Krishna and Guntur districts, land prices escalated dramatically here as well, due to the mere anticipation of the ‘development,’ modernization and urbanization that the new city

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Andhra Pradesh’ and ‘Andhra’ are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing, the TDP was in power. It suffered an electoral defeat in the *Lok Sabha* and Assembly polls held on 11 April 2019—well after the fieldwork for this dissertation was completed.



would herald. The impact was so profound that not only were prominent businessmen, real estate developers and politicians buying up land in the area in droves, local businessmen and ordinary farmers were suddenly transformed into small-time ‘real estate brokers’ to cater to this new market and make money along the way. Thus, by the time the state machinery had introduced a specific land assembly tool—called the land pooling scheme (LPS)<sup>3</sup>—and the urban planning agency—the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority (APCRDA or CRDA)—tasked with overseeing the assembly of over 35,000 acres of private land for a new city, approximately one-third of the private agricultural land in the region had already been bought and sold (*Ibid.*).

The events that led up to the formation of the idea of Amaravati—both as a speculative bubble through the wielding of an “economy of appearances” (Tsing, 2000) and as a “dream zone” (Cross, 2014) that engaged local farmers in a discourse on anticipated futures premised on capitalist modernity—provides an example of how land appropriation can take place in incremental steps over a relatively long period of time. Where political activists and a good deal of academic literature (see for example, Levien 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015a, 2015b), focus on ‘land grabs’ as a confrontation between the state / capital and landowning farmers, the recent developments in Amaravati hints at the emergence of a process of continual negotiation, anticipation and exuberant speculation between rural populations and government agencies, and implies that where possible, dispossessing authorities would now rather engage in the everyday politics of negotiation and fragmentation of the opposition than in direct coercion and the use of force. The forthcoming chapters will provide theoretical and empirical grounding for this relatively newer process.

In the broader sense, this PhD springs from an interest in the exact *process* of land dispossession in India. Land has never been an uncontested issue or resource in the country. It has historically been taken forcibly from farmers by the state, for planned infrastructure and urban development projects. This has occurred in successive stages under differing political frameworks and economic regimes. As a consequence, grass-roots protest movements against

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<sup>3</sup> GO.Ms.No.1 Dated 01.01.2015: Municipal Administration & Urban Development Department – Rules for voluntary Land Pooling Scheme in the Capital City Area. Hereafter variously referred to as the Land Pooling Act, the Land Pooling Scheme or simply LPS.

so-called 'land grabs' have brought subaltern groups in direct confrontation with powerful inter-related forces ranging from private interests and real-estate speculators, to state governments and the dominant factions of the population that align with them. The intimate relationship between land and private investors, people with political connections, and political parties is well-known (Upadhyay, 2020). However, what is less clear is the exact manner in which buy-in by powerful local groups to land acquisition (in the name of urbanization and development) impacts the strategies and interests of less powerful groups within the same society. Thus, a more precise exploration of the ways in which capitalist expansion, dispossession and state negotiation strategies with local populations have become entwined in recent years can provide insights into how different categories of cultivators negotiate for better access to resources, status and power, resulting in a slower, more negotiated form of dispossession over time.

To begin the analysis, I will first review the history of land appropriation for planned infrastructure and urban development projects in India, before situating the case study of Amaravati in salient discussions of accumulation and dispossession. Second, I delve into why the idea of Amaravati was so compelling for policy makers and how the city was conceived and constructed, including relevant aspects of the land assembly tool used in the city. Finally, I return to the central questions, objectives and thesis of the dissertation and end with an outline of the chapters to follow.

### ***1.1 Accumulation and dispossession: Positioning Amaravati within key land dispossession debates and trends***

South Asia has long been an arena for land appropriation, enclosures and dispossession (Adnan, 2013, Le Mons Walker, 2008), with large-scale 'land grabs' being a recurrent phenomenon in India in particular. Here, the proliferation of struggles over land dispossession, exemplified by conflicts between farmers and specific arms of the state over tracts of land and their use and control, has led to rural land increasingly becoming the locus of dispossession. Moreover, ever more sophisticated forms of socio-spatial transformations wrought by colonial, post-colonial and neoliberal politics and actions have brought the state and capital interests in direct confrontation with agriculturalists and local populations. Thus, the period after Independence in

1947 has seen the rise of mega urban conglomerations, state-led industrial and infrastructural projects and later, the advent of special economic zones (SEZs).

Economic liberalization in the early 1990s brought new forms of dispossession. First, it unleashed a voracious demand for land for industry, infrastructure and real estate. As the government establishment chose to liberalize and reduce the role of the public sector (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2002), the share of private capital in the economy steadily increased until it was dominant by the beginning of the new millennium (Kohli, 2012), all whilst the economy boomed. As the demand for land for non-agricultural purposes increased, this created multi-pronged effects across Indian states: it increasingly brought states into the arena of dispossessing land from small-holder farmers to overcome the difficulty of negotiations and holdouts; it created interstate competition for investments, which led to more instances wherein the state partnered with private interests to dispossess peasants; and it created incentives for states to capitalize on and benefit from the enormous licit and illicit rents land deals would generate. Taken together, the objective of the dispossessions transmuted: The state moved from dispossessing land for state-led projects in the national interest to dispossessing peasants for private economic purpose in the name of ‘growth,’ including real estate speculation (Levien, 2017).

As part of this process, Indian state governments chose to facilitate capital’s access to large portions of rural land through the use of eminent domain<sup>4</sup> in the post-liberalization period (Banerjee-Guha, 2013; Bhattacharya and Sanyal, 2011). Meanwhile, the central government’s enactment of the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Act in 2005, which mandates the establishment of SEZs usually on large tracts of rural land, to generate economic growth and opportunities for the country, only exacerbated this trend and further fanned the politically inflammatory flames of dissent. So-called ‘land grabs’ resulting from urban-industrial development created a politically volatile climate that lent itself to a series of high-profile clashes in villages across the country. The crux of the issue was the increasing proclivity of state governments desperate for

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<sup>4</sup> The doctrine of eminent domain—or ‘compulsory acquisition’ in India—refers to the power of a government to acquire the property of any individual for public purpose, without the necessity of the person’s consent. This power is premised in the sovereignty of the state. The main legal instrument concerned with the exercise of eminent domain (prior to 2014) was the colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894.

international investments to acquire land on behalf of private companies, particularly from marginalized groups such as tribal populations on forested lands, for the purpose of setting up private enterprises in the name of a purported 'public purpose' (Chakraborty, 2019).

For instance, clashes over land reallocation for business interests in Singur and Nandigram in West Bengal were the epitome of the fault lines that were increasingly being drawn all over the country as a result of expanding business and government interests in rural areas confronting peasants and their interests and livelihoods. In Nandigram, farmers launched a fierce resistance movement against a petrochemical SEZ promoted by an Indonesian conglomerate. In March 2007, violence erupted between the police and protestors and 14 farmers were killed, with many more raped and severely injured. The resulting public outcry united anti-SEZ forces across India and catapulted land dispossession into the mainstream of Indian politics. Nandigram was only the tip of the iceberg: By the late 2000s, protests had multiplied to literally hundreds of sites where SEZs were being planned or had been approved. A defining characteristics of the movements against land dispossession was the rapidity and urgency with which they emerged: while in Nandigram the movement against the petrochemical SEZ began the moment the proposed project was reported in the newspapers, forest cultivators in Jagatsinghpur launched protests against the Korean POSCO steel project on the same day the Orissan government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the company. Elsewhere, agitation against the Tata Nano car factory in Singur began as soon as Tata Motor officials, alongside government paid a visit to the proposed site location, in the affected villages (Levien, 2013).

While dissent against unscrupulous land grabbing was nothing new in India, the underlying rationale of the 2005 SEZ Act, combined with the blunt methods used to implement it, as well as inadequate provisions for compensation, rehabilitation and restitution, unleashed a torrent of resistance from a wide range of constituencies dissatisfied with India's existing legal regime as it related to land acquisition and displacement (Jenkins, 2014). Up until then, the archaic Land Acquisition Act of 1894, a nearly 120-year-old law enacted during British rule, regulated land acquisition in India. The law utilized an extraordinarily broad application of public purpose, thereby virtually ensuring that the power of government to acquire land and displace people would go unchecked. It also limited the space for dissent and objections and placed an enormous amount of discretion at the hands of certain individuals, namely the district collector

and deputy collector (or *tehsildar*). Finally, it had a vague basis for how affected parties were determined and did not provide a clear formula for how compensation would be calculated, even if it called for, on the surface, for the payment of compensation at market value. Thus, the lack of legal recourse for affected populations combined with the passing of the SEZ Act—and by extension, misuse of ‘public purpose’ under the Act—led to tense standoffs, which ultimately paved the way for the development of a new legal mechanism to address the long-standing issue of development-induced displacement.

#### **1.1.1 A new dawn in land rights: The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act (LARRA, 2013)**

The resulting *Right to Fair Compensation<sup>5</sup> and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement Act* (LARRA) 2013—or the LARR Act—was passed in 2013 with support across party lines. Signed into law just nine months before the 2014 general election in India in September 2013, it was an attempt to introduce a cohesive national law governing fair compensation, resettlement and rehabilitation for people affected by so-called development-induced displacement. The new law defined a set of rules, procedures, and oversight structures to govern the Indian State’s use of its power of eminent domain. It also governed, and in many cases, limited the latitude of states and private actors to adversely affect people dependent on the land by the exercise of this power. The changes encompassed a wide range of provisions that are premised on five key pillars: a) the use of a social impact assessment (SIA) to determine a project’s impact on people’s lands and livelihoods; b) a clause for obtaining informed consent of land-losers using referendums; c) ensuring increased compensation for farmers; d) expanded coverage for compensation; e) compulsory rehabilitation and resettlement (R&R) of people evicted from their lands; and finally, f) the downsizing of eminent domain—that is, the government’s previously unchecked power to take private property for public use. These measures together constituted a step towards the reorientation of local economies, and the rehabilitation and resettlement of rural communities, in addition to protecting rural farmers from indiscriminate land acquisition (Jenkins, 2014). Also for the first time in India’s history, land acquisition became a mainstream issue, moving out of the fringes of marginalized people’s movements, into an electorally salient topic at the state and national levels.

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<sup>5</sup> Hereafter Land Acquisition Act, 2013, LARR Act, 2013 or LARRA, 2013.

The LARR Act is a complex piece of legislation that stands on four key principles that have deep relevance from the perspective of impacts on not just landowners, but also on land users and other stakeholders in the local economy (Jenkins, 2014). First, the Act recognizes that state-facilitated development initiatives can be deeply disruptive to social and economic life of not just individuals and households, but also entire communities (*Ibid.*). Consequently, the compensation framework not just applies to individual landowners, but also to other stakeholders in the local economy, such as those reliant for their livelihoods on the economic activities of existing land-use patterns. Second, the notion and scope of ‘public purpose’—the main justification for the state’s acquisition of private land—was significantly limited within the legislation (*Ibid.* 2014). LARRA prescribed that any purported social benefits must be weighed against a larger social cost. Thus, even when a proposed project is found to “serve the stated public purpose” and be “in the larger public interest,” the land that may be taken must be proven to be “the absolute bare-minimum extent needed,” with “no other less displacing options available.”

Third, LARRA definitively includes a set of citizen-initiated and led procedural mechanisms to protect project-affected people’s rights—and at least in theory, constrains the capacity of bureaucrats and private interests from forcibly acquiring land. This includes a set of steps that must be followed to complete the acquisition process, including the necessity to consult local residents through *grama sabhas* prior to issuing a “preliminary notification” of intent to acquire land. Moreover, a series of public hearings must take place, followed by a SIA, which incorporates the views of affected families. Even NGOs have a role in the process: they can be brought in to appraise the SIA report. LARRA attempted to give citizens the right to determine the extent to which the acquisition of land for private interests or as part of public-private partnerships was “in the public interest” (*Ibid.* 2014). In addition to having a say over whether they support a proposed project (through garnering a percentage of support for it), they could also take part in Rehabilitation and Resettlement Committees formed to monitor compliance by both state and private actors to their obligations to displaced people. Ultimately, LARRA requires consent from 70 percent of the people affected by land acquisition in public-private partnership projects and from 80 percent of all people in private projects. Its compensation formula stipulates that landowners get four times the market value of rural land and twice of

urban land.

Finally, LARRA mandated a set of dedicated institutions to implement specific requirements in the Act. This includes an ‘expert group’ to conduct the SIA and another one to evaluate it; local Rehabilitation and Resettlement Committees; a National Monitoring Committee for Rehabilitation and Resettlement, and a Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Authority for each state. These serve as a check and balance to the power of the civil service, by attempting to ensure that proper procedures and actions related to land acquisition are carried out with the necessary oversight and with the participation of affected people (*Ibid.* 2014).

### **1.1.2 Roll-back of the LARR Act and the advent of state-led acquisition of land**

However, almost as soon as the LARR Act came into force on 1 January 2014, there was a concerted effort to dilute its full application across India after the 2014 national elections. The new BJP-led government, citing the need for a less time-consuming alternative for private or public-private projects (PPPs) in areas such as rural roads, affordable housing, infrastructure and building cities, attempted to dilute the key provisions of the Land Acquisition Act. Government authorities avowed that a “highly complicated process of acquisition which renders it difficult or almost impossible to acquire land can hurt India’s development” (Jaitley, 2015). Thus, while the passing of the LARR Act was a milestone that attempted to reset the balance between private and government zeal for land acquisition on the one hand and local resistance against this trend, the battle over land in India was not over.

In fact, within a year of the LARR Act coming into force, both Central and state governments were united in their attempts to circumvent and eviscerate the new law. Even as the Central government was working to water down the provisions of the Act—particularly those relating to the mandatory consent provisions for both private and public-private partnership (PPP) projects as well as to the crucial social impact assessment (SIA) requirement—through the LARR Ordinance three different times<sup>6</sup>, the government exempted five categories of projects from the

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<sup>6</sup> The new NDA government issued an Ordinance or Executive Order on 31 December 2014 that sought to simplify the government and private companies’ ability to obtain land for what were deemed important development projects. The government specifically tried to amend Section 10(A) of the Act to expand sectors where assessment and consent would not be required. The LARR (Amendment) Bill, 2015, while

consent and SIA requirements of the Act. These included defence, rural infrastructure, affordable housing, industrial corridors and infrastructure projects, including public-private partnerships (PPPs). A Centre for Policy Research (CPR) study found that these exempted categories alone accounted for half of all contested land acquisition cases before the Supreme Court over a 66-year period (Wahi, 2018).

While the LARR Ordinance collapsed in Parliament in 2015, partly because of farmers' protests on the ground, several states engaged in evasive action to avoid some of the Act's more challenging elements. This was supported by the BJP-led NDA government, which sent the signal that individual states should look for alternatives for acquiring land to encourage growth and development. Consequently, a new strategy was formulated amongst the ranks of the BJP-led NDA coalition with the aid of the government's premier think tank, NITI Aayog and its Vice-Chairman, Arvind Panagariya, namely of empowering individual states to enact their own land acquisition models. The tactics used ranged from revising state-level policies and reinterpreting existing rules, to entirely reformulating industrial-promotion strategies. According to Jenkins (2014), the most uniform pattern came from BJP-run (or aligned) state governments: Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan all opposed LARRA and sought to drastically scale it back. Gujarat and Rajasthan (in 2016) and Maharashtra, Telangana and Jharkhand (in 2017), amended the LARR Act to incorporate provisions of the lapsed Central Ordinance.

In Andhra Pradesh, The Naidu government proceeded to severely criticize LARRA's procedures—particularly those meant to protect landowners and other land users—on the basis that it was too expensive, time-consuming and cumbersome, particularly for private industry seeking to do business in the state. Consequently, Andhra Pradesh sought to make significant amendments to LARRA. This included exempting defence, rural infrastructure, affordable housing, industrial corridors and industrial projects from the SIA requirement. Significantly, it also reduced the detailed process of acquiring land to a simple agreement initiated by the District Collector and enabled the state to acquire land by paying a lump sum amount in lieu of longer-term

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passed by the *Lok Sabha*, or the lower house of Parliament, faltered in the upper house of Parliament or *Rajya Sabha*. The government tried to further push through the Ordinance by renewing it on two more occasions, but had to capitulate in August 2015 when Prime Minister Modi announced that the government would not be re-promulgating the Land Acquisition Ordinance.



rehabilitation and resettlement (Karthik, 2018). In laying down less rigorous provisions for voluntary acquisition and private negotiations, the amended Act also reduced the *grama sabha's* role to advice giving (Sonak, 2018). Andhra Pradesh received the President's assent on its amendment Act on 23 July 23, 2018.

At the same time, the Naidu government began to formulate amendments to the state's Municipal Act, allowing land pooling to become a substitute for the procedure-heavy acquisition process. Land pooling was considered particularly attractive as it allowed the government to evade more stringent aspects of LARRA, particularly the requirement that 70 to 80 percent of affected communities provide consent before land can be acquired. It further enabled the government to eliminate the legal obligation of providing monetary compensation to owners for the transfer of land, as well as avoid paying the additional up-front solatium prescribed under the Central government law. However, in cases where some landowners may be unwilling to pool their land, the government could revert to using the amended process under the LARR Act. Taken together, these two separate streams of amendments (to the LARR Act) and approaches (land pooling) allowed the government to expedite land acquisition for the state's new capital, Amaravati.

Thus, for state governments such as that of Andhra Pradesh, land pooling was seen as a 'solution' that would allow governments to gain access to land cheaply and quickly on the one hand, whilst also potentially giving landowners a 'stake' in the new development. And on the face of it, it was also an extraordinarily successful experiment: Within 60 days of implementation of the LPS, the government had seemingly convinced 25,000 farmers to give up 30,000 acres of land, creating a curious contradiction between the long history of intense conflict in many parts of rural India generated from the takeover of large tracts of land for infrastructure and urbanization projects, and the sudden abnegation of land in Amaravati. This raises important questions regarding what transpired on the ground in the months and days leading up to and after announcement of the capital city and the LPS, rendering the making of Amaravati a compelling case study of a so-called alternative form of land assembly. Therefore, I will now turn to a history of the development of Amaravati and key characteristics of the new city, before delving into the specifics of the LPS and the key questions and objectives of this dissertation.

## 1.2 *Paradise lost and reconstituted: The loss of Hyderabad and the genesis of Amaravati*

After years of protest and simmering tensions, the state of Andhra Pradesh was formally bifurcated into Telangana and a smaller, residual Andhra on 2 June 2014. In the aftermath of bifurcation, the residual state of Andhra Pradesh was left with 13 districts in three major regions: Coastal Andhra with six districts, Uttarandhra (North Andhra) with three and Rayalseema with four. While Visakhapatnam, located on the north coast of the state, and Vijayawada, situated on the Krishna River in Coastal Andhra, are now the two largest cities of the smaller state, Hyderabad remains the *de jure* joint capital of both states for a period not exceeding ten years, as prescribed by the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act of 2014. Thereafter, it becomes the exclusive capital of Telangana.

The political costs of bifurcation, along with its emotional fallout amongst those in coastal Andhra Pradesh in particular, were steep. The manner in which it occurred, and the perception that wholly inadequate provisions were made in the AP Reorganization Act<sup>7</sup> for the development of the new smaller state left a deep sense of disappointment and anger amongst many. There were allegations of insufficient consultations with key stakeholders, an absence of consensus amongst the key political parties and a lack of transparency in the mode of drafting the Bill, which in turn created negative consequences for residual Andhra. In fact, the main concerns raised by Telangana before division—funds, irrigation and employment—were that of Andhra's after division (N. Reddy quoted in The Hindu, 2019). The new state emerged from bifurcation as a primarily agriculture-based economy located in one of the largest drought-prone *and* cyclone-hit areas of the country.

Meanwhile, the battle for Hyderabad was acrimonious, prolonged and bitter, and its eventual loss to Telangana was particularly devastating as it was an economic powerhouse that generated half of the undivided state's revenues. Moreover, big industrialists and entrepreneurs from coastal Andhra had made huge investment in education, health, real estate and the film industry over years in the city. Between 1996 and 2003, Chandrababu Naidu and the TDP further pushed for Hyderabad to be an international IT hub, a venture that was propagated successfully

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<sup>7</sup> The Act bifurcated the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh into Telangana and residuary Andhra Pradesh.

by the opposition party in the following years. Given the importance of Hyderabad, nearly all of the focus during the bifurcation process was on how to divvy up the city. The plea to at least turn it into a Union Territory like Chandigarh, was disallowed, partly because historically and culturally, Hyderabad was linked to Telangana: It lay geographically at the core of the new state and was also the epicentre of the Telangana Movement<sup>8</sup> since the 1960s. Therefore, it was clear that those agitating for a separate state would never accept Union Territory status, prompting Congress and TDP MPs from Telangana, as well as other political parties (TRS, BJP and AIMIM) to oppose the move. While several other proposals were put forward by Union Ministers from Seemandhra (the regions now constituting residual Andhra), as well as the other political parties, each of these failed for various reasons, ranging from lack of practicality to lack of support for not standing up to the test of legality under the Constitution (Ramesh, 2016). Consequently, the best that was offered was a 'joint capital' for 10 years, after which, Hyderabad would become the sole capital of Telangana state.

Besides the devastating economic consequences, the loss of Hyderabad dealt a powerful psychological blow to people in coastal Andhra as many felt the resources from their region were instrumental to the ascendancy and affluence of the city. The impact was so strong that Chandrababu Naidu, after becoming Chief Minister of residual Andhra, did not celebrate state formation day. Instead, he held a week-long programme—*Nava Nirmana Deeksha*—that highlighted the injustice meted out to Andhra Pradesh during and after bifurcation, emphasising the need to build a reinvigorated and developed Andhra Pradesh. This was in effect a rallying cry to build a new capital that could outshine even Hyderabad as soon as possible. Thus, within six months of bifurcation, the Government of Andhra named the location of the new capital in an area spread over 25 villages and four hamlets across Thullur, Tadepalli and Mangalgiri mandals in Guntur and Krishna districts.

The decision to name this region the capital was controversial, particularly in light of the findings of the Sivaramakrishnan report<sup>9</sup>, which was drafted by an expert committee appointed by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) in New Delhi. The Committee was appointed

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<sup>8</sup> This refers to the long-standing movement for the creation of a new state of Telangana from the pre-existing state of Andhra Pradesh.

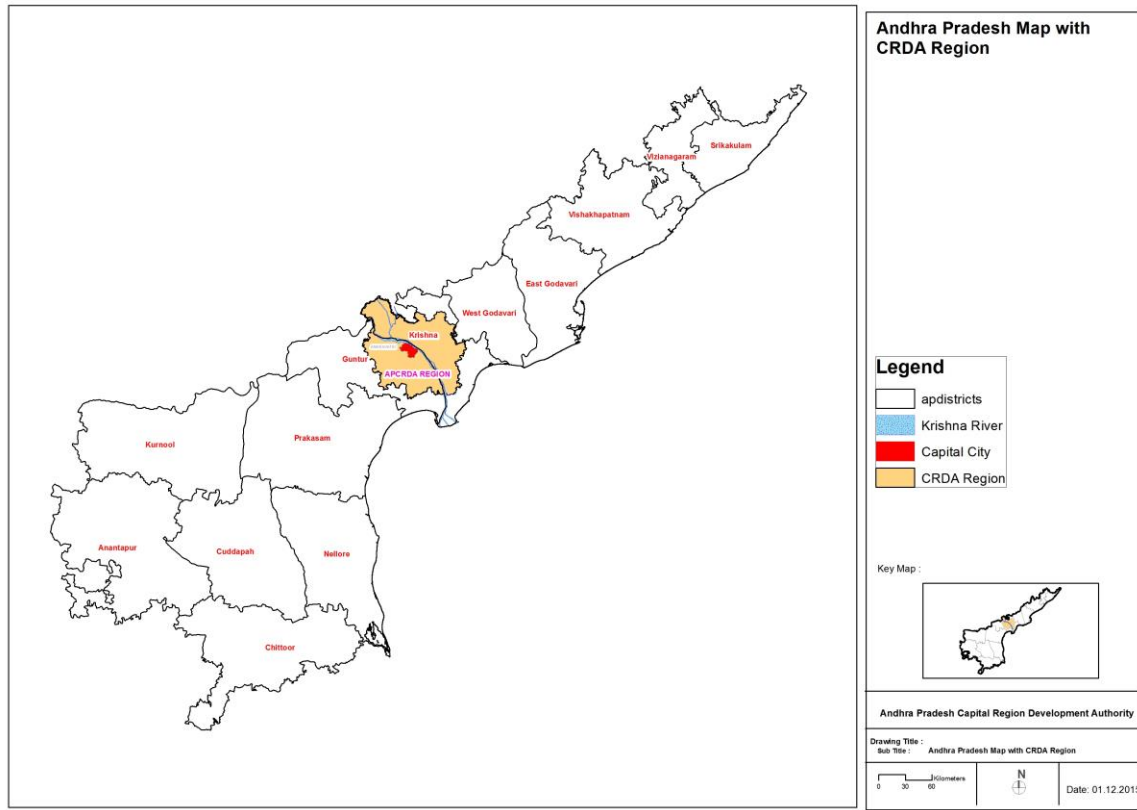
<sup>9</sup> See annex 1 for a fuller discussion on the findings of the Sivaramakrishnan Report.

with the explicit task of assessing the best location for a new state capital, and favoured a proposal for a decentralized capital based on the precept of ‘distributed development,’ as opposed to the construction of a singular greenfield location in which a super city would be developed, or even the expanding of existing cities. In fact, it declared the construction of a single large capital city to be unfeasible, citing the adverse affects of the development of such an agglomeration on other parts of the state by “sucking much private and speculative capital into the area” (Government of India, 2014: 9, 11, 26).

Yet, the Chandrababu Naidu-led TDP government ignored these recommendations—many of which focused on considerations such as sustainability, water availability, lowering inequality, achieving regional equality and on not backtracking on previous gains made for *Dalits* and other impoverished groups. Instead, the ruling party decided in favour of building a highly centralized, sprawling “people’s capital” that some commentators have pointed out was “meant to be a fitting response to the loss of Hyderabad for the elite of new AP” (Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 70). Despite the ten-year allowance for building a capital city, plans to construct a new, ambitious and expansive capital city on the lush southern banks of the Krishna River were unveiled in December 2014—just six months after bifurcation and four months after the publication of the Sivaramakrishnan Report.

The proposed capital of Amaravati was both ambitious and expansive. Apart from being conceived as one of the largest planned capital cities in modern India, it also required an unprecedented scale of conversion of fertile agricultural lands. The Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Area comprised the entire metropolitan area (Vijayawada-Guntur-Tenali-Mangalgi or VGTM) surrounding Amaravati and covered an area of 8,604 square kilometres or 3,322 square miles. It fully encompassed 56 *mandals*, of which 30 are in the Krishna district and a further 26 in Guntur district (APCRDA, 2015: 9). According to the official government line, varied considerations such as water availability, a central location within the state, the caste composition of the area, deference to an ancient system of ‘Hindu architecture’ called *vaastu*, and proximity to a glamorous water front along the Krishna River all contributed to the choice of Amaravati as the new location of the capital city (Vakulabharanam and Prasad, 2017: 70).

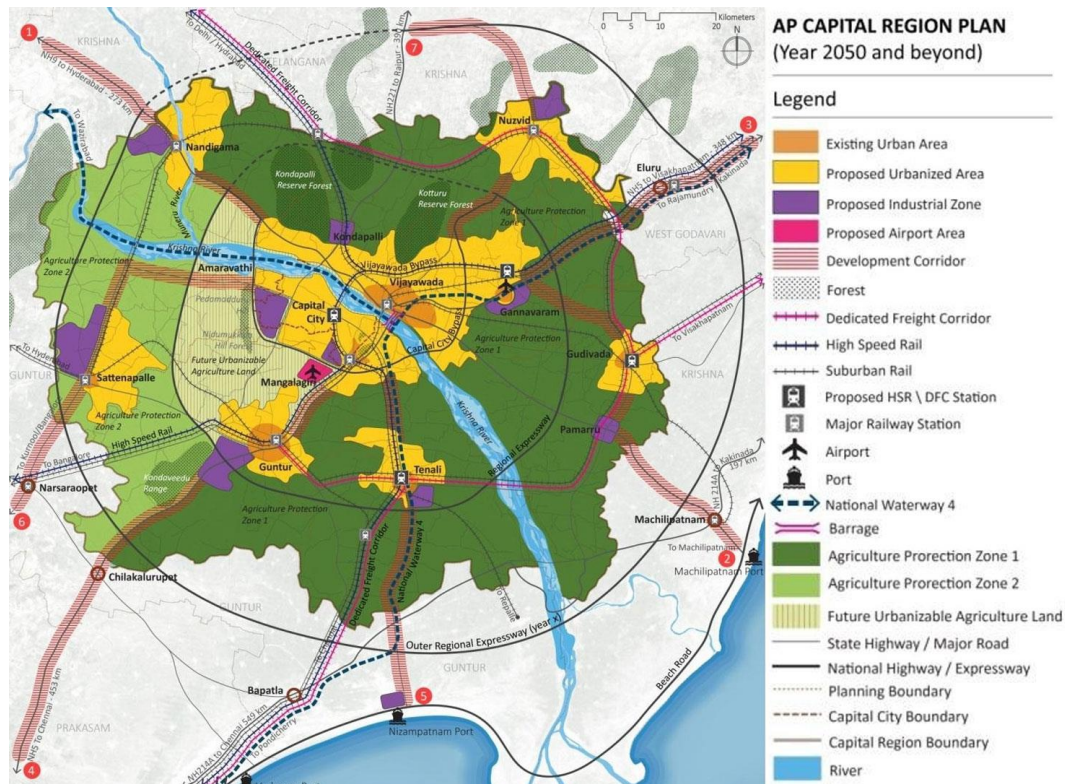
Figure 1: Andhra Pradesh map with CRDA region



Source: Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority, Master Draft Plan - I

The capital city itself was an Urban Notified Area covering 217.23 square kilometres—or 83.87 square miles—of riverfront, which comprised villages, including hamlets, from the three *mandals* of Mangalgiri, Thullur and Tadepalli. Finally, the seed (or core) capital is spread over an area of 16.94 square kilometres or 6.54 square miles and three villages—Lingayapalem, Mandadam and Uddandarayunipalem—and lies at the heart of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu’s dream enterprise of developing a greenfield capital city. In this way, Amaravati was conceived in three concentric circles: the seed or core capital is nestled within the capital city, which in turn lies within the AP capital region area (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Capital region area plan



Source: Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority, Master Draft Plan – I, 2015

Along with the announcement of the location of the city, the APCRDA came into force on 30 December 2014 (Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2014).<sup>10</sup> The Act was passed by the State Legislature with the stated purpose of “provid[ing] for the declaration of the new capital area” for the state of Andhra Pradesh. It further gave sweeping powers to the new development authority, allowing it to oversee the planning, coordination, execution, supervision, financing, funding, promotion and securing of the planned development of the new capital of Andhra Pradesh. It provided the statutory framework for all subsequent acts and deeds pertaining to the capital city by the Government of Andhra Pradesh, including the power to undertake the construction of the new capital region development area, and to manage and supervise urban services within the capital.

Based on these provisions, the APCRDA signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Singapore government, which in turn, subcontracted the preparation of a Master Plan to two

<sup>10</sup> G.O. Ms. No. 257, MA & UD (M2) Department, 2014.

private firms—the urban and infrastructure development consulting firms, Surbana International Consultants and Jurong Consultants (hereafter Surbana Jurong). The Master Plan for the city incorporated blueprints for a) the capital region (the Capital Region Perspective Plan); b) the capital city (The Capital City Master Plan); and c) a seed development area (Seed Development Master Plan) (Surbana Jurong, 2019). While the Capital Region Perspective Plan laid out the socioeconomic vision of the wider region, including plans to ratchet up the population to 11.25 million people over 20 years, and to establish key investment regions and industrial sectors, the Capital City Master Plan focused on elements to build a smart megacity, including the framework for using returnable lands or plots for commercial and residential purposes. Finally, the Seed Development Master Plan addressed medium-term needs for attracting investments into the core start-up area of the city and lays out its infrastructure and land use plans (Surbana Jurong, 2017).

### ***1.3 The land pooling scheme: Purported pathway to a prosperous ‘people’s capital’***

The land and livelihood implications of these plans were significant: the capital region (the largest concentric circle on map 2) was to be ten times the size of Singapore (Woo, 2018), and the capital city alone (the second concentric circle) required the takeover and development of approximately 53,748 acres or 217 square kilometres. Of this amount, 38,581 acres were private, agrarian land and the rest already owned by the state government. As of 2011, approximately 100,000 people lived within this area. The price tag for the new city was equally eye-watering: the original estimate cost for Amaravati was projected to be Rs. 1.09 *lakh crore* (a little over Rs. 1 trillion)—or approximately USD 14 billion (Ravishankar, 2016).

Against this backdrop, Ram Manohara, the former finance director of the APCRDA declared that the “biggest problem in a project of this nature is acquiring land” (quoted in Ravishankar, 2016). It was not viable to buy the land through the Central government’s newly passed LARR Act, 2013, as it was simply too expensive and time consuming to do so. The recent bifurcation of the state also meant that the residual state of Andhra had comparatively far less revenue to spend in its annual budget.<sup>11</sup> As discussed in the previous section, the LARR Act also makes it

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<sup>11</sup> It is estimated that at the time of bifurcation, Andhra Pradesh had a debt of Rs. 97,000 crore. The latest government estimates show that this had ballooned to a Rs. 258,928 crore by 2018-2019 (Apparasu, 2019).

particularly cumbersome to acquire land due to the requirement that consent from 70 percent of the local population is mandatory even for public purpose projects, whilst preventing the acquisition of multi-crop lands. In Manohara's words: "The state government simply could not afford that—so we came up with the land pooling policy" (quoted in *ibid*, 2016). Thus, as arguments raged in New Delhi on the relative merits and faults of the LARR Act, 2013, Chief Minister Naidu rolled out the LPS—touted as a better, alternative form of land assembly—on 1 January 2015. This was in tandem with computer-simulated images of a new urban metropolis that was deemed a "dream capital" and a "future city" (The Economic Times, 2018), which would also be "the pioneer Smart City of India" (Surbana 2015: 76). Amaravati, as an idea, was being positioned—through a relentless media offensive, continued speeches by the political leadership and slick publications—to capture people's imaginations, whilst encapsulating the aspirations and nuances of a resurgent Telugu culture.

### **1.3.1 Key land assembly tools in Amaravati**

The authorities in Amaravati used a combination of policy tools land to assemble land for the city. These included: a) the land pooling scheme (LPS), b) negotiated settlements, and c) land acquisition (eminent domain). These approaches were undergirded by legal frameworks consisting of the LARR Act 2013 (see chapter 3), the APCRDA Act, 2014 and the Andhra Pradesh Government Order of April 2017.

The first and primary tool, land pooling, was sold as a 'deal' between landowners in the capital region and the state government, wherein landowners could voluntarily 'pool' their land—that is sign ownership rights over to the APCRDA—for the development of a new capital city. This agency was then tasked with developing the land by building roads and laying sewage lines and electricity connections. Once this was done, it would return a smaller portion of the land—between 25 to 30 percent, depending on the type of land initially contributed—to the original owners through electronic lotteries. The promise of LPS rested on two outward assumptions: first, that the total area given to the government would be developed with better amenities and therefore be beneficial for the entire community; and second, that the returned smaller plots would be worth more than the acreage originally surrendered by landowners, due to the rise in property prices resulting from the intense speculation catalyzed by the announcement of the



new city. In this way, state authorities claimed that the political leadership in consultation with landowners and local leaders drew up a plan wherein “owners become part of the development process” (Srikant Nagulapalli, former Commissioner of APCRDA quoted in Kumar, 2015). Importantly, land, not money, was made the primary mode of exchange, reducing pressure on the new state’s financial resources.

To provide additional incentive for people to surrender their lands, the government promised a range of livelihood support measures including *inter alia* a yearly annuity, the waiving of agricultural loans, support for setting up self-employed enterprises and skills upgrading courses to help transform local residents within several months from farmers to shopkeepers (or electricians, entrepreneurs, air conditioner repair persons or a range of other urban workers, depending on the skill training course taken). In return for contributing land, landowners received a combination of benefits: a) returnable urban land that is a set proportion of their original land (1,250 square yards in the case of every acre of dry land and 1,450 square yards for wet land given) within a zoned region of Amaravati city; b) annuity payment for ten years differentiated by type of land; and c) access to additional benefits such as waiver of agricultural loans, skill training, and interest free loans for setting up enterprises. The annuity consisted of Rs. 30,000 and Rs. 50,000 per acre for dry (*metta*) and wet (*jareebu*) lands respectively for ten years, rising at the rate of 10 percent each year. Lands were classified as dry or *metta* if only one or two crops could be cultivated on it. Multi-cropped agricultural land with a water table of 15 feet or less under the ground was referred to as wet or *jareebu*. The categorization of land into wet and dry, with corresponding differentiated benefits was sanctioned under a particular Government Order (GO) called G.O. 41 (chapter 5 provides more details on this). Farmers were additionally promised that returnable urban plots would be allotted in and around the same village where landowners had relinquished their agricultural lands under LPS. Moreover, the government assured landowners that they would be able to choose the type of returnable plot they may receive from a broad menu of options covering residential and commercial plots.

Non-agricultural lands within village boundaries—called *grama kanttams*—where the majority of villagers resided were demarcated from the fields and made exempt from the land pooling process (see chapter 5). However, where lands and assets within village boundaries were required, the government resorted to a mode of acquisition called negotiated settlements.

Therefore, if land within these habitations was required for amenities such as roads or sewers, the government and landowners would have to agree on the terms of a compensation package that was consistent with the provisions of the 2013 LARR Act. The compensation in this case could also involve among other things, a land-for-land exchange rather than a cash exchange, as well as relocation assistance. For a house, residential plot or shops, the government provided for payment of two times the value of the structure, as well as allotment of equivalent developed land in the nearest vicinity and within the city. In addition, it promised construction grants and transitional support (for moving and subsistence during the move for one year) (Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2017). Finally, if the first two options proved unsuccessful, the Government of AP had the option of invoking the Central government's LARR Act, 2013, whereby land could be acquired in return for a set compensation (which includes the replacement value of the land, normally valued at two to four times the price of rural land), as well as livelihood support as per the requirements of the Land Acquisition Act.

On the surface at least, the government's plan to assemble land quickly was a resounding success: within just 60 days of implementation, it managed to persuade approximately 25,000 landowners to give up 30,000 acres of land. Remarkably, as of June 2018, the CRDA had acquired 33,700 acres of private land (Rao Ravi and Mahadevan, 2018). By October 2018, the reported numbers had risen again: 27,956 farmers had together pooled in 33,920 acres, amounting to 90 percent of the overall project area under government possession (World Bank, 2018). It became clear very early on that land pooling achieved some degree of success because it allowed most local landowners to profit from the steep rise in land values—either through selling their land to real estate speculators at a premium, thereby offering new opportunities for accumulation for a new range of actors, or providing land directly to the LPS and benefiting from the yearly annuities that were being provided by the government. However, less was known about the impacts of this modified form of dispossession on a range of social groups in the region and their reactions to the changes taking place. For instance, besides land owners with titles, the villages that comprised Amaravati also encompassed farmers who cultivated on government-assigned lands, landless tenant farmers, agricultural labourers and informal occupants of both agricultural lands and *grama kanttam* (village) lands. Each of these categories of owners and cultivators were also often stratified by caste. Therefore, a range of questions related to *how* different categories of people grappled with the tectonic shifts around them—

whether through negotiation or resistance—will be addressed in this dissertation, along with how the presiding authority approached each of these groups—whether through consensus-building and inclusion or co-option and coercion.

#### *1.4 Honing in on the politics of consent, negotiation and compliance: The genesis of a research topic, objectives, relevant questions and central thesis*

Taken together, the historical background of land acquisition struggles in India provides a broad framework for understanding the politics of land, consent and unequal negotiation between private and government interests on the one hand, and local peasants on the other. Owing to the hegemonic essence of the colonial era Land Acquisition Act of 1894, the balance of power lay almost entirely with the government: under an extraordinarily wide definition of ‘public purpose’, it had arrogated to itself vast legal powers to But after years of protest and demands for modifications in the legal framework underpinning the exercise of eminent domain, it could be argued that the passing of the LARR Act in 2013 heralded a shift in the balance of power towards the protection of the interests of marginal rural populations. Even then, the legal framework around land contained loopholes—from categories of land acquisition that were exempted from the SIA and consent requirements within the LARR Act to the fact that the transfer of property is an item on the Concurrent List<sup>12</sup> of the Constitution of India, thereby opening the pathway for individual states to enact their own land acquisition laws.

In fact, pushing land acquisition down to the state level was actively supported by Union Ministers and senior government officials, who indicated that such laws would receive Presidential assent as long as the state-level laws roughly followed the contours of the Central legislation to ensure “smooth acquisition” (Srivastava, 2015). Thus, some commentators have argued that law making has served as a terrain within which a ‘compromise equilibrium’ has been established between dominant and subaltern groups (Nielsen and Nilsen, 2017). This equilibrium, besides quelling dissent and opposition, still ultimately enables the long-term advancement of neoliberal restructuring (see chapter 2).

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<sup>12</sup> The Concurrent List or List-III is a list of 52 items contained within the Seventh Schedule (Article 246) to the Indian Constitution. Under a federal system (like India’s), these are items that fall within the legislative jurisdiction of *both* the Union and state governments. Item 6 of the Concurrent List includes the “[t]ransfer of property other than agricultural land...”

Against this backdrop, it is worth exploring how the process of land alienation under land pooling operates and the ways in which it impacted people on the ground in a post-LARR Act context. As discussed in the previous section, land pooling is formally a voluntary system based on the willingness of landowners to provide consent for the transfer of land to the state due to the perceived greater returns they will receive in the future. This, arguably, means that there is an increased need to understand the everyday politics of engagement and negotiation that both the state and cultivators employed for different ends: the state to accumulate land for officially-declared development purposes and local landowners to exercise and maintain some voice, control and 'stake'—over their transition from rural livelihoods to a promised urban future. Furthermore, it is imperative that the nature of consent and political negotiation be further unpacked—namely whether this entailed a genuine effort to provide information, build consensus and compromise and ensure inclusion of different groups or alternatively, if it amounted to a party-mediated exercise within a limited hegemonic structure to encourage land expropriation, maintain political loyalties, and establish neoliberal land use and ownership patterns, all under the garb of development.

Therefore, this dissertation attempts to unearth, examine and explain how events in Amaravati unfolded in the aftermath of bifurcation, and in the context of the circumvention of the LARR Act in Andhra Pradesh. I explore the specific land assembly tool—land pooling—that was used to appropriate land in the region and the responses to it by local cultivators through the prism of caste and class. In particular, I will examine dispossession as an outcome of state interests and strategies, as well as the strategies and interests of the populations to be dispossessed. This entails assessing how land pooling unfolded on the ground and who were affected most by it. Key inter-related questions cover three broad areas of inquiry:

- a. ***Motivations for, and strategies of, negotiation:*** *Why did the presiding authority—the TDP government—choose the LPS and by extension, a strategy of engaging and negotiating with residents in Amaravati? Why was it successful, at least initially? Conversely, why was there so little push back over land dispossession, particularly in a context where people were not only being dispossessed of the land they already owned, but others—tenant farmers and daily wage workers—were losing jobs?*

- b. ***Conditions of negotiation, consent and compliance:*** *How do we understand the process and nature of the negotiation that took place in Amaravati? How does the form of negotiation that took place in Amaravati relate to power balances and the hegemony of the dominant castes and the ruling party? In other words, was the outcome from the negotiation and engagement that took place under the LPS substantively different from what it would have been if the LARR Act had been imposed? Finally, under what circumstances, do dominant and subaltern groups negotiate, consent and finally comply?*
- c. ***The impact of caste and class on dispossession and the politics of negotiation and consent:*** *How do the social inequalities in the rural sector—and mediated in particular, by the institution of caste—relate to land dispossession and the everyday politics of negotiation? And how do these processes relate to dispossession, displacement, and feed back into existing caste and class-based inequities? What implications does this have on the neoliberal restructuring programme in the longer term? And finally, did this process achieve a consensus and compromise that benefitted all groups equally?*

In order to further unpack these questions, it was necessary to take one step back to ascertain the exact strategies used by the government to achieve compliance in different groups of people to the large-scale dispossession of their land and job loss generated by the LPS. Similarly, it was crucial to determine why and in what ways local cultivators and landowners engaged with the state, as they themselves weighed the potential gains against the inherent risks of giving up their rural lands and livelihoods for a promised urban future. Did they have another choice in the matter? In fact, as my research progressed, recognizing the heterogeneity inherent in communities and the “conjugated oppression” (Shah and Lerche, 2018) of those at the bottom of social and economic hierarchies as a result of the creation of a “real estate economy” (Sampat, 2015), only raised further sub-questions relating to how land pooling was impacting different categories of people differently. The focus shifted slightly to not only understanding the exact process of dispossession through land pooling, but to also achieving a nuanced understanding of how *outcomes* of the LPS varied for different categories of dispossessed people. It was important, therefore, to disaggregate and assess the impacts of land pooling on (largely) landed castes such as the Kammas and Reddys, as compared to *Dalits*—namely Mallas

and Madigas—who statistically own less land in coastal Andhra and comprise the majority of the landless labourers. Would/could they too be absorbed (favourably) into the emerging economy in Andhra? If so, how? And in instances where those at the bottom of the class and caste hierarchy do possess land, were outcomes for them the same as they were for landowners from the dominant castes? Could land pooling truly be alternate form of land acquisition that renders all landholders ‘stakeholders’ in a shared future, or is it merely a new way for governments to force through land grabs despite local resistance?

The answers to these empirical questions on the case study of Amaravati are also intended to further prise open theoretical questions regarding the nature and process of land accumulation and dispossession across India, particularly outside the framework of the LARR Act. What does Amaravati tell us about the direction in which the process of land dispossession is moving in India? Are negotiated solutions becoming more commonplace, instead of conflict? How does this process of continual contestation and seeming ‘negotiation’ between the state and local populations compare to previous examples of land dispossessions? Has it for example, resulted in a negotiated and contested—though largely peaceful—form of dispossession that has resulted in an incremental change or transfer of land rights from the original owners to either the state or private interests? In other words, has the process of dispossession itself become more protracted, cumulative and slow, dependent largely on the political processes on the ground? If so, how and in what ways does this relate to the theory of ‘accumulation by dispossession,’ which has dominated leftist discourses on how capitalism uses force to expel peasant populations from their land (Harvey, 2003; Levien, 2018)?

Viewing displacement as a protracted *process*—if that is what it is—in the context of neo-liberal reforms in peasant society may further facilitate understanding of how authorities engage with peasant politics and on the other end of the spectrum, how different classes—and castes—of displaced peasants contend with their own emerging desires and aspirations. In turn, this has fundamental impacts on both the formulation of government strategies towards the end goal of accumulation, and the mobilizations of different groups of rural populations against this accumulation. Ultimately, it suggests the emergence of new contours of engagement between a dispossessing authority and the dispossessed—exemplified by diverse forms of co-option, control, consent and compliance—within Indian agrarian society.

#### **1.4.1 Fieldwork overview**

In order to shed light on these questions, I embarked on 11 months of fieldwork, beginning in August 2016 and ending in July 2017, in and around the 25 villages and four hamlets that comprise the new capital region of Amaravati. I spent time systematically speaking to a variety of social actors—landowners, tenant farmers, landless agricultural labourers, real estate agents, members of farmers and workers organizations, other land users such as fisher folk and artisans, local politicians, *et cetera*—across the villages in order to better understand their perspectives, concerns and hopes for the development of the new city. I conducted in-depth interviews, and spent time observing people of different classes and castes, particularly women, to assess how their lives and lifestyles were changing. At the same time, I mapped a diverse terrain of bureaucrats, activists and local politicians from various political parties, to better analyze the various strategies that were being used to obtain (or refuse) consent for land pooling. Finally, I interviewed several key informants in Hyderabad and New Delhi to shed light on the broader context of land acquisition in India, in order to place ‘alternative’ land assembly methods such as land pooling within the context of agrarian transformation in India. Full details on the methodology I employed to complete the research is provided in chapter four.

#### **1.4.2 Central thesis: Land pooling is a vehicle for a protracted process of dispossession in Amaravati**

Based on the theoretical premise of dispossession, and the historical, and political history of social formation in Andhra, as well as on the results of my ethnographic fieldwork in Amaravati, I found that the announcement of the capital city in the Krishna-Guntur district had profoundly differentiated impacts on the residents there. The scope and nature of these impacts were mediated by caste politics in the state (particularly in coastal Andhra). They were also dependent to a lesser degree on ownership status and varying characteristics of land and labour relations within the villages of the capital. Specifically, members of the dominant Kamma caste, many of whom owned the majority share of the land in the region, and had links to the local administration, fared much better than others. Even in these cases, there was variation: larger landholders derived greater profits than farmers with small or marginal landholdings who weathered a fair deal of uncertainty over promises made by the authorities about the future.

Finally, a large contingent of landless people (mostly *Dalits*) were left worse off in absolute terms as result of the LPS. And where some *Dalits* owned land (through for example being assigned ceiling surplus or what is locally known as *lanka* lands), these historical gains are under threat of being reversed.

These underlying socio-political dynamics had profound implications for the strategies used both by the state and local populations to engage with the LPS. I argue that despite the early successes of land pooling, which was purported to be a better alternative to traditional land acquisition, it in fact generated a continuing, negotiated and less openly antagonistic form of dispossession. The government employed a skillfully crafted rhetorical and negotiation approach to convince and pressure initially reticent landowners to submit their lands to the LPS. It also sought to fragment the opposition through employing a carrot and stick approach that would pit communities against each other and mollify the most vocal demands, particularly if it came from members of the dominant caste, which constituted the main base of support for the ruling government. In this way, the everyday politics of co-option, deception and intimidation—as first observed by Mishra (2018) under different circumstances—became a part of daily life for most villagers. Unlike other dispossessions that may have occurred in one fell swoop, this process involved much more so-called ‘negotiation,’—a term that encompasses everything from co-option, coercion, to intimidation—of local residents, leading to small, incremental changes in ownership titles that occurred within a shifting political milieu over a much longer period of time. In this way, both economic and extra-economic means of dispossession were used at different times to achieve compliance.

### **1.4.3 Dissertation outline**

To fully unpack the diverse and overlapping reasons behind why Andhra Pradesh pursued the strategy of land pooling and its impacts on different categories of people in Amaravati, I first provide an overview of the theoretical basis for not only land grabs and dispossession in India, but the politics of crafting a new hegemony through land laws, urban planning documents and through fragmenting the opposition. I then historicize the caste and class politics of coastal Andhra Pradesh and its relationship to land ownership, before embarking on an empirical



analysis of the field site, comprising the 25 villages and four hamlets that were to transform into the new capital city.

Thus, the next chapter—chapter two—begins with an overview of the theoretical and conceptual framework around land dispossession and capitalist development. It elucidates on several relevant theoretical frameworks and discourses on land dispossession, before delving into a Gramscian analysis of how the ruling party managed to construct a form of political hegemony—that is, the rule by consent of the masses—through the control of the legal mechanism of acquiring land, creating an economy of speculation and fragmenting the opposition by leveraging caste politics. These developments have implications for not only how compliance may have been achieved for the LPS but also for how a dispossessing authority engages with those being dispossessed.

Chapter three provides a broad historical account of land use and caste patterns in coastal Andhra Pradesh. In particular, it discusses the land reform, administration, redistribution and alienation patterns in the state. It also addresses the all-important question of caste, class and co-option in the Krishna-Guntur district through examining how party politics in the state have revolved around caste allegiances, which has directly led to the social and institutional basis for landlord dominance, particularly by members of the Kamma caste. It further examines the historical, political and legislative context of land acquisition, land pooling and the evolution of public purpose in India. This provides a background to not only better understand the legal and institutional framework employed by successive governments on matters of land, displacement and development, but also the analytical tools with which to assess the LPS.

Chapter four provides a complete account of the methodology used for the empirical study conducted in the capital region over months.

Chapter five factually examines the physical geography of each of the villages in the capital region, along with their population demography. It further provides an overview of the all-important G.O. 41 that was enacted in the capital region in the aftermath of the implementation of the LPS.

And finally, the last three chapters—six, seven and eight—provide an analytical narrative and assessment of the impacts of land pooling on different classes of people. Chapter six focuses on the impacts of the emerging speculative city on landowners. Chapter seven examines the impacts of land pooling on cultivators of assigned lands. And finally, chapter eight examines how land pooling affected the lives and livelihoods of landless labourers. In each of these chapters, an attempt has been made to consider the strategies used both by government authorities and local residents, as each engaged in the everyday politics of negotiation and contestation to try to achieve the best outcome for themselves.

Finally, in the conclusion—chapter nine—I distil the main patterns and lessons learned from the experiment of land pooling as a vehicle for urbanization.

## 2 CONCEPTUALIZING LAND DISPOSSESSION, THE EVERYDAY POLITICS OF NEGOTIATION AND RESISTANCE, AND HEGEMONIC MODALITIES OF GOVERNING

It has often been argued that current examples of land appropriation represent both continuity and change from previous historical episodes of enclosures. In particular, land grab researchers have noted similarities between current land acquisitions and the enclosures of land and dispossession of peasants in England over centuries, culminating in the Parliamentary enclosures of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which Marx used to support his theory of primitive accumulation. Since Marx, the analytical lenses of classic agrarian political economy have included Lenin's (1973) postulation that capitalist agrarian change occurs through class differentiation in the countryside; while from a very different perspective, Polanyi (1944) observed that displacement of people from land brought about by capitalist intrusion into the countryside provokes political counter-movements; and more recently, Harvey's (2003) view of primitive accumulation as an ongoing, uneven process accompanying capitalist development ('accumulation by dispossession' or ABD). Other lenses of analyses have included Patnaik's (2008) accumulation through encroachment, Araghi's (2009) accumulation by displacement, and Li's (2011) emphasis on dispossessed peasants becoming 'surplus people', thereby representing the worst possible social outcome of big land deals.

These studies have together unearthed contemporary and diverse forms of dispossession that differ markedly from Marx's (1977) original thesis that expounds on the process of transition to capitalist agriculture. Yet, the sheer scale of dispossession of farmers and other independent producers in the post-liberalization era in India, combined with the use of coercive force by the state and large corporations involved in land deals have renewed interest in the Marxian idea of primitive accumulation as a continuing feature of capitalism (Adnan, 2015). For example, some argue that the advent of SEZs in India after 2005 provided "a *systematic* framework for land grabs" (*Ibid.*, 2015: 28; see also Levien, 2013), amounting to a "new enclosure movement" (Corbridge et al. 2013: 210). While new spaces for accumulation and profit have indeed opened up in this process, it is not just large corporations and high-ranking politicians who have benefited, but also small time land brokers (Levien, 2015), those in charge of land records and land conversion processes (Chandra, 2015), a host of 'middle men' (Sud, 2014) and members of the dominant classes and castes, who have aligned with the dispossessing authorities (Nielsen,

2018). These developments seem to support the assertion by Harvey (2005) that advanced global capitalism has evolved from what Marx called expanded (or enlarged) reproduction to accumulation by dispossession. The latter is a process in which the Indian state is acutely involved, both in terms of setting legislation and policymaking, and also in deploying force to evict peasants and obliterate opposition (Nielsen, 2018).

More recently, Levien's (2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2015) concept of 'regimes of dispossession' have highlighted and expounded on India's so-called new 'land wars,' which is the phenomenon of state-led land expropriation to extract profit for private investors. He provides historical specificity and the ideological basis for the process and scale of land dispossession in its current form in India, arguing that marginal rural populations are increasingly being pitted against a neoliberal "land-broker state" (*Ibid.* 2013). Levien (2018: 18) further states "compliance captures the necessary and sufficient condition for the temporally discrete process of dispossession," whilst not necessarily requiring "enduring consent to the existing social order." In this way, land dispossession requires only "temporary compliance," which he contrasts to "exploitation [which] requires enduring consent at the point of production."

However, viewing land dispossession as a one-off event, even if he acknowledges that states ensure dispossession through "*explicit* forms of inducement" such as "coercion, legitimization, and/or material compensation" (*Ibid.* 2018: 19), fails to fully take into account both the developing politics of hegemony designed to contain and fragment any opposition and the 'everyday politics' or 'everyday resistance' of marginalized populations against dominant elites or authorities. While Levien (*Ibid.* 2018: 20) concedes that states must legitimize consent to dispossession through a variety of means—i.e. through appealing to dominant groups, offering material compensation, etc.—which amount to specific combinations of "coercion, compensation and legitimacy", one key factor that deserves greater consideration is the inter-linkages between land dispossession, everyday politics and the potential for the development of anti-dispossession politics.

This chapter will theoretically examine land dispossession through four related aspects: first, it will provide an overview of key debates on land and capital transition, which includes a discussion of early Marxist theories of primitive accumulation and later, Harvey's 'accumulation

by dispossession,' before leading into a closer examination of Levien's own insights into his 'regimes of dispossession' and important critiques of each of these theories. Second, I will discuss the importance of viewing India's contemporary 'land wars' both through the prism of the everyday politics and the politics of caste, focusing on the negotiation and contestation strategies different groups of landowners and cultivators use to express their aspirations, interests, anxieties, perspectives and agency in a site of dispossession (Majumder, 2012; Majumder and Nielsen, 2017; Nielsen, 2018). By unpacking how heterogeneous groups of ordinary villagers engage with the state to maximize their own utility and manage uncertain futures, it will be possible to further analyse and explain the variety of responses (ranging from fierce opposition to ecstatic support) that people exhibit within a site of dispossession. Third, I will more closely examine the hegemonic tactics governments use to 'legitimize consent' to dispossession by drawing from the work of Antonio Gramsci, largely through the use of so-called 'inscription devices'—a concept developed by Tanya Li. Finally, the chapter will end with an assessment of theories that purport to demonstrate how subaltern groups engage with the hegemonic forces of government. The chapter ultimately argues that that it is necessary to think of land dispossession and the politics that surround it as being *both* simultaneously a one-off event and increasingly, a slow moving social process embedded in the everyday life of the dispossessed.

## **2.1 Defining and questioning concepts: land grabs, dispossession, displacement**

While agrarian change scholars have extensively focused on processes of land and resource dispossession, and to a lesser extent, their political drivers, impacts and contestations to explain changes to different aspects of social relations, it is necessary to first unpack several terms that are often used interchangeably in the literature, namely land grab, dispossession and displacement. The definitions themselves begin to expose some of the changes inherent in contemporary forms of land expropriation, as compared to historical examples.

Zoomers (2010: 249) first described land grabs as "large scale, cross border land deals or transactions that are carried out by transnational corporations or initiated by foreign governments." Borras *et al.* (2011: 2010) later claimed that: "the phrase 'global land grab' has become a catch-all to described and analyse the global explosion of large scale (trans)national

commercial land transactions.” At the time, the focus of land grab literature was on the impact of agribusiness, tourism and even conservation, and related transactions were seen as a response to global food insecurity (Gardner and Gerharz, 2016). Consequently, corporations (sometimes aided by the state) had to take over large tracts of land to provide food for export, sometimes resorting to importing foreign labour to do agricultural work (*Ibid.*; Borras et al. 2011, Zoomers, 2010, Makki and Geisler, 2011).

There is also an element of ‘foreignization of land’ in the original definition of land grabs, although examples from India demonstrate that this was not always the case: there are various examples of the Central government (or individual states within the country) working with national companies to expropriate land. Moreover, land expropriations are no longer confined just to agribusiness: vast tracts of land have been turned over for industry, real estate, property speculation and housing (Gardner and Gerharz, 2016). In the case of Amaravati, a large number of local landowners have turned over a huge tract of land (in sum) for the creation of a state capital, albeit one with ‘global ambition’ and ties to international business. Finally, the term ‘land grab’ conjures an image of a one-time seizure of land, which may even be violent. Yet, even this may not be entirely true. There are examples across India that have demonstrated that land can be transferred from one group to another in smaller, incremental and orderly steps, within a shifting and negotiated political context (*Ibid.*; Garder, 2012; Axelby, 2016)—a topic that will be revisited later in this chapter.

The term, ‘dispossession’, meanwhile, implies that someone originally possessed a parcel of land, which was forcefully taken away. Yet, even this assumption can face some perplexing realities, namely that in some cases, including that of Amaravati, people may not have full legal—or clear—tenure rights over the lands on which they live and cultivate crops. In fact, it is fairly common for many cultivators and farmers to not have legal papers to their land, despite having lived and worked on the land for a generation or more (Nuremowla, 2016; Axelby, 2016; Gardner and Gerharz, 2016). This in turn, exposes many ordinary villagers—particularly those who are unable to afford to contest cases in the court system—to even greater risk (of loss of land and livelihood) in the face of an impending development or takeover of land. Clearly, a further distinction between legal rights, customary rights and access to resources is necessary to create more ‘real’ land rights for a vast majority of rural residents. Additionally, the word

‘dispossession’ sometimes suggests that a straightforward transfer of rights occurs leaving those who have lost land dispossessed. But the process is often more complicated, involving complex negotiations between different social groups, alliances between members of different caste and class groups, as well as the ruling government. In addition, contestations between different types of rights, amongst several other factors, are also common.

Finally, the term ‘displacement’ is most often seen in India in literature that relates to large-scale (forced) movements, and resettlement and rehabilitation efforts of project-affected people. This generally occurs in the aftermath of infrastructure development (i.e. dams), mining or conservation projects (see for example, Cernea, 2006; Mathur, 2008). According to Gardner and Gerharz, 2016: 16):

The term turns our attention from questions of property and possession to emplacement: the social as well as economic forces that structure relationships to localities and livelihoods, and indeed the costs of forced movement.

Thus, displacement implies not only the loss of land, but also the loss of social and geographically-specific relationships. This analysis is deepened even further by Feldman and Geisler (2012), who distinguish between *in-situ* and *ex-situ* displacement. While *in-situ* displacement may at first appear less disruptive, it can lead to the “the critical impairment of the means of social reproduction,” which can be as ruinous as *ex-situ* displacement. Moreover, displacement itself can occur in a variety of ways: forced by the state or related agencies, compelled by private forces, or as an outcome of wider processes, such as urbanization (Gardner and Gerharz, 2016).

Distinguishing between the various meanings of these terms serves the purpose of unveiling the more subtle, yet complex processes that surround the use of, and access to, land, in addition to their analytic potential (*Ibid.*) They have particular relevance for an urbanization project like Amaravati, which rests on the successful implementation of a seemingly ‘alternative’ or new(ish) form of land assembly such as land pooling. As will be demonstrated in the latter part of this dissertation (chapters 6, 7 and 8), land pooling enjoys varying levels of support amongst people of disparate social classes and castes, who themselves have differing access and use rights over

land. Delineating the meanings of these key terms highlights how and why the surrender of this land may be supported in some cases, but opposed in others, and how this transfer may not always amount to a 'land grab,' 'dispossession' or 'displacement' in the classical sense, despite creating a sense of uncertainty and havoc in the lives of local cultivators.

## **2.2 Key debates and critiques on land and capitalist transition: Primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession and regimes of dispossession**

With a clearer understanding of the meanings ascribed to key terminology, it is possible to assess the processes by which land privation might occur. The continuing relevance of Marx's theory of primitive accumulation to the land debate in India, and Harvey's (2003, 2005) later arguments are particularly important bases for analysis for contemporary theorists. Chatterjee (2017), in his prelude to *The Land Question in India: State, Dispossession, and Capitalist Transition*, provides compelling reasons for the contemporary relevance of the concept of primitive accumulation—that is, Marx's thesis of the historical processes of change in rural life from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century in Britain and Ireland. In the seminal work, Marx argues that this period in British history saw peasants forcibly separated from their land to make room for capitalist agriculture and a landless class, which in turn became the source of economic surplus for expanded accumulation (Marx, 1977). By definition then, primitive accumulation is “non-market” driven by, and tantamount to, “extra-economic coercion” (Bernstein 2010: 27), which leads to the creation of free wage labour for capitalist industrialization. As peasants are separated from their lands, they theoretically become wagedworkers or industrial proletariats (D'Costa 2014: 324). At the same time, efficiency-enhancing capitalist farmers replace these peasants and they in turn modernize production systems, accumulate and generate economic surplus in the countryside.

However, Chatterjee (2017) outlines three shortcomings that hamper the application of this theory in post-colonial societies. First, the classical transition thesis is difficult to apply in contemporary societies, where the transition is either nearly complete or has taken on a different form. In India, for example, Chatterjee questions whether it is possible to refer to primitive accumulation when the country demonstrates both capitalist and non-capitalist forms of production organization for surplus extraction. Second, complete structural transformation as



described by the narrative of primitive accumulation has not occurred. Instead, for Chatterjee, the capitalist sector exists alongside various other economic systems, including the 'subsistence economy,' 'informal economy,' 'need economy,' or more recently, 'gig economy' in many societies, thereby suggesting an incomplete transition. Thus, India's capitalist trajectory is "a blended integration of primitive accumulation and capitalism proper" (*Ibid.*). In this way, the alienation of peasants from their land (and hence dispossession) has led neither to the complete elimination of the peasantry, nor to the exclusive creation of an industrial proletariat. It has instead given rise to the unorganized sector. Sanyal (2007: 249) further argues that besides being largely destitute, the dispossessed are absorbed through engaging in precarious forms of employment, such as casual labour.

Some economic research has further found that accumulation in agriculture in India has stalled (Byres, 1993; Bharadwaj, 1985) and "agriculture is not playing out its historic role in the transformation process" (D'Costa and Chakraborty, 2017). This is supported by survey data, which has found that Indian agriculture has failed to generate a massive surplus and is instead largely supported by state subsidies. These resources, in turn, fall mostly in the hands of powerful rural social classes. Econometric analyses have also suggested that pronounced social differentiation persists in the countryside (Banerjee and Iyer, 2005), whilst others argue that the Indian countryside continues to be marked by semi-feudal relations (Bagchi, 2010). Conversely, there has also been increasing consensus around the idea that capitalist relations do exist in rural areas, although they prevail alongside non-capitalist forms of production in some parts of the country (Harriss, 2013; Sanyal, 2007). Some like Harriss (2013) and Lerche (2013) have argued that the lack of productivity and profitability in the agricultural sector and its relative disassociation from industry is the result of India's entry into global circuits of capital. These characteristics have together had the effect of (re)producing precarious forms of employment, whilst directing state resources into the hands of dominant castes and classes (D'Costa and Chakraborty, 2017).

The plethora of debates and contradictory findings has at the most basic level generated incredibly varied perspectives on the transition debate in India. But more importantly, for this study the concept of primitive accumulation sits uncomfortably with the phenomenon of land grabbing by private capital (*Ibid.*). For instance, Levien (2015a: 3) contends that primitive

accumulation “obscures more than it illuminates about contemporary land dispossession.” This is because contemporary forms of dispossession cannot be understood within the rubric of the creation of the pre-conditions for capitalism: dispossessing farmers for various projects does not signal a transition between modes of production. In fact, with the case of special economic zones (SEZs) and Amaravati—an urbanization project—they often have little to do with agriculture or the development of capitalist agriculture, and they do not resemble historical patterns of enclosures. Instead, they are “geared towards capitalizing land with little regard for what happens to the dispossessed farmer whose labour power is largely superfluous” (*Ibid.* pg. 7).

Therefore, some scholars suggest that David Harvey’s concept of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (ABD) might be a more appropriate concept to explain land grabs (Banerjee-Guha, 2013). Harvey (2003) contends that ABD has become the predominant mode of accumulation under neoliberalism and the Marxist focus on labour must be accompanied by an analysis of proliferating struggles over dispossession. Harvey therefore applies ABD to several different examples, ranging from the expropriation of land and natural resources from peasant populations to various predations of finance capital. He argues that capitalism’s chronic problem of over-accumulation can be redressed through ‘spatio-temporal fixes’ wherein new markets are opened up or resources exploited. Taken together, the concept of ABD explicitly recognizes that dispossession is driven by advanced capitalism. It also unhinges primitive accumulation from the manacles of modes of production and the generation of capitalist social relations, allowing it to more effectively capture and explain diverse forms of dispossessions (Levien, 2012). This includes the loss of land for factories, dams, SEZs, mining projects, real estate, infrastructure projects and possibly even privatized cities. In this way, Harvey successfully “frees the idea of primitive accumulation from its historicism” (Mishra 2018: 2) through considering a number of different processes under ABD.

However, the concept of ABD also struggles to shed light on the actual techniques or steps involved in the process of dispossession. Harvey mentions collusion between states and corporations, but provides little detail by way of what this might actually look like. His focus on the “over-accumulation of the crisis of capitalism” (*Ibid.*) also gives short shift to the importance of local class processes, the role of elites or ideological justifications involved. Moreover, there is

an implicit assumption that people wish to continue to work the land, when the reality (especially from studies in South and South-East Asia) may be different (Hall, 2013; Li, 2014). He also claims that ABD is “primarily economic rather than extra-economic” (Harvey, 2006: 159) without providing further analytical boundaries.

Levien (2013a, 2015, 2017), in particular, claims that Harvey underemphasizes the most significant aspect of land dispossession, namely its deeply political nature, providing little in the way of an empirically grounded theory of dispossession politics. He focuses most of his analysis on the political process of land dispossession, namely the phenomenon of states working in tandem with private capital to dispossess people in particular contexts. He particularly rejects Harvey’s emphasis on “primary economic rather than extra-economic” means of dispossession, focusing instead on “variations in regimes of dispossession within the capitalist modes of production” (Levien, 2017: 54). With respect to the role that governments sometimes play in dispossessing people, Levien claims: “Dispossession requires a state that is willing and able to use its monopoly of the means of violence to expropriate land from certain classes for the benefit of others” (*Ibid.*). Consequently, he emphasizes that contemporary forms of dispossession have little to do with agriculture or the proletarianization of the peasantry (*Ibid.* pg. 53)—and often involve a form of force or violence.

Instead, Levien (2015a: 12) postulates that states attempt to redistribute resources to different classes or fractions for different economic purposes under various ‘regimes of dispossession’. A regime of dispossession “has two essential components: a state willing to dispossess for a particular set of economic purposes that are tied to particular class interests, and a way of generating compliance to this dispossession” (*Ibid.*, pg. 57). He argues that land dispossession is a deeply political process wherein the owner of the means of coercion transfers resources from one group to another group, which itself is an outcome of class struggle. Moreover, differing regimes of dispossession use variegated means, including force, legitimacy and material concessions, to force compliance amongst those being dispossessed (*Ibid.*).

Because dispossessing people is first and foremost a question of political authority, all regimes of dispossession must rely to some degree on the actual or threatened use of force, creating an immediate antagonism between the state and the to-be dispossessed. However, to dispossess

people of their land, every regime of dispossession must offer a compelling reason to do so. The state's intervention to acquire land has to be justified through appeals to ideologies such as 'development', 'national interest', 'public purpose' or the like. In order to ensure these claims are persuasive, the economic purpose of driving the dispossession should align with a widely accepted concept of development. Levien argues that the state, politics and ideology together, form the constitutive factors of dispossession. In this way, he reconstructs the theory of ABD by:

detaching the term from the debate over transitions to capitalism and defining it instead as 'the use of extra-economic coercion to expropriate means of production, subsistence or common social wealth for capital accumulation' (Levien quoted in Hall, 2013).

Finally, Levien contends that while in the case of labour exploitation, workers are required to turn up for work every day, in the case of land dispossession, the owner of land is forced to give up his land *at one time* in one fell sweep. This requires a different kind of manipulation of power and ideology. While the working of power in the case of labour exploitation may be opaque, in the case of land dispossession, the direct intervention of the state in employing extra-economic coercion makes the workings of power explicit. In fact, the use of power—whether it is the coercion of the state or the brute force of non-state actors—is a possible way to link the concept of on-going primitive accumulation with the primitive accumulation that took place during the beginnings of capitalism. Certainly, the use of force has led to diverse forms of dispossession around the world and in India this has become relevant, particularly after the passing of the SEZ Act in 2005.

While the three main theories outlined above have shed light on the process of land dispossession from a Marxist perspective, several others question the assumptions that undergird land grab-related dispossession and provide additional frameworks to better understand modern land grabs. Derek Hall (2013) in particular cautions that current understandings of primitive accumulation and ABD have potentially problematic assumptions about land grabbing-related dispossession—ranging from what it is, who carries it out and how, to whether it is a unified phenomenon—which have little bearing on empirical findings. He emphasizes that debates over primitive accumulation and ABD do not take place in a vacuum,

but rather intersects with related concepts such as enclosure, commodification, the double movement, neoliberalism, privatisation and capitalism.

As a result, there is considerable variation in understandings of primitive accumulation and ABD, with a plethora of terms having been coined to describe different versions of capitalist transition. These include (but are not limited to): accumulation by displacement (Araghi, 2009), accumulation by encroachment (Patnaik, 2008), accumulation by denial (Adnan, 2013) and dispossession by accumulation to name a few (Akram-Lodhi, 2012). Elsewhere, Borras *et al.* (2012) state that land grabs, whilst resulting in grabbing *control* over land, does not “always require expulsion of peasants from their lands,” nor does it have to end in dispossession. Islar (2012: 386) uses the term ABD to refer to the ways “common resources are enclosed and transformed into exclusive places” and Fairhead, Leach and Scoones (2012: 243) describe ABD as “the enclosure of public assets by private interests for profit, resulting in greater social inequity.” Akram-Lodhi (2012), meanwhile, refers explicitly to market-driven processes of dispossession.

One of the ways in which the theories differ from one another involves the speed and manner in which the dispossession occurs. Levien (2013, 2015a, 2017) and some others have largely portrayed it as an event, requiring “one-time compliance at the point of enclosure” (Levien 2015: 13). This is contrasted against the exploitation of labour, which requires “enduring consent at the point of production” (*Ibid.*) While there is a dearth of studies that address and theorize land grabs as anything other than a sudden, involuntary and sometimes violent phenomenon, there have been some studies that illustrate incremental changes over land rights. For example, Axelby’s (2016) study of how different ethnic groups in Himachal Pradesh negotiate access to and rights over grazing land over years, demonstrates that the transfer of land from one group of users to another can often be slow and cumulative. Land can essentially change hands over time, depending on complex political processes on the ground. In another study in Orissa, Mishra (2011) draws a distinction between large-scale, involuntary and ‘catastrophic’ dispossession of land for industry and mining and “dispossession in slow motion.” He argues the latter is a quieter and often clandestine process, which involves ‘voluntary’ transfers of land over longer periods of time. In the case of Orissa, he argues that local economic and political factors, such as peasant differentiation, agrarian distress, seasonal food and

employment insecurity, social and spatial concentration of poverty, and the capture of the local state by a rentier elite have all contributed to an agrarian crisis, which has in turn pushed rural poor people off their lands.

### **2.3 *Moving towards viewing India's land wars through the prism of 'everyday politics' and the politics of caste***

Thus, in the same vein as Majumder and Nielsen (2017) and Nielsen (2018), I argue that this focus on the everyday sociocultural practices and local economic and political strategies used by ordinary residents living in a particular place at a specific moment in time is critical for better understanding the plethora of anxieties, aspirations, dreams, interests, perspectives and strategies that are utilized by people to contend with the dispossession with which they are confronted. Paying analytical attention to 'the everyday'—whether this means aiming the spotlight on 'everyday politics' or 'everyday resistance' is particularly useful in capturing the “low-profile, prosaic struggles of the marginalized against dominant elites or authorities” (Nielsen, 2018), as well as internal battles within a community over the control and allocation of resources, and the values that underpin them (*ibid.*). In fact, struggles over land rights are usually more than about control over land: they affect multiple aspects of daily life and local politics. As Nielsen (2018) puts it, they:

Open new spaces for contesting and consolidating caste-class relations; they enable and undermine leadership, authority and policy agency; they urge farmers to reflect on what it means to be a farmer; and they enable popular engagement with and reconfigurations of the emancipatory and tyrannical powers of the law.

In short, the growing anthropological work on everyday popular politics in India (see for example, Michelutti, 2008, 2010; Piliavsky, 2013; Shah, 2013; Upadhyay, 2020; Wouters, 2015) has allowed for new types of questions to be posed about the role played by local politics, social relations and moral and strategic decisions made by local people, who are faced with immense changes in a short period of time. For example, where a dispossession project is met with a variety of responses, ranging from protest against, to support for it, the simultaneous expression of these vastly differing points of view by ordinary residents within the same location requires deeper analysis. Recent anthropological research has in fact shown that a number of

diverse aspirations, dreams and perspectives transpire within large-scale industrial projects (see for example, Cross, 2014; Upadhy, 2020 for analyses of different projects in Andhra Pradesh). Such internal contradictions between individuals within communities are often overlooked or glossed over in popular articles (Majumder and Nielsen, 2017) or even sometimes in overarching theses on land dispossession.

Anthropology has a long history of embracing analyses of the ‘everyday’ in various contexts of rural life and politics. For example, James C. Scott (1985; 1990) and Benedict Kerkvliet (2005) have each extensively studied the “politics in conventional places and forms” (Kerkvliet, 2009) amongst Southeast Asian peasants, with a special emphasis on the relationship between political life in peasant communities and the political systems in which they are ensconced. In India, subaltern studies delved into the notion of ‘politics of the people’ or ‘popular politics’ from the 1980s (Nielsen, 2017). Ranajit Guha, one of the founders of the collective and a long-term student of peasant uprisings in India, borrowed the term from Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist philosopher and Communist leader who developed the concept of cultural hegemony, which at its core has the idea that the state and ruling capitalist class are in a position to manipulate and dominate cultural institutions in society to maintain power. This cultural leadership or dominance, in turn, is exerted onto the ‘ruled’—or what Gramsci referred to as the subaltern.

Therefore, Guha (1988) built on this distinction between elite and subaltern political domains, to argue that subaltern politics and peasant resistance is non-hierarchical, based on “pre-existing, traditional social solidarities” (Nielsen, 2017; Chandra, 2013) and organized along “lines of kinship, territoriality, co-residence or ritual links” (Nielsen, 2017). In contrast to the politics of the educated elites that engage with the state through traditional political pathways such as public meetings, petitions, the media and activism via lobbying, subalterns groups—namely, peasants, tribal and other underprivileged people—stake very specific claims against a range of authorities, including the colonial state, landlords and moneylenders. According to Guha, this is frequently conveyed in religious idiom and organized along community lines such as caste or tribe. Moreover, the political logic of such assertions may also rest in popular beliefs, folklore and even rumours. In the context of the relatively recent battles over rural land in India, this line of philosophy lent itself to the idea that the insurgent subaltern is also one that has a communal

identity and acts on the basis of pre-existing, traditional solidarities (Nielsen, 2017; Guha, 1988; Chatterjee, 1988). Therefore, several scholars such as Mahuya Pal (2016) and Mohan J. Dutta (2013) have provided communitarian analyses of India's land struggles.

### **2.3.1 Everyday politics as it relates to caste, class and dispossession**

The importance of communitarian identities and politics—and their fragmentation in the context of displacement—is a particularly important topic for further study. While the anthropology of rural India in the immediate post-Independence period is replete with analyses of the nexus between caste, land and power (see for example, Lewis and Barnouw, 1956; Srinivas, 1959), theorization of the social and economic differences inherent within a community and the implications these hold for contemporary forms of land dispossession and displacement is lacking. Perhaps one of the most seminal studies in this vein dates back to the 1930s, when Wiser's (1988) analysis of the *jajmani* system—a complex economic protocol found mainly in Indian villages, wherein goods and services between landowning higher castes and landless service castes were exchanged—related the socio-political construction of caste to the distribution of land, wealth and power. Later studies, meanwhile, further analysed how class dominance rooted in access to and ownership of land aligned closely with caste hierarchies, ensuring that in more cases than not, the *jajman* (or 'served' caste) corresponded with those who belonged to the dominant caste in a village (Nielsen, Sareen and Oskarsson, 2020). While it is already well established in the literature that powerful and dominant caste have access to the best lands, a study by Hjejle (1988) empirically demonstrated this, confirming that the caste status of the landowner had an impact on the quality of the agricultural land that they owned, which included factors such as access to irrigation sources.

According to Nielsen, Sareen and Oskarsson (2020) in more recent years, scholarship on land dispossession—particularly from those adopting leftist political economy perspectives or by legal scholars—has almost exclusively focused on unpacking the structural and political drivers of land conflicts (*Ibid.*) or the legal underpinnings of notions such as 'public purpose' and 'eminent domain' (Banerjee-Guha, 2013; Levien, 2011, 2013a) to the detriment of systematic analysis on how caste and dispossession politics interact. Elsewhere, studies that emphasized the political ecology of mining and industrial activities in *Adivasi* areas (see Ramesh, 2017 for



instance) tended to focus on the unified anti-dispossession protests in which both *Adivasi* and non-*Adivasi* communities engaged, without analytically prising open the politics of land relations in the context of caste and class differences. Finally, urban scholars have almost exclusively focused on the prevalence of caste politics within cities, without linking this to land issues (Nielsen, Sareen and Oskarsson, 2020; Vij and Narain, 2016).

In fact, caste and class as categories of social relations are particularly important when considering how the state engages with land and its acquisition in India. Caste, for instance, mediates land transfers in modern India in significant ways: it can at different times, for different reasons, pre-empt, block or fuel processes of social contestation, whilst also realigning and reshaping caste identities and alliances. These observations may go some ways towards explaining how members of a dominant peasant caste in a particular area may support the ruling party and its policies, inducing them to even willingly consent to displacement. This is because they may have something else to gain from the arrangement. Meanwhile, members of another dominant caste or those from more marginalized castes, who failed to effectively negotiate or engage with the government during a dispossession process may be forced into complying with what is to them, a government or private sector-backed 'land grab.' These inherent tensions within a heterogeneous community in a region might alter peasant politics, either posing challenges for, or alternately, removing barriers for land accumulation efforts. The seemingly contradictory roles of the state as it has vacillated between policies aimed at redistributing land towards more marginalized and poorer segments of society (see chapter 3), particularly in the immediate post-Independence period, to pursuing capitalist development on behalf of dominant classes in other instances, also deserve special attention. Agarwal and Levien (2019) point out that while most scholarship of rural people subjected to 'land grabs' treat them with a homogenizing broad stroke, the reality is that nearly every agrarian environment in the world is marked by inequalities. Recognizing this is crucial to gaining a more complete understanding of the consequences of dispossession and the political responses to it.

The case of India is particularly important as it is both the epicentre of vociferous protests against land dispossessions and has rural areas marked by deep social inequalities, filtered especially by the institution of caste. As a result, in the words of D'Costa and Chakraborty (2017):

land, notwithstanding its historical and contemporary role in the accumulation process, has been and continues to be a turbulent arena in which classes, castes, and communities are in conflict with each other, with the state, and with capital, jockeying to determine the terms and conditions of land transactions or their prevention, through both market and non-market mechanisms.

This underlying conflict inherent in land transactions, combined with the pursuit of a specific form of ‘development’ and the concomitant spread of capitalist economic growth, has led to the entrenchment of not only income inequality, but also social inequity (Shah and Lerche, 2018). Members of the scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST) are especially disadvantaged by the form of capitalist development taking place, as their caste-based oppression takes place through “the forms of class relations in which they are enmeshed” (*Ibid.* 2018: 204)—a process Shah and Lerche (2018) have referred to as “conjugated oppression.”<sup>13</sup> In this way, caste-based discrimination combines or ‘conjugates’ with the growing economic marginalization of many in the SC and ST communities, resulting in a dynamic of institutionalized oppression. These factors are important for both better eliciting a fine-grained understanding of dispossession politics in India and putting into context the contradictions and inequalities that persist in rural India, which translates into differing political stances with respect to land within a heterogeneous community. Indeed, to account for this phenomenon, a number of recent studies have adopted a more inter-sectional lens, incorporating class, caste and gender when analysing land grabs (Nielsen, 2018; Srinivasulu, 2014; Sampat, 2015b).

Even so, this literature sits in uncomfortable opposition to a large and complex body of work—starting with Ambedkar's (1947) emphasis on the importance of modernity—that expounds on the potentially mollifying effects of industrialization, urbanization, globalization and capitalism on caste-based discrimination (see for example, Weber, 1978). This body of scholarship—sometimes termed ‘*Dalit* capitalism’—predicted that capital would ultimately destroy the caste system, as first, it was considered a pre-capitalist relic, and second, the market is inherently agnostic and indifferent to social hierarchies (Agarwal and Levien, 2019). Consequently, some scholars have argued that after India's post-1990s liberalization drive, discriminatory caste

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<sup>13</sup> This was a term first used by Philippe Bourgois (1988, 1997) in his analysis of Kuna and Guaymí Amerindian banana workers in Central America.

practices have abated, liberating some *Dalits* from the shackles of social stigma and widespread discrimination (Kapur *et al.* 2010; Kapur, Babu, and Prasad, 2014).

With the issue of land dispossession, this view has ultimately had the effect of hiding the internal heterogeneity of villagers who are under threat of being dispossessed. In fact, different villagers have unequal land and possessions—a fact skewed by caste—and “social relations of production in agriculture are often characterized not only by economic exploitation but by caste discrimination and indignity” (Agarwal and Levien, 2019: 2). At first glance, *Dalits* may not have as much to lose as other villagers due to the fact that they own less land. Yet, they often depend on agricultural labour, untitled common land for grazing animals or for housing, and may have access, use and ownership rights to land that differ from traditional *patta* rights (i.e. rights over ceiling or government lands). These assets and protections tend to be less respected and compensated during state-led grabs. Agarwal and Levien (2019) further point out that given many *Dalit* face deficits in economic, cultural and social capital, they are also less well-positioned than dominant castes to benefit from any new (i.e. infrastructural, urbanization, economic, etc.) government projects.

Taken together, the process of displacement is one that becomes part of the everyday lives of the displaced. Caste identities and social relations in particular play important roles in generating a multiplicity of responses to dispossession—ranging from support to dissent—as well as various states of incorporation and accommodation by society and government—ranging from exclusion to inclusion. Viewing displacement as a process in the context of neo-liberal reforms in peasant society may further facilitate understanding of how authorities engage with peasant politics and on the other end of the spectrum, how different categories of cultivators and agricultural land owners make claims over land and manage their own emerging desires and aspirations, particularly in a context where an imminent infrastructural or urbanization project is taking place.

#### 2.4 Constructing hegemony through inscription devices from above: State modalities to support a neoliberal regime of dispossession

Recognizing the heterogeneity within communities that are in the process of being dispossessed, as well as the corresponding socio-cultural practices and tactics they employ as part of the 'everyday', raises questions regarding the political strategies the dispossessing authority uses to achieve compliance in different groups of people. Several studies have demonstrated that non-violent catalyzers of dispossession are often just as important as coercive tactics. These include the "everyday politics of deception, co-option, corruption, delays or the threat of land acquisition" (Mishra, 2018: 2; also see Guha, 2017 and Ibreck, 2017). Nielsen and Nilsen (2017) show that in some instances, the state may adopt a "compromise equilibrium" through for example, passing laws either to facilitate land acquisition or to neutralize political demands against the means of acquisition. This equilibrium is usually struck between dominant and subaltern groups, which in turn, facilitates the neoliberal restructuring programme in the longer term. The authors demonstrate how this occurred in the context of the passing of the *Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act* (or the LARR Act) in 2013.

They argue that while the LARR Act seems at least on the surface to protect the rights of local landowners through enshrining a "humane, participative, informed and transparent process for land acquisition... with the least disturbance to the owners of the land" (Government of India, 2013: 1), in reality, the law promises much more than what it is capable of delivering. While social movements may have mobilized to advance and finally implement the new legal framework in an effort to arrest or at least slow the inching ramifications of neoliberal land grabs, the law also contains elements that act to contain dissent and opposition from the very people from whom lands are taken. Thus, while the law at least on the surface promises a range of essential infrastructural facilities, compensation and rehabilitation for affected families, whose land has been acquired, it still ultimately constructs "the material basis for consent to a regime of dispossession" (Levien, 2013a: 400). This is because the structure within which the contestations occur—the law itself—is a modality through which the overall project of dispossession can still occur, albeit perhaps at a slower pace and in more contested spaces.

Nielsen and Nilsen's (2017) formulation of 'compromise equilibrium' draws on the work of Gramsci, who argued that the ruling classes develop a hegemonic culture using ideology, rather than violence or coercive force to maintain control. This exercise of political domination often occurs through the workings of cultural or political institutions—what Gramsci refers to as the 'integral state' (Gramsci, 1998: 239), which is the combination of political and civil societies. It, in turn, transfuses "its institutions, discourses and technologies of rule into the fabric of everyday life of subaltern groups" (Nielsen and Nilsen, 2017, 5). By extension, this creates consent to the capitalist order as the dominant view or discourse becomes the "common sense" accepted worldview ("*Weltanschauung*"). Consent is therefore at the core of Gramsci's theorization of hegemony.

Much the same process can occur through other modalities. For example, Tanya Li (2014) refers to inscription devices, which is a concept that first emerges from her exploration of the meaning of land in an article published in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. In it, she stresses land's materiality, its multiple affordances and its intrinsically social character. Drawing particularly from the tangible nature of land ("it has presence and location") Li, states that:

...inscription devices—the axe, the spade, the plough, the title deed, the tax register, maps, graphs, satellite images, ancestral graves, mango trees—do more than simply record the presence of land as a resource: they are integral to assembling it as a resource for different actors (2014: 589).

She goes further by stating that in order to turn land to productive use, it requires

regimes of exclusion that distinguish legitimate from illegitimate uses and users and the inscribing of these boundaries can be made through using devices such as fences, title deeds, laws, zones, regulations, landmarks and story-lines (Ibid.).

Moreover, multiple actors (for example, experts, investors, villagers and the government) can be involved in assembling farmland, as they draw on discourses, inscription devices—including statistical picturing devices—that make large-scale investment in land imaginable and modes of calculation already available, such as maps, grids, surveys, satellite images, amongst other graphic forms to render land 'investible.' Taken together, land is an "assemblage of

materialities, relations, technologies and discourses” (*Ibid.*), each of which can be manipulated to facilitate transfer.

In a similar manner, planning processes and planning documents can be viewed as inscription devices that can be employed to assemble land. In fact, Nielsen (2020) analyzes the relationship between land use planning and dispossession in the state of Goa and argues that the dispossessing authority was able to use manipulative planning ‘from above’ to ensure a state-specific regime of dispossession was able to take hold in specific locations. According to this vein of thought, inscription devices can pave the way for land dispossession to take place in specific locations, often without the use of explicit force. In the case of the land use conversion process investigated by Nielsen in Goa, he found that it resulted in a struggle between a state-capital nexus seeking to dispossess farmers in order to convert their farmland to an eco-tourism zone, and an organized citizenry seeking to use planning for alternative purposes. Thus, the evolution of regional planning in Goa was influenced by both the dialectic between strategic planning ‘from above’ and popular mobilization ‘from below.’ However, a key conceptual point in this case (much like the earlier example of how the LARR Act was conceptualized and implemented) is the manipulation of the ‘rules of the game’—in this case, the urban planning process itself—to facilitate the transfer of land from small landholders to private interests.

## **2.5 Fields of negotiation, compromise and anticipation from below**

Against the context of a dispossessing authority that seeks to create or work through hegemonic governing structures, it is worth asking whether and how subaltern groups ‘negotiate’ and if so, can capitalist accumulation can be slowed or entirely stalled by opposition from below? Nielsen and Nilsen (2017) contend that the institutions, discourses and technologies of rule by the state are more than just sites in which hegemonic power is exercised. They are also nodes of contention where subaltern resistance can be articulated and elaborated. In these cases, Chatterjee’s (2008) theory of the emergence of the ‘political society’—though controversial—has some relevance for explaining how opposition may be neutralized and fragmented, even as the local population engages in a negotiation process with the ruling authority. The basis for the theory is that the surplus generated from the accumulation economy is diverted by the ruling authority towards dispossessed people in the ‘need economy’ for their survival. He called the

beneficiaries of this government 'largess,' and the small space created for the so-called reversal of the effects of primitive accumulation, the 'political society,' which incorporates large sections of the rural population and the urban poor. The basis for this reversal—which occurs simultaneously as primitive accumulation (Sanyal, 2007)—lies in the globally dispersed discourse of minimum functions of government and its related obligation to ensure that “certain basic conditions of life” must be “provided to people everywhere” (Chatterjee, 2008: 55). In other words, governments are obliged to find resources to reverse the negative consequences of ongoing primitive accumulation through the provision of alternative means of livelihood to those who have lost them. While much of Chatterjee’s argument is disputed (see below) the proposal that the government is obliged to alleviate the negative consequences of primitive accumulation is empirically viable.

This conception of contestation and negotiation between the state and local people starkly contrasts against the more communitarian view of subaltern politics, which contends that local rural communities mobilize on the basis of traditional, everyday cultural bonds (see for example, Guha, 1988 and discussion above). In an intensely debated and critiqued article in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, Chatterjee (2011) provocatively argues that if the events that occurred in Singur and Nandigram had taken place two decades prior, the resulting peasant insurgency would have been marked by traditional features that would include mobilizations from the bottom driven by cultural bonds, and a resistance movement that would employ both peaceful and violent means, as a reaction against the state for its attempts to grab land. In contrast, Chatterjee (2011) states that the impacts of contemporary land grabs have been softened due to the changing role of the state, which has moved from being exploitative and oppressive to more accommodative and welfare-focused, in an attempt to legitimize its own governance.

In this context, Chatterjee (2008) writes that peasants in the domain of contemporary political society are able to make demands and negotiate with the state for better terms. In fact, large numbers of rural poor people, recognizing the welfare and development functions of government, have demanded the provision of healthcare, education, basic inputs for agricultural production and other necessities of life by the government. He concludes that this has resulted in government officials in rural areas having to constantly contend with demands,

whilst peasants themselves learn to strategically apply pressure at exactly the opportune moment. Chatterjee (*Ibid.* pg. 57) sums up the process as:

Those in political society make their claims on government, and in turn are governed, not within the framework of stable constitutionally defined rights and laws, but rather through temporary, contextual and unstable arrangements arrived at through direct political negotiations.

The government responds to their demands flexibly, whilst consistently applying a cost-benefit analysis to all decisions. Significantly however, the government also breaks up all benefit-seekers into smaller discrete populations, defined by their demographic or social characteristics. This facilitates the application of a differentiated policy adapted to the needs of whatever group is making the demand at any given time. The goal is to fragment the benefit-seekers in an effort to divide potential opposition to the state. In this way, Chatterjee argues “the claims of people in political society” are “a matter of constant political negotiation and the results are never secure or permanent.” Moreover, “their entitlements, even when recognized, never quite become rights” (*Ibid.* pg. 58).

One of the effects of this constant negotiation between the state and peasants is the creation of a sense of competition between different groups in their fight to garner maximum benefits for themselves. So it is not uncommon for certain sections of the local population being dispossessed to not join agitations to oppose a dispossessing project or land-grab exercise, because they feel they stand to gain from the government policy. In these instances, the state engages not so much in exploitation, but in discrimination: they get blamed for perceived inequalities in the distribution of benefits. Through this approach to state-society negotiations, Chatterjee (2008) attempts to demonstrate how the workings of power can be diffuse, at times surreptitious and have multiple objectives.

However, why would local populations want to negotiate? While politically-connected, wealthy and high-caste landlords stand to gain large sums of money from the speculative environment created by a large-scale infrastructure or urbanization project, even small-holder farmers and *Dalit* communities—traditionally segments of the population most affected by dispossession—are willing to engage in dreams of profit, speculation and transformation (Cross, 2015). Often,



low-ranking government officials and bureaucrats responsible for overseeing the acquisition of land for a project are charged with convincing people to turn over their lands with minimum resistance. Cross (2015: 429) claims they do so through invoking an “economy of anticipation” and “conjuring up the prospect of material improvement and social transformation.” By doing so, they transmit adapted visions of development, economic security and upward social mobility through “promises of jobs, alternative lands, rehabilitation in a properly constructed colony” (Balagopal, 2007: 18). He went further by stating that if doubt crept in, “they were not un-amenable to persuasion by smooth-talking officers” (*Ibid.*). Cross (2015: 429) offers a more profound reason for their proclivity to believe in an untested future:

If they were convincing, it is because they invoked local registers of aspiration and tap into vernacular dreams for social and material transformation that are assembled from globally circulating media forms and out of local social histories.

In Cross’s estimation the end result of a large-scale project such as an SEZ reflects not only a vision imposed from the outside by government officials, builders and private capital, but also the hopes and aspirations of local residents.

Despite some of the powerful conceptual tools that Chatterjee’s concept of the political society has provided to better understand the ways in which local people might negotiate and engage with a dispossessing authority, there are also several cogent critiques of this point of view. Many commentators (see for example, Basu and Das, 2009; Baviskar and Sundar, 2008; Sundar and Sundar, 2012; Nilsen, 2015; Sinha, 2015 and Whitehead, 2015) have questioned his attempts to recast or “modify the untenable compartmentalization of elite and subaltern politics” (Nielsen, 2018). They have pinpointed several serious theoretical and empirical problems with his analysis, and have criticized his seeming blindness to the neoliberal turn in social and economic policy (Basu and Das, 2009). Specifically, the extraordinary concessions that the government granted private entities in the form of land for mining, SEZs, and ports, to name a few, in the aftermath of liberalization in India in the 1990s, indicates that few concessions if any, were given to people. Others argue that his conceptualization reduces diverse political formations within the limited rubric of political society (Nielsen, 2017; Shah, 2010; Levien, 2013a).

Similarly, Baviskar and Sundar (2008) contend that Chatterjee's analytical framework sets up too many structural oppositions—for example, between corporate and non-corporate, civil society and political society, both civil and political society together against marginalized groups, government as an arena or negotiation versus capital and market, and finally, dispossession as a characteristic of the modern economy, which is reversed by welfare measures from the government. They believe that a more insightful and constructive understanding of ongoing social change would dissolve some of these distinctions, whilst also sometimes inverting some of the characteristics of civil and political society. This overly binary conceptual framework also fails to capture how popular politics is actually practised (Nielsen, 2017). Baviskar and Sundar (2008) further disagree with the assertion that the state is largely a benign entity that provides ameliorative solutions. Instead, they point out that it is still enmeshed in the militarization of large swathes of the countryside, including in Kashmir, the north-east and central India. In addition, they critique the pronouncement that the state has more recently been providing welfare programmes due to the need to establish legitimacy. Instead, Baviskar and Sundar (2008) argue that even the colonial regime used to provide, at least in principle, compensation where needed, and recent concessions by the government may be the result of sustained efforts by the people to organize and protest, not due to increased government recognition of the legitimacy of their demands. Conversely, the violent crushing of peasant opposition to the SEZ Act and the previous colonial land acquisition law, in their view, demonstrates that collusion between corporate capital and the state continues to take place to the detriment of ordinary citizens. In this way, the domain of civil society—as described by Chatterjee—is not a domain of hegemony, but rather of domination. It attempts to make economic liberalization the *Weltanschauung* (common sense) of the times, and one that is accompanied by brute violence in order to force compliance rather than extract consent. Thus, major critics of Chatterjee's theory contend that his established categories of political society and civil society are just too inadequate to “capture the character of domination in India today, thereby missing the brutality and desperation” that persists alongside “inherent dynamism and hope” (*Ibid.* 89).

Taken together, while Chatterjee provides insightful analysis of ongoing change and contestations in the rural countryside, it is striking that his analyses of political society has little to say on how ordinary people contend with the massive changes wrought by dispossession and urbanization. While a range of scholars have criticized his theory of political society for being too

broad to properly capture what happens during the act of dispossession (see also Levien 2011, 2013a, 2015, 2017), I agree with Levien's (2013: 355) assertion that "the dispossession of land creates a specific kind of politics," which requires closer analysis. In particular, when considering fields of negotiation, contestation and even compromise between (government-supported) dominant groups and subaltern groups, it is important to ask deeper questions about the nature and quality of the 'negotiation' and 'contestation' taking place. For instance, if negotiations take place within a hegemonic structure or modality—say within the confines of a particular land law, which itself might reflect the wishes and interests of the dominant elites—then is the process of contestation, and by extension the form of consent and compliance generated, really meaningful? Moreover, even if the end goal on the part of the ruling authority is accumulation (which is in line with the theoretical contributions of Harvey, Levien and some other scholars outlined above), does the mere existence of the space and opportunity to negotiate lend itself to a slower, incremental transfer of land rights within a shifting political milieu over a much longer period of time? The overall implication is that the emergence of political society coincides with new forms of negotiation, anticipation and sometimes even exuberant speculation between rural populations and government agencies. While this may not always occur on a fair playing field—that is, outside of a hegemonic state and capital structure—it nevertheless has impacts on both the formulation of government strategies and the mobilizations of different groups of rural populations (within the same project or area).

This suggests the emergence of new contours of engagement—exemplified by a negotiated form of dispossession that occurs via co-option, control and consent, rather than force—within Indian agrarian society. Therefore, a closer examination of the politics and inter-personal relationships taking place on the ground, and via the lens of the aspirations, interests and strategies utilized by ordinary people who assign varying, often contradictory, meanings to land, is necessary. This lends itself to viewing land dispossession and the politics that surrounds it as both an event and a process that occurs in increments, whilst being embedded in the lives of local residents, as well as the strategic decisions they make to advance their own futures in a rapidly changing context. In this way, the relationship between land dispossession and everyday politics is a dialectic between a new land assembly scheme administered by a state government with little advance warning, and local people's mobilizations, negotiations, contestations and dissent. The following chapters will now turn to assessing the land-pooling scheme administered

in Amaravati, the developing greenfield capital city of the newly bifurcated state of Andhra Pradesh.

### 3 LITERATURE REVIEW: CASTE, CLASS, AND PARTY POLITICS AS IT RELATES TO LAND AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN ANDHRA PRADESH

Caste has always been an important dimension of social articulation and political mobilization across India. It has also been a key factor in determining and mobilizing political and electoral support for political parties. Andhra Pradesh is no exception to this general rule, although in terms of caste structure and articulation, the various regions of previously undivided Andhra displayed significant variations: the Reddys and the Kammas, the most politically powerful caste-based communities, are distributed unevenly across the State, with Reddys dominant in the Telangana and Rayalaseema regions and the Kammas more populous and powerful in the coastal districts of Krishna, Guntur and Prakasham (Harrison, 1956; Srinivasulu, 2002). For example, Kammas form only 5 percent of the population of Andhra Pradesh, but comprise more than 20 percent in the Krishna delta and own 80 percent of the agricultural land in the district (Benbabaali, 2018; Harrison, 1956: 381).

While state politics have revolved around these politically dominant castes for the better part of five decades, another caste group—the Kapus—also wield significant electoral power, particularly in the East and West Godavari districts of the Southern Coast of the state. Finally, the latest census (2011) indicates a three-fold increase in the number of SCs and four-fold increase in the number of STs in the state during the last five periods between 1961 and 2011. These developments, combined with the recent bifurcation of the state, have had an impact on caste-based articulations in society, politics and the economy in recent years. Like most other parts of the country, the landlord class and upper caste Brahmins emerged as the economically and politically dominant elite in the immediate post-colonial period, with the social distribution of landed property by and large overlapping with caste hierarchy (Satyanarayana, 1993).

To better understand the social and institutional basis of landlord dominance in coastal Andhra, it is first necessary to review the history of caste articulations and politics, followed by the history of land reform, administration, redistribution and alienation in the state. Therefore, this chapter is split along two main lines: the first historicizes the relationship between land, caste and party-based politics in the state and the second critically examines how caste and class dynamics are inexorably linked with land ownership in Andhra Pradesh. The overall purpose is to

contextualize and better understand the caste dynamics as well as the combined politics of manipulation, accommodation, co-option and dominance that was wielded with rampant precision in Amaravati—events and processes that are described in greater details in the latter half of this dissertation.

### ***3.1 A historical overview of caste, politics and land ownership in coastal Andhra Pradesh***

Since its formation in 1956, caste has been an important dimension of social relations and political mobilisation in the (formerly united) state of Andhra Pradesh. The state was created on the basis of language and brought together the three regions of Telangana, the fertile coastal belt of Andhra and the dry uplands of Rayalseema, each of which had a distinct historical background. While Telangana was part of the erstwhile Nizam's Hyderabad state, coastal Andhra and Rayalseema were formerly part of the British-governed Madras Presidency. The agglomeration of the different regions characterized by their differing histories, "cultural discontinuities, economic imbalances and political rivalries" (Reddy, 1989: 266) in 1956 led to vastly variant articulations of social forces and caste-class dynamics, as well as specific forms of social movements and mobilizations from those who have been historically marginalized (Srinivasulu, 2002). Moreover, the high incidence of poverty and the skewed distribution of land (to be discussed in the following sub-sections) provided the space for the politics of manipulation and/or accommodation (Reddy, 1989).

#### **3.1.1 Caste-based demography and land ownership patterns in coastal Andhra**

Each region of (erstwhile) Andhra Pradesh is distinct in terms of caste structure and relations, and the particular nature of politics in the state can be attributed in large part to this feature. The inter-regional and intra-regional variations in caste structure are particularly striking, as the northern coastal districts differ greatly from those in the central and southern coastal regions (Srinivasulu, 2002). As mentioned earlier, striking variations exist between regions (Suri, 1996). Additionally, any analysis of caste and land in Andhra is encumbered by the fact that reliable data on population proportions by caste is not publically available. The last complete caste-

based census in India was completed in 1931 by colonial British authorities.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, all caste figures are approximate (Reddy, 1989).

Roughly however, the political space in (previously undivided) Andhra Pradesh was dominated by five castes: The Reddys, Kammas, Kapus, Velamas and Goudas.<sup>15</sup> Although the members of these castes continue to wage fierce battles for political control amongst each other, they have ensured power through co-opting and accommodating members of other castes and communities (Gundimeda, 2009). While Brahmins comprised three percent of the population and continue to be ritually placed at the top of the caste pyramid, the castes that have the most economic and political power are the Reddys and the Kammas, who comprise 6.5 percent and 4.8 percent of the state's population, respectively.<sup>16</sup> While there are Reddys across the state, they are more numerous in Telangana and Rayalseema. The Kammas, on the other hand, have always been dominant in the Krishna, Guntur and Prakasham districts of coastal Andhra, whilst their presence in other regions is marginal. Meanwhile, the Kapus are dominant in East and West Godavari districts, but also present (though less powerful) in the Krishna, Guntur and Prakasham districts of coastal Andhra.

According to a census of the population of the Madras Presidency in 1921, Kammas formed only three per cent of the population of the Madras Presidency but comprised 16 percent of the population in the Krishna delta and 26 percent in the Guntur district (Keiko, 2008). They were indisputably the most powerful agricultural caste of these two regions and also the main landowners. The peasant castes were able to acquire land from the Brahmins who had migrated to the cities. By the 1950s, some estimates indicated that they formed 40 percent of the

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<sup>14</sup> UPA government, with the aid of The Registrar General of India (RGI) and under the coordination of the Ministries of Rural Development and of Housing and Poverty Alleviation, did however undertake the Socio-Economic Caste Census in 2011 to collect data on the caste and economic status of every household in the country. However, the results indicated that there were 4,673,034 categories of caste, sub-caste, synonyms, different surnames, *gotras* and clan names, requiring a significant amount of 'cleaning' of the data. Many critics stated that the data was unreliable, particularly as 81,958,314 errors were found in caste particulars and all states and Union Territories, which had to be corrected (Times of India, 2015c). Consequently, the data has not yet been fully released, with the Registrar General of India (RGI) stating that an expert group would need to analyze the data in response to a right to information (RTI) application filed by the Telegraph (Mohanty, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Given that the Velamas and Goudas are almost non-existent in the Krishna and Guntur districts of Coastal Andhra, these groups will not be discussed at length here.

<sup>16</sup> These figures are taken from the 1921 Census. The Reddys were included in the broad category of Kapus in this census (Reddy, 1989: 269).

agricultural population of the Krishna delta, and owned 80 per cent of its fertile land (Harrison 1956: 381). More recently, Purendra Prasad (2015) argues that 60 to 65 percent of the land was owned by 16 to 18 percent of the Kamma population in what is now the capital region of Amaravati. Furthermore, at least 80 percent of this caste group have very small landholdings. Therefore, historically the Kammas fulfilled most of the elements of Srinivas' original definition of a dominant caste: they wielded considerable control over agrarian resources such as land and water, and had numerical strength within a location. Their relatively low ritual status in the *varna* hierarchy (as Shudras) was superseded by their political and economic power.

In addition to these dominant castes, there are also castes grouped by the names of traditional hereditary occupations. For instance, castes largely associated with artisan and service occupations constitute a large proportion of the population in Andhra Pradesh. These castes are today known as 'other backward classes' (OBCs). There are about 50 or so OBCs listed by the state government, which include the Yadavas, Gowdas, Padmasalis, Rajakas and Mangalis to name just a few. They represent about 35 to 40 percent of the state population, with the second Andhra Pradesh Backward Classes Commission (1982) estimating that the OBCs constitute 44 percent of the population.<sup>17</sup> These castes have enjoyed reservation under the OBC category since 1961.

It is estimated that there are also about 59 Scheduled Caste (SC) communities within Andhra, constituting approximately 17 percent of the population. Undivided Andhra Pradesh represented one of the main states within India to have a large concentration of SCs, constituting 8 percent of the total SC population of the country. The two most numerous SC castes are the Mallas (7.3 percent) and the Madigas (9.7 percent). Together, they comprise approximately 90 percent of the state's SC population.<sup>18</sup> Mallas are far more numerous in the coastal region than elsewhere, whilst Madigas are more preponderant in Telangana (Srinivasulu 2002), although they are also divided by sub-caste distinctions. More than two-thirds (68 percent) of the SC population work as agricultural labourers. Many also live under the poverty

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<sup>17</sup> In the 1921 Census, it was estimated that 46.1 percent of the population were OBCs. Data compiled on caste during the 2011 Census did not have a category dedicated to OBCs. However, there are plans to collect data on OBC during the 2021 Census (The Economic Times, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that the majority of *Dalits* in the region studied have converted to Christianity, although they still face discrimination from their position in the caste hierarchy.



line and are subject to ritual discrimination, particularly in rural areas (*Ibid.*). While Madigas slightly outnumber Mallas, the latter are generally better-off in terms of education, urban employment and political opportunities. The Scheduled Tribes (STs) constituted 6 percent of the population and were largely concentrated in the forested areas of both the Andhra and Telangana regions. Finally, Muslims (and Christians) formed under 7 percent of the state population and were concentrated in Telangana and Rayalseema, as well as parts of coastal Andhra (also known as Seemandhra).

### **3.1.2 Assertions by peasant castes against Brahmin hegemony**

Historically, the Brahmins dominated social, cultural and economic life until the early twentieth century, when socio-political changes brought lower caste assertions to the fore. In the Krishna district in particular, early records imply that there was a higher proportion of Brahmins here than in other regions. They also often held the position of village *Karnam* and were therefore politically influential (Mackenzie, 1883; Keiko, 2008). While commercial communities like the Komati had marginal presence in coastal Andhra, the Kammas were particularly dominant in the Krishna district. According to an 1872 census, they made up over 40 percent of the agricultural population, although Keiko (2008) indicates that these figures may not be precise. Given that the only other significant population were those of the marginalized SC community, two influential communities stood out in the Krishna region in the late nineteenth century, namely the Brahmins and the Kammas.

Thus cultural assertions of other caste groups, including those of the Vaishyas and Kammas, often took an anti-Brahmin bent, as they were the reference point for caste-based grievances (Rama Krishna, 1993). The educated factions of the peasant castes were crucial to the emergence of caste-specific assertions against Brahmin domination. Meanwhile, the opportunities presented by colonial modernity, including access to education and employment in government and administrative services, afforded many in the Brahmin community the opportunity to move out of the rural sector and into non-agricultural vocations in urban areas (Srinivasulu, 2002). This was borne out by evidence: in the decade between 1876 and 1886, 73 percent of all Hindu candidates who successfully passed their university examinations were Brahmins (Reddy, 1989: 274).

The fact that Brahmins were the first to go through the process that Srinivas (1987) calls 'Westernization' catalyzed their move out of rural areas and opened up spaces for members of the peasant caste to buy up the lands they left behind. At the same time, the construction of anicuts (dams) over the Godavari and Krishna rivers in 1847 and 1853 respectively, dramatically increased agricultural production and resulted in the unparalleled prosperity of the coastal districts (Damodaran, 2008). The greater knock-on impacts on the dynamics of Andhra's early economy, society and politics—which included increasing prosperity of the agrarian castes leading to more investments in property, industry and education—were also dramatic. For instance, the educated elites of these peasant castes were instrumental in the emergence of caste specific assertion movements against Brahmin domination in the countryside.

Later, many were also involved in the *kisan* movement and anti-*zamindari* struggles by rallying the lower agrarian strata. Because of these struggles, which led to the abolition of the *zamindari* system and the tenancy reforms enacted in the early years of the post-colonial State, the *ryots* and tenants of these peasant castes gained control over most of the fertile lands. At the same time, as agriculture became more attractive, there was an increasing influx of tenants and agricultural labourers into the region. Lower caste assertions and peasant movements served to challenge the traditional position and privileges of members of the Brahmin community, who were in any case migrating to urban areas. As a result, the Brahmins were progressively marginalized from political life in rural areas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, superseded by the upper classes of the dominant agrarian castes.

### 3.1.2.1 *The rise of Kamma domination: The 'farmer-capitalists' of coastal Andhra*

The complex political ecology of Andhra Pradesh enabled the upper classes of the forward castes in coastal Andhra to preserve and increasingly consolidate power starting from the late nineteenth century (Reddy, 1989). This was partially made possible by the introduction of the Permanent Settlement and the *zamindari* tenure system in 1802. The consequence of this was two-fold: it created a new landed aristocracy among the Kamma community as they received a further 14 *zamindaris* under colonial rule<sup>19</sup> and it consolidated the private property rights of the

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<sup>19</sup> Vasireddy Venkatadri Naidu 'kept a retinue of several thousand men, 300 horses, 80 elephants, 50 camels . . . His palaces at Amaravati, Chebrolu, and Chintapalli, his town house in Guntur, and his other

majority of Kammas, who were small farmers—or “middle peasantry” (Benbabaali, 2018: 10)—paying taxes directly to the revenue administration under the *ryotwari system*.

This latter group further benefitted from the construction of *anicut*s—or dams used to maintain and control and irrigation system—on the Krishna and Godavari rivers around 1850. Irrigation brought more intensive forms of agriculture into use in an effort to generate surpluses. In particular, the Kammas who already owned a large proportion of the land in the fertile delta began growing high-value cash crops in large numbers. By some accounts, they were the biggest beneficiaries of improvements in irrigation (Harrison, 1960). Therefore, the development of a productive and commercialized agrarian economy, in which many Kammas were entrenched, significantly increased the value of their land holdings. Moreover the Kammas’ influence and money helped them ensure the canal waters would reach their lands due to their influence with, and links to, local administration. Thus, increased prosperity translated into political power of not just the *zamindari* landlords, but also the local peasants elites (Elliott, 1995: 137).

The ripple effects of the agrarian transformation of the latter half of the nineteenth century would be felt well into the twentieth century. Their impacts were two fold. First, a burgeoning agrarian middle-class emerged among the landowning Kammas and Reddys by the turn of the twentieth century. The increase in prosperity in turn spurred investments in education, challenging the Brahmin monopoly over education and government jobs in the Madras Presidency (Frankel 1989). Second, growing agricultural profits allowed the Kammas, and to a lesser extent the Reddys, to diversify and accumulate, leading to emigration to urban centres in neighbouring cities and towns, where they began investing in industry.

This occurred in two waves: first in the early twentieth century and the second in the 1980s. By the early twentieth century, a group of Kamma agriculturalists in coastal Andhra began looking for commercial activities to invest the surpluses they had generated through production of high-value cash crops. Falling commodity prices that occurred in the aftermath of the Great Depression provided additional impetus to enter urban industry (Damodaran, 2008). Consequently, the first wave of entrepreneurs in Andhra Pradesh, who comprised large landholders, invested primarily in agro-processing (i.e. rice mills, sugar production, tobacco), but

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residences reflected his prosperity’ (Frykenberg, *Guntur District 1788–1848*, p. 43).

also in construction, transport (bus companies) and textiles (Upadhya, 1997; Srinivasulu, 2002; Benbabaali, 2018). Later, they also invested in the film industry, which would later have particular significance in the political trajectory of caste articulations in the state. Eventually, the small town of Vijayawada—now located within a half hour drive of the capital city of Amaravati—became a thriving market with an important railway junction and the locus of urban growth and development (Benbabaali, 2018). By 1926, N. G. Ranga, a Kamma leader noted:

In every village there are a few enterprising Kammas, who have 10 to 20 acres of land and who are anxious to do some sort of business or the other. Most of them have taken to dealing in paddy and have found it profitable. They also opened general stores, manufacture factories (1926: 35).

Some Kammas were even wealthy enough to become moneylenders, sidelining in the process traditional merchant castes and business communities (Duvvury, 1986; Benbabaali, 2018).

The process of land and power consolidation was further accelerated during the Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. The introduction of new technology and the increasing commercialization of agriculture greatly benefitted landowning castes across India. In coastal Andhra, because the Kammas already held adequate start-up capital to invest in the technologies introduced at this time, they gained enormously from the Green Revolution (Benbabaali 2017: 9). It was after this period that the second major wave of industrial entrepreneurship occurred in coastal Andhra Pradesh, this time facilitated by the rise of the Kamma-dominated and supported Telugu Desam Party (TDP). Indeed, the TDP itself was born as a result of Kamma discontent with the Congress Party and it soon came to be the vehicle through which they translated economic leverage into political power (Murali, 2017). Thus, intensive farming made possible by the Green Revolution and the corresponding agricultural surpluses of the 1980s, alongside the TDP's rise to power, provided further opportunities for Kamma investments in industry (Damodaran, 2008; Kohli, 1990; Murali, 2017). In this instance, the TDP itself, dominated by the Kammas, undertook several large-scale public infrastructure projects in the early 1980s and invested heavily in the construction sector. After liberalization, those companies that were incubated in the public sector in Andhra Pradesh accounted for a large share of India's infrastructure and construction sectors as a whole (Murali, 2017). In addition, Kammas invested in the pharmaceutical industry, the hotel industry, real estate and IT.

The Kmmas, who constitute the majority of this upwardly mobile class by caste in coastal Andhra, are defined not only by their political and economic clout, but also by their distinct cultural features, which echo similar features amongst other commercially-oriented rich peasants across India. According to Upadhyaya (1997), this rural capitalist class also has links with the urban middle and upper middle classes as many of the children of the rich farmers have become educated and chosen to work non-agricultural jobs. At the same time, despite increasing incursions into urban life and the shift to accumulated capital, trade and entrepreneurship in urban centres, most members of the Kamma community kept contact with, and continued to hold property in, their native villages. Those who ventured to the cities in pursuit of investing surplus capital still depended on relatives to take care of the farm, and the funds generated from agricultural produce remained an important source of income (1988: 1437). Therefore, Kamma local dominance persisted in the countryside, even as connections were made with urban life. In Rao's (1985) estimation:

Once the surplus was disposed of, the cultivator would return to his local factional politics, moneylending, consolidation of his power at the village and *taluk* levels—activities, which increase his status in an agrarian society.

Thus, “there are significant social continuities between these rural and urban classes, interconnections which have repercussions on both sides of the (so-called) rural-urban divide” (Upadhyaya, 1997: 170).

Finally, while the dominant class of coastal Andhra is largely analogous to the Kamma caste, other landowning peasant classes—namely the Reddys and Kapus—also benefitted from the Green Revolution (Srinivasulu, 2002).<sup>20</sup> Regardless of these subtleties, dominant caste patterns, including numerical and economic strength in the countryside, combined with the creation of large entrepreneurial groups that were able to penetrate urban markets catalyzed “narrow-capitalist coalitions” (Murali, 2017) in certain periods of coastal Andhra's history. The result was the creation of an economically dominant, commercially-oriented “farmer-capitalist” class (Upadhyaya, 1988, 1997; Srinivasulu, 2002; Prasad, 2015: 78; Benbabaali, 2017: 9), which mirrored

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<sup>20</sup> Upadhyaya (1997) has also stressed that not all Kmmas belong to the dominant class, as it is possible to find a number of poorer Kmmas in coastal Andhra.

the rise of rural capitalist classes in other states, ranging from the Jats in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to the Patidars of Gujarat and the Lingayats of Karnataka.

### **3.1.3 Dominant caste rivalry and caste-based party politics in Andhra Pradesh**

The changes in the agrarian social structure ultimately led to members of the elite agrarian class to stratify along caste lines, across political parties and mass organizations. While the Reddys joined the ranks of the Congress Party and waged struggles against Brahmin leadership, the Kammas initially gravitated to the Communist Party of India (CPI). As a result of their allegiance to the Communist Party, many the Kamma families retained left-wing ideologies after the formation of Andhra Pradesh (Elliot, 1970), although this changed radically after the formation of the TDP in the 1980s. This polarisation of the dominant peasant castes along party lines constituted an important dimension of political articulation in the state (Harrison, 1956) and reverberates even now in the decisions made by the various political parties, and in how political parties engage in the politics of shifting coalitions, co-option and where necessary, negotiation with local populations to maintain power at any cost.

#### *3.1.3.1 Politics in the 1950s and 1960s: Congress and Reddy political hegemony and the beginnings of the politics of accommodation*

One of the first orders of business of the post-colonial Indian State in the immediate aftermath of Independence was to address peasant grievances through abolishing intermediaries and enacting tenancy laws (see next sub-section). With these legal reforms, two of the most important issues in the radical agenda prior to Independence were co-opted by the Congress Party regime. At the same time, Andhra Pradesh as a state was a pilot example of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru's linguistic reorganization policy, which led to the creation of modern Indian states (Brass, 1990). It was the demand for a separate Telugu-speaking province of Andhra from the pre-Colonial Madras Presidency that catalysed the process of linguistic reorganization. Moreover, this demand largely came from the political left as the ideal of 'Vishalandhra'—a united Telugu State comprising Telangana, Andhra and Rayalaseema—was a Communist agitation. The state was subsequently formed in 1953, although three years later, it became complete (and more complex) as nine districts of Telangana were merged with Andhra to create what was finally undivided Andhra Pradesh. These developments at least on the

surface, created an atmosphere of optimism and faith in Congress Party rule (Srinivasulu, 2002) that cut across different social strata.

Despite this initial confidence in Congress Party rule, a conflict between its dominant castes, namely the Kammas and the Reddys, quickly emerged. While other social groups were also politically important (particularly the Brahmins, Kapus and eventually the SCs), these two dominant castes took control of the trajectory of politics in Andhra Pradesh after the 1950s, particularly as “their social rivalry spilled into the political arena and found expression through support for rival political parties in the state” (Murali, 2017: 168).

The formation of Andhra Pradesh in 1956 marked the political ascendancy of the Reddys, as they vied for leadership positions in the Congress Party, which had been until then largely dominated by highly educated members of the Brahmin community. Reddys of the more prosperous coastal districts and Rayalaseema, were particularly interested in joining the Congress Party. In these early decades, they almost entirely dominated the party. Srinivasulu (2002) points out that the two chief Ministers, N. Sanjeeva Reddy and K Brahmananda Reddy, who together served 15 years from 1956 to 1971, were the most powerful Congress Party Chief Ministers the state had ever seen. Moreover, the composition of the State Assembly between 1957 and 1967 reflected this imbalance in representation: Reddys comprised 25 to 28 percent of the Assembly although they only comprised 6 percent of the population. Comparatively, the Kammas who comprised four percent of the population had between 11.3 percent and 12.6 percent representation. A later study by Vaugier-Chatterjee (2009) revealed an even starker asymmetry: between 1955 and 1983, the proportion of Congress legislators who were Reddys ranged from 58 percent to 84.2 percent.

Murali (2017) further elaborates on three broad trends, which characterized politics in the state in the early post-Independence period. First, the Congress Party was electorally dominant, although it was also wracked by internal factionalism. It was only in 1983—nearly two decades after the creation of Andhra Pradesh—that the Congress lost power for the first time. Commentators argue that the ultimate impacts of internal factional rivalry were so severe that it resulted in a party that “oscillated between accommodative and confrontational politics” (Ibid: 168).

The second overall trend until the 1980s related to Congress hegemony. There was no real opposition party that could successfully challenge the Congress during this time, with the possible exception of the Communist Party of India (CPI). While the Communists had their strongest support in Telangana, largely due to the presence of a feudal agrarian structure inherited from the old *zamindari* system, it was the support of the Kammas that boosted Communist success in Andhra Pradesh (Harrison, 1960). Because the Kammas were largely left out of the top echelons of the Congress Party, they turned increasingly towards the Communist Party to articulate their needs. This unlikely alliance, however, would last only for a decade. By the mid-1960s, the Communist Party had weakened significantly due to several factors. First, the party was split into the CPI and CPI (M) at the national level. Second, the Congress had managed to hijack to some extent, the Communist platform when it immediately set out to abolish the feudal *zamindari* and *jagirdari* land-tenure systems (see following sub-section) that were in place during the colonial era (Srinivasulu, 2002). And finally, the contradiction apparent in Communists relying on wealthy ‘farmer-capitalist’ landowners for support whilst a feudal agrarian structure was still in place in many places was becoming starker.

Finally, a third and important aspect of politics in Andhra during the 1950s and 1960s was the prevalence of the ‘politics of accommodation.’ This related to the manner in which the Congress party carried favour with its support base through “vertical chains of patronage” (Murali, 2017: 169). It essentially became a ‘catch-all’ party by co-opting local elites and rising social groups (Elliott 1968; Weiner 1967). The nature of the Congress social base and its modes of political mobilization made this a viable political strategy. For instance, caste-based support from the Reddys was consolidated, but the party had to contend with demands and pressures from lower classes and castes through distributing patronage and rewards (Reddy, 1989). Elliott (1970) argues:

Upper Castes in Andhra Pradesh have persisted in power in the multi-caste and increasingly democratic society through their increased and blatant distribution of welfare and patronage benefits (as well as money, liquor, and other material goods) to comparatively marginalized segments of society— for votes.”



Thus when this clientelistic structure faced a challenge by social or political movements that might have otherwise led to a restructuring of politics, they were instead absorbed into the ongoing system. This demonstrated the historic capacity of patronage politics to accommodate new claimants (Ram Reddy, 1989). Taken together, much of the power of the Congress derived from the axis of the Reddys in power and the marginalized *Dalits* on the other end.

### *3.1.3.2 The 1970s and 1980s: The emergence of two-party contestation and the Kamma-backed TDP*

As the Communist support base weakened throughout the 1960s, the Congress were left with no serious opposition in the state by the early 1970s—a significant contrast to developments in the rest of India. However, this set the stage for the emergence of the TDP in the 1980s, largely due to the disjuncture between the rapidly increasing economic power of the Kamma community, particularly after the Green Revolution, and the almost complete dominance of the Reddy community in state politics. The growing economic power of the Kammas had not translated at all into political power within Congress, amplifying a sense of neglect (Baru, 2000; Kohli, 1990; Murali, 2017; Suri, 2002). Pingle (2010), for instance, points out that in the 11 cabinets between 1956 and 1980, Reddy representation (26 percent) far outstripped that of the Kammas (8 percent). Moreover, of the nine chief ministers in Andhra Pradesh between 1956 and 1983, none had been a Kamma, while six had been Reddys (Kohli, 1990).

The emergence of the Kammas as a wealthy landowning class was also sharply at odds with the populist agenda of the Congress Party at the time (Reddy, 1989). Then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, spearheaded programmes to mobilize the poor and socially marginalized sections throughout India and their impacts were felt strongly in Andhra Pradesh (Murali, 2017: 170). Policy initiatives included a number of programmes aimed at destabilizing the dominant castes and gaining support of marginalized sectors of society, such as *Dalits*, *Adivasis* and marginal farmers. The Kamma farmer-capitalist class grew increasingly alarmed at these developments and searched for a party that could protect their interests (Reddy, 1989). Interestingly, Gandhi's populist strategy also had the effect of weakening the clientelist networks in her own party: rich landowners could not as easily manipulate vote banks of those groups below them in the socioeconomic hierarchy (Kohli, 1988). Meanwhile, as the Congress began courting members of the SC and ST communities for support, the OBCs began to eschew the party.

Taken together, the particular brand of political accommodation that had made the Congress so successful at the election polls for 25 years was beginning to fail by the 1970s (Kohli, 1988, 1990; Murali, 2017; Reddy, 1989). The final factor that broke Congress hegemony in Andhra was the highly centralized, autocratic governance of Gandhi and the party at the national level (Kohli, 1990). The perception of interference from the Union government became a major point of contention, laying the groundwork for sub-nationalist aspirations and the emergence of the TDP in the 1980s.

The TDP was formed, and initially led by N.T. Rama Rao (NTR) a charismatic film star and a Kamma who hailed from Nimmakuru village in the Krishna District of coastal Andhra in 1982. NTR was revered for playing mythological roles on screen and positioned himself to be a fighter for social justice. These two characteristics propagated an image of 'God incarnate' to many of the rural poor people in coastal Andhra (Reddy, 1989), just as Gandhi's popularity was waning. His charisma dominated the elections in 1983 and the TDP party swept into power. Their spectacular electoral success is closely related to the support received from rich Kamma capitalists.

The newly elected TDP focused on several issues including clean and efficient government, ensuring equal status for women and restoring the dignity, self-respect and past glory of the Telugu people (Reddy 1989). The party also tried to control crime, black marketing and the prices of essential commodities. It also distributed inputs to farmers, generated employment for youth and banned capitation fees. These policies—most of which were extremely populist—covered a gamut of groups and problems, although they did not make any structural changes in the system.

While NTR's charisma and populist policies made him popular among certain segments of the population, his autocratic and capricious leadership style eroded support among legislators, making him vulnerable to destabilization from Delhi (Reddy 1989). The Congress regrouped and worked to diminish the TDP's electoral base in the late 1980s, ultimately winning victories in both the state Assembly and *Lok Sabha* elections in 1989. The Reddys, *Dalits* and Brahmins continued to be the core support base of party, although to Congress also managed to appeal to

additional groups such as the OBCs in this round of elections. While they had initially left the Congress in the 1980s, they returned after becoming disenchanted with NTR and the TDP (Suri 2002). This subsequently established a trend of OBC and the Kapus—who recently agitated for and attained OBC status, as well as related reservations—becoming an important group of swing voters.

#### *3.1.3.3 The 1990s and 2000s: Shifting coalitions, neoliberalism, corruption and co-option*

While the new decade began with the Congress in power, the party's time in office was tumultuous as it was plagued by problems of factionalism, corruption and a growing Maoist movement. The curtailment of several welfare schemes, including the subsidized rice scheme led to a further popularity decline (Suri, 2002). By 1994, the TDP was back in power with an alliance with the CPI and CPI(M). And in 1995, Chandrababu Naidu took over the reins of the party after effecting a coup of sorts on NTR, who also happened to be his father-in-law. Naidu went on to become the Chief Minister for the next nine years until 2004.

Naidu's term in office was marked by a growing move towards neo-liberalism. Instead of NTR's populism, the TDP under Naidu embraced liberalization (Kennedy, 2004). Naidu entirely transformed the party from one that purported to be an advocate for poor people to a party that implemented policies that were more in line with the interests of its core supporters, who valued investor-friendly, technocratic and fiscally prudent approaches and solutions. A quick analysis of the TDP support base shows that the Kammas not only overwhelmingly voted for them, but also dominated the internal organization structure, comprising 40.4 percent of its legislators in the 1994 Assembly and 55.3 percent in the 1999 Assembly (Vaugier-Chatterjee 2009). In the process, he cemented the TDPs move towards the political and economic right.

As Naidu was being "iconized" by international financial institutions and the media for his neoliberal agenda (Rudolph and Rudolph, 2001), he began a campaign of reversing some of the populist measures undertaken earlier by his own party. He increased electricity tariffs to farmers and reduced rice subsidies (Srinivasulu, 2003; Suri, 2002). With World Bank backing, he sought to balance 'welfare' concerns with 'development' imperatives and brought out an ambitious plan for the development of the state by 2020, which was called Vision 2020. The vision included reducing government subsidies, reducing expenditure on welfare schemes, liberalizing

the economy and dismantling the state sector, whilst encouraging foreign private investment. The focus was on attracting investors and creating a business-friendly climate. The TDPs shift is seen as a response to pressure from wealthy Kammas supporters who favoured a pro-business environment.

Naidu was not above wielding populist policies as a political tactic, however. This is because while he could always count on Kamma support, they as a group were not numerically large enough to win elections on their own. So immediately prior to the 1999 Assembly elections, he tried to expand the TDP base by making populist promises. At the same time, the TDP also aligned with the national BJP, whilst trying to break *Dalit* support of the Congress Party. Naidu attempted to do so by splitting support between the Mallas and Madigas, who comprise more than 90 percent of Andhra Pradesh's *Dalit* community. The Mallas had become more economically affluent through reservation policies and a cleavage began to grow between the two groups. While Naidu tried to also appeal to the Madigas, this was met with a lukewarm response (Murali, 2017). Apart from these attempts to widen the support base of the party, the Kammas remained the primary supporters and backers of the party throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

Naidu's uncompromising focus on a neoliberal growth model and on creating an investor friendly business climate came at the cost of rural neglect. Andhra Pradesh was strongly affected by the agrarian crisis of the late 1990s, leading to a high incidence of farmer suicides, and increased poverty and income inequality. Thus, while Hyderabad was thriving as a result of strong investment and growth, the rural hinterlands were in a state of distress. Journalist P. Sainath (2004) opined:

Why has this happened more in Andhra Pradesh than anywhere else?... For one thing, Andhra Pradesh under Mr. Naidu was far more aggressive than any other State in pushing that model [the Washington Consensus model]. With the national—and global—elite backing him, he acted without compunction. Most of the support systems the poor in the State had (some put in place by N.T. Rama Rao) were ruthlessly dismantled... Also, no other State and leader were so totally exempt from critical scrutiny.

Ultimately, these factors led to Naidu's defeat in the 2004 elections, at the hands of a resurgent Congress Party, catapulting a medical doctor and leader of the party, Y S Rajasekhara (YSR) Reddy, to power. He won power in the state by tapping into widespread anger over the agrarian crisis, and the lack of support offered to farmers by the TDP. YSR promulgated a pro-poor, pro-farmer public image that contrasted sharply with Naidu's tech-savvy profile. In this way, he not only helped to revive the Congress organization in local regions, which had been dormant during the TDP's time in office, but "was also crucial in evolving the winning slogans, strategy and alliances for the legislative and parliamentary elections of 2004" (Srinivasulu, 2009: 8). Once in power, YSR sought to enact an elaborate agrarian and welfare policy regime, which included provisions for agricultural loan waivers, free electricity and input subsidies to crisis-ridden farmers. The Congress policy approach also included plans to initiate major irrigation projects. Separate measures related to health, housing, pensions, education and a push to implement national schemes such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGA) was also made. These expenditures were possible due to the increase in the revenue of the state government as a result of expansion in economic activity during the growth years after 2005, as well as the relative increase of tax revenue as a proportion of gross state domestic product (GSDP).

Taken together, YSR cultivated (and invested in) a populist image of being a generous provider of help to poor people, as well as of development in the form of investments in irrigation projects, roads and bridges, which would benefit all people. These latter measures helped to ensure wealthier segments of the population would continue to support the government. Over time, the regime built networks with contractors, builders, real estate developers and other service providers, who were eventually considered part of the government retinue. Eventually, it was argued that these contractors benefitted more from the schemes than even the targeted poor people for whom the scheme was created (Murali, 2017).

Despite scathing criticisms of corruption, YSR won a significant personal victory and a second term in office in 2009, once again bringing together the traditional Congress support base of Reddys and *Dalits*, along with the Adivasis and Muslims. The party also had as much OBC support as the TDP. However, YSR died in a mysterious helicopter crash later that year, in September 2009, creating for years after, considerable turmoil both within the Congress Party

and within the state of Andhra. At the same time, a movement to carve out a separate state of Telangana from Andhra Pradesh gained momentum.

#### *3.1.3.4 The 2010s and beyond: Movement towards bifurcation*

After YSR's death, the Congress party came under stress and began to crumble, as YSR left no viable party behind: there was no overarching ideology to ensure continued loyalty from intermediate leaders that had emerged due to patronage and clientelism. Consequently, many of the party lieutenants deserted the Congress after it lost two by-elections. They followed his son, Jagan Mohan Reddy, to a new party that they felt would have better chances of winning (Elliot, 2016). By the 2014 election, the centralized system had disintegrated and the Congress party itself had split.

At the same time, dominant castes were divided over the resurgent agitation for separate Telangana statehood, which had transmuted from a movement seeking to demand urban jobs to one focused on the problems of lack of irrigation and electricity, which in turn attracted greater rural support (*Ibid.* 2016). On the other end of the spectrum, many *Dalits*—including leaders of the *Dalit Bahujan Front*—were hopeful that bifurcation would potentially end years of domination by the two upper castes. According to *Dalit* activist Melam Bhagya Rao: "Bifurcation of the state will benefit *Dalits* in all aspects as they would emerge as a strong political force" (quoted in Times of India, 2013). Cross-class and caste alliances within the Congress party was now lost. Taken together, the combined effects of lack of leadership and ideology and the Telangana movement destabilized government and polarized people for almost five years as themes of sub-nationalism and caste-based allegiances re-emerged. By 2014, the state had been bifurcated into Telangana and a smaller Andhra Pradesh, with Chandrababu Naidu emerging as the new Chief Minister of the latter state.

#### **3.1.4 The history of *Dalit* mobilization in coastal Andhra Pradesh**

In addition to the polarization of caste support along party lines, an additional important frontier of analysis that sheds light on how caste, politics and agriculture are entwined in Andhra, is the modern history of the *Dalit* movement in the state. It involves significant

developments that are relevant to the sociology of caste and *Dalit* studies, whilst also providing some insight into the continuing economic polarization in the agrarian sector of coastal Andhra.

#### 3.1.4.1 *Pre-Independence Dalit movements: Class-based mobilization*

It was not until the early twentieth century when *Dalits*, as a constructed group<sup>21</sup> transformed into modern political subjects. The *Dalit* movement in the state of Andhra Pradesh dates back to 1906, when Madari Bhagya Reddi Varma in Hyderabad founded *Jagan Mitra Mandali*. In the nearly fifty years between then and the formation of the modern state of Andhra Pradesh in the 1953, independent *Dalit* mobilization in coastal Andhra veered from more radical assertion for change to more timid demands. For instance, *Jagan Mitra Mandali*, promoted the *Adi*-ideology (called *Adi-Andhra* in what is now coastal Andhra), which claimed *Dalits* were the original inhabitants of the land, whilst avowing others in the country (including *Brahmins*) were migrants. They also sought to reform archaic social practices in the community, such as ritual sacrifices and child marriage. Thus, by the 1920s and 1930s, education initiatives were spearheaded, including the establishment of innovative schools for labouring *Dalits* and vocational institutes for women. *Dalit* journals also began to emerge in this time, generating greater knowledge of caste-based oppression by more dominant castes.

However, by the late 1930s, the more radical aspects of the *Adi-Andhra* Movement began to give way to the Gandhian *Harijan* (children of God) uplift programme. Congress leaders became involved in *Dalit* welfare schemes after the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* was formed in Vijayawada in 1932. The *Dalit* faction within the Congress Party operated to make the government adopt the *Harijan* identity, although Ambedkar and *Dalits* in other regions roundly rejected this term. They also created a new generation of *Dalit* middle-men, particularly in coastal Andhra, who began working in administrative matters of the state and providing support to so-called *Dalit wadas*—or localities—which became centres of political activity (Chinna Rao, 2015). By 1940, the autonomous *Dalit* movement started to fade as most leaders joined either the Congress or the Communist party, as momentum to join a national movement gained traction in the late 1930s. By 1947, more than 90 percent of the *Dalits* in Andhra were purported to be members of the Congress (Kurmayya, 1947).

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<sup>21</sup> Prior to this, colonial authorities deployed the generic identity of ‘untouchables’, an overarching category, which supposedly cut across regions and within regions.

However, even amongst Communists, the *Dalits* who comprised the majority of agricultural labourers did not have true representation: Communists leadership in Andhra (particularly coastal Andhra) was drawn from the upper peasant classes—namely the landed Reddys and Kmmas. The Kmmas were the basis of CPI support in coastal Andhra where they were most populous. This caste dimension of political support—and in effect, Kamma takeover of leftist politics—would have longstanding impacts on pre-Independence agricultural labourers and the labour movement itself, as over and over again, Communist leaders were found to sacrifice the interests of the rural poor to those of the dominant caste peasants (Pouchedass, 1980; Pavier, 2011).

Taken together, the anti-Ambedkar atmosphere and factionalism within the *Dalit* movement in the Congress and Communist parties led to the weakening of the *Dalit* movement in coastal Andhra (in contrast to neighbouring Telangana). The incorporation of *Dalits* within the Congress through the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* dealt a further blow to the *Adi-Andhra* movement in coastal Andhra and ultimately precipitated the end of the movement itself. By the late 1940s and certainly by the end of the 1950s—when the modern state of Andhra itself was constituted—it can be argued that the establishment of the Brahmin (and later Reddy)-led Congress hegemony, combined with Kamma economic hegemony (and control of the Communist party) in coastal Andhra Pradesh, entirely arrested the *Dalit* movement in this region.<sup>22</sup>

#### 3.1.4.2 *Post-Independence Dalit action: Increasing caste consciousness in response to atrocities*

Therefore, the first two decades after Independence was a fairly dark period for the *Dalit* movement, primarily because of the politics of accommodation in the state and the rise of vote-bank policies. While many educated *Dalits* were able to benefit from the reservation policy, activists were absorbed into mainstream political parties and their more radical political action neutralized. It could be argued that in coastal Andhra, the *Dalits* were already better off, since the region provided abundant employment in agriculture, and wages were higher due to

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<sup>22</sup> The one exception is the notable Maoist movement in coastal Andhra that mirrored the revolutionary peasant rebellions in Telangana. Despite this, the coastal region was largely a stronghold for the richer peasant classes.



demand for work and the impact of earlier labour movements. After Independence, some benefitted to a greater extent from the reservation system: they were able to gain greater access to schools, government jobs, and elected positions, thus becoming less dependent on agricultural labour.

However, members of the local dominant castes sometimes murderously resented the social development of *Dalits*. This was indicated by the Karamchedu and Chundur massacres of 1985 and 1991, respectively. These violent attacks on the *Dalit* community by members of the dominant caste reflects how a group of power holders sometimes use their dominance to reassert their power, often through violent force, and in the process, re-embed caste in the corporate agrarian mode of production. In coastal Andhra Pradesh, Mallas and Madigas are comparatively better-off, better-educated and more assertive than they are in other parts of the state (Balagopal, 1991: 2399). But it was alleged that the dominant castes resented their increasing confidence and attacked them.

News of these massacre had the impact, however, of mobilizing people throughout the state. It became a rallying cry for greater consciousness of the relevance of caste—not just class—among *Dalits*, non-*Dalits* and even amongst the ranks of a strong revolutionary movement like the Naxalites. In the aftermath of the incident, the *Dalit Mahasabha* was formed as an immediate response and caste was placed at the centre of a new and strong direction of activism and debates. Meanwhile, the growing importance of caste in the wake of the massacres, led some *Dalits* to even reject Left movements, which had previously remained silent on caste violence. The resulting caste consciousness combined with class-consciousness created a new ideology that was more in line with Ambedkarism, (re)generating an independent social movement.

### 3.2 Land reform, administration, redistribution, and alienation in Andhra Pradesh

The second part of this chapter will more closely examine the direction, successes and failure of land reform initiatives in Andhra Pradesh over several decades. Land reforms in India refer to a long-term effort to achieve a more equal social structure, a diffusion of wealth, and increases in productive capacity, through conferring greater access to land for landless rural poor people (Sankaran, 1996; Suri and Raghavulu, 1996). The term is used interchangeably with agrarian

reforms and often involves enacting public policies favoring redistribution of land in favor of marginalized and landless segments of society, including agricultural labourers, tenants and small farmers. In fact, the agrarian structure in India is characterized by great inequalities in ownership: a small minority of big landholders own a substantial portion of the agricultural land, whilst millions of smallholder farmers eke out a precarious existence on fragmented and tiny plots (Sankaran, 1996).

In Andhra Pradesh, land distribution among agriculture dependent households is especially unequal: Wealthy farmers or those who own large tracts of land control most of the land whilst agricultural workers, tenants and marginal farmers constitute nearly 87 percent of agriculture dependent households (Reddy *et al.*, 2012). This latter group owns either very little land, or none at all. Moreover, inequality is highest in south coastal Andhra<sup>23</sup> as compared to other parts of the state: data from a study of 88 villages spread over 22 rural districts covering 21,657 households shows that big farmers hold 396.12 times more land than agricultural workers in south coastal Andhra (as compared to 42.58 times in north coastal Andhra and 72.93 times in Rayalaseema) (*Ibid.* 2012).

Meanwhile, many people own no land whatsoever. Data from the Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) released by the Union Rural Development Ministry in 2015 reveals that the highest rates of rural landlessness in India is found in (unbifurcated) Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu (73 percent) (GOI, 2015). They constitute landless agricultural workers who sometimes rent land under a tenancy agreement with little to no security or rent fixity, and at other times work for a daily wage. The high numbers of landlessness might also indicate that farmers are selling their lands and earning their livelihoods through the proceeds of land sales (Dr. Sucha Singh Gill, quoted in The Tribune, 2015). However, data from the SECC illustrates that 48.41 percent of landless households in (unbifurcated) Andhra Pradesh derive a major portion of their income from manual casual labor (GOI, 2015). A separate study by Reddy *et al.* (2012) found that 56 percent of agricultural workers are landless. This goes up to 63 percent in South Coastal Andhra, with landless rates reported as high as 71 percent in the Krishna district. Crucially, increasing land concentration and related landlessness is more prevalent in areas where the

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<sup>23</sup> South Coastal Andhra includes the districts of East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam and Nellore districts. The Amaravati capital region is located in the Krishna and Guntur districts.

irrigation has been available for a greater length of time, and where the capitalist relations are well developed (*Ibid.* 2012).

Of particular relevance is the close relationship between Hindu caste hierarchies and the agrarian structure: while large landowners are frequently from upper or dominant classes and cultivators from the middle castes, landless agricultural laborers tend to be from the SC, ST and OBC communities (Sankaran, 1996). For instance, agricultural workers as a group comprise one of the poorest economic groups. Further analysis reveals that amongst agricultural laborers, 36.4 percent are from SC households, 8.65 percent from ST households and 44.74 percent from BC households. Together, nearly 90 percent of all agricultural laborers are from one of these three caste groups in Andhra Pradesh (Reddy *et al.*, 2012), linking caste and class dynamics inexorably together.

Given the structural dynamics of land ownership and control in India, land reforms have followed a particular trajectory in the country. Whilst the preoccupation amongst colonial administrators in the pre-Independence period was on ensuring efficient collection of land revenue, the thrust of redistributive reforms accelerated for several years in the immediate post-Independence period. Even then however, the “politics of manipulation / accommodation” wherein successive post-Independence governments acted to preserve the power of the upper classes of the forward castes, continued well into the 1980s (Reddy, 1989). More recently, some argue that land reforms and distributive efforts have been tempered by feudal land holdings being slowly turned into capitalist holdings (through for example, accumulation - refer back to chapter 2). The following sub-sections provide an assessment of how this occurred by examining post-colonial land administration and reform efforts in Andhra Pradesh.

### **3.2.1 Relevant land reforms in the post-Independence period: Abolition of intermediaries, ceiling legislation, limited tenancy reforms and redistribution of land**

Perhaps no other country has matched the volume of land reform legislation in India since its independence in 1947. Under the 1949 Constitution, individual states were conferred the right to enact and implement land reform. Most states passed legislation in the early 1950s abolishing

landlords and other intermediaries between the government and the cultivator.<sup>24</sup> Other categories of land reform include tenancy reform, laws that placed a ceiling on land holdings and acts that allowed—sometimes inadvertently—consolidation of different land holdings (Besley and Burgess, 2000). These were pursued by different states and different times (Banerjee and Iyer, 2004). Besley and Burgess (2000) provide a thorough assessment of these laws and their impact on poverty rates.

However, the mere enacting of laws has not guaranteed good results. Some legislative provisions have failed to generate the desired effect, and even sometimes resulted in perverse and unintended consequences (Hanstad, 2005). Early land reform measures in what used to be unbifurcated Andhra Pradesh were a combination of the administrative histories of the Andhra and Telangana regions, the former of which was under the British Madras Presidency and the latter ruled by the *Nizam* in colonial India. Mirroring the priorities in the rest of the country, land reforms in Andhra Pradesh had three priorities: abolition of intermediaries, tenancy reforms, and administering ceilings on land holding. To a lesser extent, it also involved other government initiatives, such as attempts to redistribute (some) government and waste lands to rural, landless poor people and abolition of *inam* lands.

Abolition of intermediaries: In the immediate aftermath of independence, the AP (Andhra Areas) Estates (Abolition and Conversion into Ryotwari) Act of 1948 was the first legislation that governed agrarian reforms. It abolished the *zamindari* system, removed intermediaries and conferred rights over land to cultivators/*pattadars*. The Act provides for the survey, settlement, and payment of compensation to the landholders for those estates taken over by the government, and for the granting of *ryotwari pattas* to ryots and landholders. These measures sought to bring all land in the Andhra area under the *ryotwari* system.<sup>25</sup>

Tenancy reforms: Tenancy reforms, intended to abolish or regulate tenancy to ensure fixed tenures and a fair rent, also rapidly followed after India achieved Independence. It was a means for farmers to establish direct relations with the government. To this end, the Hyderabad

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<sup>24</sup> The exceptions were Gujarat, Kerala, Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, which passed legislation after 1958.

<sup>25</sup> In Telangana, the *Jagirdari* tenure system ended with the Abolition of Jagirdari Act of 1949.

Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act was enacted in 1950. Later, the AP (Andhra Area) Tenancy Act 1956 was passed to ensure that a tenant was not evicted from his/her holding except by going to court. Specifically, this Act: (a) fixed a maximum rent level, (b) set a minimum period of lease, (c) laid out the procedure for determination of a fair rent in case of disputes and for remission of rent, (d) detailed circumstances under which the landlords could terminate the tenancy, and (e) defined the machinery for settlement (Parthasarathy and Prasada Rao, 1969). However, with respect to rent levels, while the National Policy stipulates that rent payable by tenants should be fixed at a rate of one fifth to one fourth of the gross produce, it is higher than this in Andhra (along with Haryana and Punjab) (Bandhyopadhyay, 1986).

The Act also gave the landlords the right to resume the land after the expiry of the lease period. Consequently, tenants were often at a disadvantage when bargaining with their landlords and evictions occurred on a large scale (Ramachandraiah and Venkateshvarlu, 2014). It also had several loopholes, which made termination of tenancy relatively easy. Thus, the government introduced an amendment to the Act in 1970. The Andhra Pradesh (Andhra Area) Tenancy (Amendment) Act 1970 provided for (i) fixing a fair rent, (ii) automatic renewal of lease, and (iii) pre-emptive rights. Automatic renewal of lease was provided, but the landowner was allowed to recover the land back for personal cultivation if he or she owned less than the ceiling limit under the Andhra Pradesh Ceiling on Agricultural Holdings Act of 1961 (to be discussed further in the next sub-section). In addition, “the amendment provided for pre-emptive rights, without seeking to regulate the price of land” (*Ibid.* 2014: 13). Further, the tenancy laws of Andhra Pradesh included no provisions for conferring rights of ownership on tenants and sharecroppers, unlike several other states (Bandyopadhyay, 1986).<sup>26</sup>

Ceiling legislation: Legislation on ceilings on agricultural holdings in India was enacted and enforced in two phases: (1) the period from 1960 to 1972 when no specific policy guidelines were present; and (2) the period since 1972, after the adoption of national policy guidelines

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<sup>26</sup> Though the approaches vary, other state laws (with some exceptions) include provisions to confer ownership rights to tenants on non-resumable land. Some states deem eligible tenants to be owners: their ownership becomes final after payment of the price established by the government, which in turn is usually paid to the government, not to the landlord. Other states paid compensation to the landlord to assume ownership of eligible tenanted land, subsequently transferring rights to tenants based on their application and payment of an amount that may or may not match the amount paid to the landlord (Hanstad 2005:13).

(Hanstad, 2005). The Andhra Pradesh Land Reforms (Ceiling on Agriculture Holdings) Acts were passed in 1961 and 1973.

After the failure of initial efforts to implement ceilings on land holdings—for example, through an amendment to the Hyderabad Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act of 1950, a series of peasant uprisings in the 1960s and 1970s and other land struggles prompted the Government of India to issue guidelines to state governments on land ceiling implementation (Joshi, 1982: 90). The guidelines included provisions to: limit ceilings to a smaller size, varying between 10 and 54 acres, make the family the unit of application with some allowances for families with more than five members; treat adult sons as a separate unit; limit exemptions applicable to lands held by religious, charitable and educational institutions, amongst others. Thus, the Andhra Pradesh Land Reforms (Ceiling on Agricultural Holdings) Act 1973 was enacted. According to the 1973 Act, every person whose holding is in excess of 10 acres of wet land or 25 acres of dry land was required to provide a tribunal with a declaration of his or her holdings within a particular time (vide Sec. 8). Though the new law did not make any radical impact, it achieved better results than the 1961 Act.

Redistribution of land by the government: A major reformist step in land redistribution was the assignment of government lands to landless poor people in the state, which accounted for 12.5 per cent of the net sown area. By the end of 2002, it was estimated that 43.21 *lakh* (4 million, 321 thousand) acres of government land was assigned to 23.98 *lakh* (239,800) beneficiaries, 24 percent of whom were SCs and 28 percent STs (Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2004: 26; Ramachandraiah and Venkateshwarlu, 2014).

### **3.2.2 Land reforms in the post-colonial period: An unfinished agenda**

On the whole, the abolition of intermediaries has proven to be fairly successful in Andhra Pradesh. However, other reforms such as changes relating to tenancy and the redistribution of land has had mixed to disappointing results. Because land reform fell under state jurisdiction under the 1949 Constitution, their enactment and implementation were often determined by the political will of state authorities (Appu, 1996; Bandhyopadhyay, 1986; Radhakrishnan, 1990). The abolition of intermediaries, for instance, was approached with diligence due to the

“perceived oppressive character of the *zamindari* (and their intermediaries) and their close alliance with the British” (Banerjee and Iyer, 2004). The effect was that the majority of these reforms were passed by nearly every state by the 1950s.

Elsewhere, political recalcitrance over implementation has plagued land ceiling laws. Here, the existence of numerous loopholes and poor policy formulation led to many landowners escaping expropriation by ensuring any surplus lands were put in the names of relatives, friends and dependents (Appu, 1996). For instance, it took two tries in Andhra Pradesh to close (or at least tighten) loopholes that prevented the transfer of lands from wealthy to poor. Consequently, implementation of land ceiling legislation, as well as tenancy reform did not meet targets set out in the national Five Year Plans (Bandyopadhyay, 1986; Banerjee and Iyer, 2004; Radhakrishnan 1990). Even then, Andhra Pradesh took possession of approximately 645,599 acres of ceiling surplus lands. An additional 172,249 acres, however, remain outside of the government’s possession largely due to litigation issues (Ramachandraiah and Venkateshvarlu, 2014). By 31 March 2002, the government had distributed a total of 582,319 acres of ceiling surplus land to 540,344 beneficiaries (*ibid*, 2014). However, since the total cultivable area of unbifurcated Andhra was about 2.5 *crore* acres (approximately 25 million acres), the ceiling surplus land distributed was little more than 2 percent of all cultivable land in the state (Balagopal, 2007: 3831).

However, despite the figures on record, in practice little of this land actually reached the people they were meant to go to. One of the reasons for this, both recorded in previous literature (Banerjee and Iyer, 2004) and confirmed during various interview I conducted, is that distributed ceiling lands were sometimes encroached upon, often by the original declarant or his/her relatives and the recipient was not in the position (politically, socially or physically) to take possession of it on his or her own. Additional issues relate to the quality of land distributed and the consequences of an unequal relationship between landowners and beneficiaries. First, much of the land handed over by landlords tended to be the least cultivable of their holdings. This meant that much of the land was either very difficult to cultivate or entirely uncultivable. As a result, some of the beneficiaries of the distribution abandoned the land, which was then reoccupied by the landlord. In poorer areas of the state marked by near feudal relations between landowners and labourers, this abandonment and reclaiming of land by landowners

happened even when the land was not of poor quality (Balagopal, 2007). Information gleaned from interviews in Amaravati will also show that assigned lands were sometimes ‘sold’ due to exigencies resulting from poverty (see Chapter 7). The government in these cases rarely resumed such lands (*ibid.*).

As the ceiling laws failed to address the problem of landlessness even in a small way, the government turned to distributing public lands to landless people living in poverty (*ibid.*) In terms of total land assignment, 4.25 million acres have reportedly been assigned to 2.91 million households in (unbifurcated) Andhra Pradesh since the 1960s (GoAP, 2006: 85; Ramachandraiah and Venkateshvarlu, 2014).<sup>27</sup> This constitutes the most amount of land assigned to the greatest number of assignees in any one state in India—amounting to nearly half the total amount of such land distributed in the entire country (Balagopal, 2007). Even in this case however, the same problems that plagued the distribution of ceiling lands were encountered by assignees. In many instances, the distribution remained only on paper: while a document indicated where the assigned land plot was located and who the beneficiary was, s/he was likely never got possession of the land. In other cases, there was no clear indication of what land was granted where: while a grant may display a survey number indicating a particular number of acres of land assigned, there was no indication of where exactly this plot was located (*ibid.*).

Elsewhere, the land granted would already be encroached on by someone else (a phenomenon that also occurred on some assigned lands in Amaravati) and the government would do little to rectify the situation. And in still other cases, the land that was assigned would require intense, expensive and large-scale clearing of brush and stones to make it cultivable—something that the already poor assignees could ill afford to pay for. As a result, assignees were often forced to alienate (sell) their land, or as was common in Amaravati, lease it to a third party. A final factor that accounted for the loss of land amongst landless poor people is the physical distance between the plots assigned to an assignee and their existing habitat: As was seen in Amaravati, if the assigned lands were located far from the cultivator’s home or was difficult to reach, they could not afford to travel daily to their fields, whilst also towing their agricultural inputs and

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<sup>27</sup> Another source states that 75.40 *lakh* (7,240,000) acres of public lands have been distributed, mostly to 39.30 *lakh* (3,930,000) landless poor, and an estimated 2.2 million households were given homestead rights (Centre for Good Governance 2014: 8).



implements. This in turn led to even more alienation of land, with the government itself estimating that one million acres out of the 4.25 million acres that was distributed—nearly a quarter—had been alienated (Balagopal, 2007: 3832).

In terms of tenancy laws, because the landed classes controlled many state legislatures, reforms that may directly harm their interests were often blocked. It was only where tenants had substantial political representation that some successes were recorded (*ibid.* 2004). As Besley and Burgess (1998: 6) argue, even in areas where tenants were well-organized and some successes recorded,

there ... [was] a range of documented cases of imminent legislation prompting landlords to engage in mass evictions of tenants and of the *de jure* banning of landlord-tenant relationships pushing tenancy underground and therefore, paradoxically, reducing tenurial security.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, in a study of tenancy laws in the four Southern states by Besley *et al.* (2013), the authors contend that while Kerala undertook the most land reform and Karnataka the least, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu both passed intermediate levels of land reform. For instance, Kerala entirely prohibited tenancy, whilst Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh allowed it in limited cases. Tamil Nadu and the Andhra area of what was then unbifurcated Andhra Pradesh placed no restrictions on future tenancy. Even in the latter case, Appu (1996) argues that limits on maximum rent and provisions on tenants' right to purchase land had the effect of disincentivizing tenancy arrangements (Besley *et al.* 2013). Therefore, while tenancy reform did reduce land inequality within villages, they did so mainly by transferring land from upper caste landowners to middle caste tenants (Besley *et al.*, 2002). Increased equity was only achieved through increased convergence (through land transfers) between those of the upper and middle castes (Besley *et al.*, 2013)

The unintended consequence of these developments was that it increased the number of landless SC/ST households in Andhra Pradesh, a group that also had poorer access to credit (*Ibid.*). In fact, landlessness actually increased amongst the SCs over time: between 1961 and 1991, the number of SC cultivators decreased from 23 percent to 12 percent, and the proportion

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<sup>28</sup> See Gough (1989) for a more thorough discussion on this.

of *Dalit* agricultural labourers increased from 57 percent to 72 percent (Balagopal, 2007: 3831). In absolute terms, it is estimated that 100,000 SC persons lost land in this period. Moreover, the average size of landholdings by SC landowners decreased from 1975-76 to 1995-96 from about 3 acres to 2 acres (*Ibid.*). Das (2000) further states that land reform resulted in tenants who had substantial rights obtaining freehold occupation, while ‘inferior tillers’—that is, poorer tenants, sharecroppers, paid labourers—lost access to cultivable land entirely.

### *3.3 Synopsis of trends: The rural landscape of coastal Andhra is marked by the political power of dominant castes, caste-based politics of accommodation and an unfinished land redistribution agenda.*

Taken together, an assessment of historical caste-based assertions in the Krishna-Guntur districts clearly demonstrates that the benefits of agrarian prosperity has been captured largely by the dominant peasant castes and this has not percolated down to the agrarian poor. Some (Srinivasulu, 2014) have even argued that the economic conditions of most labourers have worsened, as wages have remained low and indebtedness to landowners has increased. Meanwhile, the market-oriented and capital-accumulating class of peasantry in coastal Andhra is comprised almost completely of a single caste, namely the Kammas, indicating that rural areas in this region are marked by economic polarization driven by the sociological institution of caste. Caste and class are therefore closely related in this region given most landlords are from the Kamma caste and a large proportion of agricultural labourers are *Dalit*.

However, *Dalits* themselves have been undergoing a process of change, as they have benefited to some extent from reservations that have allowed many to access an education and jobs outside of agriculture. This has resulted in a renewed expression of assertion by this community, including through political mobilization (*Ibid.*), although at times, these developments have resulted in antagonism and resentment by the dominant caste, exploding at its worst into retributational violence. At the same time, Andhra Pradesh passed intermediate levels of land reform, with included land ceiling laws, combined with the AP Assigned Lands (Prohibition of Transfers) Act, 1977 that ultimately resulted in the most amount of land assigned to the greatest number of assignees in any one state in India.

Yet, in practice, these lands rarely ended up in the hands of those who needed them the most. Instead, a series of factors, ranging from the encroachment of the distributed land by the original landowners to lack of capacity by assignees to clear and cultivate these lands (which tended to be of poorer quality), resulted in a missed opportunity to redistribute land toward poorer segments of society, and by extension, to realize the welfare-enhancing and inequality-diminishing benefits of land redistribution. Thus, without government intervention to improve the quality of the land, to make it cultivable and protect assignees from encroachment, even large scale efforts to distribute public lands to poor people could be meaningless (Balagopal, 2007).

Despite these mixed trends and the fact that ceiling legislation in Andhra Pradesh was not as effective in redistributing land, as it was in other parts of India, it nevertheless placed a constraint on the accumulation of even more land by the landed elite. Additionally, the political mobilization of many rural cultivators, inspired by more radical political parties and the Naxalite movement, further prevented (at least temporarily) the drive to consolidate larger land holdings. Some of the wealthier peasantry began to sell their land and transition to non-agricultural vocations at the same time. As a result, it can also be argued that while the land ceiling laws were by no means perfect or airtight, at least some surplus land and government wastelands were transferred to SC and ST communities, as well as to other rural poor people.

Given this backdrop of caste-based politics and semi-failed land redistribution in Andhra Pradesh, the remainder of the thesis will now turn to examining the specific land assembly model, called the LPS, utilized in Amaravati to convert huge swaths of rural land to an urban conglomeration. Much of the analysis will focus on why land pooling was initially successful, particularly in the context of pitched land wars in the rest of India, and how (or if) the authorities in Andhra achieved compliance amongst the local population to the massive changes happening around them. The following empirical chapters will begin with an overview of the methodology used to complete this study.

## 4 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND LOGISTICS OF FIELDWORK IN AMARAVATI

I began my fieldwork in earnest in India in August 2016 after almost a year of desk-based research prior to my arrival in the country. My starting point was a list of the key social actors I had compiled during the previous year, as well as a map of the potential power and institutional dynamics of the region. I also had a literal map of the villages of the region. I was eager to speak with people whose daily lives would be impacted by the huge change represented by the state project of land pooling as soon as possible. Before doing this however, I had to attain a better grasp of the local language and also find a reasonable 'way in' to life in a rural village in Andhra Pradesh.

### 4.1 *Initial scoping, preparation and positionality vis-à-vis the research process*

Because I am of Indian origin – from the state of Kerala in India – and still have many family members living in the country, I was able to arrive and stay in Secunderabad, Telangana, in July 2016, where a direct uncle and aunt reside. Through my uncle's friends, I found a tutor from whom I received daily intensive Telugu lessons. Within approximately six weeks, I knew some basic phrases and could hold a simple conversation. This would require constant practice over the next several months to improve. However, it was still imperative to find a good translator once I arrived at my field site due to the complexity of conversations surrounding land, money, loans and dispossession.

I also began to speak to people who were originally from the capital region about the socio-political environment in and around the Krishna delta region during this time. The goal was to get a sense of which villages were at the epicentre of real estate activity and land speculation, whilst also getting a feel for the depth of political support for the ruling party (or conversely, for the opposition party) and the topics around which discontent (or support) were most salient. Indeed, most of the people I spoke with during this time were from the Kamma community and extremely positive and excited about recent events taking place in the capital, including the LPS.

My family positioning and related connections were instrumental in determining how I would enter the field area and was later able to find housing and help, including a driver and my initial

translator. It also helped to establish some degree of trust and support amongst some of the people—particularly amongst the Kamma community—in Thullur, the village in which I would eventually come to reside. This was because many of the contacts my uncle had in the region were members of the Kamma and Reddy community. The main contact to whom I was introduced, Mr. Anjanaiah,<sup>29</sup> in turn introduced me to a local real estate agent and a family who were also members of the Kamma community. This meant that at least initially, I was moving largely in a dominant caste community. Thus, caste associations played into considerations over the housing I secured and how I was treated by my landlords. This, however, only came to be a significant feature of my interactions during my ‘personal’ or ‘free’ time outside of formal ‘fieldwork’ within Thullur.<sup>30</sup> Outside of Thullur, these caste-based associations fell away. I will elaborate on this further in sections below.

#### **4.1.1 First view of my field site and deciding to set up base in Thullur**

Mr. Anjanaiah helped me find a local real estate dealer through his own contacts, who in turn located several potential places I could rent. One apartment stood out: It was a vacant apartment within a brand new house in the village of Thullur, located almost at the epicentre of the Urban Notified Area of Amaravati. Moreover, Thullur was a high profile village, as it was initially chosen as the nucleus of the seed capital, only for the government to later change it to nearby Mandadam, Uddandarayunipalem and Lingayapalem.<sup>31</sup> While these villages were once considered little more than the rural backwaters of Vijayawada and Guntur, they were now at the heart of the intense speculative and real estate activity surrounding the capital city in anticipation of the changes coming.

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<sup>29</sup> I have changed the names of all the private citizens who directly helped me during my fieldwork, including those of the people with whom I stayed, my driver and translators. The names of local politicians, (political) informants and activists who lead public lives and whose work are reported in the news remain the same

<sup>30</sup> This differentiation between “home-life” and “fieldwork” may seem arbitrary as I was also technically also doing ‘fieldwork’ (i.e. participant observation) during my so-called ‘personal’ time after my ‘formal’ interviews were over. However, for the purposes of explaining how I moved between different caste and class communities, it is illustrative.

<sup>31</sup> At the time of my arrival, the temporary Secretariat was located at Velagapudi village, which is located just a few kilometers from Thullur.

#### 4.1.2 The first consideration of caste: Labelling myself

Mr. Anjanaiah himself was a member of the Kamma caste, which meant that from my very first entry into the village, I was immediately associated with people of this caste. I knew this would be a consideration for how people from different castes might later relate to me (though this would be less of a potential issue in other villages). Because I am of Indian (Hindu) heritage, but from a different state, there was some speculation by my host family over my family's caste.<sup>32</sup> Given I was first introduced to the locals by a Kamma from Guntur who had some business dealings in the capital region, I was immediately looked upon as someone of a similar caste. I came to later find out that Mr. Anjanaiah had also later called the family, in whose home I would rent an apartment, to explicitly state that I was from a similar caste from a different state—or as my landlord's wife told me months later, a "Kerala Kamma." Mutual friends told me later he had made the phone call to ensure my protection by the family in whose home I would be staying, as I was a single woman moving into an unknown village.

#### 4.2 *Move to Thullur village: Situating the 'Kerala Kamma' from Canada, acclimatizing to village life and establishing a fieldwork routine*

I moved to Thullur in October 2016. Like the steady stream of government workers shifting to the capital region at the time, I decided to 'move in' in a more traditional sense. I got a place, bought furniture and set up a home. Regardless, it was rather unusual for a single woman from outside Andhra or Telangana, and in fact, from outside the country, move in.<sup>33</sup>

I also had a peculiar arrangement with my hosts: whilst I lived independently, I would spend every breakfast and dinner with them. In this way, I could get to speak to them, have some companionship and get to slowly know the people of life in the village and their (changing) lifestyles and views, whilst also maintaining some level of independence. As I was living in a dominant caste household and neighbourhood that largely supported land pooling, I realized

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<sup>32</sup> In the case of Hindus, because surnames associated with specific castes or *jatis* change by state, it is not immediately obvious what a person's caste is across state lines.

<sup>33</sup> Many of the government workers moving in were male was because most had come on their own to find suitable accommodation and to get a sense of their new surroundings, leaving their wives behind temporarily with their children in Hyderabad. Where there were female government workers, nearly all chose to live in all-female boarding houses in either Vijayawada or Guntur—or alternately, some had moved into the capital region with their entire families, never single.

too many associations with high-profile dissidents or members of opposition parties might prove alienating and uncomfortable for the people around me. This in turn could lead to somewhat counter productive interactions at 'home.' Therefore, I also made a somewhat artificial separation between a 'home' life and a 'work' life: 'fieldwork' – or interviewing people systematically cross the villages in the region—would become my 'day job' and my personal life at home would be marked by slightly different rules of behaviour on my part. This was to ensure that I could establish rapport with members of the family in whose whom I was living and the local community, and they in turn could feel more comfortable around me. It would also ensure my safety.

#### **4.2.1 Participant observation and objectivation: Observing life in a village whilst maintaining a sense of reflexivity**

Participant observation, a research methodology central to cultural and social anthropology, was a key component of my work and daily experiences. Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999: 91) describe participant observation as “the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting.” This was particularly important during the moments and days I spent at 'home'<sup>34</sup> as I had the additional requirement of 'fitting in' with the villagers whom I also studied. I endeavoured as Erlandson *et al.* (1993), put it, to provide a “written photograph” of the environment under study through “active looking, improving memory, informal interviewing, writing detailed field notes, and perhaps most importantly, [being patient]” (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002: vii). I consciously tried to lower the cultural barriers between the villagers and me and to acquire “knowledge through the body” (Okely 2012: 77-78), in turn gaining a fuller understanding of some people's lived experiences. Thus, while I was in 'work mode' in other neighbourhoods or villages, I asked pre-determined, open-ended questions of my subjects and felt a time pressure

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<sup>34</sup> The word 'home' in this scenario is tricky: while I lived in Thullur, it was also one of the sites of my formal fieldwork. In this instance, I use it to refer literally to the building in which I lived and the people in it, including my host family and my direct neighbours in the same building. To a lesser extent, it also includes some of my neighbours and the community of *Kothur*, as these were the people I would see the most in my daily personal interactions: I would walk with neighbourhood around the walking tract daily, I would eventually go to family functions of residents in the village, and eat some meals with my neighbor across the street. Over time, I also had a second 'home' in my translator's home/village area in Penumaka, where I was able to more extensively employ participant observation methods on account of the amount of time I spent with them.

to extract the most accurate information as fast as possible. This was admittedly a sort of ‘gaze from farther away’ as I was in the role of a rather naïve observer who was more remote from the person I was interviewing. However, at home, I was relaxed (in relative terms) and embedded in the daily lives of the people around me. I asked the same questions (and more) over time, whilst observing peoples’ interactions more closely: those between members of my host family, between the host family and their tenants, between the neighbours, between people of different castes in my neighbourhood, between landowners and land users or simply those working in different vocations (i.e. restaurant owners, drivers, cement workers, etc.), between local power brokers and other community members, between immigrants from other parts of Andhra and the locals, *et cetera*.

Meanwhile, it was equally important to acknowledge that while my new neighbours and friends were informing me about land-related topics and events in the villages—that is, my own research topic—my presence and physical being may also have influenced the people around me. Bourdieu (2003: 283) terms this phenomenon “participant objectivation,” which requires scientific reflexivity on the part of the researcher about “the social world that has made both the anthropologist and the conscious or unconscious anthropology that she (or he) engages in her anthropological practice.” Therefore, several aspects of my own background—as an Indo-Canadian woman—required analysis and reflection, including my own ideological perspectives on subjects as wide as land pooling, caste and gender. For instance, ‘looking’ Indian—however subjective this may be—and being from a dominant caste Hindu background may have both played in my favour and against me at the same time for different reasons.

On the one hand, my ‘Indianness’ and dominant caste ‘Hinduness’ afforded me the ability to ‘blend in’ easier over time within the family environment of my household. Equally importantly, I was intrinsically aware of, and able to adapt to, at least some of the common ‘cultural’ codes of practice or etiquette of conservative, rural Indian society.<sup>35</sup> Fortuitously for me, the residents of the village were already familiar with Keralites: Nuns from the state of Kerala ran the main

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<sup>35</sup> Cultural practice/etiquette is a broad term and in this case, used as a catchall phrase to describe a wide variety of activities that deal with custom and everyday ‘life’ practices for a woman in a rural South-Indian setting. This ranged from what was deemed appropriate attire (for example, avoiding sleeveless *kurtas*, donning silver anklets and *bottu*—a dot on the centre of the forehead generally worn by Hindus and Jains—to signal my background, etc.) to appropriate behaviour (not interacting openly with too many men in public, avoiding public displays of affection and not drinking alcohol).



private English-medium school in Thullur, whilst many Hindu pilgrims from the village would ritually visit a particular temple in Kerala every year. As a result, many of the people in the village were affectionate towards Keralites and by extension, me. In this way, I established myself as somewhat of a marginal 'insider,' as an Indian origin, Hindu, upper caste woman. At the same time, I was also very much an outsider for a different set of reasons. Besides also being a Canadian and a UK-based student, the most unusual aspect about me in my new neighbours' eyes was that I was an unmarried Indian woman in my 30s. Not only was this an uncommon occurrence, it bordered on being transgressive, particularly as I was seen as being more Indian than Canadian over time.

As a result, I had to negotiate this 'singleness' vis-à-vis my gender and cultural background within rural society. In fact, much of my time was spent safeguarding my security and communicating through actions that I was a 'respectable woman' regardless of me being on my own. This meant that whilst I had a particular job to complete in the daytime—going to people's homes and fields to interview them regardless of caste or gender—in my 'personal' life after work, I behaved very much within the confines of how other women in the village behaved: socializing almost exclusively with other women or children, ensuring my 'modesty' (i.e. by dressing conservatively, not drinking alcohol, etc.) and ensuring all communication with men were either with those who had been 'pre-approved' (i.e. my driver) or in cases where it could not be avoided, strictly controlled and highly transparent. For instance, where other researchers or my translators came to my house, I would very clearly and obviously open up all windows and doors to ensure the neighbours could see nothing untoward was happening (therefore not creating rumours). In the case of my driver and translators, who would sometimes come to my home during lunch to have a meal in the middle of the day when it was too hot to interview people in the fields, I tried to outwardly present myself (to anyone watching) as the 'boss' – much like a government official.

I also had to answer many questions about why I remained unmarried and chose to pursue a degree at such a late stage instead of getting married. Although an educated woman on her own was not an anomaly, it was the fact that I was educated AND choosing to remain unmarried that was seen as strange and perhaps slightly confronting for some women who had made—or were forced to make—the opposite choice. Many women struck up conversations with me often

about the importance of marriage and family. The process of answering these questions was delicate: to do so from my perspective might mean imparting my own ideological beliefs around gender roles, education and a range of other subjects, creating unnecessary conflict, confusion or distance. Therefore, I had to learn to strike a balance between being fairly honest but not overbearing, and to listen more than to speak. Despite these very deliberate steps to both fit in and also differentiate myself where necessary—that is, create a space to be able to talk to and interact with men, whom I had to interview for research purposes, within a conservative society—I knew my own rather alien presence and way of life was an adjustment for some people, yet another indication of how much life in Thullur was changing for local residents.

#### **4.2.2 Arranging transportation: Immediate success**

Whilst navigating and settling into my ‘after work’ life in Thullur, I was also sorting out key issues in my fieldwork plan. In addition to the actual mapping of villages and methodology of fieldwork (which will be discussed in the next section), I had to arrange the twin necessities of transportation and translation quickly. Arranging transportation turned out to be the easier of the two tasks, although it was potentially the trickiest because of the security issues. The bus service was unreliable in the village areas, and somewhat dangerous, particularly at night. However, even with a car and driver, I was concerned about security as I anticipated most of my time would be spent in a car alone with the driver in an unfamiliar terrain. I eventually hired a local person—Subash Rao—who was recommended by my host family. Subash was known to the family and was the first person to own a car in one of the neighbouring villages, Dondepadu, where he started his driving business over a decade ago. Hareesh was an extremely straightforward, trustworthy person who quickly became my most important guide and friend during my stay in Amaravati. As my driver, I spent the most time with him during fieldwork. He became my main informant, bodyguard (where necessary) and language instructor. He had innumerable contacts and knew the villages well. He was also from a mixed caste background: some of his family were Kamma, but others were from an OBC caste.

Through him (and also eventually my translators), I was better able to understand the geography of each village, the intricate social, cultural and religious customs of the area and the caste histories of the region. I got a sense of how poorer people with extremely tiny portions of

land were jostling and negotiating with local authorities to benefit from the LPS. He himself owned a fraction of an acre of land in his village—just the land under which his very small, somewhat dilapidated house stood. And ever since the speculation boom began, he started a small side business as a real estate broker to capitalize on the changes taking place in the capital city region. In many ways, he represented people who were on the absolute margins of possibly benefiting (or not) from the speculative boom in Amaravati: while he had a tiny amount of *gramma kantham* land—or land within the village confines—this was land that he could neither sell (since he lived on it), nor pool as part of the LPS. He neither owned cultivable land, nor made his livelihood from land. Because he was a driver, he was hoping to benefit from the increased economic activity in the region, despite the fact that the cost of living was also going up rapidly.

I paid Subash Rs. 30,000 a month plus the cost of petrol to ensure I was able to travel freely for at least 12 hours a day, six days a week. This was my most expensive outlay of funds during fieldwork, but was worth it for the insight I got over time, the access it afforded me to more remote areas (such as the islands in the middle of the river where people farmed) and the sense of security I felt in having readily-available transportation.

#### **4.2.3 Finding a translator: Tricky start, successful finish**

As part of the deal with the real estate agent during the move to Thullur, I also agreed to hire his friend, Pratap, a self-professed English professor and a “mouthpiece of the local TDP party” as my translator. He was essentially a rank and file member of the TDP party who was hired to emcee party events as needed. Pratap only worked for me very briefly, a total of 11 days. In that time, he was extremely biased towards the TDP party and called too much attention onto himself and to me. He often voiced strong opinions in front of the people I was interviewing, some of whom were frightened into silence, particularly if they felt that they would run afoul of the TDP. But in some ways, Pratap ultimately added to the research process: because of his limited political connections and my desire to commence fieldwork by systematically going to all the villages in the capital region, we were able to go to each village and speak with nearly every *panchayat Sarpanch* (head) within the first few weeks. Through Mr. Pratap’s own identity as a Kamma person within the TDP party, I was also able to very quickly gather the stories of those who had benefitted the most from land-pooling, namely, land-owning Kamma farmers and even

a few non-Kamma individuals who simply owned enough land to engage in speculative activities. Finally, I got to interview an influential local TDP MP from Guntur due to Pratap's proximity to him.

After Pratap's departure—an event that occurred after a strained discussion—I employed another translator for a short period of three weeks. Unfortunately, her English was not particularly good. While my knowledge and ability to communicate in Telugu was fairly passable for everyday conversation, I was cognisant that the often intricate discussions I was having about money, savings and legal and land rights required a much more subtle understanding of the language. I was almost certainly missing the nuances. As a result, I had to once again look for a new translator.

Thereafter, I was able to employ two very good translators, Koteswar Rao and Nanda Kumar of Penumaka village (one of the 20 villages of Amaravati), through a set of serendipitous circumstances. I met another foreign student—a Norwegian cultural anthropologist—who was living in Penumaka in the final stages of his own fieldwork. Nanda Kumar and Koteswar Rao had served as his translators. Before he departed, I discussed with all three if they would be available to work for me. They were more than happy to continue their work as translators and my Norwegian friend was relieved that his friends would have work after he left. The reason that I chose to hire both translators instead of one was because they brought different skills: Koteswar Rao was an older family man, who was also a community organizer and social worker who ran an old folks home that fed destitute older *Dalit* people in his neighbourhood. He had also worked on and off in several NGOs in the region. While his English was not perfect, he had vast knowledge of the villages was particularly good at explaining how *Dalit* people viewed the changes in the villages. Meanwhile, Kumar was younger and primarily raised in Maharashtra. He was much less familiar with the villages, but his English was excellent. I decided to hire both men to ensure that if one of my translators (and friends) were sick or unable to work one day, the other would be available.

In fact, Koteswar Rao and Nanda Kumar opened up a whole new line of inquiry in a very real way for me, namely the status and treatment of *Dalit* people in the Amaravati region. They were *Dalits* from the Madiga sub-caste – one of the two main sub-castes that fall under the official

Scheduled Castes (SC) category in the coastal region of Andhra (the other being Malla). Madigas were historically considered more economically depressed than the Mallas (see chapter 3). Nanda Kumar and Koteswar Rao lived in the outskirts of the main village of Penumaka, in a community also called *Kothur*. However, unlike the *Kothur* in Thullur, *Kothur* in Penumaka was populated almost entirely by the SC/ST community. In addition, Penumaka itself was one of the three villages in the area that had put up fierce resistance in the face of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's efforts to implement the land-pooling scheme.

Thus, two months into my residence in Thullur (by December 2016), I had my team in place and we had established a daily routine of leaving in the morning and returning about 10—sometimes 12 or more—hours later after completing a systematic set of interviews. We worked six days a week and spoke to a wide variety of people who represented each of the castes in every village. In this way, I had designed my double life: my 'private life' in Thullur where I mostly interacted with women and members of the dominant Kamma caste during my evenings and Sundays and my 'work life' which entailed travelling to different villages to interact with a wide variety of people, particularly those were the most marginalized. In addition, because my translators, who would over time become friends, lived in a *Dalit* colony in Penumaka, I was also increasingly aware of *Dalit* perspectives, concerns and demands in the aftermath of land pooling. We would eat together for lunch everyday, either in a restaurant or packed meals in my apartment and discuss each interview. As high summer approached, we would work several hours in the morning, spend three to four hours in the middle of the day eating, discussing and napping to avoid the mid-day scorching heat, and the evenings again doing interviews. Where necessary, we would pause and have discussions in the car over a roadside tea and snack or even immediately after the interview, so I could fully understand what was said and why and what the repercussions might be.

#### **4.3 Research methodology: Planning my approach, deciding on the questions, conducting interviews and analysing results**

Whilst finding my bearings in Thullur and the surrounding villages, I began to collect primary data via extensive interviews of people living in the 29 villages that comprise the capital region, as well as from key interviews with informants in Vijayawada, Hyderabad, Mumbai and New

Delhi. After an initial set of interviews across all the villages, which took approximately 6 weeks to complete,<sup>36</sup> and assessing the demographic and socio-political data available for each of the villages, I chose three villages—Nidamaru, Thullur and Undavalli—on which to concentrate further. However, before embarking on these interviews, I began the process of mapping social actors involved in the design and construction of Amaravati far before my entry into the region to ensure I was able to first, identify the most important social actors in the region and second, understand the underlying relationships between people vis-à-vis caste and class, as well as the dominant discourses on land and land use. I assessed and reassessed this framework throughout the time I spent in the field—from August 2016 to July 2017—in order to ensure my approach remained flexible and adaptable to potential changes. Therefore, my research process is split into two time frames: a pre-field work period between January 2016 and August 2016, when I moved to India and a fieldwork phase, split into four phases that covered different aspects of my research.

#### **4.3.1 Pre-field work I: Assessing social actors (January 2016 – July 2016)**

The process of mapping social actors in Amaravati involved identifying and disaggregating the main categories of residents in the region, as well as potential key informants (activists, politicians, journalists). Important categories of residents in the regions ranged from landowners to those who made a livelihood on the land without necessarily owning it—for example, tenant farmers and agricultural labourers. In addition, there were also shopkeepers in some of the larger villages, and fisherfolk, who lived in some of the riverfront villages. These groups were further demarcated by caste, class, location (village) and influence (for example, some were local leaders, union representatives, members of the *gram panchayats*, etc.).

To help me organize my key questions and plan out who might be best placed to shed light on them, I first sought to deepen my contextual and relational understanding of the actors involved in the land pooling process in Amaravati. Some guiding questions included: What are the different social groups in this region? Which ones are powerful—or not, as the case may be—and where do they cluster? How is ‘power’ defined in this region? How do class and caste

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<sup>36</sup> While the actual interviews took six weeks, this amounted to nearly 8 weeks in real time as I took an extra week to analyze the data, and was also in the midst of handling the initial logistics of moving to Thullur, getting to know the people around me, settling into a routine and hiring a driver and translator.

interact in these regions? Addressing these questions involved speaking to those with a clearer idea of the different social groups involved in the creation of the new city, particularly with respect to various land-related issues. They included academics, journalists and activists largely based in Vijayawada. In addition, I spoke to representatives of farmers' movements, Communist party leaders and other civil society activists, as well as bureaucrats and government officials.

In addition, an analysis of government and economic structures was useful in that it allowed me to assess the nature of state-capital alliances. The most important questions were: what are the formal and informal structures that mediate the relationship between the state and rural actors, such as landowners and land users? What type of relationship exists between the state machinery and different categories of residents in Amaravati, from landowners to agricultural labourers? To more clearly understand this process, I interviewed party officials and local residents and activists—particularly *Dalit* activists—from different backgrounds and castes.

Finally, concurrent with my initial research and later, the interviews I was conducting, I began to track the various news reports on land pooling. This included press releases and speeches by various government officials, as well as local protests and statements against land pooling from activists and opposition party members. I wanted to know the sources of support and dissent, and their respective reasons. In addition to analyzing CSO publications and speeches by local leaders and activists, I interviewed local APCRDA officials, some village-based activists and members of opposition parties. In this way, I was able to glean more information on why some groups of people were against land pooling, whilst others supported it.

#### **4.3.2 Pre-fieldwork II: Learning Telugu, choosing my questions and how often to ask them (August 2017 – December 2017, but with slight changes thereafter)**

While the majority of mapping occurred prior to entering the field and in the early months of fieldwork, I also honed my questions over time, as I began speaking to people and gathered more information. I initially began preparing a basic set of questions as soon as I arrived in Hyderabad in August to begin Telugu lessons. These questions were oriented around finding out more about people's livelihoods in the villages that comprised Amaravati both prior to the announcement of land pooling and afterwards. I began asking some of these questions to

people I knew through my networks (see above) in Hyderabad, to get a sense of what the general sentiment was about land pooling. Through this initial process, I quickly realized that because I wanted to disaggregate the responses I would receive by factors such as caste, class, gender and to some extent, age, I would need to start by asking everyone the same basic biographical information. After collecting this initial information, my questions were more open-ended and comparative (prior to land pooling versus afterwards) and centred on jobs and income, including the number of people in the household and household income. After some time, I asked even more open-ended questions about impressions of the capital city and levels of happiness and trust in the government. I also asked if people gave their land to the LPS and if so, why.<sup>37</sup>

In practice, after the main biographical details were recorded, the conversations were usually free-flowing. In time, some of the questions had to be modified to apply to the particular circumstance, social category and/or land ownership status of the interviewee. As I began to better understand the variant ways in which land pooling affected different categories of people, I posed specific questions relating to their individual experience. For example, the questions posed, or responses to, a landowner, would be different to those posed to a landless agricultural labourer, government official or real estate developer. In addition, the conversation also varied somewhat if a person had a particularly unique story to tell—for example, from the perspective of an activist, a woman, an artisan or fisherman—all people I spoke with during my time in Amaravati.

Finally, I was faced with the question of determining how many people of a certain category (by caste, profession, gender, location) I should speak to in order to develop a complete or ‘accurate’ picture of the impacts and perceptions of land pooling by different social actors in the capital city area. How would I know a particular narrative was representative of an entire neighbourhood or group of people, without having spoken with every single person? By adhering to just semi-structured questions, I was aware that perhaps I was limiting my involvement in the world I was studying by observing ‘from the outside,’ and through the use of translators—or intermediaries—interrogating my interview subjects at the same time. On the one hand, I wanted a framework or theory to guide my dialogue with participants—or as Polanyi

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<sup>37</sup> Refer to annex 3 for a full list of interview questions.



(1958) elaborates, rely on the “rationality” of theory, by utilizing a set of cognitive maps through which to apprehend the new world in which I was immersed. On the other hand, it was also necessary to engage further with my subjects by way of what Buroway (1998: 5) terms “the reflexive model of science—a model of science that embraces not detachment but engagement as the road to knowledge.” He further expands this model into the “extended case method”<sup>38</sup> wherein reflexive science is applied to ethnography in order to “extract the general from the unique, to move from the “micro” to the “macro,” and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on pre-existing theory (*Ibid.*, 1998: 5).

Thus, I entered the field each day prepared to test the hypothesis generated from the previous day’s dialogue. I would keep asking members of a group—for instance, a particular caste of people in a village—questions until I had a more or less a uniform narrative across many interviews. This strategy stands in contrast to one of inductive generalization—that is, the attempt to seek out “common patterns among diverse cases, so that context can be discounted” (Buroway, 1998: 19). Instead, I was more interested in the integrative or vertical approach of “tracing the source of small difference to external forces” (*Ibid.*, 1998: 19). In this way, I could test whether my hypothesis (that land pooling was changing the lives of different social actors in different ways) corresponded to reality. Taken together, I settled on a methodology that combined a set of qualitative methods, which included participant observation, focus group discussions, and an interview process that ran from rather positivist (in cases where the interviews were formal and involved a clear interviewer and respondent) to reflexive (in cases where I saw people multiple times and went to community meetings with the same people, thereby breaking down some of the separation between myself as a researcher and the people I was there to observe). Finally, I analysed existing data, such as newspaper articles and research studies on the class and caste dynamics of the Krishna and Guntur districts of coastal Andhra Pradesh.

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<sup>38</sup> The term, “extended case method” was first coined by the Manchester School of social anthropology (Garbett, 1970; Gluckman, 1958, 1961a, 1961b; van Velsion, 1960; Mitchell, 1956; Epstein, 1958).

#### **4.3.3 Phase I of fieldwork: Initial scoping of every village (6 weeks from October 2017 to December 2017)**

After establishing my residence in Thullur and familiarizing myself with my immediate surroundings, which included trying to find an appropriate translator and driver—all of which took slightly over a month—I spent the following six weeks systematically going to all of the 25 villages and four hamlets of the region (see chapter 5 for an overview of each district and village), speaking to nearly every village *panchayat* head in the process. I also communicated with a cross-section of people of different castes in each village. Following this, I was able to get a fair idea of the size of each village, their proximity to the nearest town or city, their demography in terms of caste and class, patterns and size of land ownership by different groups, the type of land (wet versus dry) in each village, the average revenue that would be derived per month by growing particular types of crops, and finally, the political leanings of their population. Based on this information, I devised criteria for selecting the core villages on which I would focus for more extensive interviews. It was clear from the initial scoping of all the villages that they each varied somewhat by land quality and productivity (dry lands versus wet lands), pattern of land ownership, size of landholdings, prices of land and to some extent, demography. There was also a difference in the socio-economic standing of, and the types of livelihood strategies available for, people living in the villages that were closer to the nearest town (Vijayawada) and for those who lived further inland from metropolitan centres. In addition, I found the political leanings of residents varied by caste (see the Empirics section below for more detail).

#### **4.3.4 Phase II of fieldwork: Choosing villages for deeper study (18 weeks between December 2017 and April 2018)**

Based on this information, I chose to deepen research in the three villages of Thullur, Undavalli and Nidamaru. I chose these villages because they each represented a key constituency in Amaravati and had different types of soil—which was a critical component of how much compensation (“package”) residents received from the government. Thullur, a medium size village located nearest to the core capital region had largely dry—or *metta*—soil. It was considered the seat of Kamma power as members of this cast owned the majority of land in the village and wielded the most power and status. Consequently, most of the people in this village supported land pooling. Meanwhile, Undavalli was a large village that was almost semi-urban,

due to its proximity to the city of Vijayawada. It had some of the most fertile lands in the region. Unlike Thullur, members of the Reddy and Kapu castes dominated the village and the majority of the people here opposed the LPS. Finally, Nidamaru was a small village that had some of the most lucrative floriculture fields in all of Andhra Pradesh. Its soil composition was however, mixed: some the land was considered less fertile and/or flood-prone, whilst other parts of the village were carpeted by extremely fertile and well-irrigated soil. The dominant castes in this village were the Reddys and to some extent, the OBC Yadavas, although it also had a comparatively high population of SC/ST people, many of whom worked year round in multi-cropped fields. While people in Nidamaru were initially against land pooling, this changed over time as many land owners began selling their land to investors, who in turn supported the government and its LPS. Taken together, these villages represent the widest possible range of social actors in the village—demarcated in terms of caste, class, land ownership, soil type and political leanings—thereby providing greater insight into how the engagement, negotiation and in some cases, contestation strategies with the government differed by community.<sup>39</sup>

After my initial scoping, I spent approximately six weeks interviewing people in each of these three villages, amounting to a total of 18 weeks. Most of the interviews took place in people's homes or fields; others took place in a group at a local meeting point (for example, in front of a temple or church, or in village square). While I developed the best personal knowledge and understanding of Thullur as a result of living there and having the opportunity to share my life with my hosts and neighbours every day, I heard by far, the greatest number and variety of narratives in Undavalli. This may be because of how strongly many of the people there objected to land pooling and how much more aware they were of their rights. I also felt a deep sense of understanding for the grievances of the people in this village because my translators were from the immediately neighbouring village of Penumaka, whose residents shared many of the same views. Finally, Nidamaru had particularly strong political representation and voices from the SC/ST community. For instance, the main representative of Mangalgiri mandal (of which Nidamaru was a part) was a charismatic member of the opposition YSR-Congress Party and exposed me to a range of issues with which landless labourers contended in the context of the changing environment.

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<sup>39</sup> For more information on the villages and its demography, please refer to the following chapter (chapter 5) which further expounds on the geography and demography of the villages of the capital region.

#### 4.3.5 Phase III: Reassessing the social map and further interviews in riverfront villages (four weeks between May and June 2017)

Whilst beginning the interview process, I was sent a population survey, demarcated roughly by caste from a government source (see chapter 5 for more details). From this information, I began to categorize people by caste and location in each village. I wanted to speak to a minimum number of people belonging to each of the caste groups represented in every village. The main caste groupings were: Scheduled Castes (SC), which included people who identified either as Mallas (SC) or Madigas (SC)<sup>40</sup>; Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST), which consisted of people who identified as Lambadis; Other Backwards Classes (OBCs), which comprised of Chakalis, Mudirajus, Padmasalis, Pallikarulus, Rajikas, Upparas, Yadhavas and some other sub-castes; and finally the Open Category castes—or ‘OCs’ as the local people referred to members of the forward castes—which included the Kammas, Reddys, Kapus<sup>41</sup>, Brahmins and Vaishyas.<sup>42</sup> In addition to traditional Hindu caste groupings, I also spoke with other minorities such as Muslims (who themselves were sometimes divided into two sub-‘castes’ – the Urdu speaking people who enjoyed higher status, and the Telugu speaking people who tended to have lower status). The *Dalits* (people officially categorized as SC/ST in reservation lists) are mostly Christian, although they also identify with their Hindu caste. While I intended to speak to all segments of society, it should be noted that I spent more time speaking to landless agricultural labourers (who overwhelmingly came from the SC/ST community) than I did with large landowners.<sup>43</sup> This was for several reasons. First, I was particularly interested in how subaltern groups engaged and negotiated with both the government and government-aligned dominant groups. I wanted a better sense of how contestation strategies differed between poorer and less privileged segments of the population and the more privileged groups that had greater access to government and was particularly interested in how poorer families were adapting and changing

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<sup>40</sup> Note there are many sub-castes within the SC category in Andhra Pradesh. Mallas and Madigas are the most prominent and the only ones I came across during my field study in Amaravati.

<sup>41</sup> Note that at the end of 2017—after the end of the fieldwork period—Chief Minister Naidu approved the inclusion of Kapus into the OBC category.

<sup>42</sup> There were very few *Brahmins* and even *Vaishyas* in the capital region.

<sup>43</sup> It is important to note that not all *Dalits* were poor. In several villages including Penumaka, Undavalli, Nidamaru and Uddandarayunipalem there were many well-off *Dalits*, who owned land. Similarly, the villages there were marginal Kamma farmers and landless Kammas. Even so, there was a correlation between caste and class in the region, in which most Kammas and Reddys belonged to the prosperous farmer-capitalist class and most *Dalits* belonged to the landless working class (Still 2013: 71).

their livelihood strategies in the wake of the sudden changes wrought by the LPS. Second, as the research wore on, I focused increasingly on the issue of how assigned lands were handled in Amaravati (see below). Because most of the assigned land cultivators were from the SC community, I naturally completed more interviews with people from this community. However, I was careful to speak to every category of residents in the capital region.

As I began to compile people's narratives over time, it became increasingly necessary to complete some additional interviews in neighbouring villages. This was because I found over time that the futures of those who were owners of what is termed 'assigned lands'—mostly *Dalit* cultivators—were particularly precarious after the passing of the LPS. Therefore, I eventually went to every riverfront village with assigned lands in order to see for myself what the lands looked like, who owned and controlled them and how the government was grappling with ensuring fair compensation for the owners of these lands. I spent considerable time in the riverfront villages of Borepalem, Dondapadu, Rayapudi, Lingayapalem, Uddandarayunipalem, Velagapudi, Malkapuram, Mandadam, Thalleyapalem, Venkatapalem, Krishnayapalem and Penumaka, in addition to Undavalli, which also had a considerable amount of assigned lands. This also accounts for the larger number of people interviewed under the SC category, as compared to other categories of people (please refer to table 1 in the following sub-section). As a result of these interviews, a fascinating story about the fate of assigned lands and their current owners emerged, which will be extensively discussed in chapter 7.

#### **4.3.6 Phase IV of fieldwork: Key informant interviews with activists, bureaucrats and politicians in Amaravati and elsewhere (October 2016 to July 2017, with a concentration of interviews from June to July 2017)**

Finally, I spoke with key activists in the capital region throughout my fieldwork stint. While few people were willing to speak on record against land pooling, there were several notable exceptions. These included several wealthy Kamma and Reddy landowners who opposed land pooling, a human rights lawyer, the primary plaintiff of the National Green Tribunal Case against the state of Andhra Pradesh, several private citizens who owned land in the villages and had filed complaints against the land pooling scheme, a prominent *Dalit* activist, a social movement activist who spearheaded a fact-finding mission in Amaravati as early as 2014, main opposition

party workers and members of the Communist (Marxist) party. After several months had passed and I was confident that I had collected sufficient information from local residents, I began to speak to several political figures within the villages. I wanted to ensure that I had a substantial amount of narratives already recorded before speaking to government officials, as I was afraid they might try to give me a false picture of what was transpiring in the villages. To this end, I spoke with the then-Commissioner of the CRDA, Sridhar Cherukuri, several officials within the local *panchayat* and CRDA offices, particularly in Thullur and Undavalli; two MPs, one each from the ruling and opposition parties, and representatives of the CPI(M) party in the capital region. In addition, I spoke with the head of the Land Pooling Association and a former Agricultural Minister from 1999 to 2004, who despite being a TDP member, came to vehemently oppose the land pooling scheme. I rounded off my interviews by speaking to several so-called ‘technical’ people, who were on various committees created as part of the land acquisition process for those lands that were not ‘voluntarily’ given as part of the land pooling process. Finally, I interviewed a range of land acquisition and land pooling experts in New Delhi to better locate the example of land pooling within the context of agrarian transformation in India, as well as within the literature on urbanization.<sup>44</sup>

#### 4.4 *Total number of people interviewed*

In total, I interviewed a total of 524 people during my fieldwork. The exact breakdown by caste and gender is provided in table 1 below. I spoke to a total of 135 people from the OC community, 231 people from the SC community, 19 people from the ST community and 19 Muslims. A further 32 people (categorized as ‘other’) were key informants from various government departments, particularly from the local CRDA offices, academia and media (i.e. journalists). While I was aware of their caste affiliation in some instances, I omitted this from the table because they were not interviewed as residents of the villages. There is also an additional category of ‘unknowns’: these are people who did not feel comfortable officially identifying either their caste or sub-caste to me in the context of an interview. In rare instances, because of the nature and location of the interview (for instance, people who stopped me on the side of

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<sup>44</sup> For a list of key informants interviewed, please refer to annex 4. Please note that the people listed are either well-known public figures or those who have given me permission to list their names. I also spoke to several more informants, who worked in the lower ranks of the government, who did not want to be named.

the road to tell me their stories at a rapid pace between work shifts), I was not always able to ask them their exact sub-caste.

*Table 1: Number of people interviewed over the course of fieldwork*

		Men	Women	Total
OC	Brahmin	4	0	<b>4</b>
	Kamma	67	15	<b>82</b>
	Kapu	16	2	<b>18</b>
	Reddy	23	4	<b>27</b>
	Vaishya	4	0	<b>4</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>135</b>
OBC		43	26	<b>69</b>
SC	Malla	111	24	<b>135</b>
	Madiga	36	16	<b>52</b>
	Unknown**	21	23	<b>44</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>231</b>
ST		9	10	<b>19</b>
Muslim		4	15	<b>19</b>
Other*		29	3	<b>32</b>
Unknown**		16	3	<b>19</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>340</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>524</b>

It should be noted that in addition to the direct interviews recorded above, I also attended several large gatherings—usually attended by well over 100 people—where I also spoke extensively with people about their experiences and listened to their narratives. These were usually rallies against land pooling by assigned land holders or landless labourers; a number of village level meetings convened by the CRDA to discuss the social impact assessment (SIA) reports produced by the government for those people who refused to provide their land under the land pooling scheme and hence fell under the acquisition procedures of the Central government’s LARR Act (see chapter 6); and the SC Commission meeting where a large number of *Dalit* residents converged to air their grievances against the LPS (see chapters 7 and 8). However, unless I systematically interviewed people following the set of questions I had already prepared (which only occurred in one instance), I have not included the number of people I spoke with during these meetings in the table above. The discussions during these gatherings

were generally more spontaneous and pertained to the specific grievance that people had come to air in that moment.

#### *4.5 Research challenges and shortcomings*

The key challenge of doing research in and around the villages that comprised Amaravati concerned my gender and marital status. I found that being a single woman sometimes precluded me from freely associating with—and therefore asking questions of—the men in the village in which I was residing. Therefore, when there were groups of men huddled under a tree or sitting in a road side coffee shop, I had to rely almost completely on my associates—a driver, or my translators or even another male researcher—to “break me” into the group, so I could ask questions. This was only in the beginning however. Over months in Thullur, the entire village knew I was there and what I was doing, so some people at least, were expecting me to approach them for an interview—though this was by no means a universal reaction.

The lack of trust may have also been a barrier to getting to a realistic understanding of life in the region during this time. When people were eager to speak to me, I wondered if they did so because they had their own agendas to further or alternately, they presented a particular narrative out of fear. In Thullur, for example, most people spoke in extremely glowing terms about landpooling and the ruling party. Many were eager to discredit the claims of the opposition parties, even if they did not necessarily stand to gain from land pooling. As an example, I found more agricultural labourers reticent to speak negatively of what could be perceived as quite feudal relations between landowners and labourers in this village, perhaps because they feared repercussion. They did not always trust that I was not an agent of the land owning classes. Conversely in Undavalli, I would often get stopped by strangers for a talk during my day because people thought I was associated with the Joint Collector (one person went so far as to ask if I was the Joint-Collector’s sister as he thought I looked like her) and wanted to air some of their grievances. This was to some extent valuable for my research, but might have also biased it to some extent as I attracted more supporters of land pooling in Thullur and detractors in Undavalli.



Meanwhile, my relationship with authority figures in the region was also a source of concern. As mentioned earlier, I sought to speak to the most number of people possible across different social castes and classes. Therefore, I began my field research without formally introducing myself to the formal CRDA office in either Thullur or Vijayawada as I wanted to speak with a certain number of people using my criteria, without external bias. I also sought to gain an understanding of people's views before posing specific and more difficult questions to the authorities. While an MP in Guntur (associated with my first translator) knew of my existence, the CRDA did not. This eventually raised a fair deal of suspicion. For instance, during one of the days of my work, I went to a YSR-CP rally in one of the villages (Kuragallu) to hear the opposition party leader speak. There, two men who posed as journalists confronted me. They attempted to ask me vaguely threatening questions about my research and my place of residence. One of the men then spoke to me in my mother tongue of Malayalam after I told him I had family in Kerala. He told me in Malayalam that they were undercover police officers. I would thereafter run into these men again near the end of my research, at which point they wanted to know what information I had collected and what I thought of the land pooling process. They also openly wondered if I was there as an undercover researcher for the World Bank or other international agency (from whom the government was applying for a loan). They ultimately escorted me to the train station (a place where I was already headed) the last time I was in the villages. These incidences were to some extent harmless, but I worried about the impacts of these run-ins with my driver, translators or hosts.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, another tricky aspect of my research was bridging the *Dalit*-Kamma divide as a researcher. In Thullur, my external identity was aligned with the Kamma community on account of where I lived and the fact that a mutual friend had informed people that I was a "Kerala-Kamma." Yet, my translators were *Dalit* and my research was increasingly focused on the concerns of landless labourers and assigned landowners. I established rapport with many *Dalits* (particularly my translators whom I considered my colleagues) because of the amount of time I spent with them, as well as my increasing focus on what was perceived as largely *Dalit* issues. Interestingly, being of Keralite origin was also an advantage as many of the people I spoke with in this community were Christian converts, who had had some contact with missionaries from Kerala. Because Kerala has a significant Christian population (and indeed, one of the private

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<sup>45</sup> In both major run-ins, neither my regular driver, nor my translators, were with me

schools in the village of Thullur was run by a Kerala-based church), I found people were even more curious to speak to me. Yet, there was the tension of my Kamma-dominated 'home-life' and my arguably "*Dalit*-dominated" fieldwork. This would come to the fore in rare moments, usually when Koteswar Rao and Nanda Kumar would come to my home during lunches to discuss to who we spoke during the day and what was said. I found that my Kamma landlords would be uncomfortable with them and they, in turn, uncomfortable if my landlords were present. Moreover, I was aware that during interviews with certain government officials or Kamma landlords, my translators were sometimes uncomfortable. We usually discussed the reason why after the interviews.

The remainder of this dissertation will now turn to the empirics of field research in the Andhra Pradesh capital region of Amaravati.

## 5 AMARAVATI: THE GEOGRAPHY AND DEMOGRAPHY OF VILLAGES OF THE CAPITAL REGION AND IMPLICATIONS ON GOVERNMENT POLICY

By the time I arrived in Thullur in October 2016, land pooling was well underway in the twenty-five revenue villages and four hamlets<sup>46</sup> that together consisted of the core capital region of Amaravati. The foundation of the city was ceremoniously laid at Uddandarayunipalem on 22 October 2015 and the interim legislative buildings—that is, the structures that comprised the temporary Secretariat for Andhra Pradesh—were already constructed in Velagapudi. By April 2016, the office of the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh had also shifted its operations to Velagapudi and core government staff had arrived in the area. Amaravati, from the outside, was administratively functional as a capital city.

Yet, in amongst the intense construction and miles of fallow fields, it was still possible to catch glimpses of verdant agricultural fields—usually located adjacent to the Krishna River—in some of the more fertile villages that produced lucrative cash crops. These flashes of the ‘old’ life provided some insight into how residents lived prior to being convinced to forfeit their land as part of the LPS. Through interviews and daily visits to the fields, I attempted to delve into the elements that had stayed almost completely the same for generations, namely the physical geography of the region and the demography (demarcated by caste and class) of the cultivators who still lived and (tried to) work in the area. I sought to better understand the relationship between the land and the people who lived there—in other words, how certain social groups had come to live in particular villages and own certain types of land. By extension, I was also interested in how this translated into political support (or lack thereof) for the land pooling process on the one hand, and the manner in which the government crafted a strategy to convince different segments of society to give up their land for the dream of Amaravati, on the other.

Therefore, this chapter will begin with a critical review of the basic geography and physical features of Amaravati, including the proximity of different villages to a water source and the

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<sup>46</sup> For simplicity, unless I refer to a separate source, I will refer to these 25 villages and four hamlets as 29 villages hereafter.

impact this had on soil type and land quality. It will also assess the caste and land ownership structure in individual villages and raise some pertinent questions relating to the classification of lands, particularly in the context of the irrigation network that undergirds agricultural production in some of the fields. Finally, the chapter will end with an overview of G.O. 41, the government's compensation package for different categories of landowners and land users in the capital region. In this way, it will provide some critical background information that will lay the foundation for analysis, concerning how authorities achieved compliance to the LPS after a protracted process, in the subsequent chapters.

### **5.1 Key components of Amaravati: 3 mandals, 29 villages, contested land types**

The villages that comprise Amaravati extend over three *mandals*—Mangalgiri, Tadepalli and Thullur—and are situated on the Southern banks of the Krishna River in Guntur district (see table 2). They cover an area of 53,748 acres and include various different types of land (wet, dry, assigned, ceiling, temple lands, etc.) held by different social groups. The main crops grown in this region include tobacco, chilli, cotton, maize, pulses, lemon, guava, coconut, sugarcane, *jasminum sambac* (also known as Arabian jasmine or *malli* in Telugu), and banana/plaintain. Other crops are also grown here on a smaller scale, including a variety of vegetables (for instance, onion, corn and drumsticks) and flowers. While the villages may at first appear to be homogenous, they are not: they differ from one another depending on their proximity to the river and to the nearest city or town (i.e. Vijayawada or Guntur), the type of soil they contain (i.e. alluvial versus black or red soil; wet versus dry land), the land ownership structure (i.e. few big landowners versus many small landowners), their size, and demography (i.e. caste composition). Table 2 provides an overview of population by village and people's perceptions of the type of land in each village.

Table 2: Mandal, village, population and local perceptions of type of land in Amaravati

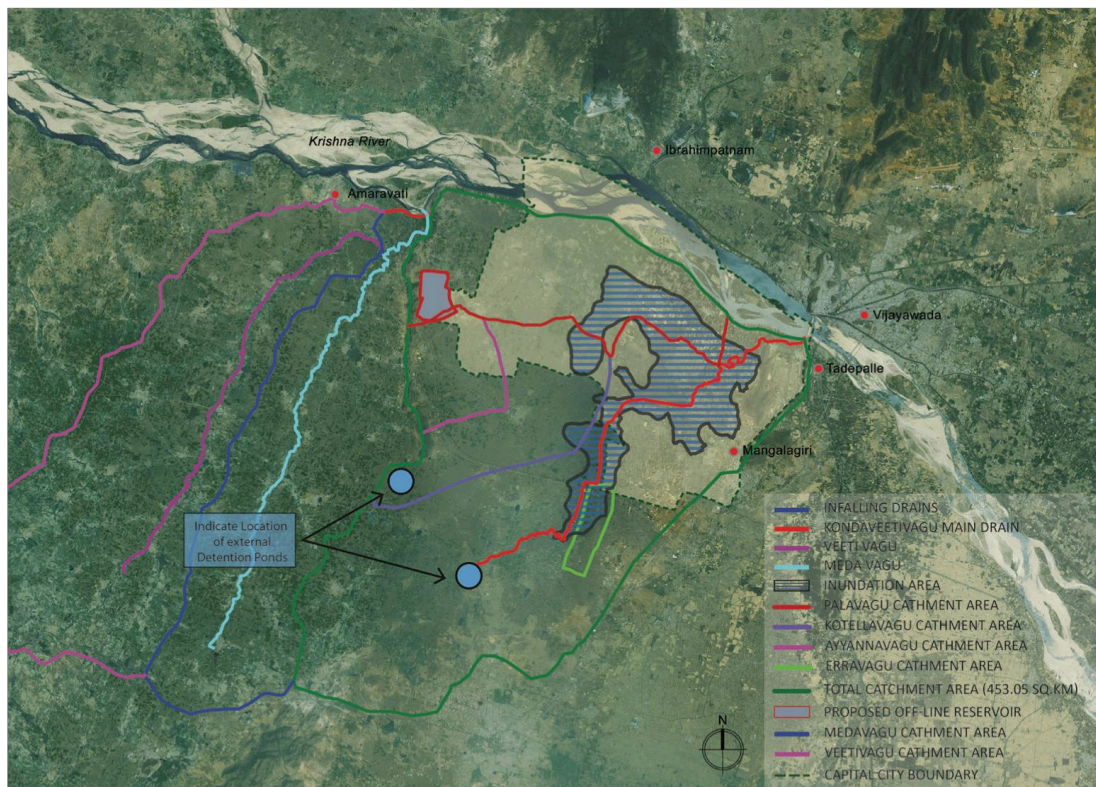
Mandal	No.	Village	Local perception of land type
Thullur	1	Abbarajupalem	Both
	2	Ainavolu	Dry
	3	Ananthavaram	Dry
	4	Borupalem	Both
	5	Dondapadu	Dry
	6	Lingayapalem	Wet
	7	Mandadam	Both
	8	Malkapuram	Both
	9	Nekkallu	Dry
	10	Nelapadu	Dry
	11	Rayapudi	Both, but ¾ wet
	12	Sakhamuru	Dry
	13	Thullur	Dry
	14	Uddandarayunipalem	Mostly dry, wet on the waterfront
	15	Velagapudi	Both (50/50)
	16	Thalayapalem	Wet
	17	Kondamarajupalem	n/a - depopulated
	18	Pitchikalapalem	n/a - depopulated
	19	Venkatapalem	Both, but ¾ wet
Mangalgiri	20	Bethapudi	Both
	21	Krishnayapalem	Both
	22	Kuragallu	Both*
	23	Neerukonka	Dry
	24	Nidamaru	Both (50/50)
	25	Nowluru	Dry
	26	Yarrabalem	Both (50/50)
Tadepalli	27	Penumaka	Wet (1/4), dry (3/4)
	28	Undavalli	Both
	29	Tadepalli municipality (partial)	n/a – not agricultural land

The villages vary so much from one another due to their physical location: They are at the confluence of where *Kondaveeti Vagu*, a major 29.4 km canal known popularly as the ‘Stream of Sorrow’ that originates in the Kondaveedu Hill Range in Guntur district, joins the Krishna River upstream of the existing Prakasam Barrage. According to the city Masterplan:

Together with its own tributaries, Kondaveeti Vagu flows across the Capital City and causes inundation over about 13,500 acres of land every year during the monsoon season...The inundation of the low-lying areas within the capital city development area will usually last for 5 to 7 days during each spell of heavy rain and this occurs two to three times annually (CRDA 2014: 107).

Of the 13,500 acres of the inundation area, 10,600 acres is within the planning area of the capital city. This means that some of the villages—those located along the Kondaveeti Vagu main drain and within the inundation area (see figure 3), as well as some land along the Krishna River—are flood prone. Yet, when there is no flood, most of the villages (located several kilometres inward of the Krishna River) are dry and often drought-prone. Therefore, the soil in the capital region can be classified into three types: dry (or rain fed), wet or fertile, and irrigated. Each will be discussed briefly below.

*Figure 3: Inundation area and Kondaveeti Vagu main drain to the Krishna River*



Source: APCRDA, 2014 (Masterplan, chapter 7, page 107).

### 5.1.1 Riverfront villages and *jareebu* lands

The villages that front the Krishna River in Amaravati—including Abbarajupalem, Borupalem, Lingayapalem, Rayapudi, Krishnayapalem, Mandadam, Thalayapalem, Venkatapalem, Penumaka, Uddandarayunipalem, Undavalli—generally have fertile, alluvial soil, rich in potassium. It is estimated that about 13,000 acres from Vaikuntapuram to Venkatapalem villages along the Krishna River are wetlands (S. Rao 2017, personal communication, 14 April).<sup>47</sup> They have relatively high water tables (50 feet or less) and the soil is especially suited for growing lucrative cash crops such as sugarcane and plantain. It was said many times over during my time in Amaravati that 120 different crops grow year round on the land in these villages, providing full employment to landowners, tenant farmers and agricultural labourers alike.

These highly fertile, wet lands—known locally as *jareebu*—are important for the food security of the state. Sand deposits in the floodplains stretching to about three kilometres on both sides of the river also have a large natural water storage capacity (Soni and Khosla 2016: 13). Taken together, these lands have the potential to provide both food and important freshwater reserves for the state. This fact led several activist groups, including members at the Indian Society of Landscape Architects, Ekta Parishad, the National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM) and several retired IAS officers to appeal to the State government to move the coming city away from the *jareebu* lands on the waterfront and to protect the floodplains near the river from intense construction. They argued that moving the city further inland—towards the drier lands and away from the floodplains—and integrating farming along the river into the urban areas, would result in a more sustainable city, whilst still preserving the main elements of the Subarna Masterplan (*Ibid.*)

### 5.1.2 Inland villages and *metta* lands

While the riverfront villages boast highly fertile lands and easy access to groundwater, the villages further inland—in particular, Ainavolu, Ananthavaram, Dondapadu, Nekkallu, Nelapadu, Neerukonda, Nowluru, Thullur and Sakhamuru in addition to the inland parts of Abbarajupalem,

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<sup>47</sup> This figure is roughly corroborated by the findings of the census survey conducted by the APCRDA (2018: 86) from February to March 2015, which found that 37 percent of the resident landowners hold *jareebu* lands, which correspond to 31 percent of the total extent of the land in the capital region.

Borapalem, Bethapudi, Krishnayapalem, Kuragallu, Mandadam, Malkapuram, Nidamaru, Uddandarayunipalem, Velagapudi, Yerrabalem—face a markedly different reality. These villages (with some exceptions explained below) have black soil considered largely dry—or *metta*—and in some villages, they are inundated (flood prone) during monsoons due to their proximity to *Kondaveeti Vagu*. Each monsoon season, the waters from this canal have the potential to submerge standing crops in Mangalgiri mandal, upstream of the Prakasam barrage. According to the census survey conducted by the APCRDA in 2015, 61 percent of the resident landowners possess dry land corresponding to 63 percent of the total land in the capital region. Cultivators of *metta* lands are more dependent on rain-fed agriculture and tended to only invest in and grow (with some risk) one main crop a year. While farmers in this area tended to grow tobacco, this was eventually replaced by cotton cultivation (see chapter 8 for more details).

While there was significant contention over the issue, the CRDA Commissioner, Mr. Sreedhar Cherukuri claimed in various interviews (including with me), that the large majority of land in the capital region was dry. In one interview, he was quoted as stating:

Perhaps, about 12-15% of the 34,000 acre taken over via land pooling had earlier been used for growing two crops each year with the use of groundwater. The rest was only single crop land (quoted in Lasania and Sreevatsan, 2018).

According to outdated revenue records that date back to 1903, all but one percent of the land in the capital city is categorized as dry (see chapter 6 for more details). And even where authorities once categorized the land as wet, at the time of research, they were in the process of reversing this classification using various means (refer to subsequent chapters for more details on this). This is significant as only dry lands can be taken under the Central government's LARR Act, 2013, whereas multi-cropped land cannot be acquired even for public purpose projects. Thus, in the event that a farmer refuses to pool his or her land and the government is forced to resort to the LARR Act, it can only do so if the land is officially categorized as dry.

### **5.1.3 Irrigated lands: A contested 'in-between'**

While it is generally accepted that lands closer to the river have high(er) water tables and tend to be 'wet,' it is also true that several villages further inland benefit from lift irrigation (LI)



schemes that allowed landowners to cultivate multiple crops a year, much like the wetlands closer to the river. In fact, there are four forms of irrigation used in the 29 villages: 1) individual bore wells, 2) lifting from the Krishna River, 3) lifting from *Kondaveeti Vagu*, and 4) lifting from bore wells built by the SC Corporation (also known as ‘community lifting’) (A. Gandhi 2017, personal communication, 27 March). Irrigation water from the Krishna River was provided through the Rayapudi Lift Irrigation and Thullur Lift Irrigation Schemes (Bhargava, 2015).<sup>48</sup> Thus while virtually every village has some individually-constructed borewells, Abburajpalem, Ainovolu, Ananthvaram, Borapalem, Dondapadu, Nekallu, Nelapadu, Rayapudi, Sakamuru, and Thullur also benefitted from lift irrigation schemes from the Krishna River.<sup>49</sup> Cultivators from Ainovolu, Bethapudi, Kuragalu, Neerukonda, Nidamaru, Nowuluru, Krishnayapalem, Penumaka, Undavalli, Yerrabalem, and even the relatively urban Dolas Nagar were able to access water lifted from *Kondaveeti Vagu*. Finally, a handful of villages, including Malkapuram, Uddandarayunipalem and Velagapudi, were beneficiaries of bore wells built by the SC Corporation.<sup>50</sup> In total, 11 lift irrigation water schemes were operative in the villages of Undavalli, Tullur (2), Anantavaram (2), Yerrabalem, Neerukonda, Krishnayapalem, Nowluru, Bethapudi and Nidamaru<sup>51</sup> in the Amaravati capital region (Deccan Chronicle, 2016). In total, it is estimated that 13,537 farmers benefitted, and 25,507 acres of farmlands received water for irrigation purposes with the aid of lift irrigation schemes for the past 40 years (*Ibid.*).<sup>52</sup> One

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<sup>48</sup> Lift irrigation is a method of irrigation wherein water is lifted (say from a river) through pumps, surge pools or another delivery chamber, usually situated at the highest point in a command area. They then tend to distribute this water to the field of intended farmers using a suitable distribution system.

<sup>49</sup> This information is further corroborated by G. Venkataramana Rao (2014) who writes “[f]armers of Rayapudi, Sakhamur, Ainavolu and Velagapudi villages fall under the ayacut of the Rayapudi Lift Irrigation Scheme. Similarly the farmers of Vaddamanu, Nekkallu and Dondapadu are in the ayacut of Thullur LI Scheme. Farmers of Nekkallu get their water from the Ananthavaram LI Scheme. Farmers of some villages get water from more than one lift irrigation schemes. Ryots of Vaddamamanu, Ananthavaram and Thullur draw water from two LI schemes for their crops.”

<sup>50</sup> The Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Castes Co-Operative Finance Cooperation Ltd. (APSCCFC)—known colloquially as the SC Corporation provides financial assistance for the creation of income generating assets to poor SC households. As part of this mission, they provide minor irrigation facilities for the lands of SC marginal and small farmers through drilling bore wells, installing submersible pump sets and laying pipe lines (APSCCFC, 2014). It was reported via interviews that some bore wells were drilled by the SC Corporation on SC-owned land.

<sup>51</sup> Lift irrigation came to Nidamaru in 2004. Before that, the village was dependent purely on bore wells. It is estimated that the ground water level is at 30 feet after bore wells were drilled and before lift irrigation, this was 50 to 60 feet (Maniamma 2017, personal communication, 27 March).

<sup>52</sup> The oldest lift irrigation scheme was launched in 1954 in Undavalli and with further schemes initiated in Yerrabalem, Neerukonda, Krishnayapalem, Bethapudi, Nowluru, Nidamaru, Rayapudi, Anantavaram, Tullur and Vykunthapuram in later years (Deccan Chronicle, 2016). As of the time of research, the waters

activist claimed that of all the land in the capital region, only 2,000 acres—located in Mandadam—were ‘not lifted’ (A. Gandhi 2017, personal communication, 27 March). Therefore, there is some considerable contention over what constitutes ‘dryland’—a topic that will be addressed in the next chapter on the experiences of landowners in the capital region. This is because even in supposedly dry land (*metta*) villages, years of successful implementation of lift irrigation schemes had allowed farmers to draw water from sources such as the Krishna River and *Kondaveeti Vagu* to irrigate thousands of acres of farmland.<sup>53</sup>

## 5.2 Additional land types in the capital region

In addition to the dry land / wet land binary—or as one activist put it, “fantasy” (M. Seshagiri 2016, personal communication, 06 December)—there are several additional categories of land in the capital region. Each is described in brief below.

### 5.2.1 Semi-urban lands

Some limited areas in the capital region are categorized as semi-urban (or mixed) land. This land tends to be agglomerated closer to the town or city centres of either Vijayawada or Mangalgi. It is more valuable than dry lands, although not necessarily used for agricultural purposes. Some parts of Bethapudi, Nowluru, Yerrabalem, Penumaka and Undavalli have semi-urban land. The income levels and value of these areas resulted in this land being given the same entitlements as *jareebu* or wet lands through the introduction of GO Ms. No. 59, Dt. 20-03-2015.<sup>54</sup>

### 5.2.2 River islands (*lanka bhoomulu*)

In addition to the wet and dry plots of land, Amaravati also has 13 river islands. Together with some land on the flood-prone area between the Krishna River and the river bund<sup>55</sup> (or *karakata*), these lands are known locally as *lanka bhoomulu* (island lands) and are sometimes

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from these schemes are being diverted to supply the Secretariat, with further plans to use the water to supply drinking water to the public.

<sup>53</sup> Despite this, most farmers of dry land regions do not cultivate during the summer monsoon season (*yenda kalam*). One observer explains this contention further in the next chapter.

<sup>54</sup> See annex 2 for a full list of relevant government orders (GOs) that relate to land pooling in Amaravati.

<sup>55</sup> A bund is an embankment, an embanked quay or small stone dams usually used in rural India to control the flow of water or provide flood protection. The Krishna river bund was initially built in 1957.

estimated to amount to approximately 2,000 acres. The changing course of the Krishna River and periodic flooding has led to deposits of extraordinarily rich alluvial soil on these islands over time. As a result, when they are not inundated with water, they have the capacity to produce extremely lucrative crops, much like those grown on *jareebu* lands: paddy, banana trees and sugarcane. The majority of people who own this land are from the SC community as the government assigned much of it to poor landless people in the immediate post-Independence period (see chapters 3 and 9). These lands fall under the jurisdiction of the revenue villages of Borupalem, Dondepadu, Lingayapalem, Mandadam, Rayapudi, Uddandarayunipalem, Undavalli, Thalayapalem and Venkatapalem. While a majority of the land is located on islands, those cultivated by some people in Uddandarayunipalem and Lingayapalem villages are contiguous to both villages on the river side of the bund, and located directly within the coming seed capital area. As a result, they constitute some of the most valuable lands within the capital city. Meanwhile, an estimated 500 *Dalit* families also live on the islands, as they are located at a fair distance from the village hamlets (World Bank 2016: 4).

*Lanka* lands are particularly important in the context of the upcoming capital city because of their skyrocketing value and their unusual land titling status. In the pre-LPS era, they were considered to be less desirable agricultural land because of their close proximity to the river, their remote location (in the case of the islands) and their tendency to get flooded. In the changing rural to urban environment of a new capital city, these lands have suddenly acquired a special value. The Masterplan states:

The Krishna River cutting across the region offers a riverfront stretching 130 km. This offers an opportunity to provide open public spaces with waterfront facilities and commercial activities; leading to vibrant and eco friendly communities (2014: 24).

In addition, the 22 km waterfront in the seed capital is expected to house the city's civic core and central business district (CRDA 2016: 9). Therefore, the potential skyrocketing real estate value of river front land in the context of an urban environment cannot be overlooked. Moreover, the uncertain ownership status (at the time of research) of assigned lands potentially provides a loophole for prospective buyers to gain access to these lands at very low rates.

Chapter 7 will engage in a deeper discussion of the status of assigned lands, government strategy to acquire them and the repercussions on their owners.

### **5.2.3 Ceiling surplus lands**

In addition to the lanka lands, surplus ceiling lands also exist across the villages. However, estimates for how much of Amaravati constitutes this type of land varies depending on who provides the answer. Some sources indicate it is 6,000 acres, whilst some activists claim it is closer to 10,000 acres (Maganti, 2018). Much like the assigned lanka lands, land holders with this category of land hold DK *pattas* – or assigned land rights.

### **5.2.4 Village habitations (*grama kanttam*)**

Existing village settlements—or what is locally known as *grama kanttam* land—comprise an additional important category of land in the capital city area. It is estimated that about 663 acres of land in the capital region falls in this category (Devasahayam, 2015). This consists of the residential plots in which people live within the 29 villages (which is separate from the agricultural lands surrounding the village habitations). While agricultural lands were subject to being pooled, people’s habitations—or village habitations—were exempt from land pooling, thus protecting them from physical displacement. Instead, where necessary (for example, for roads or other public buildings), the land is being taken via negotiated settlements (see chapter 5). It is the stated objective of the government to retain the existing settlements and strengthen them by:

...seamlessly integrating with the new land pooling scheme developments. This has been addressed through land use planning, shared social and economic infrastructure (neighbourhood centres, town centres, etc.) (CRDA 2016: 13).

While this sounds utopian, the problem immediately arises from the fact that owners of village plots (where their houses are built) are able to keep the entirety of their land in this location, while being obliged to give their agricultural lands (which immediately surround the village habitations) for landpooling. Given the burgeoning real estate market, the more land that remains with owners, the more they benefit. This is particularly true for villagers who might not

be owners of agricultural land—for instance, those who might work in construction, at a local business, or are landless agricultural labourers who have been able to buy a house in the village. Therefore, the delineation of *grama kanttam* boundaries became a particularly important and contentious issue.

From the viewpoint of most villagers, there is an incentive to have more generous *grama kanttam* boundaries and from the perspective of the CRDA, it can be assumed that they favor smaller villages to maximize the amount of land pooled. *Grama sabhas*—or public consultations—were held in each village to provide information and sensitize residents to the capital city master plan, the land pooling scheme and the delineation of village boundaries. However, many of the meetings I attended across villages ended in discord and disagreement: When the issue of where the *grama kanttam* boundary line should be drawn was raised, it became extremely contentious, often leading villagers to shout at CRDA officials out of sheer frustration. For instance, at a CRDA meeting I attended in Nekallu on 19 November 2016, many villagers asked anxious questions about the status of their *grama kanttam* lands. They were deeply frustrated by the limited boundaries around the village, as well as the lack of redressal mechanisms available. Many complained that they did not even know when the meetings took place on a consistent basis. It ended with people shouting over each other. One person at the meeting further asserted that the villages of Thullur and Mandadam were treated entirely differently with respect to the *grama kanttam* issue because they are in the seed capital area and politically connected (J. Vinay 2016, personal communication, 23 November).

Much of the problems are caused by the fact that the authorities referred to old records of the revenue department—data that stretches as far back as 1903—to not only assess the type of land in villages, but also to delineate village boundaries (N. Kanna Rao 2016, personal communication, 7 December). In the intervening years, the villages had simply grown in size. Related to the use of outdated land records was the fact that land boundaries themselves were identified using vague markers (i.e. the location of a tree or fence) that had changed over time.

Much like assigned lands (see chapter 7), the issue has particular relevance for *Dalits* as nearly all the villages are segmented by caste, with most *Dalit* neighbourhoods located on the edges of village habitations due to the practice of ritual purity (discrimination) by higher caste Hindus.

Thus for example, several *Dalits* in the villages came to tell me about how their land was taken off original *grama kanttam* records and given to the LPS without their knowledge or approval (J. Prashanth 2017, personal communication, 7 April). Many *Dalits* are also landless agricultural labourers, therefore the only land they might claim as being their own might be their residential plots (one to five cents of land) on which their houses sit within the *grama kanttam*. As a result, they were most in danger of losing their habitations to land pooling (since some of this land was not considered a part of the *grama kanttam*). However, more ominously, one activist claimed that this also amounted to leverage that the government could use to quell protests against landpooling by landless agricultural labourers: the threat of losing their only piece of land (due to the lack of current records) may have rendered some people too afraid to protest the mass loss of jobs with the advent of the LPS (A. Gandhi 2016, personal communication, 12 December).

#### 5.2.5 Endowment lands

A final category of lands in the capital region is endowment lands, encompassing both Hindu 'temple lands' and Muslim 'Wakf' lands.<sup>56</sup> It is estimated that about 1,034 acres of land in the capital region is endowment land (BV Mahalakshmi 2015).<sup>57</sup> While I found very little evidence of extensive Wakf land in the capital region, it has been reported that there is about 25 acres of Wakf land in the capital region (Devasahayam, 2015). However, there was a fair amount of information on temple lands. The very few Brahmins<sup>58</sup> in the capital region control temple lands. These lands are in turn generally split into three categories: *Devadaya* (endowment for temple sites), *Dharmadaya* (trustee land traditionally used as resthouses or halls to conduct Hindu functions) and *Archakas* (land allotted to temple priests) (B. Acharyalu 2017, personal communication, 9 February). All of this has reportedly been landpooled (N. Rao 2017, personal communication, 31 January). Trustee land is being compensated at the rate of Rs. 30,000 per

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<sup>56</sup> Temple lands are technically administered by the AP Endowments Department and Waqf lands by the Andhra Pradesh Wakf Board. There is also some controversy over whether endowment lands are government lands. Various court rulings have indicated they are not (see Mutha 2018, for example) although in practice, this has not always been respected as governments have taken temple lands for development purposes without the explicit permission of the high court.

<sup>57</sup> This was confirmed by interviews. One member of the *Rajdhani Archaka Samakya* told me that there was approximately 1,100 acres of endowment lands throughout the 29 villages (R. G. Charilu 2017, personal communication, 9 February).

<sup>58</sup> I found that Yerrabalem had the most number of *Brahmins*, whilst Thullur had no more than 7 families. In total, several people told me that there were no more than 150 Brahmin families in the entire capital region (R. G. Charilu 2017, personal communication, 9 February).

acre. This money tends to go to a trust account under temple management. However, the status of *Archaka* land is more controversial because temple priests are purportedly getting Rs. 30,000 per acre personally for it although they do not technically own it. In fact, most *Archaka* land had been leased out to the highest bidder.

However, one interview revealed a more complicated income stream for Brahmin priests in the context of landpooling. Before LPS, generally whatever income was generated from the temple and temple lands were shared between the temple priest (who would receive 30 percent) and the temple board (70 percent of the income would be used as ‘development works’). After LPS, the government granted an income of Rs. 10,000 a month as minimum salary to temple priests—an amount deemed “too low to survive on” by some of the temple priests with whom I spoke (R. Acharya 2017, personal communication, 20 February). They have also been allocated residences (small houses) within the vicinity of the temples, though they were not given ownership of these houses. Consequently, temple priests have united in the capital region under the banner of *Rajdhani Archaka Samakya*. The group demanded higher salaries and yearly increments in line with the state’s Pay Revision Commission (PRC). They have also requested land rights over endowment lands. In general however, I found that many temple priests either owned additional (personal) land elsewhere or alternatively lived off the revenue from the *Archaka* land of the temple. At the time of the interviews, they largely supported the land pooling scheme and the capital city project.

### **5.3 Demography of Amaravati: Caste, class, land ownership patterns and political affiliation by village**

In 2011, the Government of India completed its 15th population census in the (then) 28 States and seven Union Territories of the country. Some information on caste was included in the census for the first time since 1931, although extensive caste data was reportedly riddled with errors (Times of India, 2015). However, the general categories of “Scheduled Castes,” “Scheduled Tribes, and “Others” (including OBCs, OCs and minorities) were used and is useful

for providing a quick overview of the demography of the 29 villages of the capital region (see table 3).<sup>59</sup>

The census immediately demonstrates that the population size of each of the 29 villages varies significantly: from just 490 people in Abburajpalem to 24,862 people in Nowuluru. While not explicitly apparent from the numbers, the District Census Handbook of Guntur (Directorate of Census Operations Andhra Pradesh, 2011) also states that two of the ‘villages’ – Nowuluru and Undavalli – were classified as being ‘outgrowths’ which means that are treated as rural areas that are contiguous to a statutory town, and have some urban features. Therefore, the villages themselves range in the extent of their ‘ruralness.’ The total population of the villages was 97,960 in 2011. This figure was further broken down by gender and caste: 50.2 percent of the population was female, 49.8 percent male, 29.7 percent from the SC community and 4.4 percent ST. A later household survey conducted by the APCRDA in 2015 recorded the total population of the capital city villages as 103,873, with 30 percent belonging to Backward Castes, 32.2 percent to the Scheduled Castes, 4.7 percent to Scheduled Tribes, and Other Castes (or forward castes) and minorities (i.e. Muslims) constituting the remaining 29.6 percent of the population (APCRDA 2018: 85).

As these numbers suggest, the villages have a significant population of people from the SC caste, who are almost exclusively either Mallas or Madigas. While there are fewer people from the ST community throughout the villages, they form a notable portion—between 7 and 15 percent—of the total population in at least seven villages (Ananthvaram, Malkapuram, Mandadam, Penumaka, Thullur, Velagapudi and Venkatapalem). However, there are more significant numbers of *Dalits* across all the villages. In particular, four villages—Abburajpalem (57 percent), Malkapuram (50 percent), Sakhamuru (52 percent) and Uddandarayunipalem (55 percent)—have more than half their populations from the SC community. In a further seven villages, *Dalits*

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<sup>59</sup> In early 2015, the CRDA completed a census survey of each of the villages (APCRDA 2018: 85), enumerating landowners, landless workers and other categories. The purpose was to create a socio-economic baseline and to collect information vis-à-vis landownership status, income levels, skill levels and debt conditions, in order to design an appropriate “LPS package.” I received some of the raw data for population by village from a CRDA officer in early 2017. But this was incomplete for some of the villages. The raw data has also not been published as a table in an official document. Therefore, I have opted to rely on official data from the 2011 Census and consulted the APCRDA census survey only to either add additional granular data or corroborate the initial numbers. Where I use the later updated numbers, I indicate it in the text.



comprise more than 40 percent of the village population: Ainavolu (42 percent), Borupalem (48 percent), Krishnayapalem (44 percent), Lingayapalem (41 percent), Mandadam (48 percent), Velagapudi (42 percent), Venkatapalem (41 percent). Taken together, at least 30 percent of the entire population of the villages are from the SC community<sup>60</sup> and a further 4 percent are from the ST community. The villages with the lowest *Dalit* population are Nekkallu (16 percent) and Undavalli (18 percent). Table 3 provides a breakdown of population by village and caste.

*Table 3: Population by village and social group in Amaravati (taken from Census of India 2011)*

District	No. Village	SC	% of total population (SC only)	ST	% of total population (ST)	% of total population (SC + ST)	Others (OC + OBC + minorities)	% of total population (OC + others)	TOTAL POPULATION
THULLUR	1 Abburajpalem	279	57	1	0	57	210	43	490
	2 Ananthvaram	1,301	38	498	15	53	1,592	47	3,391
	3 Ainavolu	777	42	-	0	42	1,061	58	1,838
	4 Bethapudi**								
	5 Borupalem	571	48	39	3	51	580	49	1,190
	6 Dondapadu	790	36	12	1	37	1,387	63	2,189
	7 Kondamarajupalem***	-	0	-	0	0	-	0	-
	8 Lingayapalem	643	41	10	1	42	901	58	1,554
	9 Malkapuram	679	50	117	9	59	564	41	1,360
	10 Mandadam	3,134	48	442	7	54	3,012	46	6,588
	11 Nekkallu	309	16	7	0	17	1,592	83	1,908
	12 Nelapadu	345	34	8	1	34	675	66	1,028
	13 Pitchikalapalem***	54	100	-	0	0	-	0	54
	14 Rayapudi	1,001	21	75	2	22	3,741	78	4,817
	15 Sakhamuru	629	52	27	2	54	562	46	1,218
	16 Thalayapalem**								
	17 Thullur	2,361	30	674	9	39	4,759	61	7,794
	18 Uddandarayunipalem	824	55	6	0	55	673	45	1,503
	19 Velagapudi	1,131	42	264	10	52	1,293	48	2,688
	20 Venkatapalem	1,514	41	244	7	47	1,974	53	3,732
MANGALGIRI	21 Krishnayapalem	682	44	2	0	44	876	56	1,560
	22 Kuragallu	1,141	26	120	3	29	3,079	71	4,340
	23 Neerukonda**								
	24 Nidamaru	2,319	37	148	2	40	3,729	60	6,196
	25 Nowluru*	4,570	18	814	3	22	19,477	78	24,861
	26 Yerrabalem**								
TADEPALLI	27 Penumaka	2,283	29	602	8	36	5,033	64	7,918
	28 Undavalli*	1,768	18	81	1	19	7,894	81	9,743
	Tadepalli municipality								
	29 (partial)****	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
TOTAL		29,105	30	4,191	4	34	64,664	66	97,960

\* Nowluru & Undavalli are classified as 'outgrowth' (OG), an adjoining rural area to a statutory town with urban characteristics, in the 2011 Census.

\*\* Note that Bethapudi and Yerrabalem are considered hamlets of Nowluru. Population data is therefore included under Nowluru.

Thalayapalem is a hamlet of Mandadam. Its population is recorded under Mandadam village.

Neerukonda is a hamlet of Kuragallu. Its population is recorded under Kuragallu village.

\*\*\* These villages are now officially considered depopulated.

\*\*\*\* Portions of land in Tadepalli municipality are industrial centres (Nulakapet and Dolas Nagar). There is little to no agricultural land here.

If both the SC and ST populations are taken into account, a total of eight villages have more than 50 percent of the population comprising SC/ST people: Abburajpalem (57 percent), Ananthvaram (53 percent), Borupalem (51 percent), Malkapuram (59 percent), Mandadam (54 percent), Sakhamuru (54 percent), Uddandarayunipalem (55 percent) and Velagapudi (52

<sup>60</sup> The APCRDA reported roughly 32 percent of the entire population are from the Scheduled Castes.

percent). These numbers were corroborated by information gleaned from multiple interviews. For instance, the *Sarpanch* of Venkatapalem stated that of a voting population of 2,700 (not to be confused with the total population of 4,000), roughly half the population were either from the OC or BC castes and the other half were entirely from the SC Malla community (R. Babu 2016, personal communication, 11 November). Interestingly, most of these villages, apart from Krishnayapalem and Penumaka are located in Thullur *mandal*. Meanwhile, the 2011 Census found that Nidamaru, which is famous for employing a large number of agricultural labourers for its flower fields, has a combined SC/ST population of 40 percent.<sup>61</sup>

### 5.3.1 Support for, or opposition to, the capital city project tends to be stratified by caste

Kammas are numerically dominant in nearly all the villages of Thullur *mandal*, although they are also represented in significant numbers in the villages of *Mangalgiri* *mandal*. This is significant because caste allegiances have a definitive bearing in Andhra Pradesh on determining political support for a party—as is the case with Kamma support for the TDP (see chapter 3)—and by extension, support for (or lack thereof) for the capital city project. Therefore, many residents pointed out to me that it was no accident that the area of the seed capital falls directly in three villages of Thullur *mandal*—Lingayapalem, Mandadam and Uddandarayunipalem—considered the Kamma heartland (Still 2013: 71).

Elsewhere, *Dalits* have historically voted for the YSR party, although I found a fair number of exceptions during my interviews: in general, *Dalits*—largely Madigas—in Kamma dominated villages, particularly if they owned land, supported the TDP (although this trend was not entirely uniform). Many landless labourers also supported the Communist [CPI(M)] party. However, almost all *Dalits* in Reddy dominated villages backed the YSR party. Moreover, those SC people who lived in villages on assigned *lanka* lands, particularly in Uddandarayunipalem and Lingayapalem (most of whom are Mallas) in lands contiguous to the villages themselves, tended to entirely disavow the TDP and land pooling in general. There was also agitation against the then-ruling TDP party in the villages of Nidamaru and Kuragallu—neighbouring villages that

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<sup>61</sup> In the most recent household survey conducted by the CRDA, this figure was reported to be 42 percent. In a personal interview with the then-MPTC, Nagaratna—who herself was from the SC community—she claimed that most of the population of Nidamaru was from the SC community (personal communication, 05 December 2016).

have extensive flower fields and a powerful workforce comprised mostly of *Dalit* workers. In the case of Nidamaru, where *Dalits* owned land, they together with the Reddys, tended to oppose land pooling. But this also had much to do with the type of land they owned: those with the more lucrative red soil (which produced flowers) were against landpooling; those who owned the more water-logged and difficult black soil land (which produced cotton) tended to prefer to sell and make a profit, while the LPS created a burgeoning speculative land market.

Kammas are not represented in significant numbers in seven villages of the capital region: Ainavolu, Bethapudi, Nidamaru, Penumaka, Sakhamuru, Undavalli and Yerrabalem. There has been significant agitation against the LPS in three of these six villages. Bethapudi's population consists primarily of OC Kapus and OBCs (Sagara, Yadhava, Gowda, Padmasali) in addition to SC (Madiga) (J. Dhurga Rao 2016, personal communication, 14 September). Ainavolu also has a significant population of Kapus and people from the SC community. Sakhamuru reportedly has only five Kamma households and about 30 Reddy households, whilst the rest of the population is comprised of *Dalits* (J.M. Rao 2016, personal communication, 14 September). Yerrabalem is dominated by Kapus and also has significant presence of people from the BC caste. Undavalli is dominated by Reddys and Kapus combined, Penumaka almost exclusively by the Reddy community, and Nidamaru by significant populations of both Reddys and OBC Yadavas, in addition to the SC population (N. Reddy 2017, personal communication, 1 April). As outlined in chapter 3, for historical reasons, the Reddys in large part support the YSRCP. Table 4 provides information on caste affiliation by village and related attitudes towards land pooling.

The role and impact of Kapus on Andhra politics is more difficult to analyze, as Chandrababu Naidu's TDP government formed a coalition with the Jana Sena Party (largely supported by the Kapu community) to maintain power after elections. Thereby, it can be assumed that a large proportion of Kapus voted for the TDP party during the 2014 elections. However, the Kapus are fighting to be categorized as a backward class in Andhra in order to gain 10 percent quota reservations in education and employment. The TDP's unfulfilled promise of guaranteeing this reservation for the Kapu community has led to dissatisfaction amongst the Kapus with the TDP, threatening to split their vote in a future election (Ganeshan, 2019). There is also a smattering of people from the *Vaishya* community (another wealthy forward caste) in the villages. In Thullur for instance, *Vaishyas* own most of the shops and are economically powerful although relatively

small in numbers (estimated to be about 55 families in total). They tend to support the TDP and the land pooling scheme. Finally, there are no more than a handful of *Brahmins* in all the villages (estimated to be 150 families in total), most of whom seem to be concentrated in Yerrabalem (A. Rehman 2016, personal communication, 13 December). They also tend to support the TDP because of the benefits accrued from endowment lands (see section above).

Table 4: Political allegiance by caste in the 29 villages of Amaravati

Mandal	No.	Village	Dominant caste			SC Caste			Others	Additional notes
			Main OC group	Party affiliation	Land pooling attitude	Main SC group	Party affiliation	Land pooling attitude		
Thullur	1	Abbarajupalem	Kamma	TDP	For	Malla	YSR CP	Against	About 50 people from the BC community (i.e. Rajakas) and minorities, including Muslims.	Landless people do 'sandwork'; 80 percent are TDP supporters; 20 percent are YSR CP supporters, though nearly everyone gave land to the LPS.
	2	Ainavolu	Kappu	Mixed (some Kapus voted for the TDP, others voted for the YSR CP)	For	Madiga	Uncertain	Largely against	One of 3 Kappu dominant villages.	Almost everyone gave their land to the LPS
	3	Ananthavaram	Kamma	TDP	For	Malla, Madiga	Uncertain	Against		All land given for LPS. SCs own only 20 acres of land in the village.
	4	Borupalem	Kamma	TDP	For	Malla	Uncertain	Somewhat mixed but mostly against	Approximately 10 Muslim families. Also has a substantial number of BC people.	This is a majority SC village.
	5	Dondapadu	Kamma	TDP	For	Malla, Madiga	YSR CP	Largely against	Has a substantial population of BC people. Very few Muslims.	Almost everyone gave land to the LPS.
	6	Kondamarajupalem								
	7	Lingayapalem	Kamma	TDP	For	Malla (approx 150 families); Madiga (approx. 100 families).	YSR CP	Largely against		150 acres of land not given to LPS - some landowners holding out for greater compensation. Assigned lands contiguous to the village. A fair bit of 'sand farming' took place here.
	8	Mandadam	Kamma	TDP	For	Malla	Uncertain	For (landowners); Against if no land owned.	Some limited numbers of Vashyas and Brahmins. Also a substantial number of BCs (approx. 3,500 people).	
	9	Malikapuram	Kamma	TDP	For	Madiga	YSR CP	Against		
	10	Nekkallu	Kamma	TDP	For	Uncertain	Uncertain	Against		
	11	Nelapadu	Kamma	TDP	For	Uncertain	Uncertain	Against		
	12	Pitchikalapalem								Although officially depopulated, there were a few people living in temporary houses when I visited. They were largely Dalit labourers and against land pooling.
	13	Rayapudi	Kamma	TDP	For	Malla, Madiga	YSR CP	Against	Has a substantial population of Muslims.	20 people had not given land (approx 500 acres with one person owning 200 acres). Village with assigned land. All assigned land owners against LPS remuneration scheme.
	14	Sakhamuru	Small population of Reddys and Kammass (about 50 families each)	Both TDP and YSR CP	For	Mostly Malla with very few Madiga families	YSR CP	Largely against	Substantial population of BCs (Yadavas, Kumaris) and SC people	Sakamuru is a largely SC dominated village.
	15	Thullur	Kamma	TDP	For	Malla, Madiga	Mixed	Largely against, but some with land are for	Substantial population of BCs, STs and Muslims.	
	16	Thalayapalem	Kamma	TDP	For	Malla	YSR CP	Against		
	17	Uddandarayunipalem	Kamma	TDP	For	Malla	YSR CP	Against		Fairly powerful population of SCs in this village, most of whom own assigned lands contiguous to the village.
	18	Velagapudi	Kamma	TDP	For	Malla, Madiga	YSR CP	Against		
	19	Venkatapalem	Kamma	TDP	For	Mostly Malla; some Madiga	TDP	Those owning patta lands are for; assigned land owners and landless labourers are against.	Some BC voters	All SC people who owned regular patta land (about 20 families) gave land to the LPS. Village with assigned land.

Mandal	No.	Village	Dominant caste			SC Caste			Others	Additional notes
			Main OC group	Party affiliation	Land pooling attitude	Main SC group	Party affiliation	Land pooling attitude		
Mangalgiri	20	Bethapudi	Kappu, OBC	TDP	Initially against, slowly turning with land sales	Madiga	YSR CP	Against	Substantial population of BCs (Yadhavas, Gowdas, Padmasalis, Sagara)	Extremely mixed village. No Kammas or Reddys. Largely OBC dominated--OBC groups together outnumber the number of Kappus in the village.
	21	Neerukonda	Kamma, Kappu	TDP	For	Malla, Madiga	Uncertain	Against	Majority Kamma, but with substantial populations of Kappus and SCs	Only 5 SC/ST families owned land amounting to 5-6 acres in total.
	22	Nidamaru	Reddy	YCR CP	Against	Malla, Madiga	YSR CP/ CPI (M)	Against	Substantial population of BCs and Muslims. Mallas are more powerful than Madigas in this village.	775 acres not given to LPS at time of research - mostly jasmine fields.
	23	Nowluru	Mixed	Mixed	Largely for	Malla, Madiga	YSR CP	Unclear	Substantial population of BCs.	Semi-urban
	24	Krishnayapalem	Kamma	TDP	Largely for	Malla	Uncertain	Uncertain		200 landowners; many are big owners, with biggest owners having above 50 acres.
	25	Kuragallu	Reddy	YSR CP	Initially against, until many sold their lands	Largely Madiga	YSR-CP	Against	Substantial population of BCs	314 acres of land in this village owned by landowners from Nidamaru. The Sarpanch is from the YSR CP.
Tadepalli	26	Yarrabalem	Kappu	Largely TDP	Largely for	Malla, Madiga	YSR CP	Against	One of 3 Kappu dominant villages. Also substantial population of BCs (Yadhavas) and Brahmins.	Semi-urban. Of 1,226 acres, all but 60 acres were given to the LPS. People started giving land after allotment of jareeb land.
	27	Penumaka	Reddy	YSR CP	Against	Malla, Madiga	YSR CP	Against		724 acres not given to LPS
	28	Undavalli	Reddy, Kappu	YSR CP	Against	Malla, Madiga	YSR CP	Against	One of 3 Kappu dominant villages	Semi-urban. 750 acres not given to LPS
	29	Tadepalli municipality (partial)	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown

### 5.3.2 Land ownership structure, land type and attitudes towards the LPS

The APCRDA (2018: 85) census survey reports that those owning metta (dry) lands (61 percent of all landowners) had an average landholding size of 0.65 acres, and those owning jareebu (wet) lands (37 percent of all landowners) had an average landholding size of 0.81 acres across the villages in the capital region. However, the reality was far more complex behind the numbers. In interview after interview, I found that there was a greater inequality of ownership in the dry land villages than in the wetland villages.

In largely dry land villages, those from the dominant caste (largely Kammas<sup>62</sup>) own nearly all of the land. There are generally two categories of Kamma landowners: The wealthier farmers who possess larger tracts of land (10 acres or more and sometimes over a hundred acres) and slightly poorer farmers with either small or marginal landholdings. Interestingly, many of those who own larger tracts of land were either absentee landlords (they lived abroad) and leased out their lands to tenants, or their children had moved abroad. Very few people, if any, from the Scheduled Castes own land in these villages. For instance, I was told that in Borupalem, only two

<sup>62</sup> While most of the dry land villages had majority Kamma populations, this was not exclusively true for all dry land villages. For example, Sakamuru, a dry land village in Thullur mandal, was dominated by Reddys, and Ainovolu by Kapus.

*Dalits* own land, with each having one acre (V. Raghavallu and S. Rao 2016, personal communication, 11 November). In Ananthvaram, *Dalits* own less than 20 acres of land in the entire village (B. Surya Babu 2016, personal communication, 19 November). And in Neerukonda, only five SC families own land, amounting to just 5 to 6 acres in total (Samrajan 2016, personal communication, 21 November). Meanwhile, the land ownership structure at the upper end in some dry land villages seemed almost feudal: The largest landowner in Rayapudi had 200 acres and other members of the same family also owned substantial amounts of land.<sup>63</sup> Three brothers in Ananthvaram together owned 173 acres. The extended family members of a single family also owned upwards of several hundred acres in Dondapadu. In Nelapadu, the largest owner had 50 acres and was also the Sarpanch of the village. All of these people are from the Kamma caste and they all are rumoured to have close ties with the TDP party.

In contrast, in a village like Kuragalu (which is technically considered a dry land village, though the farmers themselves contest this), I was told that almost everyone owned land here. Most own small amounts, from half an acre to an acre and of the 10 big landowners, all of them own less than 10 acres of land (P. Venkatta Rao 2016, personal communication, 14 September). Similarly, in declared wetland villages, more people own small tracts of land, with even the wealthier, dominant caste farmers owning smaller amounts of land than their counterparts in the dry land villages. For example in Nidammaru the largest owner (unusually a woman) owned 28 acres (Jayamma Reddy 2016, personal communication, 8 December). Many of the *Dalits* with whom I spoke also owned small bits of land (often under one acre). One observer stated that at least 10 to 20 percent of the *Dalits* of Nidamaru were landowners although most owned an average of 0.5 to 1 acre. However, the biggest *Dalit* landowner in the village reportedly owned 10 acres (Nagaratnama 2016, personal communication, 5 December). Elsewhere in Undavalli, one resident claimed: “Very few of [the people living here] are big landowners. The majority own maybe half an acre or maybe 30 cents of land” (U. M. Reddy 2016, personal communication, 1 December). He further stated that there was little caste differentiation in the ownership pattern. And importantly, because the plots of land that people own in wetland

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<sup>63</sup> The M family (name redacted) are a wealthy and politically connected former *Zamindari* family that owned approximately 1,800 acres prior to the imposition of land ceiling laws. Currently, various members of the family own large amounts of land throughout Guntur district. One member was also the *Sarpanch* of Velagapudi during the time of research. Interestingly another was a lawyer and vocal advocate *against* the land pooling scheme.

villages such as Undavalli are smaller (often less than an acre), they would also have smaller allotments of residential and commercial plots as prescribed under the LPS.

However, it is important to point out that there are several outliers to this general trend, particularly in villages with mixed land. For example in Yerrabalam (which has mixed dry and wet land), all the landowners were either from the OC (Kapu) or BC (Yadava) communities. I was told that those from the SC/ST community owned very little land (A. Rehman 2016, personal communication, 13 December). Meanwhile, in Krishnayapalem, which also had both types of land, the biggest eight landowners each owned over 50 acres of land (Y. Samba Shiva Rao 2016, personal communication, 21 November). However, the general trend is that in the wetland villages, most people owned slightly smaller tracts of land and there were more *Dalit* owners of land, although most tended to own plots that were under an acre in size. In contrast, the dry land villages tended to have more people with large landholdings. These were owned almost exclusively by members of the dominant Kamma caste and these landholdings tended to be much larger than those held by the biggest landowners in villages with significant amounts of wetlands. However, these villages also had significant populations of small to marginal landholders, although most of these people were also from the dominant (usually Kamma) caste. Moreover, there were in general very few *Dalit* landholders in the dry land villages, thus resulting in a rather startling finding: in the few instances that *Dalits* owned land in the capital region, they tended to be small to marginal holdings of more lucrative wet lands than dry lands. The reasons behind for this trend are further elaborated in chapter 9.

#### **5.4 A focus on three villages: Nidamaru, Thullur and Undavalli.**

Based on the geographic and demographic trends in the 29 villages, I focused my study on the three key villages of Nidamaru, Thullur and Undavalli, located in Mangalgi, Thullur and Tadepalli *mandals*, respectively. In terms of geography, Thullur is approximately 17 kilometres from Undavalli and 16 kilometres from Nidamaru. From Thullur, it was possible to reach the other two villages inside of about 25 minutes by car. Undavalli and Nidamaru are located approximately a ten minute drive from one another. Key characteristics of the villages are provided in table 5 below.



Table 5: The villages chosen for study in Amaravati

Village	Mandal	Size ( <i>by pop</i> )*	Type of land	Dominant caste	SC/ST population (percentage)	Distance to nearest town
Nidamaru	Mangalgiri	Small: 5,086	Mix between fertile & flood prone or dry	Reddy, with significant populations of OBC	43	18 kms to Vijayawada; 2 kms to Mangalgiri
Thullur	Thullur	Medium: 8,528	Predominantly dry	Kamma	39	26 kms to Vijayawada; 28 kms to Guntur
Undavalli	Tadepalli	Large: 10,991	Predominantly wet	Reddy, Kapu	20	8 kms to Vijayawada; 8 kms to Mangalgiri
* I have used updated population figures provided by the CRDA in this case as these numbers were corroborated by interviews with local officials (i.e. the Sarpanch and some CRDA officials) in each village.						

#### 5.4.1 Thullur: The Kamma heartland

Thullur is located just outside of the core capital region (neighbouring Mandadam, Lingayapalem and Rayapudi). At the time of research, it gave the impression of a vast construction site. Its main feature was a large man-made pond, around which a series of double and triple storey homes were furiously being constructed. This was taking place in anticipation of the boom in demand for housing that was expected as government employees moved into the region. The majority of these new modern homes also had cars. I further noticed at least three liquor stores that looked new on the main street and several new restaurants that were busy and filled with people (mostly men).

At the time of research, Thullur had a population of approximately 8,600 people and was the capital of its namesake Thullur *mandal*. Nearly all the land located in the village is considered dry (though cultivators were able to use a lift irrigation scheme to produce a wider variety of crops). It is largely dominated (in terms of power, status and land-ownership) by members of the Kamma community. However, it also has quite a large proportion of people from the SC community—both Mallas and Madigas (about 2,500 people in total – or about 30 percent of the population). In addition, vendors and shopkeepers from the wealthy Vaishya caste (estimated to be about 55 families) dominate the main market area. Their wealth is comparable to, if not greater than the Kammas, though they comprise only a small proportion of the total population of the village and of the capital region. There is also a significant population of Muslims (about 300 families), STs (about 250 families) and people from the OBC community (Kumaris, Padmasalis, etc.) in the village (N. Rao 2017, personal communication, 31 January).

The village includes a main shopping and market area, a central road that connects it to Guntur in the South and Vijayawada to the North, a private Christian school run by nuns from Kerala on the main road and a large man-made pond around which people walk and socialize. People of different castes also tend to live in segregated neighbourhoods within the same village, although there were also a few more mixed neighbourhoods. For example, the largest Kamma landowners and Vaishyas owned property just off the main market centre, where they lived in older, more stately homes. Muslims tend to live together in one neighbourhood surrounding a mosque one side of the main thoroughfare of the village. Across the main road from the mostly Muslim neighbourhood was *Kothur*, the neighbourhood in which I lived. *Kothur* was located fairly centrally (a little off the main village market centre), but was clearly a newer part of the main village. It had a more mixed caste (ST, OBC, Kamma and Brahmin) composition, with many of the smaller Kamma landholders opting to live here. People from the OBC community largely lived in another somewhat mixed community (comprising of ST and some OC Kamma people) on the other side of the Muslim neighbourhood. Finally, landless labourers, comprising largely of *Dalits* and some members of the ST community were consigned to the periphery of the village. In addition to this, there was an entirely separate area called 'Ainacheruvu' which stood some distance away on the main road, located in a sort of isolated spot between Thullur and Sakamuru. Here, a combination of destitute ST and Kamma families lived. Burial grounds, then barren fields lay beyond the main village boundaries. The main crops produced in Thullur prior to the implementation of the land pooling scheme (LPS) were cotton, maize, chilli and pulses.

#### **5.4.2 Undavalli: Epicentre of Reddy resistance**

Undavalli, located on the banks of the Krishna River just on the outskirts of the city of Vijayawada, is a fairly large 'village' with a population of 11,000 people at the time of research. Most of these people consider their village to be an extension or suburb of the city of Vijayawada itself as it is located a mere 5 kilometres outside of city lines across a small bridge separating Vijayawada from the hinterlands. It consists of Undavalli village and Undavalli Centre, the latter of which is categorized as an urban area, as it mostly has shops and commercial establishments. Undavalli village is on the banks of the Krishna River. It is said that the land is so fertile here that it produces 120 different varieties of fruits and vegetables, ranging from sugar cane and bananas to various vegetables—crops that can only be produced in rich, wet lands.

Flower farming is also evident in this village. Unlike Thullur, and with some exceptions, people tend to own smaller tracts of more fertile and lucrative lands here. Many of the people I spoke with either owned no land or just one or two acres of land. A significant proportion of the people also had regular paying jobs (whether it was in offices or driving auto rickshaws) in Undavalli as they were able to commute to Vijayawada to work. Members of the Reddy and Kapu castes dominate the village.<sup>64</sup> For a variety of reasons (see chapters 6, 7 and 8), the majority of the population is vehemently against the LPS in this village.

#### **5.4.3 Nidamaruru: Black cotton soil versus red soil**

Finally, Nidamaruru is the smallest of the three villages in which I conducted the majority of my interviews. It has a population of approximately 5,000 people. Nearly 2,000—almost half—of these people are members of the SC/ST community (both Mallas and Madigas), which included the village sarpanch at the time of research. Nidamaruru is renowned for its jasmine fields across much of South India. The fields here produce three main varieties of jasmine in slightly overlapping seasons across the year, providing year-long work for those who work in floral farming and a very healthy income for landowners and tenant farmers. As a result, Nidamaruru is a powerhouse employer in the region: agricultural workers come from surrounding villages to find work here. Entire families can work in these fields.

However, as mentioned earlier, the red soil that yields the flowers in Nidamaruru only carpets a portion of the village. The remaining land is covered in black cotton soil, where regular cotton farming occurs. In addition, parts of Nidamaruru are low-lying and flood prone, making these lands considerably less valuable than the red soil lands. Three further points make Nidamaruru interesting: While it has a high population of SC/ST people, the largest landowners are from the Reddy community, who constitute the dominant caste in the village. It also has a history of Communist activity, although the impact of this was not perceptible in the interviews I conducted. Finally, the largest land owner in the village—owning nearly 30 acres—is a woman.

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<sup>64</sup> The role of Kapus in particular are interesting in Andhra politics as Chandrababu Naidu's government had to make a coalition with the *Jana Sena* Party (largely supported by the Kapu community) in order to maintain power after elections. However, the Kapus are now fighting to be categorized as a backward class in Andhra in order to gain a few more reservations seats. This has led to some tensions between the Kapus and the ruling TDP.

She claims to be completely self-made having accumulated most of the land over nearly 30 years. She is also a powerful YSR-CP ally and is a vocal opponent of land pooling.

### *5.5 The emergence of GO 41: Core government strategy that accounts for the inherent differences in land type and ownership structure in Amaravati*

It can be safely argued that these differences in land type and caste-based distribution vis-à-vis land ownership in the various villages of the capital region was well known to government officials. Therefore, the emergence of a differentiated set of compensation guidelines in the aftermath of the announcement of the land pooling scheme is particularly illuminating. The CRDA introduced a new set of rules covering five separate categories of land in the Amaravati capital region in February 2016. This controversial categorization was encapsulated in what is known as Government Order (GO) Ms. No. 41 – or simply, G.O. 41. The order incorporates previous GOs (1142, 743) that specify one set of rules for assigned lands granted to ex-service persons and freedom fighters, and another for landless poor people.

Specifically, G.O. 41 prescribes that those who were assigned lands before 1954 (when GO. Ms. No. 1142 was introduced) will receive the same compensation (in terms of the amount of land returned and yearly annuity) for the land they ‘voluntarily’ gave to the LPS as those who bought their land and hold title deeds—or regular *pattas*. Much of the land assigned before this date was given to ex-servicemen and freedom fighters. However, those who obtained their DK *pattas* after 1954 are eligible for less compensation by the rules prescribed in G.O. 41. Most local *Dalits* from the region received their land after this date, or because of circumstances either ‘bought’ or ‘sold’ these lands (see chapter 7 for details) in the intervening years. Moreover, G.O. Ms. 743 exempts ex-service men and freedom fighters from the non-alienability condition of their land after ten years. Thus, if they are able to prove ownership for ten years, they can sell the land. *Dalit* cultivators are not officially afforded the same right. Additional conditions and differentiated compensation packages are prescribed under the G.O., depending on whether assigned land tillers still hold their original DK *pattas*, if their names are noted in record books and if they have received some form of funding or other inputs (i.e. seeds, borewells, etc.) from the government, in case they no longer have their DK *pattas*.

In terms of exact compensation amounts, those with private (registered *patta*) lands that are classified as being wet or semi-urban are eligible to receive a total of 1,450 square yards for every acre given in addition to Rs. 50,000 per acre of yearly annuity for every acre forfeited for 10 years. Those with private (registered *patta*) dry lands are eligible to get back 1,250 square yards in total for every acre given to the government, in addition to Rs. 30,000 per acre of yearly annuity for 10 years. The annuity will further be increased by 10 percent each year for ten years for both categories of land—amounting to an increase of Rs. 3,000 every year for each acre of dry land and Rs. 5,000 for each acre of wet land given. These same benefits accrue to those who received assigned lands (with associated *DK pattas*) prior to 1954.

Thereafter, the compensation scheme sharply diverges for every category of owner. Those who received land after 1954 (and still have their *DK pattas*), get back 900 square yards for every acre of dry land given to the government and 1,000 square yards for every acre of wet land provided. Those who currently till assigned lands, but no longer hold *DK pattas* (a phenomenon that exists for various reasons and will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 7) are eligible to receive 550 square yards for every acre of dry land given to the government and 600 square yards for every acre of wet land. This category is considered equal to yet another category called ‘un-objectionable government lands.’ This refers so-called ‘encroachers’ who have cultivated on land over time without any records, and yet have received some form of passive assent from the government, as evidenced by the deployment of government programmes such as the building of borewells or electricity lines on these lands. The final category is reserved for so-called ‘objectionable government land.’ This refers to land that has been occupied continuously, but with no previous support from the government. These people are eligible to receive 250 square yards in return for every acre of dry and wet lands provided to the government. Finally, those without any land at all (i.e. landless agricultural labourers and tenant farmers) are eligible to receive Rs. 2,500 *per household* every month (or Rs. 30,000 per household each year) for ten years. The rationale for the disbursement of this amount is that this is the average income derived from cultivating one acre of dry land per year. A full list of compensation offered by the government for lands forfeited as part of the LPS by different categories of residents in Amaravati is provided in table 6.

Table 6: Differentiated benefits of land pooling scheme (G.O. 41)

Land categories	Land received back (in square yards) from the government for every acre given by landowners*			
	Dry lands		Wet lands / semi-urban lands	
	Residential	Commercial	Residential	Commercial
a) Private (registered <i>patta</i> ) lands	1,000	250	1,000	450
b) Assigned (DK <i>patta</i> ) lands				
▪ Assignment before June 18, 1954	1,000	250	1,000	450
▪ Assignment after June 18, 1954	800	100	800	200
▪ Resumed lands-- eligible <i>Sivoijamadar</i> ** occupation	500	50	500	100
▪ Un-objectionable government lands – eligible <i>Sivoijamadar</i>	500	50	500	100
▪ Objectionable government lands – eligible <i>Sivoijamadar</i>	250	0	250	0
c) Yearly payment of annuity to all landowners losing land (INR)	30,000 / acre		50,000 / acre	
d) Yearly increase (INR)	10 percent or 3,000 per acre		10 percent or 5,000 per acre	
e) One-time additional payment for gardens (INR)	100,000			
f) Payment to agricultural labourers / tenants without lands (residing in LPS villages as of December 08, 2014) (INR)	2,500 per month for ten years (yearly increase under consideration)			
* In cases where people have less than one acre of land to give to the LPS, they are expected to receive annuity payments equivalent to one acre.				
** To be considered as a claimant of assigned land, <i>Sivoijamadar</i> is one who has been in occupation of the land at the time of consideration for its assignment, provided the person has been in continuous occupation of the land from the <i>fasli</i> (year) immediately preceding the one in which the assignment is considered.				

This extraordinary and differentiated list of compensation enshrined under G.O. 41 must be analyzed not only in terms of the socio-political circumstances of the inhabitants of these villages, but also against the rules set out in the Central government's LARR Act, 2013. In the Central government's formulation, a 'land owner' is defined as anyone

who is reflected as the owner of the land in the land records or any person who is granted *Patta* rights or is entitled to be granted *Patta* rights on the land, under any law of the State including assigned lands (GOI, 2013).

The implication is that cultivators with assigned lands are to be treated on par with owners of any other category of land and receive equal compensation. Crucially, G.O. 41 only affords the same treatment for assignees that were freedom fighters and political sufferers and those who were assigned land prior to 1954.

Taken together, this element of the land pooling scheme created shockwaves that rippled through the 29 villages that comprise Amaravati. Some people were clearly in a position to benefit from the scheme, whilst others were extremely afraid of the devastating livelihood consequences that would follow. To assess the main winners and losers, and how the presiding authority attempted to negotiate with and fragment segments of the opposition, the following three chapters will turn entirely to assessing the impacts of land pooling on the three main social groups in the villages of the capital area: landowners, holders of assigned lands and landless agricultural labourers. Each chapter will examine how the government negotiated with each social group in their efforts to procure land for the construction of the Andhra Pradesh's new state capital and in turn, how (or if) the local population contended with these strategies.

## 6 THE IMPACT OF AN EMERGING SPECULATIVE CITY ON LANDOWNERS: EUPHORIA IN DRY-LAND VILLAGES, RESISTANCE IN WET LAND VILLAGES

This chapter is concerned with the relationship between the government and the different group of dominant landowners in the fieldwork area. The announcement of the location of the capital city and the introduction of the LPS in the 29 villages of what would become Amaravati had an almost immediate effect on land prices. This in turn had profound consequences for all people, including landowners in the new capital region. The excitement and energy of the announcement was palpable amongst the small farmers<sup>65</sup> in *Kothur*, my local neighbourhood in Thullur, from the day I moved in—nearly two years after the official announcement was made in November 2014—to begin fieldwork. Besides the obvious signs of intense construction (of homes and business establishments such as liquor stores and hotel-restaurants) around the village, people were immediately eager to tell me about how they had benefitted from land pooling, about how much easier their lives had become since they gave up farming and how much more their land was currently worth. While what happened between 2014 and October 2016, when I arrived in Thullur, is a topic addressed later in this chapter, I was beset by rapturous stories of approval and gratitude by the community of mostly smallholder Kamma landowners into which I had moved.

The positive impact of the announcement of the capital city on these farmers was perhaps best exemplified by the sudden stroke of good fortune that befell my host family in Thullur. After the announcement and subsequent surge in land prices, Srinivas, my host, had managed to sell slightly under two acres of his nearly four acres of agricultural land and made more money than he had ever imagined in his lifetime: approximately 1.5 *crore*—or 15 million rupees—an acre. He then gave the remaining two acres he had<sup>66</sup> to the LPS, thus diversifying his risk. With the proceeds from his land sale, he built a large, colourful, multi-story house, with multiple self-contained apartments for renting (like many of his neighbours) in *Kothur*. I was told many times that the home cost Rs. 1 *crore*—or 10 million rupees—to build. Interestingly, the house was

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<sup>65</sup> I use the definition official Government of India definitions where a small farmer refers to a farmer cultivating less than two hectares (five acres) and marginal farmer implies a farmer cultivating land up to one hectare (or 2.5 acres).

<sup>66</sup> Note that Srinivas gained half (2 acres) of the family's 4 acres from his wife, Gauri, after their marriage. The interesting implications of this will be elaborated in greater detail later in the chapter.



constructed on what is to be the future path of a coming express highway. When I inquired why they chose to build such an expensive house on this particular plot knowing that it would be torn down in the future, he told me that he expected the government to compensate him with another, larger developed plot, and money for the lost assets, once they were acquired for the public road.<sup>67</sup> They had also built an additional house on a second small patch of *grama kanttam* land that the family owned several streets over. They planned to move to this house when the land (and house) on which they lived was acquired for the highway. With the fortune they made from the sale of their two acres in Thullur village, they bought an additional seven acres of land (at a cheaper rate) approximately 80 kilometres away in another village. Thus, with the end of all cultivation in and around Thullur, Srinivas had effectively amassed a fortune and retired. Instead of the tough life of a cultivator, he now whiled away most of his days post-LPS sitting under a village tree with his friends, engaging in light activity like peddling a newly bought gym bicycle on his rooftop or organizing parties for special events with his friends. He also talked of plans to open a future (real estate) business.

While the total embrace of a speculative economy (by those who could take advantage of it) was one common story in these villages, there was also a diametrically opposite set of strategies being employed by small and marginal landowners in other villages. In these villages—usually those with more fertile lands nearer to the Krishna River—landowners outright rejected the LPS. They continued to till their land as though the announcement had not even occurred and began to (eventually) organize against the LPS. To this end, they attended every scheduled public *panchayat* meeting to ask for more information and berate local officials; organized protests both within the villages and in the city centre of Vijayawada; invited external experts (for example, members from the National Commission for Scheduled Castes) to question government motives; and when all else failed, burned documents—for example, social impact assessments they claimed were carried out by biased authorities using false information—in front of journalists to express their fury. The difference in reaction within a 25 km radius was striking.

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<sup>67</sup> This falls under the ‘negotiated settlement’ provision that is a part of the basket of land acquisition tools the APCRDA promotes (see the introduction).

To evaluate the range of strong reactions of landowners in different villages, it is first necessary to understand the history of farming and nature of the land itself in these villages, their ownership patterns, and the caste dynamics in each individual village. The variance in people's reactions has as much to do with the type and amount of land they owned, as they do with pre-existing caste configurations within the villages. Second, this chapter will outline the myriad ways in which the government encouraged a speculative economy in Amaravati, and what bearing this has had on how much—and which—landowners supported the LPS in the weeks and months following the announcement of the capital. Gaining a better understanding of these trends sheds light on both the variant strategies pursued by landowners in either supporting or fighting the government's LPS, and also in determining the government's strategy in cajoling people to give up their lands for the capital city.

### **6.1 Metta vs. jareeb lands: Uneven benefits from a speculative economy**

*Undoubtedly the most elated group of people in the capital region in the still early days after LPS was announced consisted of landowners—largely from the Kamma community—in the dry (metta) land villages. For landowners with small to marginal landholdings in particular, the sudden increase in the price of land was life changing, as many lived rather precarious lives with high debt prior to land pooling, particularly after the decline of tobacco farming in the region (N. Rao 2017, personal communication, 31 January). Conversely, farmers from villages with wet (jareeb) lands were livid: LPS was radically and negatively changing the value of their land, their income streams, and their lifestyles.<sup>68</sup>*

#### **6.1.1 The history and perspective of dry land farmers in the region**

Historically, most farmers in the dry land villages such as Thullur cultivated tobacco, a profitable, but labour intensive cash crop, that required relatively less water to grow and only four months of labour a year. The main buyers were from China and the former Soviet bloc countries, customers that used to pay for the crop in advance, guaranteeing a relatively stable level of income for farmers over time.<sup>69</sup> However, with a decline in demand following increased

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<sup>68</sup> See table 2 in chapter 5 for a list of local perceptions of villages with dry and wetlands.

<sup>69</sup> (Undivided) Andhra Pradesh contributed nearly 52 percent of the total production of tobacco in India (Dutta and Bundela, 2014: 11). The bulk of this production was concentrated in coastal Andhra. The

production in China and the fall of the Berlin wall, these same farmers switched over mostly to cotton production, another cash crop, requiring approximately eight months of work a year. Like tobacco, cotton (along with chilli) is a climate (weather)-dependent crop that requires cheaper inputs and more labour, with potentially high (and also high-risk) returns (A. Gandhi 2017, personal communication, 27 March).

But, as the *Sarpanch* from Thullur—a farmer and brilliant novice agrarian historian from the Kumari (OBC) caste told me (N. Rao 2017, personal communication, 31 January)—two trends negatively affected the fortunes of farmers in the dry land villages, particularly in Thullur. First, with the introduction of hybrid seeds and with continued intensive tobacco farming, the soil began to lose its quality over time. Decreasing rainfall in an already dry region was another factor that led to greater losses. As a result, intercropping with groundnuts, black grams and other pulses was introduced to retain the quality of the land, diversify income streams and maintain the tobacco yield. Yet, the land quality continued to diminish over time and many tobacco companies began to leave. The intermediary crops themselves added to the losses because they were often infected and pesticides had to be used, further decreasing the quality of land. Second, the arrival of lift irrigation schemes in Thullur had a perverse impact on the debt burden of local farmers. While it catalysed an initial switch towards traditionally water-intensive, lucrative crops such as paddy, sugarcane, turmeric, banana, onion and other vegetables, it also required farmers to provide higher input investment, prompting them to start borrowing more funds. They also had to incur losses on them due to low market prices for the produce in some years. Many thus became indebted in time, despite loan waivers provided by the Chief Minister for up to Rs. 1.5 *lakh* per family. According to the *Sarpanch*, this may be an additional reason that people were so eager to give land to the LPS when it was introduced.

Taken together, several interlinked factors led to decreasing fertility of the soil and increasing losses for farmers in the dry land regions. These included intensive tobacco farming, intercropping that led to higher use of damaging pesticides, decreasing rainfall in some years

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Tobacco Board of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry is based in nearby Guntur, and sets the production limit for each State. Only registered farmers can cultivate it. The Board mediates between farmers and tobacco companies by arranging auctions, in which major tobacco companies like ITC and Philip Morris participate. Tobacco Board also falls under the Commerce Ministry, whose primary motive is to promote the business of tobacco, not the welfare of farmers (Singh and Maganti, 2018).

and natural calamities (too much rain) in others, higher input costs associated with certain crops, and the advent of animal husbandry (N. Rao 2017, personal communication, 31 January). The long-term trend in agricultural yields ultimately turned downward in these villages (even those with lift irrigation schemes). The *Sarpanch* of Thullur avowed that:

The farmers in this region were constantly gambling. In a period of 10 years, they had five years of loss, two years where they broke even and two years of absolute loss. If they were lucky, one good year in ten covered all the losses.

This story was repeated by many of the farmers in the dry land villages. For instance, one *Dalit* (Malla) cultivator in Thullur was adamant that cultivation was only leading to losses:

While I once rented 40 acres during the tobacco times [about 10 years ago], this gradually came down to 3 to 5 acres as I was forced to cultivate other crops including chilli, cotton and paddy. But the cultivation was almost always leading to losses. Most recently, I had to sell 5 cents of land and get a gold loan. Compared to this, LPS is much better (P. Madhav Rao 2017, personal communication, 16 February).

Hence, the difficulties and land use patterns associated with farming in traditionally dry land villages—even some with lift irrigation facilities—led many land owners to look towards LPS as a possible route out of debt and increasing livelihood strain.

#### *6.1.1.1 Contestation over classification of irrigated lands*

Significantly however, even amongst so-called dry land farmers, support for the LPS was not clear cut or straightforward. For example, several people in Sakamuru—a village considered utterly dry by most local observers—told me that while cultivation was indeed difficult at one time, in 1996, the introduction of the Thullur and Rayapudi lift irrigation scheme resulted in increased output, more variety of crops being planted (for example, diversification from tobacco and cotton into sugarcane, turmeric, chili, maize and turmeric) and even some years where multiple crops were harvested (B. Ram Babu and J. Kiran 2017, personal communication, 07 April). These same farmers told me that all of Sakamuru (1,600 acres) benefitted immensely from lift irrigation, as did Nelapadu (800 acres) and parts of Ainovolu (200 acres).

Due to the differentiated remuneration system offered for different types of land, several local landowners who were deemed to have dry (*metta*) lands, took the government to court to claim the same remuneration as what owners of ‘naturally’ wet (*jareebu*) land were receiving for their lands. For example, in early 2019, a group of 13 farmers with small to marginal holdings in Abbarajupalem launched a hunger strike opposing the government’s refusal to revoke its land classification from *metta* to *jareebu*. These farmers alleged that the CRDA had changed the classification of their lands from *jareebu* to *metta* three years after they had signed over the land as part of the LPS. Moreover they were getting the wetland annuity of Rs. 50,000 per acre for years and were assured they would get 1,450 square yards per acre given in return, until the classification changed almost overnight (Subba Rao, 2019).

The issue of somewhat arbitrarily categorizing land—and in some cases, changing this classification—was already evident when I was present in the villages. I attended an extremely contentious Social Impact Assessment (SIA) meeting in Kuragalu, located in a tent behind the village CRDA office in December 2016. SIA meetings were held in cases where farmers had decided not to pool their lands and the government sought to use the Central government’s LARR Act to acquire land. As part of the procedures spelled out in the Act, it was necessary for local government officials (including the MLA, the MPTC, the village *panchayat* president, the MPP Deputy Collector and a member of the team that wrote the SIA report) to consult all relevant parties of the village to inform them of their findings and to also listen to comments. So many farmers attended the meeting that there was only standing room in the tent. Rather menacingly, police officers carrying guns also surrounded the tent. Many of the farmers in attendance were actually from Nidamaru as 314 acres of the land in Kuragalu was owned by farmers residing in the former village. People were extremely angry for a number of reasons, ranging from what they claimed was a shoddy consultation process to broken promises vis-à-vis the promised ‘benefits’ of LPS. However, their biggest grievance was with the classification of land in the village. Kuragalu was classified as having dry *metta* land, despite having acres of jasmine fields, much like Nidamaru. The fight that ensued lasted 15 to 20 minutes and ended with the MLA representative of Mangalgiri (who was a member of the opposition YSR party) asking for signatures to officially boycott the meeting in protest over the decision of the SIA report. Thereafter, a farmer flagged me down and took me to his land (located walking distance

from the meeting site) to show me acres of his jasmine fields and claim there was no rhyme or reason behind the government classification of land (Srikanth 2016, personal communication, 18 December).

A similar scene also took place during an SIA meeting in Penumaka several days earlier (13 December 2016). One farmer shouted with great exasperation at the deputy collector:

Why have you stated the lands are dry, when they are wet? Why did you produce a report without talking to us?

The Deputy Collector responded that a Resurvey Settlement Register (RSR)—or field survey used for land records—from 1903 was used to determine the land type in Penumaka. This survey does not take into account the bore wells that had been built over many decades in the village, to extract ground water for the fields. The meeting ended with a group of farmers burning the report on the stage on which the government officials stood.

Yet another case involved the land in Nidamaru and Bethapudi, which are neighbouring villages with essentially the same mixed type of land: roughly half with red soil suited to growing lucrative jasmine (and other) flowers and the other half with brackish water logged black soil that can only grow maize, cotton, chili and tobacco. In the beginning, both villages were declared *metta*, with most farmers only eligible for the lower compensation of Rs. 30,000 a year per acre, in line with the differentiated compensation scheme laid out in G.O. 41. Cultivators of jasmine fields were offered a one-time first-year payment of Rs. 50,000 per acre to encourage them to hand over their lands to the LPS<sup>70</sup> and Rs. 30,000 a year per acre thereafter. However, a later government 'clarification' resulted in a different outcome: the government declared the land in five villages, including Bethapudi (but not Nidamaru), to be *jareebu*. Therefore, despite Nidamaru and Bethapudi having almost identical land, landowners in Bethapudi received Rs. 50,000 a year per acre and those in Nidamaru received Rs. 30,000 a year per acre as compensation (N. Reddy 2017, personal communication, 1 April). There is speculation that much

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<sup>70</sup> This one time figure differed in several different interviews. Several people stated that they were offered a one-time reward of Rs. 1 lakh per acre to remove the jasmine crops. Many took this amount but did not remove the crop. Likewise, some sold the land but did not remove the crop as some investors were willing to let people continue cultivating until the government began construction.

of this difference comes down to political allegiances: the majority of people in Bethapudi are supporters of the (then) ruling TDP party, whereas a significant component of the original owners and workers in Nidamaru supported the (then) opposition YSR party (A. Gandhi, 2017, personal communication, 27 March).

Whatever the reasoning, the issue of classifying land in the Amaravati region into dry and wet lands is a cogent one as it calls into question the entire differentiated remuneration scheme that undergirds the LPS. Because land is classified into such limited and strict categories of wet and dry, it is also likely that the capacity for crop production per unit of land area and by extension, incomes derived from agricultural activity in these villages, is being undervalued. This is because the availability of irrigation allows for greater opportunity to practice multi-cropping and inter-cropping methods. Moreover, it puts other categorizations of land (for example between so-called 'government' assigned land and *patta* lands – see chapter 7) under suspicion. One activist stated emphatically:

The government is playing mind games here. There is no such thing as dry land/wet land. Dryland is a feeling created by the government, through a campaign of fear and misinformation. (A. Gandhi 2016, personal communication, 12 December).

He went on further to state that there was really only 2,000 acres of truly dry, unirrigated lands (located in Mandadam) in the entire capital area. Another environmental activist had more modest, yet still damning, estimations:

The government is now saying only 6,000 acres here are *jareeb*. But this is wrong! In reality, at least 70 percent of the land in these 33,000 acres (already given) is *jareeb*. The lands not given are also *jareeb* but the owners here realize the con (S. Narayana 2016, personal communication, 4 December).

At the very least, these concerns have implications for the appropriateness of building an urbanscape on productive lands. It also raises questions regarding the differentiated compensation scheme of the LPS for wet and dry land owners, and also for landless agricultural labourers. This is because the latter group receive a sustenance income of just Rs. 2,500 a month per household (or Rs. 30,000 a year) based on the principle that this is the average

income derived from cultivating one acre of dry land per year (see chapter 8 for more information on the compensation scheme for landless labourers).

### **6.1.2 The experience of wet land farmers in the region**

In contrast to the dry land villages, those villages on or near the riverbank have highly fertile and multi-cropped fields, known locally as *jareebu* (or wet) lands. While some (though not all) of the land next to the river is categorized as ‘assigned’ (see chapter 9), this land is marked by high water tables (about 15 to 20 feet underground, in contrast to upwards of 50 to 100 feet in dry land villages), allowing cultivators to produce up to 120 varieties of crops, often on a year round schedule. While the risk of losses was sometimes higher in *jareeb* lands, land owners also tended to lease off smaller plots of this land (often just one to two acres) to tenant farmers, who in turn took a big risk by cultivating these lands. However, input costs were often lower for these lands, the cultivation period was shorter, multiple crops could be planted leading to several harvests a year and the remuneration would come faster for crops produced on these lands (N. Rao 2017, personal communication, 31 January; K. Reddy 2016, personal communication, 13 December).

The farming techniques and ownership patterns between dry land and wet land areas were so different that one prominent anti-LPS activist from Lingayapalem, a largely wet land village at the nucleus of the seed capital, flatly stated: “Thullur farmers are lazy” (A. Gandhi 2017, personal communication, 27 March). According to him, the problems in dry land villages were caused by the size of land ownership in the village (large) and the presence of many absentee landlords. He stated that even with lift irrigation, the pipes were only opened twice a year to accommodate cotton cultivation there, therefore, “even if farmers wanted to plant something else, the system of farming that dominated there did not allow for it” (A. Gandhi 2017, personal communication, 27 March). He contrasted the fate of Thullur farmers with those of Yerrabalem, a nearby flood-prone village with lift irrigation. There, people own smaller tracts of land and the flooding led people to adopt multi-cropping and inter-cropping strategies, wherein they often earned more per acre than Thullur. Another commentator reiterated the point that farmers in the region were “lazy” because they only worked half a year at most (Dr. Srinivas 2017, personal



communication, 26 April).<sup>71</sup> A *Dalit* (Malla) farmer in Sakamuru, a dry land village in the capital region, corroborated this story. While he conceded that the profits from tobacco farming was waning due to the degradation of land, as well as the decision of the Tobacco Board, which controlled the number of tobacco licences given each year, he claimed that the introduction of lift irrigation was beneficial. The land could suddenly be multi-cropped and incomes jumped from about Rs. 50,000 – 60,000 per year per acre prior to lift irrigation to approximately Rs. 2 to 3 *lakh* per year per acre after (B. Ram Babu 2017, personal communication, 7 April). This raises the somewhat separate question of what constitutes ‘wet’ and ‘dry’ land to begin with. For activists like Anumolu Gandhi, the separation is a lie: he believes that nearly all of the land in the capital region is either wet or irrigated, thereby making the land fertile, with the ability to produce multiple crops year round (see discussion in previous chapter).

Irrespective of the diverging narratives between owners of wet and dry lands, *jareeb* lands in the riverfront vohillages were already highly valued prior to land pooling. This was especially true in three villages—Undavalli, Penumaka and parts of Nidamaru, where land prices *decreased* significantly after land pooling (Prasad 2017: 75-76). The reasons for this decrease are multifold. First, Undavalli and Penumaka are located very close to the city centre of Vijayawada—adjacent to the Krishna River and directly across a bridge from the city. As Vijayawada grew over the years, speculative real estate prices in these villages also increased steadily, reaching a high of Rs. 4 to 6 *crore* per acre in parts of Undavalli. Nidamaru, meanwhile, is the epicenter of the lucrative floral trade in the region: comprising nearly 2,700 acres of farmland, the village is home to hundreds of acres of jasmine, marigold and crossandra fields, in addition to producing banana, cotton, various kinds of gourds, root vegetables and chillies, amongst other vegetables. As a result, Nidamaru also had extremely lucrative and expensive land prior to land pooling. But perhaps more importantly, Nidamaru is an engine of employment: it provides an army of landless workers from across the district with year round, sustainable employment.

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<sup>71</sup> As an example, tobacco farming starts in November. The crop comes in during January and curing and cultivation occurs between January and March. The money is received in April. This amounts to about six months of work. The commentator claimed that some people sometimes grew pulses or jute during the off months but this was rare.

### 6.1.3 Uneven benefits, competition and jealousy amongst wet and dry land villagers after land pooling

The announcement of the capital region and introduction of the LPS was therefore, met (eventually) with enthusiasm from most—though not all—farmers in dry land villages. It caused an immediate surge in prices in the capital city area. Much of this price escalation occurred in the drier lands further inland from the river, particularly in and around the villages located in Thullur and Mangalgiri *mandals*. Real estate price of agricultural land in Thullur village was said to have multiplied by *at least* ten times: from a low of Rs. 7 to 15 *lakh* (Rs. 700,000 – 1.5 million) prior to the announcement of the capital, to Rs. 1.5 - 2 *crore* (15 million to 20 million rupees) an acre in its aftermath. For them, the sudden opportunities to either sell land for rates that would have been previously unthinkable and to erase accumulated debt, or to provide land for land pooling (with the promise that the returned land would be worth more than the acreage given) was a way out of deteriorating farming conditions and debt.

The reaction amongst people in villages with wet, multi-cropped land, was very different. Here, after the announcement of the capital, real estate prices collapsed. This was because prices for the entire capital region (for both dry and wet land) largely equalized (or came close to equal) across the 29 villages despite the differences in land type. Like the dry land villages, the price of agricultural land in the area was valued at Rs. 2 *crore* (or very slightly higher) an acre—a net reduction in price in places like Undavalli and Penumaka. This swing in land prices—marked by an increase in the dry land villages and a decrease in the wet land villages—created a level of enmity and competition between residents in these areas. Therefore, a common refrain I heard in Undavalli and Penumaka was: “the development that has taken place here only helps dry land farmers” (S. Reddy 2017, personal communication, 18 February). I also heard different versions of: “[T]here are people in other dry land villages that are willing to give land. But the CM insists on taking this [already developed] land” (*Ibid.*) In contrast, many villagers in Thullur and surrounding dry villages such as Dondapadu, Ananthvaram, Nekkallu and others, flatly stated that residents in Undavalli and Penumaka were “jealous,” calling them “troublemakers” and “political opponents.” For most landowners in these regions, LPS was a boon: “The land value is skyrocketing, so LPS has been good for us” (P. Madhav Rao 2017, personal communication, 16 February).

## 6.2 *A superficial analysis two years after land pooling: Caste, diverging land prices and landownership patterns determine support for a capital city in the Kamma heartland*

Given the uneven benefits that accrued to owners of dry land and wetland farms in the capital region, it is somewhat understandable that support for the LPS was first and foremost determined by caste and landownership status. As chapter 3 described in some detail, the Krishna district represents the traditional bedrock of support for the TDP party. It was openly known and alleged during my time in Amaravati that the government wagered they would have the support of the land-owning classes, drawn largely from the Kamma caste, in these villages. Many local residents and several political actors alike claimed that the TDP and Chief Minister Naidu chose this region for caste reasons, overlooking the decentralised model recommended by the Sivaramakrishna committee (see chapter 1). This is because the TDP with its long history of courting and promoting Kamma caste members to higher positions in both the bureaucracy and legislature in state politics (see chapter 3) already wields the trust and support of this community, particularly within Coastal Andhra. In fact, the word “trust” was often used to describe people’s relationship with government. From female agricultural labourers to more powerful landowners in many of these villages, they outright claimed to trust not only the government, but also the then-sitting Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, directly.

For example, in Thullur, most people (even a few people from the SC/ST community and Muslims who happened to own land) tended to support the TDP party. Most landowners<sup>72</sup> in particular were fervently in favour of land pooling and felt that they had benefitted enormously from the land speculation that resulted from the announcement of the capital region. Some farmers claimed their land prices went up as much as ten times, from a low of about Rs. 15 *lakh* an acre to approximately Rs. 1.5 – 2 *crore* an acre. However, during interviews, they claimed to have benefitted not only because of the astronomical increase in land prices, but also because of the ‘duty’ to ensure the ‘orphaned’ state of Andhra would have a prestigious new capital. While not as extreme as in Nelapadu (which was almost feudal with a few large families owning nearly all the land), there were some landowners with very large land holdings in many of the

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<sup>72</sup> In this instance, landowners with assured land rights—ie. holders of *patta* lands—not, those with assigned lands (see chapter 9 for more on assigned land).

villages of Thullur *mandal*. While it was also common for many to have small to marginal landholdings, larger landholdings (upwards of 50 acres) were more common in and around Thullur, than in Undavalli or other wetland villages (with some rare exceptions).

Regardless, it was somewhat startling when a government official at the local APCRDA office in Thullur, directly stated that: “we got the caste politics right here” (personal communication, 2 March 2017). Another government representative and local landowner admitted on the absolute condition of anonymity that: “Caste played a major role in people giving lands. We are die-hard followers of NTR”<sup>73</sup> (personal communication, 27 April 2017). This person went on to state that that this “invisible factor” applied to all Kammas, some people from the OBC community and some Kapus: most members of these communities supported NTR’s vision and felt that Chief Minister Naidu (who was also incidentally the late NTR’s son-in-law) represented his ideals the best. Similarly, a YSRCP-aligned commentator from Undavalli categorically stated: “The Amaravati capital city project is solely a project of the TDP and of one community” (D. Balaji Reddy 2017, personal communication, 28 April). Additionally, Dr. M. Madala, the head of the pro-TDP Landpooling Association at the time of research, claimed that the majority of landowners in the region had grown children who were no longer engaged in agriculture. Many lived in cities or abroad and comprised an absentee landlord community who were finding it increasingly difficult to handle the day-to-day cultivation of the land (personal communication, 26 April 2017). Thus, it was a foregone conclusion that Kamma farmers, particularly absentee landowners who owned fairly large tracts of land, would likely offer their land for land pooling because it was more convenient. They also presumably expected (due to the history of TDP activity in these districts) for the government to return the favour through special caste-based concessions and benefits.

In fact, the seed capital city was planned and located entirely within Thullur *mandal*, considered by many to be the “Kamma heartland” (Still 2013: 71). It is estimated that 60 to 65 percent of the land in the capital region is owned by 16 to 18 percent of the population (Prasad 2015: 80) and Kammas, who form 40 percent of the agricultural population of the Krishna delta, own 80

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<sup>73</sup> NTR refers to N. T. Rama Rao, the former and actor and politician who served as the populist Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh for seven years over three terms. He was from the Kamma community in coastal Andhra and founded the TDP in 1982.

percent of its fertile land (Benbabaali 2018: 8). As predicted, many of the landowners—the majority of whom own less than five acres and are from the Kamma community—decided to volunteer their lands almost immediately after land pooling was introduced. The statistics somewhat shockingly bear out this fact: farmers had ‘voluntarily’ offered about 90 percent (approximately 32,637 acres) of the 38,581 acres required to the LPS by mid-2017.

As stated in the previous chapter, many of the farmers from Undavalli, Penumaka and Nidamaru were from the Reddy caste. Most of these people opposed land pooling. However, if asked directly if their abhorrence for land pooling was based on caste sentiments, they denied it. One farmer in Penumaka, for example, avowed that it was not for political nor economic reasons that many in the village opposed the project. He asked: “If I surrender my lands in a land pooling scheme, how will my children survive?” (K. Reddy 2016, personal communication, 13 December). He was convinced that the government would not be fair to all farmers. To further emphasize his point, he insisted that even if he was from the same caste as the Chief Minister, he would not give his land to the LPS due to a lack of trust in oral assurances from the government. In addition to a general distrust of the government, others mentioned sentimental reasons for keeping their lands. Typically, farmers would avow their “land is like mother” (*kannathali bhumu okkatey*) and that ancestral land should not be bought or sold, but instead be given to their children and grandchildren. Some were also pragmatic, staying simply: “We have very good lands here, it is not right to cement it over” (S. K. Reddy 2017, personal communication, 27 February). As I was sitting by the side of the road talking to a villager in Undavalli, one farmer passing on a bicycle shouted: “Why should I give up my life and livelihood for a project that may only come to fruition in 40 or 50 years?” (R. Reddy, 2017, personal communication, 27 February). Another person made an equally poignant point: “If you require a shirt, take my shirt. But don’t take the entire bale of cloth and say I will give you enough for your entire life” (S.K. Reddy 2017, personal communication, 4 March). Most claimed to be proud of their work and their land and emphasized on more than one occasion, the importance of food security (B. Reddy 2017, personal communication, 28 April). Many farmers from Undavalli, Penumaka and Nidamaru in particular, pointed out the wonders of cultivation, emphasizing the quality of rural life, the value of local cultural and religious sites, the beauty of the greenery and the importance of continuing to produce food for the state.

Despite these pronouncements—and even as trust levels in the Chief Minister varied depending on caste allegiances—it was clear that a core roadblock for landowners in wetland villages was the decreasing value of their lands, paired with the fact that they already derived good incomes from agriculture. In places like Undavalli and Penumaka, land prices were already at a high of Rs. 3 to 6 *crore* an acre. The decrease in their land value after LPS was unfathomable for many, more so because they perceived the centre of Amaravati to be located deep within the dry land villages, giving the impression that the outer villages of Undavalli and Penumaka were part of a wider “real estate deal” (S. Reddy 2017, personal communication, 29 March). One owner of wetlands in Undavalli (who now lived in Vijayawada) reiterated this point by asking:

The seed capital region is only from Venkatapalem to Rayapudi. Outside of these areas in Penumaka and Undavalli, these areas will be used for commercial and residential purposes or real estate plots. This is stated in the master plan (N. Reddy 2017, personal communication, 19 February).

Thus, many were adamant that they would not give away their land for any price. To make matters worse, the allocated land in Undavalli—that is, the zoned land that will be returned to owners as part of the LPS—was located near an area called Nulakapetta, which is known to be barren lands without water. One farmer pointed out that the water levels there are very low—about 180 feet in the ground, as opposed to the 30 to 50 feet they currently have (B. Prasad 2017, personal communication, 27 February). This meant that the value of their allocated lands would be intrinsically lower than the land they already own—an exchange of land that most were vehemently against. Additionally, they worried about the added problem of lack of availability of natural water in the future in a place like Nulakapetta. They also earned a good income from farming, unlike farmers in dry land villages. As a consequence, they felt no need to suddenly give up their land and lifestyle for the dream of a capital city.

Yet, on occasion, when I asked some landowners about whether they would be willing to part with their land if either the selling price was higher or there was an even better compensation package from the government, some furtively said yes, particularly if they owned only very small parcels of land or felt they were in a precarious state. One pertinent example of this is *Dalits* who felt either harassed or like their livelihoods were at stake under the uncertain conditions of

the time. This was partly because of the atmosphere of unease and insecurity that had been brewing for years. One person responded with: “Yes, because I no longer want to take on additional risk” (R. Babu 2017, personal communication, 6 March).

In fact, while concerns were already being aired within weeks of the announcement of the capital, the government moved at lightning speed to quell a great deal of the resistance using a very strategic set of aggressive, and sometimes intimidating, tactics—both with landowners and landless labourers. The remainder of the chapter examines the government’s approach to convince landowners in particular to forfeit their land.

### *6.3 The government’s approach: Manufacturing consent amongst landowners through speculation, negotiation, co-option, corruption and coercion*

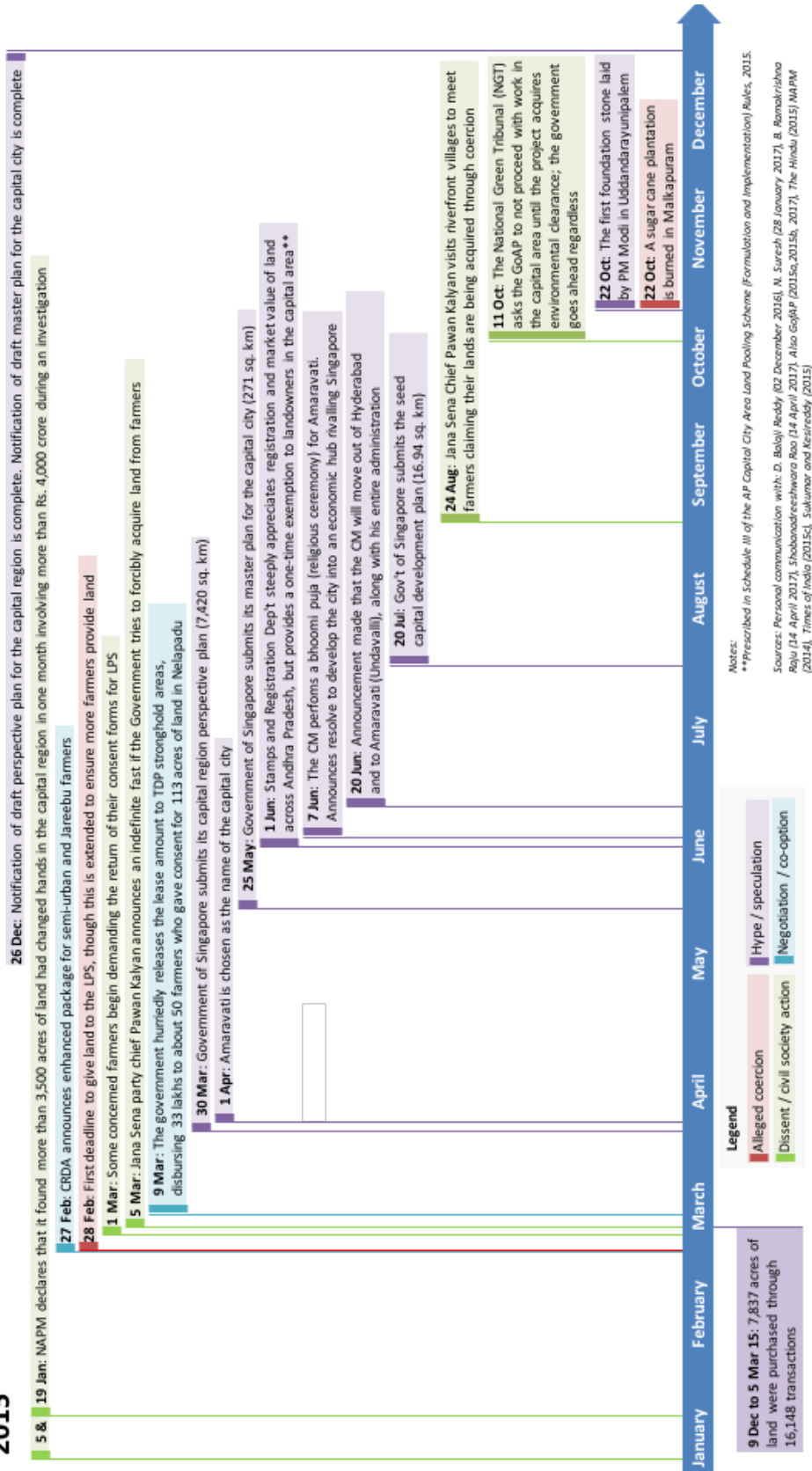
While the narratives of landowners from different parts of the capital city area—from dry land villages to wetland or riverfront villages—seemed straightforward when I first arrived in Amaravati in October 2016, the history and details of how so much land was acquired so quickly was more opaque. When I arrived in the area, government officials and many landowners alike were quick to tell me that land pooling was a resounding success—with over 95 percent of all landowners having ‘voluntarily’ given their land within months of the announcement of the LPS. But in reality, the timeline of events (see figure 4) that transpired involves initial dissent by many landowners, followed by a slow turning of opinion, which was driven by a variety of factors, including purposeful—economic, political and some argue, illicit—strategies by the ruling government at the time.

2014

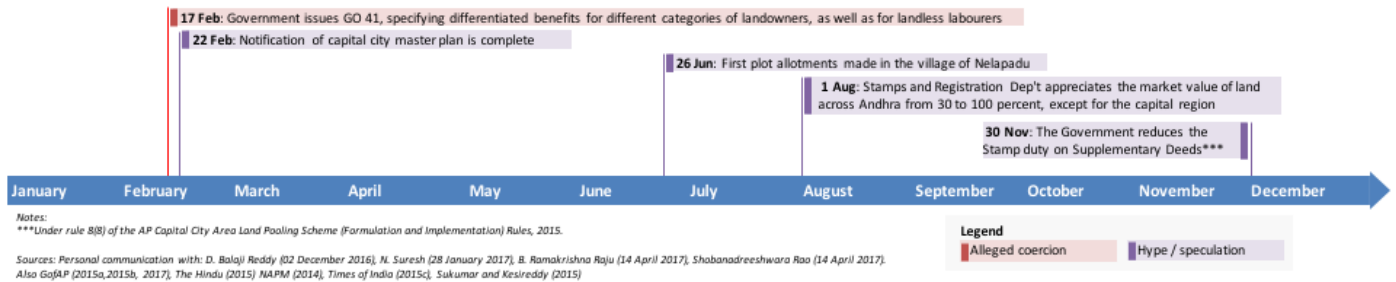




## 2015



2016



### 6.3.1 Responding to early rumblings of dissent with an attempt to co-opt landowners

The initial announcement of the capital city region by the government in late 2014, left many landowners, even in Kamma dominated areas, confused and concerned. While there was immediate interest in the poorest dry land villages and particularly amongst absentee landlords, most people across the villages were initially suspicious of land pooling. For example, in Lingayapalem, a largely wetland village dominated by the members of the TDP and the Kamma caste, many residents were initially opposed to giving their land to the LPS. They were, allegedly, threatened to do so by the *Sarpanch*, who was a TDP member (B. Rao 2017, personal communication, 6 February). However, the most opposition came from landowners in the riverbank villages, as well as from Nidamaru. Nidamaru residents were so anxious that the *panchayat* passed a resolution opposing both land acquisition and land pooling in the capital city (Ramachandraiah 2016: 72). According to Ramachandraiah, this resolution received official status when the *panchayat* secretary assigned a seal to it and the government responded by instructing other *panchayat* secretaries to not give official status to similar resolutions. Thus, when there were attempts to pass similar resolutions in Rayapudi and Penumaka (both riverfront villages), the village secretaries refused to recognize these (*Ibid.*; Times of India 2014a).

Meanwhile, a particular group of powerful landholders originally from Lingayapalem and Rayapudi (but now residing in Vijayawada) approached key activists, such as B. Ramakrishna Raju, the National Convenor for NAPM, and MG Devasahayam, a retired IAS officer who was closely involved with the building of Chandigarh, as well as a few *Dalit* organizers such as KY

Nagaiah and others, as early as November 2014. Nagaiah told me that while they initially seemed happy about the coming capital, some were also concerned about job loss and the scale of the land takeover (KY Nagaiah 2017, personal communication, 21 April). The fact that it was large landholders, including Anumolu Gandhi (from Lingayapalem) and Malela Sesha Giri Rao (who was from a former *Zamindari* family from Rayapudi) who began to organize against land pooling (and not strictly landless labourers) was on its own, a curiosity. In interviews, they cited a variety of reasons for their anger: the fact that a large amount of pristine land was being taken over for an urban city development project, the negative environmental impacts of building on the riverfront, the disruption to a sustainable agrarian economy and the loss of jobs (of agricultural labourers). Yet, they stood to gain a large amount of money from the venture. Presumably, in addition to the general concern they felt about the loss of livelihoods and lifestyle, there were other background economic and political considerations at play, which were admittedly never fully clear to me.<sup>74</sup>

In either case, a press meet was held on 19 November 2014, following a series of protests by the CPI and CPI(M) and a *dharna* held at the Thullur bus stand, where a group of protesters were reportedly attacked by TDP party sympathizers (*Ibid.*). One newspaper article from this time encapsulates the scale of protest in the region:

The difference that have arisen between farmers over parting with their lands for the capital city in three mandals—Thullur, Tadepalli and Mangalgiri—in Guntur district has now become aggravated into full scale conflict (Vardhan, 2014).

In the face of such early opposition, the TDP first arranged face-to-face meetings between then-Chief Minister Naidu and farmers in Hyderabad. They identified a select group of 150 farmers from the villages and sent them by bus to Hyderabad (*Ibid.*). Once they got there however, many reported being counselled by TDP leaders to not speak against land pooling (Times of India, 2015a). Despite this, they continued to raise their concerns. Even farmers “from TDP strongholds like Nelapadu ... demanded at least 1,200 sq yards of residential plot and 200 sq yards of commercial land” (*Ibid.*) for every acre of land given to the LPS. Those farmers from

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<sup>74</sup> Anumolu Gandhi in particular was rumoured to have flirted with a political career prior to the announcement of land pooling.

riverbank villages were more adamant. While many pronounced their happiness on “getting the capital close to [their] villages,” they urged the Chief Minister to consider granting them a better package (*Ibid.*) Interestingly, the same article mentioned how villagers from inland areas worried that the Chief Minister might move the capital to another region due to resistance from farmers in the riverbank villages. In this way, the contours of conflict between the farmers from the riverfront and inland villages were already beginning to take shape.

At nearly the same time, members of NAPM, led by MG Devasahayam visited 15 villages from 5-6 December 2014.<sup>75</sup> The committee met with affected farmers, agricultural labourers, local body representatives, leaders of farmer unions and local activists (NAPM, 2014). Based on the interviews, they found that:

...the approach of the A.P. government in proceeding with the capital region identification and development without any due process and legal basis... has spread confusion, fear and tension among the residents of the 29 villages...

They further continued that:

In an area of most diverse and prosperous agriculture, a very disturbing game of real estate speculation and land sale has been unleashed while there is no rationale for acquiring such a huge extent of land...(NAPM, 2014).

While these concerns were already being aired within weeks of the announcement of the capital, the government moved at lightning speed to quell a great deal of the resistance using a very strategic set of aggressive, and sometimes intimidating, tactics—both with landowners and landless labourers. The remainder of the chapter examines the government’s approach to landowners in particular.

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<sup>75</sup> These villages included: Krishnayapalem, Kuragallu, Lingayapalem, Malkapuram, Mandadam, Neerukonda, Nidamaru, Penumaka, Rayapudi, Thullur, Uddandarayunipalem, Undavalli and Venkatapalem from within the capital region; and Peddaparimi and Vaddamanu just outside the capital region.

### 6.3.2 Unleashing a publicity blitzkrieg and wild speculation

From the very first moment land pooling was announced, it was proclaimed to be a more equitable scheme that would allow owners to become “partners in development”, as opposed to land losers. The result would be the creation of a “world class capital city that respects its roots and people, but at the same time lays the foundation for a state of art modern city” (Surbana Jurong, 2015). This “people’s capital” (Government of Andhra, 2015) would in turn enable landowners to “buy-in” have a “stake” in future developments. These terms were used to raise aspirations in local residents time and again, not just in official documents (such as the Master Plans and in the Government of Andhra Pradesh’s, A.P. Capital City (Formulation and Implementation) Rules of 2015), but also in various press conferences, newspaper articles and interviews that were released in late 2014 and 2015. In tandem with selling a vision of a future where landowners would essentially become land speculators and entrepreneurs, politicians and real-estate developers began to disseminate speculative projections for how land values would rise with the development of the capital city. For instance, a steady stream of political visitors—from the Agricultural Minister and the Municipal Administration and Urban Development Minister to the Chief Minister himself—made multiple visits to the capital area in mid to late 2014, to convince landowners of the benefits of land pooling. Each politician spoke to the central message that reverberated with landowners (particularly in dry land villages): given the expected rise in land prices that would occur with the arrival of the capital city, the reconstituted plots that landowners would receive as part of the LPS would be worth more than the acreage they originally gave (Vakulabharanam and Prasad, 2017).

These promises and visions were in turn complemented by a steady stream of events and announcements: a high profile *bhoomi puja* (a religious ceremony) in Mandadam attended by the Chief Minister, the laying of the first foundation stone laid by Prime Minister Modi in Uddandarayunipalem, the announcement of various welfare projects and initiatives (see chapter 8), the quick building of the interim Secretariat and Assembly buildings in Velagapudi, the Chief Minister’s own move to a house on the banks of the Krishna River in Undavalli, and the announcement of various summits and conferences—ranging from meets for potential entrepreneurs, religious figures, urban developers and community leaders to colloquiums on

“urban innovation with a focus on citizen happiness.”<sup>76</sup> The constant barrage of announcements and slick media packaging led one of the farmers with whom I spoke to declare in reference to the Chief Minister: “He is not a CM, he is an event manager” (S. Rao 2017, personal communication, 26 February). Despite these suspicions, different versions of an urban dreamscape—and the possibility that came with it to escape the toil of daily farming for air-conditioned office jobs and easy wealth—was attractive to many people, even if some were less convinced. For instance, Ramachandraiah (2016: 73) reports that farmers who had a one-on-one meeting with Chandrababu Naidu in November 2014 were both disappointed with his authoritarian attitude and his “bluff” of making each farmer a ‘GMR’—referring to a private company in Andhra worth billions of US dollars. Yet the messaging continued to be the same in the following years. One vocal activist stated:

The CM is selling a fantasy that will never come true. He said: “You live in the mud, but now is your time to make money. You are now above a farmer” (M. Seshagiri Rao 2016, personal communication, 08 December).

Elsewhere, the tantalizing and glossy pages of the Master Plans (all three) advertised a utopian vision of shiny skyscrapers, landscaped gardens, modern waterways and futuristic metro rails, mostly to outside professionals (i.e. IT workers, doctors and entrepreneurs) looking for a place in which to invest and live. Devasahayam in a roundtable presentation in New Delhi in January 2015 after NAPM had completed a fact-finding mission opined:

An army of property dealers descended on these villages with wads of cash inducing farmers to sell their land. This led to wild realty-play. Within a month, cash-sale of more than 3,500 acres involving over Rs. 4,000 *crores* took place.

In the resulting run for land, many began either selling their land for large sums of money or giving their land to the LPS in the hopes of developed plots that would be worth more than what they gave in to the government. In this process, it was the farmers who were incurring exorbitant risks as very little money was changing hands in the transactions with government as part of the LPS. While the government provided an yearly ‘annuity’ for the land given, there was

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<sup>76</sup> For the most recent example of this, see: <http://www.happycitiessummit.org/>

no more than a simple promise that the land returned would a) occur on time and b) this would be on favourable terms (i.e. on plots of land that were serviced, in a good location that would retain their value over time and in the context of an urban environment). Meanwhile, there was mass interest from buyers after the announcement of the capital location: land values skyrocketed in the dry land villages from a low of Rs. 20 to 50 *lakh* to nearly Rs. 2 *crore* per acre and land transactions became a prominent activity from late 2014.

Right to Information (RTI) records obtained by former Agriculture Minister Shobanadreeswara Rao (personal communication, 14 April 2017) indicate that from 1 June 2014 to 3 September 2014, 582 acres of land were purchased through 2,390 transactions. But from 4 September 2014 to 8 December 2014, these numbers were drastically reversed: 2,460 acres were purchased through just 278 transactions, indicating much more land was being purchased by a smaller group of people. Finally, from 9 December 2014 to 5 March 2015, 7,837 acres were purchased through 16,148 transactions. In sum, a total of 10,879 acres was purchased in 18,816 transactions, with extremely suspect numbers recorded exactly during the period when the capital city location was announced (S. Rao 2017, personal communication, 14 April). According to Mr. Rao, this amounts to ‘black money’ from big industrialists and politicians being pumped into the region for speculative purposes.

### **6.3.3 Providing superficial concessions**

To aid in the process of buying and selling, the government sought to keep stamp and registration duties low in the capital region. The state government collects revenue on real estate transactions by levying stamp duty on the transaction value of the land. On two separate occasions—on the 1 December 2014 and on 1 August 2016—the Revenue (Registration and Stamps) Department steeply increased stamp duties on all land transactions. Yet these rates were kept low in the capital region: according to the AP Capital City (Formulation and Implementation) Rules, 2015, all buyers would be provided with a “one time exemption from stamps and registration fee, non-agricultural land assessment and development fee” (Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2015). In 2017, it was also announced that farmers who

pooled their land were exempt from capital gains tax for three years and this could be applied retroactively from April 2015 (Deccan Chronicle, 2017).<sup>77</sup>

These superficial concessions (low stamp and registration rates, exemption from capital gains tax, etc.) were part and parcel of an effort to engage suspicious landowners in a negotiation process over the terms and conditions of the LPS. It was reported that even prior to the official announcement, details regarding the size of the reconstituted plots for every acre given and the yearly annuity was floated around to gauge support. When it was officially announced, many of the riverfront farmers were particularly unhappy. One TDP party member and principal negotiator on the terms of land pooling confirmed that strategic negotiations did in fact occur between the Chief Minister and representatives of farmers (M. Srinivas 2017, personal communication, 2017). He further claimed:

*The CM has the ability to vocalize a dream. He is a flexible negotiator and walks the extra mile to settle existing land issues. He also made promises around jobs and pensions.*

Hence by February 2015, the CRDA announced its enhanced package for semi-urban and *jareeb* farmers and began providing annual compensation to all farmers who pooled their land. The government ultimately increased the size of commercial plots for these farmers from 250 sq. yards to 450 sq. yards. Meanwhile, when riverfront farmers began to have second thoughts and demanded for the return of their consent forms—that is, the form that provided consent for the government to take their lands as part of the LPS—in early March 2015, the government hurriedly released the lease amount to TDP stronghold areas, disbursing Rs. 33 *lakh* to about 50 farmers who gave their consent for 113 acres of land in Nelapadu (Times of India, 2015a). This was despite the fact that the process of verification of documents and land survey had not been completed yet. Senior officials thereafter launched land-levelling works in the capital city area to mark the beginning of capital city development.

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<sup>77</sup> The change was made through adding a new clause (37A) in section 10 of the AP Capital Region Act, 2015.



A year later in February 2016, a more comprehensive benefits package was announced as part of G.O. 41, which caused considerable consternation, particularly amongst assigned landowners, due to the differentiated benefits that it sanctioned between different categories of landowners and cultivators (see the following chapter). There were further concessions, aimed mainly at landowners or those interested in buying land in the future: first, the government made it possible to sell land deeds even after land had been pooled. This convinced many dry land farmers to pool land, as it opened up the possibility of selling land in the future as prices went up (Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 71). Meanwhile, it was alleged that the government began to later accept land without proper *pattas*—that is, assigned land that was bought illegally from mostly *Dalit* holders by members of the dominant castes—and provided compensation in return for this (see chapter 9).

However, the deployment of these seemingly minor concessions and strategic engagement in so-called negotiations was not limited to members of the TDP party. Vakulabharanam and Prasad (2017) allege that even the YSRCP leadership (from the Reddy caste) were engaged in political game in the villages: while they were severely critical of land pooling on the one hand, they also actively negotiated a higher compensation package with revenue officials who visited the village. While the same article stated that these officials did not take up the issues of landless workers, my own findings contradict this: certain elements of the leadership had begun taking the ruling party to court regularly based on the outcry from landless agricultural labourers from villages, such as Nidamaru.

#### **6.3.4 Tolerating corruption: Large land purchases and use of *Benami* lands**

At one point, there were so many land dealings that that it was nearly impossible to keep track of potential corruption in the process. In informal discussions with several real estate agents and local residents, *benami* purchases of land—particularly of assigned lands (see the next chapter)—was a recurrent theme. The numbers that Shobanadreeshwara Rao presented to me indicated an interesting trend: between 4 September 2014 to 8 December 2014, the number of transactions had reduced dramatically by 90 percent (from 2,398 to 278), yet the amount of land exchanged had more than quadrupled (from 582 acres to 2,460 acres) from the previous quarter, suggesting fewer, wealthier buyers were suddenly purchasing larger tracts of land.

This was confirmed via more informal (and sensitive) discussions with some political figures and real estate figures. It was alleged that some high-ranking Ministers in the TDP party had bought hundreds of *crores* worth of extensive land in the villages. These ranged from one Minister buying 196 acres of land, to others purchasing between 50 and 60 acres.<sup>78</sup> Another real estate mogul with close ties to the then-Chief Minister is also alleged to have bought about 800 acres of land, which he sold for a Rs. 4,000 *crore* profit. In addition, he supposedly bought 168 acres of multi-cropped land for a pittance (around Rs. 10 – 40 *lakh* an acre) and converted this into “a single affiliated” entity, which was rumoured to be entirely exempt from the LPS. Several political figures allegedly had a share in this affiliate. The illicit purchase of land largely before the announcement of the capital (but with the knowledge that this announcement would be made), was reiterated to me several times by locals. One activist went so far as to claim “all land was bought by about 20 people from the TDP” (M. Seshagiri Rao 2016, personal communication, 08 December). Another local villager stated:

In Thullur, relatives of those in the ruling party purchased land in advance of the announcement at low rates, then Thullur was announced as the epicentre of the new capital. 1,600 acres were bought in this way and given for land pooling (S. Reddy 2017, personal communication, 18 September).

As for purchases after land pooling was announced, one farmer in Nidamarra claimed that:

The 1,000 acres that was given to government from this village was given by outsiders. People purchased land from scared villagers, then gave it to land pooling (N. Reddy 2017, personal communication, 4 March).

An even more worrying trend concerns the allegation that nonsalable riverfront assigned lands were purchased (illegally) by non-*Dalit* and non-poor purchasers during this time. The same commentator stated: “Undavalli has about 200 acres of *Lanka* lands. These have also largely been bought by TDP officials” (*Ibid.*). I will refer to this trend in more detail in the next chapter.

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<sup>78</sup> In some cases, I was told the exact name of the Minister and how much land was purchased where and when. However, I have redacted names as these allegations are in the realm of conjecture and rumor. The important point is that these rumors were rampant and taken to be true by most villagers.

### **6.3.5 Conducting an alleged campaign of coercion and fear**

In addition to the constant strategy of creating a speculative environment and engaging with landowners up to a certain extent, the authorities also allegedly wielded blunter tactics. These ranged from the relatively benign encouragement of large landowners to provide land to the LPS to the more menacing deployment of police forces in the villages.

#### *6.3.5.1 Large landowners encouraged to give land*

It was believed that when the biggest landowner in a village or area consents to giving his or her land, others would follow suit. One TDP party member and head of the land pooling association, whose family originally hailed from Neerukonda, claimed that he initially coordinated the first giving of land—amounting to 1,000 acres—in the three to four villages in Mangalgiri, including in Neerukonda and Kuragalu (Dr. M. Srinivas 2017, personal communication, 26 April). This trend was evident across many of the dryland villages: during informal discussions with big landowners, they told me that they contributed anywhere from 25 to a hundred acres to the LPS. This in turn was designed to persuade landowners with smaller landholdings to contribute land to the LPS.

#### *6.3.5.2 Rhetoric of urgency and fear of land acquisition*

Another tactic that was employed was the constant referral to the need for speed and urgency in not only giving land, but also in passing laws, regulations and policies to ensure the city would develop (Ramachandraiah, 2016). This was particularly evocative in the context of how Andhra Pradesh had been left an ‘orphan’ in the aftermath of bifurcation and the loss of Hyderabad. One commentator flatly stated that people were willing to give up their land so readily partly because of the “heat of election and bifurcation,” claiming that “they won’t be able to do it [land pooling] again here” (J. Vinay 2016, personal communication, 23 November).

Many people also gave up their land because of the real fear that they would lose out financially in case they did not. The government gave notice for people to offer their lands under LPS in late 2014, with a deadline of February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Several people stated that they were warned that if they did not volunteer their land, it would be forcibly be taken using the Central

government's Land Acquisition Act (LARR Act), 2013, under which they would get far less compensation than they would if they either sold their land or gave it to LPS. This is because the compensation offered under the Act is based on a multiple of the circle or registration rate of land,<sup>79</sup> which is set by the government. In the case of the villages in Amaravati, this rate is far lower than the market rate of land. It was alleged that the government had purposely kept this rate low in Amaravati despite raising it in other parts of Andhra on two separate occasions to dissuade people from resorting to the protections of the LARR Act to fight dispossession (D. Balaji Reddy 2016, personal communication, 02 December; S. Rao 2017, personal communication, 14 April). Interestingly, these same people were not informed that under the rules of the LARR Act, it was forbidden to take multi-crop irrigated lands.

At the same time, in the rest of the VGTM region, prices crashed to less than half of the speculative rates. This was partly caused by the announcement that parts of the capital city, which had not given land to the LPS or as part of land acquisition, would be declared a 'green belt' (The Hindu, 2017). Green belt areas are historically devoid of development, preventing owners from either building structures on the land or eventually even cultivating it for agriculture. Thus, many—particularly vulnerable *Dalit* cultivators who owned very small tracts of land—claimed they gave up their lands out of fear:

The government gave notice for people to give lands by February 28<sup>th</sup>. They threatened people by saying that if they did not give their land, it would be taken at a lower rate using the land acquisition. The police also began picketing roads in the city (S. Reddy 2017, personal communication, 28 March).

This message was reiterated over and over again to me in informal conversations with every social category of people (outside the wealthiest) across the villages. Another cultivator claimed: "only 5,000 acres were given in the 29 villages willingly. The rest was given by people due to fright" (P. Nageshwar Rao 2017, personal communication, 3 April).

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<sup>79</sup> The central government ACT stipulates that up to four times the value of agricultural land be paid as compensation and two times the value of urban land. Andhra Pradesh state law indicates only two times the value of agricultural land must be paid.

Distrust of land pooling and fear of land acquisition, combined with the threat of losing money, also led many people—particularly vulnerable *Dalit* landowners—to sell their lands. One Madiga woman in Nidamaru stated: “Ninety percent of landowners in this community sold their land, despite the fact that land prices actually went down, because of fear” (M. Kattepogu 2017, personal communication, 30 March). Another *Dalit* owner in Nidamaru stated that: “60 percent of all SC owners sold lands after LPS because they were afraid they would not receive compensation. Most only owned half an acre to an acre and were unwilling to take the risk of either land pooling or land acquisition (Nagaratnamma 2017, personal communication, 4 March).

#### 6.3.5.3 *Outright coercion and intimidation*

In cases where more benign tactics (in relative terms) had not worked and people continued to resist giving land, it is alleged that the ruling party went to great lengths to intimidate those who were still opposed to LPS. The early campaign of coercion and scare tactics effectively quelled resistance, in particular, amongst Kamma caste members, though landless labourers and opposition party members were also threatened.

Within two months of the announcement of the capital, burnings of banana plantations were reported in six riverfront villages. These took place on 28 December 2014, two days before the APCRDA Act was brought into force and three days before the LPS Rules were published on 1 January 2015. It is alleged that the government itself were behind the burnings, as it was an attempt to intimidate people owning large tracts of land into giving these to the LPS (N. Suresh 2017, personal communication, 28 January). In addition, eight police battalions—approximately 10,000 police officers—were deployed to the villages and Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (1973), which prohibited the assembly of more than four persons in an area, was imposed for a time. Meanwhile, in Penumaka, Undavalli and Nidamaru (all dissenting villages), the government allegedly filed at least 20 cases against farmers themselves who were accused of setting the fires (N. Reddy 2017, personal communication, 15 April).

In addition, the farm burnings gave authorities the mandate to arrest people who are against land pooling (Ramachandraiah 2016). Several people—a Kamma landowner, a *Dalit* assigned land owner and YSRCP supporter and a member of the CPI(M)—to whom I spoke related

harrowing tales of arrest and intimidation. One resident stated that the government “created a cloud of fear” to intimidate people into giving land (N. Suresh 2017, personal communication 28 January). A *Dalit* YSRCP leader and owner of 5 acres of land (some of which was inherited and some bought), he told me that he began representing people who were unwilling to give land from the different villages. In response, he was arrested on 3 January 2015. He claims that the police asked him to confess to creating the agitations in the villages. They wanted him to state that hooligans were brought in from outside the state to create trouble on behalf of the opposition party. When he refused, he claims the police removed his clothes, pointed a gun at him and threatened his life. He was then offered money to admit to fabricating the story about the banana plantation burnings and to state that this was done at the behest of Jaganmohan Reddy, the leader of the opposition party (and current Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh). He was only released the next evening on January 4<sup>th</sup>. However, the next day, the authorities contacted him to tell him they had enough evidence to arrest him and put him in jail and his best recourse was to confess. When he refused again, he claims that one particular officer threatened him with violence from within the village: he was told that the dominant caste people in his village were harbouring a grudge and would be watching him.

Another local resident from Lingayapalem—the son of a Kamma landowner who had lived and worked in Hyderabad for several years and returned in 2014—related another story of arrest and intimidation. He had opposed land pooling and posted a video stating the same on YouTube, which had gone viral. In addition, the few media interviews he had done had gained traction due to his previous connections in Hyderabad. After the burnings on the banana plantations had occurred, he was arrested on the night of December 29<sup>th</sup> and “taken into custody like a thief.” During the night, they transported him from police station to police station, in an apparent attempt to evade anyone who might try to find him and demand his release. During this time, he claims that the questions he was asked had little to do with the actual purported crime of farm burning. Instead, he was asked why he did not want to give land to the LPS, with some officers threatening him to surrender his land. In the end, he was harassed for five days in various police stations and charged with inciting farmers against land pooling before being released (S. Chowdary 2016, personal communication, 11 December). His parents were

also harassed while he was detained. The interview was abruptly cut short by his very nervous and agitated parents who did not want him speaking to anymore ‘outsiders.’<sup>80</sup>

In this manner, Sesha Giri Rao, a lawyer and anti-pooling activist in Vijayawada, stated that up to 3,000 farmers, particularly youth in riverbank villages, were arrested, interrogated and sometimes beaten in the aftermath of the burnings (personal communication, 08 December 2016). The coordinated nature of the burnings, subsequent arrests and deployment of police—all within days of the passing of the APCRDA Act and the publication of the land pooling rules—indicate that these incidences were likely politically planned to incite fear.

#### **6.4 Concluding remarks: Questioning the meaning of ‘voluntary’ consent**

Taken together, the manner in which the vision of a “people’s capital” was ‘sold’ to local farmers raises questions around the extent to which land pooling—the primary vehicle by which land was taken for the capital—was voluntary. Most people seemed unaware of the myriad implications of giving up their lands and lacked clarity when it came to a number of technical issues—ranging from development charges, to the types of facilities that would be provided on returnable plots and layouts. Many were also pressured into giving land through the creation of a false sense of urgency on the one hand and the wild speculation on the other. Ramachandraiah (2016) calls the use of such measures a “regime of co-optation,” which was in turn facilitated by manipulating key pressure points in the population, including caste allegiances, competition and jealousy between different categories of land owners, and the concerns of absentee landowners, who looked for an opportunity to make quick money in the speculative environment created by the LPS.

Elsewhere, grievances from landowners regarding the use of the Central government’s land acquisition process (LARR) were also systematically ignored—from the flippant nature of consultations, the contentious classification of lands, and scant compliance with court proceedings to the quality of the SIAs that were conducted, amongst a myriad of other issues.

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<sup>80</sup> This person was so rattled by his experience that he called me months later while I was driving to an interview to tell me that he received a call from a government source who asked him about a ‘female researcher’ in the field. He warned me to be careful as the authorities were suspicious of my presence and of my research.

These issues resulted in a constant, cumulative contestation process between landowners and representatives of the government. Every time an issue was raised, it generated protests during public meetings, leading to promises of future meetings and sometimes further studies. In some cases, local CRDA officials announced important public meetings—such as those prescribed by the LARR Act, like the SIA consultations—late, during the middle of the day when most people (who had not already forfeited their lands) were in the fields, or not at all. Some commentators stated that this was a concerted effort to ensure that fewer members of the public attended them, therefore quelling protest. Taken together, evidence suggests that authorities placed a steady, concerted and often threatening pressure on some landowners to give up their lands to the LPS, regardless of whether this would benefit them or not. These issues bring into question the very nature of what is considered negotiation, consent and compliance within the developing capital region. Moreover, these events amounted to a sort of dispossession that occurred over time—first through negotiation and discussions with local landowners, then more clandestinely through lack of information imparted about the rules (and later, the changing of rules), the use of out-dated official documents, and concerted efforts to arrange meetings when few could attend them, amongst other tactics. It can be safely be argued, therefore, that while compliance was achieved, this was not necessarily through obtaining enduring natural consent of the people.



## 7 CAPITAL(IST) ASPIRATIONS FOR ASSIGNED LANDS: CREATING A CAMPAIGN OF MISINFORMATION AND FEAR TO GENERATE CLANDESTINE LAND TRANSFERS AND REVERSE HISTORICAL WELFARE GAINS

This chapter is concerned with the relation between the government and assigned land cultivators, the vast majority of whom in the capital region are *Dalit*. There is an estimated 6,000 acres of assigned lands in the capital region. Of this, a reported 2,271 acres is assigned *lanka* land. While assigned lands were found in each of the populated villages, *lanka bhoomulu*—or *lanka* lands—were perhaps the most lucrative because of their location on the riverfront or on islands within the Krishna River. They were particularly important in the urbanizing environment of the Amaravati capital region, as the CRDA itself stated: the “River Krishna waterfront is one of the key assets for the Amaravati capital city” (CRDA, 2014: 51).

The concept plan for Amaravati includes three important axes,<sup>81</sup> one of which is termed the ‘waterfront axis’ located “along the river front lying between the civic and recreational axis” (*Ibid*, 2014: 46). A ‘sports city’ (one of nine themed development cities within the capital area) is planned along the north-western riverfront, with “waterfront attraction accommodation large stadiums, arena and event venues for international scale sports events” (*Ibid.*, 2014: 49). Finally, ‘finance city’ or the city’s central business district (CBD), touted to become the “economic core within the iconic waterfront” and ‘tourism city’, “planned in proximity to the historic Undavalli caves along the river Krishna waterfront” are all expected to have access to prime waterfront land (*Ibid.*, 2014: 49). The government has further proclaimed its intention to build a waterfront marina “boasting of luxury retail, entertainment and dining along with open spaces,” in addition to water sports sites and a dedicated adventure sports area (Amaravati Development Corporation and APCRDA, 2017). The vision for a future tourism city is premised on “creating an iconic water based leisure destination” (*Ibid.*). The benchmark cities used to compare Amaravati’s future riverfront development included London, Hong Kong, Bangkok and Singapore—all cities on or near the waterfront.

So, while city developers conjured glamorous visions of a greenfield city and draw plans for large-scale rural-urban transformation inside of two decades, the fate of assigned landowners

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<sup>81</sup> The three purported axes are: the civic axis, the recreation axis and the waterfront axis.

hung in the balance. In fact, at the time of research, authorities in Andhra Pradesh had already begun the process of acquiring much of the land that previous governments had assigned to landless poor people, most of whom were from the SC or OBC communities. This reality was made starker as more and more people claimed that the government had even offered these lands to real estate developers in the pursuit of developing a ‘world class’ city. It had done so through a slow, but deliberate process Ramachandraiah and Srinivasan refer to as a “social justice project in reverse gear” (2011: 62).

In order to assess how this occurred and the manner in which the authorities sought to achieve compliance to the LPS amongst assigned land cultivators, it is necessary to first review the existing laws pertaining to assigned lands and how they have worked in practice. Thereafter, I will review the status of one particular category of assigned lands, known as *lanka bhoomulu*, in each of the riverfront villages of Amaravati. To do so, I will provide a detailed snapshot of how much assigned *lanka* land is in each of the river front villages, who has control over it and how it was used prior to land pooling. I will further attempt to assess how local residents have maintained control—or not, as the case may be—of these lands. The chapter will then end with an analysis of how the authorities have wielded a concerted strategy to acquire these lands, regardless of whether they achieve consent or compliance from local residents.

### 7.1 A brief primer on assigned lands in Andhra Pradesh

The distribution of assigned lands is governed by administrative orders—or board standing orders (BSOs)—that are periodically issued in Andhra Pradesh. BSO 15 governs the assignment policy in Andhra, as well as the orders issued in G.O. Ms. No. 1407 of the Revenue Department passed in 1958. There are specific criteria for assignment of various categories of land in the state. The different categories of land include:

- a) Unreserved assessed and unassessed land—which are *prima facie* available for assignment;
- b) *Poramboke*<sup>82</sup> and reserved land—these tend to be *prima facie* not available for assignment, but can be assigned after duly following prescribed procedures;

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<sup>82</sup> *Poramboke* refer to government vacant lands or lands that do not fall under any revenue records.

- c) Earmarked reserved land—these lands are specifically prohibited from assignment and entered in the prohibition register. It includes the following categories of land:
- *Poramboke* (Tank beds, foreshore of tank beds, cattle stand, burial grounds, grazing grounds, lands reserved for depressed classes or for any public purpose) and watercourse *porambokes*, which includes land on the margins of channels, channels themselves, streams, etc.
  - Lands in the vicinity of reserved forests; lands containing topes or valuable trees; lands within cantonment limits; lands reserved U/S 26 of Forest Act; lands within port limits; lands in the vicinity of railway stations, aerodromes or landing grounds; lands containing minerals, quarries etc.; lands within the flood banks of rivers *padugais*.<sup>83</sup>
  - Lands situated at district and mandal headquarters, municipal towns and major panchayats, except for the purpose of house sites and other needs of weaker sections of society including Harijans, Girijans, BCs and EBCs.

Only several categories of people are eligible to receive assigned lands. They include:

- a) Landless poor persons directly engaged in cultivation including, ex-toddy tappers, backward communities and weavers;<sup>84</sup>
- b) Ex-servicemen or serving soldiers (*jawans*) who were discharged on compassionate grounds after five years of service;<sup>85</sup>
- c) Serving soldiers;
- d) Political sufferers from the Indian freedom struggle;<sup>86</sup> and
- e) Cooperative societies consisting of landless poor persons.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *Padugai* is a tamil term that refers to land on the lower-level bank breadth of a river between the edge of the sandy stream bed and the high flood-level bank.

<sup>84</sup> G.O. No. 1142, Revenue Department, dated 18th June 1954.

<sup>85</sup> G.O. No. 1090, rev. dated 13 July 1964. In addition, G.O. Ms. No. 743 of the government of Andhra Pradesh, Revenue (B) Department (dated 30 April 1963) provided for the assignment of lands up to an extent of 2.5 acres of wet, or 5 acres of dry lands to ex-servicemen. The G.O. also contains a condition that the assigned lands shall not be sold or otherwise alienated for a period of ten years. Writ petitions (WPs) Nos. 33218, 33442 and 35225 of 2012 also refer to assignment of lands to ex-servicemen.

<sup>86</sup> G.O. No. 3102, Revenue, dated 23 December 1947. Additionally, clause (iv) of para (3) of Board Standing Order (BSO) 15 defines 'political sufferers' as persons who have gone to jail for a period of six months or more as a result of taking part in several specified movements of the Indian Independence effort. These include (but are not limited to) Salt Satyagraha of 1930 and the Quit Movement of 1942.

<sup>87</sup> G.O.Ms. No. 1407, Revenue dated 25 July 1978. See also Board Standing Order (BSO) No. 15(11).

While ex-service persons, freedom fighters, political sufferers, and even families affected due to terrorist violence<sup>88</sup> were eligible to receive assigned lands starting from the colonial period,<sup>89</sup> G.O. No. 1142 introduced in 1954, stipulated more comprehensive assignment rules, specifying that:

lands at the disposal of Government should be assigned only to landless poor persons who directly engage themselves in cultivation, including ex-toddy tapers, backward communities and weavers.<sup>90</sup>

A landless poor person in this case is defined as someone who owns an extent of land that is no more than two and half acres of wet land or five acres of dry land, has no other means of livelihood and an annual income not exceeding Rs. 11,000. All of the above categories of people can be assigned a maximum of 2.5 acres of wet land or five acres of dry land. In the case of landless poor people, the total extent under their possession *after* assignment cannot exceed 2.5 acres of wetland and 5 acres of dry land. However, this limitation does not apply for political sufferers and ex-service men.

The newer and more comprehensive rules from 1954 and from the Transfer of Assigned Lands Act (POT) Act of 1977, also cemented a hierarchy of rights amongst different categories of assigned land recipients. For example, whilst there are no prohibitory rules for lands assigned prior to the issuance of G.O. Ms. 1142 in 1954, rules prohibiting the transfer and alienation of lands were put in place for lands assigned after 1954. G.O. Ms. 743 from 1963 also specifies that while assigned lands shall not be sold or otherwise alienated, this prohibition is only valid for ten years for ex-servicemen in possession of these lands.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, a High Court recommendation prescribes that lands assigned prior to 1954 be excluded from prohibited list 22A (Subba Rao,

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<sup>88</sup> This is only by special order.

<sup>89</sup> Resettlement of lands were done during 1900-1920 (R.S.R) Resurvey Settlement Registers were prepared (Based on this 'A' registers were prepared). Some of these lands were reserved to military service people and Depressed Class (D.C) people as per the Settlement Register, for assignment (see 'A' registers).

<sup>90</sup> G.O. No. 1142, Revenue Department, dated 18 June 1954.

<sup>91</sup> This is further underlined by GO Ms. No. 1117 (11 November 1993), which stipulates that ex-servicemen are free to sell assigned lands after ten years. Freedom fighters are also free to sell their assigned lands and house sites after a period of 10 years, as prescribed by GO Ms. No. 1045 (15 December 2004).

2017). Therefore, only lands assigned to those identified as landless and poor are never to be sold, only inherited, limiting in the process, the rights of latter categories of assignees (i.e. landless and poor) in perpetuity.

In an effort to ensure that assigned lands do not leave the possession of poor, landless persons, a clause stipulating any alienated assigned lands will be resumed by the government has also been incorporated in every assignment. Despite the existence of this clause, substantial portions of lands assigned to landless poor persons have been alienated for a variety of reasons (to be discussed later in this chapter) and are in the possession of wealthier and more dominant segments of society. Moreover, under the existing rules, there are no consequences for those who purchase such lands from landless, poor persons. The case studies that follow will show that these lands are particularly susceptible to *benami* transactions. In addition, the definitions of the different categories of ‘assessed,’ ‘unassessed’ and reserved lands are not airtight: whilst the state government may deem a parcel of land as being *poramboke* or reserved (and hence not available for assignment), in reality, another branch of government may implicitly have recognized a particular person’s or community’s right to cultivate the lands through denominating funds for the development of that land.

An additional issue is that much of the land that has been assigned does not reach the intended beneficiary in the first place. It is estimated for instance that as much as 30 percent of the reported beneficiaries in Andhra Pradesh do not have either legal or physical possession of their allocated land (Hanstad, 2005). This is due to a variety of reasons, which include: (a) the assignment of land is indicated on paper only, with physical possession withheld; (2) the beneficiaries have been evicted from their lands; and (3) in numerous cases, the survey subdivision work was not completed, thus denying beneficiaries their individual parcels of land. Moreover, standing orders are also not statutory instruments and do not have any enforcement power.<sup>92</sup> Thus, it may be argued that the conditions of the assignment, together with inadequate deterrents for the sale or alienation of this land, has prevented the full achievement of the social goal of conferring greater access to land to marginalized communities.

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<sup>92</sup> One exception is orders issued by virtue of statutory powers of the Board.

## 7.2 The status of assigned *lanka* lands (*lanka bhoomulu*) in Amaravati

Assigned *lanka* lands exist primarily next to the riverfront or on islands on the Krishna River.<sup>93</sup> This land tends to be in the possession (officially) of *Dalit* cultivators. The assigned plots were initially considered sub-par as their proximity to the river often meant that they became water logged periodically as the river swelled during monsoon season. Agricultural productivity loss can also occur as a result of soil and crop damage from the flooding. Some residents pointed out that large amounts of their riverfront land became denuded over time as the flowing river has redistributed soil from fields and ditch banks further down stream or transferred tons of sediment back into the river.<sup>94</sup> While the high water tables of the lands near water have translated into more fertile land, this land is also more vulnerable to hydrological changes caused by changing river patterns and flows or even climate change.

Yet, many of the assignees of these lands—particularly those whose land is contiguous to the village in which they live—expressed how important the land has been in ensuring a more secure livelihood for them. They were quick to point out that lands were assigned to them in different tranches as far back as the 1920s. Moreover, some people received individual *patta* land deeds. For those who did not, they joined or formed societies, and each society collectively received one *patta*.

According to one resident:

when assigned (*lanka*) lands were given to communities in the region, several societies were formed comprising of usually 100 to 300 members. The society's function was to apply for 'group benefits' –i.e. for the building of borewells, procuring plans for cultivation through the SC corporation, etc. (M. Krishna 2016, personal communication, Uddandarayunipalem, 18 December).

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<sup>93</sup> Note that while there are assigned lands throughout the capital region, I focus on assigned *lanka* (riverfront or island) lands in this dissertation, due to the strategic location of this land and the impact it has had on the livelihoods of several *Dalit* communities is significant.

<sup>94</sup> The Krishna River is known to create intense land corrosion throughout the monsoon, between June and August.

Thus about 46-48 *lanka bhoomulu* societies formed from the geographical stretch of Vaikuntapuram to Venkatapalam. Villages with societies in the Amaravati region include: Borupalem, Dondepadu, Lingayapalem, Mandadam, Rayapudi, Uddandarayunipalem, Undavalli, Thaleypalem and Venkatapalem. In addition, two that do not border the Krishna River also have societies overseeing assigned lands: Thullur, which has 1,280 acres of a category of land known as *cheruvu* (or pond) lands and Nelapadu (1,328 acres). In order to understand the status of assigned lands in the capital city region, it is necessary to closely examine the narratives of people in each of the riverfront villages with these lands.

### 7.2.1 Borupalem

The *lanka* lands of Borupalem village are located on two islands in the Krishna River—*Pedha Lanka* and *Chinna (or Purnaya) Lanka*. These islands also contain *lanka* lands that were assigned to some *Dalit* residents in Rayapudi.<sup>95</sup> They are located a fair distance away from the village (at least one hour away by car). Ninety families from Borupalem—mostly from the SC Malla community—have assigned *lanka* lands. While people began cultivating the land in 1954, they received their *DK pattas* for 55 cents of land per family in two tranches in 1964 and 1974. The exact assignment of land in Borupalem was as follows: 15 cents in Narayana Vuota (a region within *Pedha Lanka*), 25 cents from *Nadimi Lanka* (located in the middle of the river and technically also part of Rayapudi) and 15 cents from *Madigadhiba* located to the North of *Nadimi Lanka* and South of *Pedha Lanka* in the middle of the Krishna River.

Most, if not all the residents in the village no longer have their documents. By the time the announcement for the capital was made, only 20 families had retained their *DK pattas*, and they all decided to ‘sell’ their lands to interested parties. Most sold their land for extremely low prices: approximately Rs. 18 *lakh* per acre (thereby only receiving about Rs. 9 *lakh* as they had rights to only 55 cents of land). According to various people, they decided to sell because they did not trust the government to provide them with appropriate compensation or to deliver on promises (D. Maleshwara Rao 2017, personal communication, 3 April).

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<sup>95</sup> Borupalem *lanka* owners have a historical dispute with Rayapudi *lanka* owners.

Several people I interviewed within the *Dalit* community in Borupalem also claimed to have ‘bought’ additional *lanka* lands from farmers in Rayapudi. Thus, one gentleman had accumulated five acres of land on the islands through purchasing three acres from a farmer in Rayapudi (and acquiring passbooks for the land in the transaction), and a further two plots (amounting to one acre) from a farmer in Borupalem, as well as inheriting a further two plots of land from both his father and grandfather (D. Maleshwara Rao 2017, personal communication, 3 April). He indicated his frustration with government surveyors and the village revenue officer (VRO), who measured his lands. They claimed that one of the acres he bought (out of the four) was only 14 cents. He disagreed with this and asked for a resurvey. The matter is still pending. In fact, after the survey was completed, the records indicated that nearly everyone had less land than was initially assigned. Currently, while 90 families were assigned 49.5 acres, the survey only shows 24 acres. The frustration around the surveys has also led to multiple land disputes. Some of these involve cultivators in Rayapudi as residents from both villages have attempted to bribe surveyors and the VRO to have their names included in the survey or for the survey to show a greater expanse of land under their names.

### **7.2.2 Dondapadu**

There are 37 assignees from both the SC Malla and SC Madiga communities in Dondapadu. The majority—or 30 original assignee families—is SC Malla, whilst the remaining seven families are from the Madiga community. However, there is a discrepancy in how much land is considered assigned in Dondapadu. The Guntur Revenue Records show both 40 acres and 33 acres. The residents of the village claim to collectively have 40 acres, which is slightly over one acre per family. Of that land, 25 acres are being cultivated with crops of maize, turmeric and banana, whilst there is no cultivation in the remaining land. The *lanka* land is located on a peninsula, with one side connected to Borupalem Island. They began cultivating these lands in 1940, when *relu* grass used for the thatched roofs of traditional housing, was first planted.

Meanwhile, the Society, now called the Christian Society, was formed in 1940 with 28 founding members. Currently, the Society has 37 members. Most of these members never received DK *pattas*, but they claim to have a letter from the colonial government that proves their right to cultivate the land. In 1979, six members received DK *pattas* for six acres of land (one acre each).



Although it is not clear why only six Society members received their official documents, in 1986, the entire Society received borewells, oil engines and seeds from the SC Corporation. They also paid taxes to the PWD department until 2005. They stopped paying after the Society President was replaced. Beyond the six DK *pattas*, they have no other official document and do not have minutes of their Society meetings. In 2003, the Society was further expanded from 28 members to 37. However, in 2009, they began to lease out the land for a five-year period to a farmer from Borupalem who now stays on the *lanka*. Since then, a second tenant has begun leasing the land and also lives on the island.

After the announcement of the LPS, the CRDA requested a list of Society members, as well as a list of those who were willing to provide land for the LPS. As a Society, everyone age was initially willing to give their lands to the government. They also signed individual consent forms. However, after satellite measures were conducted by the CRDA in late 2016, they were told each person would be allocated only 23 cents. In response, the assignees went to protest at the nearest CRDA office, located in Rayapudi. The officer in response asked them to apply for a re-survey, which they have done. The issue is still pending as another survey has not been conducted at the time I conducted my interviews.

### **7.2.3 Lingayapalem**

In Lingayapalem, there has historically been a mix of SC Malla and SC Madiga people cultivating assigned lands. One *Dalit* colony has a total of 150 Malla families, whereas a second colony contains 100 Madiga families. They have been settled in the village for over 100 years and began paying land tax during colonial times. One hundred members initially received DK *pattas* in 1979 for a total of 200 acres. Most of those who hold *lanka* lands are Mallas, with only 30 Madiga members cultivating these lands. However, according to one resident, the quality of the land they received varied greatly with some of it being good, productive land and others being unsuitable for cultivation. Therefore, they returned the documents they received in 1980 to the government with the demand that everyone get good quality land, whilst they continued to cultivate as they had done since colonial times (P. Nageshwar Rao 2017, personal communication, 3 April).

In 1986, under the NTR government, the SC Corporation provided bore wells and oil engines (for power) to the cultivators. They received about 90 motors in two phases. Decades later in 2006, the executive director of the SC Corporation came to Lingayapalem and recommended that they plant flowers and orange plants on their lands. The SC Corporation provided orange trees (about 60 trees per acre) and fertilizer. Objections were raised by the then-*Sarpanch*<sup>96</sup> due to what is perceived (by the *Dalits* of the village) as caste-based prejudice. However, plants and seeds were provided despite these objections. In 2007, Congress government Minister, Dokka Manikya Vara Prasad, appointed a person to survey the land to begin the process of granting DK *pattas*. Again, the then-*Sarpanch* objected to this. In the end, DK *pattas* were not provided in Lingayapalem. One reason given for this is that crops and borewells were destroyed during a flood and the *Sarpanch* at the time and others argued for the government not to provide DK *pattas*, only compensation.

Complicating matters more is that the land revenue records for Lingayapalem indicate that the entire village has a total of 1,200 acres of both assigned and regular *patta* lands. In reality, however, there are 1,900 acres in Lingayapalem, meaning there are no records to account for 700 acres of land, all of which is located directly on the riverfront. These 700 acres are considered sandy wastelands that have become uncultivable since severe inundation occurred in 2005 as a result of widespread flooding. Even so, *Dalit* farmers have encroached on at least some of this land and cleared it for cultivation. When government surveyors arrived to assess the land, they noted that 155 acres on one side of a small road was assigned as they were previously included in a government 'enjoyment list.' However, 200 acres, which have also been cultivated on the other side of the road, was not taken into account. In addition to this, the aforementioned 700 acres were also ignored. Government officials indicated that they would be back later to do a survey on those lands.

Thus, the lands cultivated by *Dalits* in Lingayapalem have been declared to be "objectionable government land"—also known as *Sivoijamadar* lands. Under this category, they would be eligible for no more than 500 square yards of residential and 100 square yards of commercial land for every acre they give to land pooling. This is in spite of the fact that they are on an

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<sup>96</sup> Interestingly, the *Sarpanch* of the village is a first cousin of Anumolu Gandhi, one of the loudest and most vociferous critic of LPS in the capital region.

‘enjoyment list’ and the SC Corporation borewell list, they paid land taxes and have receipts that date back to the colonial era and have their old DK *pattas*. Consequently, at the time of the interview, local residents were gathering their documents in order to launch a case.

#### **7.2.4 Malkapuram**

Starting in 1921, *Dalit* farmers from Malkapuram—most of whom are Madigas—began cultivating 112 acres of river belt land in Uddandarayunipalem. They formed a society called *Pathe Uddandarayunipalem*, which had approximately 60 members at the time of constitution. However, by the 1960s, access to the land by the SC Madigas had weakened. It began when a moneylender, R. Krishnaiah, who was a descendent of one of the original cultivators, began to amass up to 50 acres of land through ‘confiscating’ them from cultivators who could not repay their loans. He then entered an agreement with A. Nagaiah—a Kamma farmer and former *Sarpanch* of Mandadam—wherein he leased the land out to him for the cultivation of sugarcane. In time, more and more people leased their lands to the Kamma landlord. Thus, he cultivated almost the entire expanse of the *lanka* lands for about five years. Krishnaiah came to eventually dislike this monopoly, and went to Hyderabad to get a stay from the High Court, claiming Nagaiah was cultivating his land without permission. In retaliation, Nagaiah cultivated the lands and burned down the crops thereafter. The situation prompted the government to provide DK *pattas* to 107 members in 1979, each of whom had the right to cultivate 87 cents on the riverfront.

In the following years, nearly all the land was ‘sold’ slowly parcel-by-parcel to the SC Malla farmers from Uddandarayunipalem. This was almost entirely brokered by Ravuri Krishnaiah and a third Society member. Some people now claim that they even sold some peoples’ lands without their knowledge by taking signatures on plain papers or forging documents. One reason for the sales was the economic hardship of the Madiga community in Malkapuram. Another was the fact that farmers in Uddandarayunipalem were stealing their crops (as they lived closer to the lands than the farmers in Malkapuram). Thus, many in Malkapuram decided it would be better to sell of the lands.

By the time the LPS was announced, only 10 people in Malkapuram had their original lands along with their DK *pattas*. These people later sold their lands for high sums of money. The announcement of the LPS has also generated visits from the *Dalit* buyers from Uddandarayunipalem: Many have come asking for signatures on land documents from the original assignees, who have often refused to do so, unless they receive a fee. They have also consulted with a lawyer—who is incidentally the granddaughter of a Kamma man from Malkapuram—to assess whether they have a legal right over the lands they themselves had initially vacated. The preliminary feedback has been negative: The MRO of the village (who is also alleged to have illegally bought *lanka* lands since the announcement of the capital region) has indicated that there is likely not legal ground for gaining back the lands due to the amount of time that has passed since they were given away, even if this occurred without the consent of the original assignees. Worryingly, during the time of the interview, it was discovered that the farmers had also given their original documents (without a copy) to the lawyer.

#### **7.2.5 Mandadam**

Mandadam is one of the wealthier villages in the Amaravati notified area and falls completely within the core capital region. Its residents also have one of the longest histories of cultivating assigned lands and have a *registered* society that was originally shared with Thalheypalem. They claim to have received *lanka* lands as far back as 1923 under the British colonial regime. In an interview with a group of 10 assigned farmers, including the society president, most expressed positive feelings about land pooling. They stated that LPS has allowed marginal farmers to live beyond their dreams (through sales) and landless people to get higher paying jobs in other vocations such as construction, rod bending, etc.

In recounting their history, the assigned landowners of Mandadam described how 40 SC members from Mandadam and Thalheypalem—the majority of who are Mallas—sought to gain permission from the British government to cultivate the *lanka* lands and eventually received it. They began cultivating *relu* grass from the colonial period. By 1950 the residents of Thalheypalem wanted their own society. The solution was to let them keep one-third of all output to distribute amongst themselves and to keep two thirds of output for Mandadam. Meanwhile, agreement was also reached between Mallas and Madigas to equally share the

output of Mandadam. During the time of the construction of the Prakasam Barrage (1955-1969), Society membership was expanded to 69 members.

In 1965, the Collector visited the *lankas* and declared these lands suitable for cultivation and *DK pattas* were eventually given. Thus, 69 members received *DK pattas* in 1979. They were assigned 1.79 acres each, amounting to a total of 123.51 acres. The land was divided between margin dhiba (on the waterfront), Thurp Dhiba and Munsif Dhiba. Thus all 69 members got 77 cents on Margin Dhiba, 26 members got 1.2 acres on Thurp Dhiba and 42 members got 1.2 acres on Munsif Dhiba. The assignees began to gradually switch over to proper cultivation: They planted sugar cane, watermelon, cucumbers, carrots and tomatoes. The SC Corporation in the late 1980s provided electricity lines, borewells, motors and other implements. Thereafter, they also provided seed for groundnuts, guava and a few other crops. In time, they switched to banana cultivation. To access their lands, fishermen used to lease them boats on an annual basis (though for lands on the margin or waterfront, they could just walk). In addition, they could also walk over to Munsif Dhiba in the past, as that portion of the river had no water prior to the construction of the nearby thermal plant, after which they had to use boats.

After receiving individual *pattas*, assigned landowners in Mandadam cultivated their own lands without sharing profits. However, the Society was continued because there was extra 'wastelands' on the *dhibas* (about 600 acres) that they hoped to take over. In fact, because there was an extra 600 acres in the *dhibas*, other people (of different castes) were also eyeing the land. Thus, when Rajashekar Reddy's YSR-CP government came into power in 2004, the Society went to the AP High Court and stated that since they had historically been caretakers of this land, they should have hereditary right over it. They have been paying partial taxes—for 40 of the 400 acres they claim—from 1923 to 2013, to the PWD irrigation department, despite not necessarily cultivating this extra land. They managed to get a stay of the government's plan to distribute these lands. They also expanded membership of their society to 400. After the announcement of LPS, it was further expanded to 714 members, despite assignees only having 69 *DK pattas*. These members together cultivated all the land on the *dhiba*.

With the announcement of the new capital region, the 718 members of the Society gave the entire land they were cultivating (i.e. 123 acres for which 69 members had *DK pattas* and an

additional 400 acres they had encroached upon) to the LPS. They are asking for compensation on all the lands. Thus far, the 69 people with *DK pattas* have received compensation for their lands, including the annual sum of Rs. 50,000. The status of the remaining land is still pending.

#### **7.2.6 Rayapudi**

Rayapudi, a village located in the Thullur mandal, has one of the largest accumulations of *lanka* lands, although the entirety of this land is located some distance away from the village on two (connected) islands in the Krishna River, called *Pedha* (big) *Lanka* and *Chinna* (small) or *Purnaya Lanka*. The President of one of the cooperative societies of the village mentioned that the village has 128.7 acres of *lanka* land divided into 143 plots of 90 cents each. Most of the cultivators of these lands are from the SC Malla community. Cultivation of these lands began in 1922 although residents received *DK pattas* only in 1972. At this time, land was transferred directly to the cultivators and 143 people received *DK pattas*.

People on the *Pedha Lanka* have individual *pattas*, with each family initially given 68 cents of land. But most of this land was inundated in a cyclone in 1977. After this occurred, extra land was found elsewhere due to the changing course of the river. When the land was surveyed and recalculated in 1986, people were found to have only been left with 35 cents of land and were compensated with a further 55 cents on the *Chinna Lanka*. These two separate plots on different islands together account for 90 cents in total. There are 140 people now physically living in the relatively remote *Pedha* and *Chinna Lankas*, although a society member told me that 800 families in total are dependent on the *lanka* lands in Rayapudi. Those with assigned lands have formed 20 groups of seven to eight families each.

The assignees have leased out the land because of the exorbitant cost of travel to the island. Taking a ferry to the island costs Rs. 100 per day. There are also practical problems associated with not living near the land. They include the inability to ensure the security of crops, the cost of transporting harvests, etc. Assignees get approximately Rs. 6,000 a year for leasing the land. This is in contrast to the Rs. 15,000 a year they would get from cultivating. But the difference would be accounted for by the travel and transport costs of cultivating in a remote location. In addition, about 50 percent of the original assignees have informally 'sold' their lands, some to

other *Dalits* (especially if these sales occurred before the announcement of the LPS) and most recently to unnamed 'outsiders' represented by real estate brokers, who are overwhelmingly not from the SC caste.

However, the main topic that came up in Rayapudi with respect to the assigned lands was the government survey that was being conducted to measure the extent of land in the *Pedha* and *Chinna Lankas*. In April 2016, the government conducted its first survey of the *lanka* lands in Rayapudi. They did this without a field measurement book (FMB),<sup>97</sup> resulting in the finding that each assignee only had 70-73 cents each. All the *lanka* landowners objected to this, as there was no consultation. They then went to the Rayapudi CRDA office and stated they would not give these lands to the LPS with these measurements. Thus, the government came back to take measurements for the second time in June 2016. This time, they carried out their work with farmers present, but the surveyors did not measure or count a six metre wide internal road. In addition, while the surveyors accepted that the plots of land in the *Pedha Lanka* was as is (35 cents), they claimed the size of the plots in *Chinna Lanka* was smaller than what had been assigned (33 to 37 cents) and that even this was 'encroached.' This was despite the fact that the assignees had MRO stamped *DK patta* titles stating that they had received 55 cents in 1986/87.

At that point, the farmers went directly to the Joint Collector's office in Guntur to request another recalculation after having already approached the MRO to voice their grievance. The MRO claimed that the land in question was 'government land' and he could do nothing. The farmers told the Joint Collector that they were willing to give land for the LPS but they had to recount or recalibrate their findings in a third survey. The Joint Collector gave the order for a third survey, but at the time of my interview, no specific date had yet been set for this to occur.

However, the net effect of calling at least some of their lands encroached has been profound: farmers suspect that one possible reason for declaring it as such may be because the compensation mandated under G.O. 41 (see table 6) for this type of land is much less than for regular assigned lands (250 square miles returned for every acre of encroached land given, versus 900 to 1,000 square miles returned for every acre of *DK patta* lands given). This in turn caused many people to sell of their lands in fear that they would not get adequately

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<sup>97</sup> Alongside *adangal* records, the FMB provides data about land and ownership at the village level.

compensated if they held on to it. This amounts to a form of coercion. In addition, this time period also saw real estate brokers who would approach farmers and claim that the buyer would handle the titling issues. They would simply get the signatures from the assignees and pay money for it—and often at lower than market rates to account for the uncertainty of buying/selling assigned lands.

It is important to note that Rayapudi also has three cooperative societies: The Harijana Cooperative Joint Farming Society established in 1922, the Ambedkar Cooperative Society created in 1995 and the Lenin Cooperative Society, established shortly before the LPS was announced. Together, the three societies cover 712 acres in the Rayapudi revenue area, which goes beyond Rayapudi village to include the villages of Borepalem, Lingayapalem, Abburajpalem, Dondepadu, Vaikuntapuram, and additional villages in the Krishna district (i.e. Kirlospuram, Molapadu and Thumalapalem). Approximately 160 acres fall under the Ambedkar Cooperative Society, 200 under the Lenin Cooperative Society and 342 acres are represented by the Harijana Cooperative Joint Farming Society. In 1995, the Ambedkar Cooperative Society had 43 families. Now a further 125 have been added. The Lenin Cooperative Society started with 11 families and now has 100 families. Finally, the Harijana Cooperative Joint Farming Society has 278 families.

The societies pay for a lease from the public works department (PWD) for access to irrigation for the purpose of growing *relu* (tall) grass for cultivation. They control about 120 acres of land in the *Ibrahimpatnam dibba* (one of the island in the river) and a further 40 acres in the *Chinna/Purnaya lanka* or *dibba*. This land is technically under the control of the irrigation department. As an example, the Ambedkar Cooperative Society takes this land under lease for cultivation from the PWD for Rs. 16,000 per year (i.e. Rs. 100 an acre). This was the case from 1995 to 2013. In 2013, the society found 120 acres to be cultivable. They approached the Collector about taking over these lands. They only had to pay for the 40 remaining acres, which amounted to an additional Rs. 8000 to be paid annually. Their lease amount in turn was increased from Rs. 100 to Rs. 200 per acre. They now unofficially lease this land out to a third party for the cultivation of Eucalyptus trees. The Harijana Cooperative Farming Society also leases out 300 acres for Eucalyptus cultivation.



### 7.2.7 Uddandarayunipalem

Uddandarayunipalem is unique in that it is only one of three villages (Mandadam and Thalleypalem being the other two) that have *lanka* lands that are contiguous to the village itself (hence easily accessible). It has more expansive lands than the other villages: according to one person, 450 acres of assigned lands. At the same time (and perhaps because of greater access to cultivatable land), the *Dalits* in the village—who are largely Madigas—are more politically aware and active, whilst being economically more well off than their neighbours in other villages. One observer from neighbouring Thullur went so far as to claim, “the *Dalits* of Uddandarayunipalem may be more powerful than the Kmmas.” Some are wealthy enough to even rent land from Kamma farmers in other villages. Therefore, these farmers, in particular, began agitating for rights with the help of other activists (some of whom were wealthy, upper caste people living in nearby urban centres such as Vijayawada and Guntur).

All of the assigned land in Uddandarayunipalem is administered under a joint farming society, created in 1975. It had 125 families at that time, and membership has substantially grown since then. The government has surveyed their lands a total of four times since LPS was announced. In addition, residents claim to hold *DK pattas*, *patta* holders’ passbooks, title deeds and revenue records to their lands.

The key observation during interviews with assigned landholders in Uddandarayunipalem was their absolute revulsion of the uncertainty surrounding the fate of their lands, and in particular of the differentiated benefits offered to assigned lands under GO 41. They claimed that when LPS was announced, rumors immediately started circulating about how the government did not have a specific package related to their land and may seek to repossess it without compensation. Therefore, people began selling their lands for a low price—at about Rs. 12 to 15 *lakh* (1.2 to 1.5 million) an acre—far below the market rate for that region under the speculative environment generated by the capital announcement. However, people were also quick to point out that because of the political awareness of the residents in Uddandarayunipalem, as well as the proximity of their lands to the village, they sold far less than their neighbours in Rayapudi and Venkatapalem, who in any case had to travel far to reach their lands. But when sales did take place, buyers tended to only give 50 percent of the asking price or give money in small

installments, which did not allow the sellers to buy or invest elsewhere. Moreover, the prospective buyers were outsiders and not *Dalit*.

Many of the people I interviewed in this village claimed that they should be entitled to the highest compensation (in line with what was being offered to registered *patta* holders of wet lands) as their lands, according to one farmer, are “even more fertile than the most fertile land owned by a Kamma farmer” (P. Prashanth 2017, personal communication, 16 February). He further pointed out that *Dalit* farmers should get more compensation if the land acquisition law (LARRA) of 2013 was followed. However, during my interviews, I was struck by the fact that when I asked them how much they stood to receive from the government under the current scheme, they told me they were eligible to receive 500 square yards of residential land and 100 square yards of commercial land. One person in particular defined ‘*sivoijamadar*’ as “*lanka* lands that have been sold from SC to SC.” Both statements (related to expected compensation and the definition of *sivoijamadar*) struck me as odd for different reasons. The first because I wondered why they would not be eligible to receive 800 square yards of residential land and 200 square yards of commercial land, given that they claimed to possess *DK pattas*. The second because *sivoijamadar*, in colloquial terms, simply refers to occupied or encroached lands.

It was only months later when I was in an entirely different village (Malkapuram), which I describe above that a fuller picture emerged: much of the land ‘owned’ by *Dalit* farmers (largely from the SC Madiga community) in Uddandarayunipalem was bought from the original *Dalit* assignees in Malkapuram (who are also largely from the SC Madiga community). Thus, many of the names in official land records still reflect the original assignee names, even if the villagers in Uddandarayunipalem hold all other documents. This brought an additional dimension to my research into assigned lands as alienation occurred far before LPS was ever announced and some of it took place between different *Dalit* communities, not just between *Dalits* and dominant caste groups. This might also might explain the relative delay in protests around assigned lands as many people were unsure of their status and rights as they surmised land records may reflect the discrepancy. They may have been afraid that the government would react by resuming lands under the Transfer of Assigned Lands (POT) Act of 1977. My interviews in villages in which people still had their original records (i.e. see Mandadam above and Venkatapalem below) cemented these suspicions.

### 7.2.8 Undavalli

Undavalli amongst all the villages has the clearest example of how *lanka* lands can be alienated over time and conflicts between various heirs of the original assignees can lead to a weakened response to dispossession. Moreover, land grabbing can take place within and amongst the *Dalit* community, not just between dominant castes and weaker segments of society. I first approached Undavalli by making an appointment to speak to the sitting *Sarpanch* of the village, a *Dalit* woman from the Malla community. I had thought she might have interesting insights into the livelihoods of *Dalits* in the village since the advent of LPS. However, I found it curious that she, and her vocal husband, who were both members of the TDP, did not have many critical things to say about the LPS. He in particular felt strongly that the LPS was mostly good for the residents of the village, including landless labourers, whom he claimed had jobs in the nearby town of Vijayawada. He had even fewer things to say about assigned lands.

Thereafter, I spent days interviewing people about their livelihoods and daily cultivation routine in the *Dalit* colony located on the outskirts of the main Undavalli town centre. One day, several men came with records of the *DK pattas* that were assigned to the original members in the SC colony and the names of the people who had inherited these parcels in subsequent generations. They had mistakenly thought that I was associated with the Collector and wanted to claim what they perceived to be their more legitimate claim to the land. In time, an extraordinary story emerged about how these lands fell out of the hands of the original assignees, then was recovered, only to be further mired in controversy when in-fighting ensued between various family members of the original assignees over their rights over the land. They had split into factions, with one group in particular funded by a mysterious ‘benefactor’ – a non-*Dalit* wealthy individual—who stood to gain considerably if they wrested control of the lands. This faction also included members who were relatives of the *Sarpanch’s* husband, thereby implicating that family in the controversy around assigned lands.

The entire story pieced together from interviews and the examination of original documents as well as a series of legal petitions is as follows: Undavalli has a total of 39 acres and 11 cents of *lanka bhoomulu*, located on an island in the middle of the Krishna River. This was originally

assigned to 26 SC Malla families. All of the land was leased to one man, Dr. Rao, a Kamma doctor from Vijayawada in 1979. One by one, the assignees began to 'sell' their plots to him over time, relinquishing in the process, their original *DK pattas*. The doctor then attempted to re-register these lands (37 acres and 53 cents) under the names of five people, namely his children and other relatives. The 'purchasers' got the sale registered on 1 September 1992 at the Sub Registrar Office (SRO) in Mangalgi. However, seeing a discrepancy in the records, the *mandal* revenue officer (MRO) of Tadepalli district (of which Undavalli is a part), initiated action under the AP Assigned Lands (Prohibition of Transfer) Act, 1977. The officer then issued orders authorizing the village administrative office (VAO) in Undavalli to take possession of the land from the purchasers and to restore the land to the original assignees and/or their legal heirs.

However, at this point the 'purchasers'—that is, Dr. Rao and his family—filed a series of appeals asking for the suspension of the orders of the MRO of Tadepalli, as well as the orders of the RDO. Ultimately, the High Court ruled against them (even after several appeals) and over time, the land was re-allotted to the original assignees on 16 December 1997. The lands were handed over and the assignees' acknowledgement was received on 30 December 1997. However, the purchasers filed yet another writ petition (No. 3615/1998) in the Andhra Pradesh High Court under the daughter's name. At this point, both the Joint Collector of Guntur and the MRO of Tadepalli submitted statements. The Joint Collector asked for a 'fair counter' in the Andhra Pradesh High Court and the MRO reported (years later in 2003) that the original assignees were in possession of the land, but had also leased it out to cultivate *Sarvi* trees. The Andhra Pradesh High Court subsequently set aside the order of the RDO of Guntur from 1996 and the Joint Collector from 1997 and remanded the matter to the current RDO of Guntur, who was asked to hear the matter afresh. At the same time, there was a case against the then-Revenue Inspector (RI), Ms. M. Kumari, who was accused of wrongfully entering the name of the purchaser in the *adangal* records. She was subsequently demoted, although the names of the assignees were not re-entered into the *adangal*.

Years passed and the Amaravati region was declared the new capital of Andhra Pradesh after bifurcation in 2014. The original assignees and their legal heirs submitted an application in September 2015 to the *Tehsildar* of Tadepalli requesting that their names be entered in the *adangal* and for them to be reissued *pattadar* passbooks (PPBs). However, after a visit by the

*Tehsildar*, it was found that the assignees had been leasing their lands to a third party for the previous five years. Knowing this, the ‘purchasers’ also came forward and submitted an application on 28 November 2015, requesting to enter their names in the revenue records as they claimed to have purchased the land with registered documents. Astoundingly, they also claimed to have been cultivating it through their representative, suggesting collusion between the ‘purchasers’ and the people who leased the land from the original assignees for cultivation. This murky overlap between original assignees, leasers and would-be ‘purchasers’ indicates that various means were used to dispossess the assignees of their lands and because the assigned lands were located some distance away from the village, other interests were always poised to grab the land whenever possible. The purchasers have also fenced in the *lanka* lands with CCTV cameras installed around its perimeter.

However, this was not the only thread of the story that indicated a rush to claim land rights and dispossess the legal heirs from their land in a heightened climate of speculation. I conducted an extensive interview with the group of men who initially approached me with documents whilst I was interviewing people on the street. These five men claimed to be the legitimate heirs to the assigned lands in Undavalli. The leader of this group Mr. Kumar, was adamant that in the aftermath of the announcement of the LPS, a number of people, including the *Sarpanch* and her husband, as well as various village-level administrators such as the village revenue assistant (VRA) and the *mandal* revenue inspector (MRI), were in cahoots to grab land from the original assignees as part of a real estate syndicate (personal communication, 22 February 2017).

According to these men, the *Sarpanch* and her husband struck a deal with possible claimants to the land in order to derive profits from its sale. They claimed that the *Sarpanch*’s husband’s syndicate (who were all incidentally members of the TDP) picked and chose whom they spoke with and only included the names of those who supported them in their own *adangal* request. It was alleged that they promised to include the names of certain people in the *adangal* in return for 50 percent profits from the sale of the land or compensation from LPS. In this process, the actual range of legal heirs to the land was left out. It was alleged that they sometimes even doctored records, including getting written statements from people who were not in reality the legal heirs to the land. In all of the written statements, the same person—the *Sarpanch* herself—signed the documents as a witness.

The men claimed that the application to have the assignees' names (or their legal heirs) entered into the revenue records was entirely illegal and illegitimate. As an example, one of the men, Mr. M. Ravi Rao, who claimed to be the grandson of one of the original assignees related a story about how his brother, Mr. A. Rao (who was one of three siblings) betrayed him by including only his own name as the legal heir to his father's land and applied for only a single name to be included in the *adangal* (personal communication, 22 February 2017). In another example, Mr. K. Adam claimed that he and his two brothers were not in agreement with the *Sarpanch* and his syndicate. They declined the deal. Subsequently, their names were entirely scratched off the new list. Taken together, there were additional problems with the list submitted, including: 1) unrelated persons have been listed as heirs; 2) only one sibling of many has been acknowledged as the heir; c) the name of the assignee has been scratched off the new list; and d) distant relatives (i.e. nephews) were now shown to be heirs to the assigned lands.

In response to this, I asked for and got an interview with Mr. Rama Rao, who was related to the *Sarpanch's* husband. He was from the SC Malla community and was considered one of the main drivers of the application to have new *adangal* records reflect the names of the original assignees and their legal heirs. Consequently, he was implicated in the so-called real estate syndicate. He spoke to me at length about the ordeal with the *lanka* lands in Undavalli. According to his narrative, all 26 assignees gave general power of attorney (GPA) to Dr. Rao in 1985. Between 1985 and 1992, five of the original owners passed away. With his acquired GPA, Dr. Rao proceeded to re-registered these lands under various family members' names and began the long struggle to illegally gain rights over the land. But for his part, Mr. Rama Rao claimed that in the effort to retain the lands, they could only submit one name per assigned plot as part of the *adangal*. According to him, they held a meeting with the 26 members and asked them to nominate one member. The plan was to later draft a letter saying the person whose name is on the *adangal* would share land or proceeds from the land with other members of their family.

When I asked Mr. Rama Rao how he was funding the effort to collect all necessary documents, making booklets of the various legal proceedings and paying the administrative and legal costs of the case, he claimed there was an external anonymous 'donor' who had been quietly

providing funds for the campaign to wrest back control over the land. In his words, the donor has been “giving fruit directly to our mouths, so we can eat easily.” He further pays a ‘commission’ to Mr. Rama Rao and some of the people who work for him. He went on to vaguely state that it was reasonable for the ‘donor’ to expect “some profit” later on as part of this transaction. He claimed that the representatives of the 26 families were willing to give a portion of their land to this donor (personal communication, 23 February 2017). The narration of this story prompted me to ask an additional question: had the team who was applying to have names re-entered into the *adangal* considered directly negotiating with the ‘purchasers’ to avoid a court battle? To that, he responded that they tried to negotiate with the son of the original purchaser in 2016, but he demanded to keep 30 acres and offered to only ‘give back’ five acres to the original assignees. Therefore, they had no choice but to follow the route they had.

#### **7.2.9 Thalleypalem**

Thalleypalem is a largely wetland village adjacent to Mandadam and Venkatapalem. The villages of Thalleypalem and Mandadam have the same society (though different secretaries and presidents). Each society member in Thalleypalem has 1.02 acres of land (whilst each society member in Mandadam has 1.79 acres). In 1929, the SC community from Thalleypalem (both Malla and Madiga) advocated to get permission from the British government to cultivate *lanka* lands that were within Thalleypalem’s jurisdiction. Upon receiving this permission, they began cultivating fruits and vegetables (i.e. watermelon, cucumbers, curry leaves, amongst others) until they switched to *illu gaddi* (tall grasses) in the 1960s. They switched to grasses because it was more lucrative and required less effort. However, they eventually stopped growing the grasses as well as thorny trees began to grow in the same land and the demand for the grass decreased as a new housing scheme (NTR scheme) was introduced in the area.

The Society in Thalleypalem had 66 members from 1950 to 1979. Each member had 1.02 acres located in three different plots: 1) All 66 members had 42 cents on *Margin Dhiba* (located on the riverfront near Thalleypalem), 2) 33 people had 59 cents on *Munsif Dhiba* and 3) the remaining 33 people had 59 cents on *Thurup Lanka*. *Munsif Dhiba* and *Thurup Lanka* are islands in the Krishna River. While these islands can only be reached by boat now, there was once a land

bridge that connected the mainland to the island. In 1979, all 66 people got individual *DK pattas* and passbooks. Thereafter, they also started paying taxes (along with Society members in Mandadam) for 45 acres of additional land because they were also cultivating these lands on the islands. In 1995, the government gave them permission to cultivate these 200 acres. They have a letter attesting to this. However, they also claim to not have cultivated these lands.

The Society President claimed that when former Chief Minister Rajashekar Reddy came to power in 2004, he wanted to distribute the entire 200 acres to all SC people. But the Society objected: they wanted each society member to be granted five acres and only the leftovers to be distributed. The government rejected this and stopped distribution altogether. Since the announcement of LPS, they have expanded members to 168 as part of a bid to claim 600 acres of unaccounted (waste) lands. They have thus far encroached on 200 acres to benefit their 168 members. The remaining 400 acres is being encroached by Society members in Mandadam.

The President of the Society also has a personal story of alienating assigned lands, which he came to later regret. His father had 1.01 cents of land. He gave 42 cents to his older brother and 59 cents to him. He bought a further 77 cents of *lanka* land from someone in Mandadam in 1978. He sold his 59 cents after the announcement of LPS for just Rs. 3 *lakh* to a Kamma person. However, his sons objected to this, so they went to the CRDA office saying that the 'sold' land is assigned land inherited from their grandfather. However, the 'purchasers' objected to his contention and gave legal notice to the family demanding that the land be transferred and claiming the sellers no longer have rights to it. According to the Society President, the 'purchasers' also attempted to bribe the MRO to get records changed. They have now received notice from the MRO asking them to handover all records for land that is technically non-transferable.

#### **7.2.10 Ventakapalem**

Venkatapalem, a fairly wealthy wetland village located about a twenty-minute car ride from the nearest city of Vijayawada, has 96 families who received *DK pattas* for 96 acres of land in 1978. I spoke to several people in this village over two days, including the Society president. Assignees



have 46 acres in *Chinna lanka* and 50 acres located in *Pedha lanka*.<sup>98</sup> However, the 96 acres they received was degraded to 56 acres by 1990 due to erosion. Therefore, they paid taxes only for 56 acres for the past 25-30 years (and no taxes since LPS was announced). The assignees also formed a society in 1983. The purpose of the society is to: a) pay taxes on the acres they control (about Rs. 100 per year per acre) and b) facilitate cultivation and leasing of the lands for 'relu' grass. Thus for example, the cultivation of *relu* grass was auctioned within the group to the highest bidder. Then, some of the proceeds were distributed to all members of the Society (about 30,000 distributed to 96 members per year). In addition to the 96 acres they officially received, they also cultivate an additional 200 acres of 'wastelands,' which they cultivated unofficially since colonial times and prior to even receiving their *DK pattas*.

Strikingly, of the 96 original owners, 70 have sold their lands in Venkatapalem. However, there is an interesting dynamic in Venkatapalem: the prospective 'buyers' have been giving their land to the LPS *under the names of the original assignees*, with their consent. The reason is that original assignees get additional compensation of land according to the compensation scheme set out by the government under GO 41, which the new buyers benefit from. Thus, instead of getting 600 square yards in return for every acre of *Sivoijamadar* land given, they receive up to 1,000 square yards in return for every acre given to the LPS. In return, the original assignees receive the yearly compensation of Rs. 50,000 from the buyer (because the buyers are less interested in this).

Essentially, assigned landowners in Venkatapalem have very clear records (in addition to those from Mandadam) and have possession of their *DK pattas*. Therefore, they are in a stronger position vis-à-vis the LPS and are even able to negotiate a price or possible profit sharing mechanisms with prospective 'buyers.' In addition, they are also on a better footing with respect to negotiating with government: for instance, the day before I had arrived in Venkatapalem for my interviews, a meeting was held at the main CRDA office in Vijayawada, wherein it was promised that assignees with clear records who had given their lands for LPS would receive plots within the next two weeks.

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<sup>98</sup> Note that the *Pedha lanka* and *Chinna lanka* referred to by residents in Venkatapalem are islands that are entirely different from the *Pedha lanka* and *Chinna lanka* mentioned by residents in Rayapudi, although all islands are located in the Krishna River.

Overall, the people of Venkatapalem seem to be extremely happy with land pooling. They claim that prior to LPS, no one was really cultivating their assigned lands (due to its distance and lack of transportation facilities). Now the scenario has changed as the demand for their land has skyrocketed. People are delighted to sell for more money than they have ever before seen. Finally, it was intimated that because the authorities in Venkatapalem are friendly to the ruling party, they do indeed receive 'support' from local leaders when it comes to receiving favors from the government. For instance, assigned landowners who have given their lands for LPS in Venkatapalem receive an annual compensation of Rs. 50,000 much like owners of registered *patta* lands – and unlike many other assigned landowners from neighbouring villages who have given their lands for pooling.

### ***7.3 Analysis: Areas with assigned lanka lands are prime sites of capitalist aspiration and dispossession in Amaravati***

The narratives above demonstrate that dispossession and lack of access to land is not a new phenomenon amongst assignees in the villages that comprise Amaravati. The examples from Undavalli and to some extent, Lingayapalem and Rayapudi, show clearly that these lands have fallen out of the hands of the original assignees for a number of reasons, ranging from sales due to family exigencies to long-term leases to third parties who eventually encroach on and claim the land as their own (as was the case in Undavalli and to some extent, Malkapuram and Rayapudi). Moreover, land grabbing has also taken place within the *Dalit* community—the examples of Undavalli and Uddandarayunipalem/Malkapuram highlights this phenomenon. This sometimes occurs in cases where the assigned land is located in remote areas (i.e. on islands) and cultivating these lands is seen as close to impossible due to the exorbitant cost of reaching the location, ensuring the security of the crops or procuring constant access to water and electricity for cultivation. Moreover, prior to the announcement of the capital city in the area between Guntur and Vijayawada, the price of land in these areas (i.e. in the islands of the Krishna River) was at least ten times lower than what they ascended to after the announcement of land pooling. Hence, they were treated as less valuable. More recently after the advent of land pooling and the sudden increase in land prices, collusion by the government and those in the dominant castes, or even between local real estate syndicates and the government may

have helped to ensure the most lucrative *lanka* lands were given up for low rates by *Dalit* cultivators due to a sense of fear, intimidation and uncertainty.

Even prior to the LPS announcement, assigned lands did not always reach their intended recipients. Loopholes in the Andhra Pradesh Land Reforms (Ceiling on Agricultural Holdings) Act of 1973 and a lack of its enforcement, allowed many landowners to avoid giving up their land under the land ceiling laws by transferring it to the names of relatives and friend, or by granting land that was of poor quality or virtually uncultivable. Other landlords went so far as to fence out assignees from land they were meant to grant to landless poor people, even as the recipient's names were added to land records. For example, during an interview of a *Dalit* leader in Thullur, he described how his family had (technically) received ceiling land. But this was only on paper: the landowner claimed to have given away 18 acres of excess lands which were to be redistributed in 1992, but in reality, he was leasing this land out to someone else. When people took this issue to the collector, he claimed that the records showed that the lands were already handed over and being cultivated by *Dalits*. While the issue was resolved in 2004, they still had to fight for compensation when LPS was announced (Verlankaya 2017, personal communication, 1 February).

Indications that assigned *lanka* lands were being (illegally) bought and sold at rising rates were provided during my own interviews in various villages. For instance, during an interview with a farmer in *Pedha lanka* (where the *lanka* lands of assignees in Rayapudi and Borupalem are located), I was informed that 90 percent of people there had sold their lands. A farmer stated that where there used to be 300 acres of assigned land there, 250 acres had already been sold by the time I spoke to him. The various means by which these lands have fallen out of the hands of the many *Dalit* cultivators—largely through what can only be interpreted as a concerted government strategy of misinformation and intimidation—since the announcement of the capital are described in greater detail below.

### **7.3.1 Mass sales caused by misinformation, fear and uncertainty over land rights**

*“Because the lands were managed by the society, the government claimed it was their lands and wanted it back without compensation” – Thomas, Rayapudi, President of PSIV.*

Official records from 2016 indicate that 348 acres of assigned land has changed hands within the CRDA limits (Deccan Chronicle, 2016). There are indications that hundreds of additional acres of have been transferred after the CRDA started the land pooling exercise. Despite the fact that assigned land owners have their rights enshrined in the Prohibition of Transfer Act (1977), a lack of information led many to fear that they would lose their lands after the site of the capital city and the LPS was announced. It could even be argued, as Ramachandraiah (2016: 73) does, that ruling government politicians willfully propagated a campaign of misinformation and intimidation to dispossess farmers of their lands, including assigned land tillers. Much of the scare tactics involved the status of their land deeds. In the immediate aftermath of the announcement, it was unclear whether assigned landowners would get fair compensation. For instance, rumors started circulating that assigned landowners were '*sivoijamadar*' who were living on government lands, which would be taken back once the new city was developed.

The term '*sivoijamadar*' itself came with some fear amongst the villagers, and they often assumed all assigned lands fell under this category and hence eligible to be retaken by the government. Under such fear, combined with a basic distrust of the promises made by the TDP, and skyrocketing land prices, these farmers were suddenly incentivized to 'sell' their land for payment. Several people told me during a rally and information session for assigned land owners that they felt pressured to make an unpleasant choice: either give up their land to the government under the LPS and receive the 'guaranteed' compensation package it offered, however unfair it may be, or risk the government acquiring it without compensation. Many assumed that at least by selling the land, they would make some money out of the transaction as land prices were rising. This was a better prospect than risking faith in a government they did not really trust.

For instance, during an interview of a prominent SC cultivator and Society member from Uddandarayunipalem (P. Prakash 2017, personal communication, 16 February), he explained in great detail how people have been manipulated into selling their lands for a low price (about Rs. 12 to 15 *lakh* per acre, which is a tenth or less of the current market rate of Rs. 1.5 *crore*). He stated that while some people in other villages sold their lands voluntarily (as was the case in Venkatapalem and Rayapudi) and early, the people in Uddandarayunipalem waited for a time and only began to sell land out of a sense of fear that the government might take it without

compensation. This occurred as rumors started spreading that no compensation package would be offered for assigned land as this was considered government land to begin with. In addition, when sales did take place, many buyers tended to only give 50 percent of the price upfront or otherwise pay money in small installments, thereby precluding sellers from buying or investing elsewhere. I also spoke to several farmers in Rayapudi (*Pedha lanka* and *Chinna lanka*) who claimed to have sold their land, but only received half the sum for which they asked. There is no doubt that this is because of the uncertainty of status accorded to assigned lands: many buyers would offer lower prices than what they would offer to registered land owners simply because assigned land owners were in a weaker negotiating position when they do decide to sell their land.

### **7.3.2 Benami names and unofficial or informal land sales arrangements**

Mr. Prakash (and many others) also stated that most buyers were ‘outsiders,’ not *Dalits* or even people who hailed from the village. Thus, when they did buy the land, they would immediately sign it off to the government for pooling. During my interviews of cultivators in the *Pedha* and *Chinna lankas*, several people also told me that real estate brokers, representing clients they could not name, would arrive sometimes daily looking for land to purchase. There have been widespread allegations that influential members of the ruling TDP party have been acquiring these lands illegally and getting them regularized (i.e. by obtaining official *pattas* and bribing government officials to change names on the official records). According to some reports, lands worth tens of millions of rupees were obtained for a pittance by force and blackmail (Ravi Kumar, 2015).

Several people I interviewed—both farmers and local real estate brokers—claimed land records were surreptitiously changed over time in favour of the buyers, most of whom were not publically known. When I asked assignees in different villages to whom they had sold their lands, they would sometimes say they were brokers representing political leaders (*‘nayakulu’*) or ‘big players.’ In fact, the name of the same broker, representing an unnamed client, would come up over and over again. During an interview of several farmers in the *Chinna* and *Pedha lankas* (where residents from Rayapudi and Borupalem have assigned lands), I was told that while there were some sales that occurred before LPS (often to other *Dalit* people who were willing to move

to the *lankas* to farm), sales after LPS were to “big players.” These people would rarely ask for additional guarantees to ensure the land would be theirs as they presumably had pull elsewhere to ensure land records would be accordingly changed. Mallela Seshagiri Rao, a human rights advocate who hails from an old *zamindari* family from Rayapudi, but now resides in Vijayawada and is a strong critic of the LPS, claimed during interviews that members of the TDP having been purchasing large amounts of land under fake—*benami*—names for a pittance. He told me that at least half of the 33,000 acres of agricultural land in the capital region have been bought up in this way, although there is little evidence to prove this.

An additional example of sales involves ceiling lands. In Rayapudi proper (not in *Pedha* or *Chinna lankas*) 48 acres were given to 48 people in 1992 as part of the ceiling law legislation that required redistribution away from large landholders and towards landless poor people. However, many of the people who were assigned this land never actually received it. Thus, although they had been given title deeds by the government, the original owner was still cultivating the land. When LPS was announced, at least 20 members immediately sold their land, either directly, or with agreement with the previous owner (and an agreement to share the profits).

In fact, informal profit sharing agreements between buyers and sellers were quite common across the villages. In *Chinna lanka* and *Pedha lanka*, for instance, this was especially common primarily because land had changed hands so many times. Due to the difficulties of farming this remote patch of land, many assignees had ‘sold’ it (one farmer claimed that of the 144 plots of 55 cents assigned in *Chinna lanka*, 73 plots were sold, though much of this to other *Dalits* prior to LPS). In these instances, the informal buyers and original assignees had come to an agreement so that they could claim some compensation under LPS. This is also made easier when informal buyers and sellers live in close proximity to one another and have a cordial relationship. The latter does not seem to be the case with buyers and sellers from Uddandarayunipalem and Malkapuram. What is, however, interesting is that the option of not giving their land to LPS under these circumstances is never considered as the informal buyers are afraid that they have little to no claim over the land anyway and the original assignees are quite happy to receive any compensation at all since they gave up their land years ago.

### 7.3.3 Uncertainty generated by multiple land surveys

Given that at least some *lanka* lands did change hands were alienated for a variety of reasons and much of this land is located in or near the river where the soil can get denuded over time due to flooding, the CRDA initiated a 'social enumeration survey' to begin the process of assessing how much assigned land exists and to whom it belongs. However, this proved to be an administrative and technical nightmare, as not only has the land cultivators changed over time, but so has the actual land, due to changes in the river flow. This has caused officials to do multiple surveys (the joint collector of Guntur had just called for a third survey in Borupalem, Dondepadu, Lingayapalem, Rayapudi and Uddandarayunipalem when I was there in the first half of 2017) as assignees complained about government officials noting wildly different information on land size and ownership than what is stated on record. In fact, at least twice in the course of two years, assignees had rejected the government's survey as being inaccurate—often indicating plot sizes were smaller than what they had initially received from the government.

The entire survey process, including the delays associated with getting accurate measurements and identifying 'rightful' assignees can be viewed as a tactic of the state to intimidate assignees into selling their land (Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 72). Many were afraid that the government would in any case only recognize a fraction of their ownership rights (see case studies from Dondepadu, Lingayapalem and Rayapudi) and they would be compensated with much lower amounts of annuity and land. Thus, as the value of, and demand for, *lanka* lands went up, many who still had their land deeds decided that selling their land would be a safer livelihood strategy than either holding on to the land or giving it to the LPS. Again, the incentive structure was stacked against assigned land holders and subtle forms of intimidation was enough to break any resolve to challenge the process either in the court system or through direct resistance or protest.

It is also important to note that as long as the survey is not completed, assignees will not receive compensation or plots under the LPS, even if they have signed over their lands, as it is unclear who is eligible for the compensation package. This also means that many *Dalit* assignees have not been assigned commercial or residential plots alongside their non-*Dalit* neighbours, leading some to speculate that *Dalit* residences will be located separately and in the periphery of the

main living areas of the city, mirroring existing *Dalit* colonies in nearly all the villages currently comprising the Amaravati capital region. To add to this, many *Dalit* assignees cannot receive the agricultural workers' pension of Rs. 2,500 a month per household. This is because official records indicate they have land, even though they may or may not have access to this land as a result of the reasons outlined above.

#### **7.3.4 The looming threat of government repossession**

Given that the speculative environment has created a rush for land in the capital region, there have been multiple examples of different factions, even within a single village, fighting to retain control over land. The situation in Undavalli—where different groups within the same set of families that originally received assigned lands are battling to have their names recorded on revised land records—is perhaps the best example of how land has fallen out of the hands of the original assignees and their families over time. First, the land was leased to an OC Kamma person from Vijayawada, who then attempted to buy individual plots from the assignees and subsequently get land records changed. When this was challenged a long legal battle ensued, resulting in a reallocation of the lands to the original assignees. However, the assignees once again leased out the land, which led to another legal challenge by the 'buyers.' In the meantime, an internal battle within assigned families resulted in several challenges to the land records by different members of the same family. Because only a single name per plot could be entered in the *adangal* records, different family members began aligning themselves in separate factions to claim their rights. Moreover, one faction had the economic backing of an external 'donor' who was expected to claim a portion of the lands as a possible reward for this support.

All in all, several claimants to the land had approached the CRDA asking for their names to be added to the record. However, the government would be able to use the Andhra Pradesh Assigned Lands (Prohibitions of Transfers) Act 1977, to repossess these lands as it clearly states that they would be able to do so where there is clear evidence of alienation. The same rule could ostensibly be applied to the lands sold in the *Pedha* and *Chinna lankas* of Rayapudi and Borupalem, as well as to the assigned lands sold to cultivators in Uddandarayunipalem by the original assignees in Malkapuram (though the latter case would prove far more controversial as the transfer took place farther back in time and between *Dalit* communities). Thus, if it was



absolutely necessary, the government has possibly another path to circumvent the obligation of paying compensation, restitution or yearly annuity to the original assigned land cultivators in the capital region.

### 7.3.5 Changing of rules after land transfer

It is truly extraordinary that the courts have not annulled such sales and the government has not yet repossessed alienated assigned lands. But perhaps this most clearly shows the power of Kamma landed groups as so many of the most recent sales of assigned lands are rumored to have occurred between *Dalit* assignees and wealthy non-*Dalits* property speculators. Repossessing lands at this stage would not be conducive to the interests of the buyers, who are likely from the dominant castes. Moreover, during multiple interviews with sellers and real estate brokers, it was intimated that big politicians (*'nayakulu'*) have been illegally purchasing these lands and surprisingly, even getting them (re)registered in their names. In fact, by 2016, the Andhra Pradesh Revenue Department had directed the Inspector General of Registrations to book a criminal case under Act 9 of the Andhra Pradesh Assigned Lands (Prohibitions of Transfers) Act, against a suspended Mangalgiri sub-registrar for illegal registration of assigned lands. It was alleged that the official had registered hundreds of acres of assigned land in the name of others, including some politicians (The Deccan Chronicle, 2016).

With respect to registration, where assigned lands did not have the name of the owner—or *pattadar*—on record, they were enrolled during the colonial regime with a dot sign in the Re-Settlement Registers (RSR) in nine districts, including the Krishna and Guntur districts, where the capital development area is located.<sup>99</sup> However, more recently in August 2017, the government enacted the Assigned Lands Regularisation Act. This legislation aims to confer ownership rights for those lands that were recorded with a dot-signature. Under this Act, lands that have been assigned, alienated or where a title transfer has been recorded, with proof of occupation for 12 years, would be recorded in the RSR (The Hindu, 2017). This comes at the heels of intimations by the government that it was looking to amend Act 9 of Andhra Pradesh Assigned Lands (Prohibitions of Transfers) Act 1977, to allow people the right to sell assigned lands, thus

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<sup>99</sup> The other districts where this occurred include: Anantapur, Kurnool, Kadapa, Chittoor, Prakasam, Nellore and East Godavari.

automatically legalizing lands purchased in the past (The Deccan Chronicle, 2016).<sup>100</sup> The precedent for this was already set in Telangana, when the government moved to regularize assigned lands that were originally allotted to landless poor people but are now in the possession of others. Citing the difficulties associated with “taking back these assigned lands from private individuals and firms,” the government has resorted to regularizing the land by collecting fees and penalties, in the process earning huge revenues (The Deccan Chronicle, 2017).

The move to regularize assigned lands was already evident during my fieldwork in the capital area in early 2017. First, when I asked real estate brokers why buyers were willing to invest in risky real estate such as assigned lands, which were technically illegal to purchase, they told me that it would be a matter of making the purchase and ‘paying the fine’ later. Moreover, during an interview with KY Nagaiah, a prominent *Dalit* activist who had organized several information sessions for assigned land owners in the time I spent in the villages, he mentioned that in four villages of Nidamaru, Kuragalu, Nowuluru and Krishnayapalem, the CRDA announced on 29 July 2016 that compensation for assigned lands would be equal to registered *patta* lands. In addition, in the village of Kuragalu, it was declared that people who claimed to own assigned lands, but without their original documents, could also receive compensation.<sup>101</sup>

Clearly the move to legalize sales after so transactions between *Dalit* assignees and non-*Dalit* buyers have already occurred—and much of it under unfair selling conditions and low prices generated by the uncertainty of status accorded to assigned lands—is in the interests of buyers, including speculative real estate developers. Assigned lands in theory are meant to be used only for agricultural purposes. But in the speculative environment of Amaravati and given the prime location of the *lanka bhoomulu* in particular, there is no doubt that interest parties are buying these lands for non-agriculture purposes in an effort to convert these lands into playgrounds (a waterfront “boasting ... luxury retail, entertainment and dining along with open spaces”) for the

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<sup>100</sup> The Deccan Chronicle provided a source for this information: Apparently then-Principal Secretary of Revenue J.C. Sarma said that the Chief Commissioner of Land Administration (CCLA) has sent a circular to all district collectors asking for the latest position of assigned lands in their respective districts.

<sup>101</sup> It is now alleged that the state government pooled nearly 6,000 acres of assigned lands that were ‘bought’ illegally, mostly by members of the dominant caste and granted them compensation under LPS (Samdani, 2019).

wealthy and politically connected. But this effort is spearheaded not by private interests alone, but by the ruling government.

#### ***7.4 Conclusion: The accumulation of assigned lands occurred through a protracted process that involved the wielding of a campaign of misinformation and intimidation***

It is clear from an analysis of the history of land reform combined with an investigation of how G.O. 41 was being implemented in the Amaravati capital region, many *Dalit* assignees were being dispossessed of their lands and had little recourse. Prior to land pooling, wealthy individuals from the dominant caste already had the means and power to slowly dispossess assigned land farmers using various means. Many assigned landholders were forced to 'sell' their lands due to poverty and personal need. But the speculative environment generated after the announcement of the capital city created a heightened environment in which different, sometimes competing, groups were vying for extremely lucrative land within the capital region. Where some *Dalits* have clear land records and individual *DK pattas* for plots of land (for example, cultivators in Mandadam and Venkatapalem), they seemed to be willing to give up land for the LPS in return for a perceived stake in the capital city. Some of these individuals had even encroached on additional unaccounted-for lands either on the riverbank or on the islands (as was the case with residents in Lingayapalem and Mandadam). They hoped to claim this additional land and ultimately contribute it to the LPS in return for more developed plots.

However, most *Dalit* cultivators remained in a weak negotiating position. A range of reasons, including a lack of documented (individual) rights over the land, the confusion generated by G.O. 41 and its differentiated benefit scheme, inaccurate and delayed land surveys, and the continuing campaign of misinformation and intimidation over rights over assigned lands, created continuing uncertainty for the mostly *Dalit* cultivators of these lands. This in turn, contributed to a sense of mistrust towards the government. While several attempts were made to contest these changes—with rallies, meetings and even negotiations between government officials and *Dalit* representatives held, many residents began to believe over time that it was better to alienate or sell their land for whatever low sum they may be offered, than to forfeit it to the government for nothing. The government, in turn, was able to use the resulting confusion and suspicion generated from this protracted process to divide people, break

cohesion, even amongst the ranks of *Dalits* who owned *patta* lands and those who cultivated on assigned lands, and quell resistance within communities in order to convince people to ultimately bargain away their rights over their land.

## 8 IMPACTS OF THE LPS ON AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS: MASS JOB LOSS, UNCERTAINTY AND LIVELIHOOD CRISIS

The implementation of the LPS in Amaravati changed the livelihoods of tenant farmers and landless labourers almost overnight. The transformation in land use in these villages had an almost immediate negative consequence on these workers, many of whom had been settled for generations in what is now the core capital region. They had previously led fairly sustainable livelihoods due to the richness of the land in the region, and because multiple cropping seasons, particularly in wetland (*jareeb*) villages, also meant they had reliable jobs and incomes for much of the year. Moreover, lift irrigation (see chapters 5 and 6) had allowed so-called dry land villages such as Nidamaru to become the epicenter of intensive floriculture, resulting in a large number of sustainable and well-paid jobs throughout the year. One tenant farmer in Nidamaru claimed:

These are all multiple cropping lands, with work available all through the year—365 days a year if needed—even in the rainy season. Husbands and wives work in the same land and they have income year round. Others come to this village for work. The community lives in relative harmony. We depend on each other (K. Rao 2017, personal communication, January 15).

With the advent of land pooling, the majority of landowners, particularly in dry land (*metta*) villages left their fields fallow, as much of it was signed over to the CRDA or otherwise sold to real estate contractors. Only some owners in the riverfront villages, particularly in Undavalli and Penumaka, and approximately half of those in Nidamaru, continued to farm and to hire labourers. In dry land villages like Thullur, almost the entire daily agricultural work force—many of whom were from the SC or OBC communities—lost their jobs.

Therefore, a key question is: how did the government manage to secure the compliance of landless agricultural labourers in the wake of the announcement of the LPS? To begin answering this question, the chapter will begin with an examination of the incomes that agricultural labourers earned prior to land pooling and in the immediate post-LPS period. It will then move on to discuss how the government approached this large contingent of residents in the capital city. I will argue that they sought to quell resistance to the LPS, at least initially, by making quite

extravagant promises of delivering social development schemes and additional livelihood programmes. Some people were initially inclined to believe in the dream of moving from a rural livelihood—however secure it was—to a supposedly more advanced urban one, where their children could get jobs in government offices.

However, when the delivery of these promises was either stalled or negated, the government did precious little to compensate or protect these residents as they had little bargaining or negotiation power in the capital region. This was unlike the situation with landowners and even assigned land cultivators where the authorities adopted a longer-term engagement and negotiation approach, presumably because both groups owned land, the key bargaining chip in Amaravati. Even attempts at protest and mobilization amongst landless labourers were scant and where possible, scuttled by the government through intimidation and even arrest of key activists. Where there were actual attempts to create a movement against LPS, much of this seemed to have been spearheaded by members of the dominant caste, who themselves disagreed with the LPS and presumably used the issue of mass job loss as an additional line of argumentation against official government policy. In fact, in the case of landless labourers, the government began to employ a discursive campaign that sought to paint many of them as ‘migrant labourers’ who in any case, were not true residents of the region. Thus, the government employed a fairly straightforward campaign of carrot and stick co-optation strategies with this group, designed to fragment opposition and quell dissent. The following subsections will describe these developments in greater detail.

### ***8.1 Livelihoods of landless agricultural labourers prior to land pooling***

At the same time, several studies attempted to examine the difference in incomes of agricultural labourers prior to and after land pooling. The findings of various reports markedly differed from one another, depending on the methodology used for collecting data and the time period within which the data was collected. They also differed extensively from my own findings during interviews with agricultural labourers.

### 8.1.1 Official reports on agricultural incomes before and after land pooling

According to a survey conducted by the APCRDA in March 2015 and analyzed by *Vasavya Mahila Mandali* (VMM), a non-profit agency working in rural and urban areas of Andhra Pradesh, the incomes of the 19,140 registered labourers (as of 2015) were low and irregular before LPS was launched. It found that 63.2 percent of agricultural labourers earned Rs. 2,500 per worker per month or less and only 35.5 percent earned between Rs. 2,501 and Rs. 5,000 per worker per month. The report further stated that only 1.2 percent of all workers earned more than Rs. 5,000 per month. The average reported monthly income was just Rs. 2,347 per worker (implying an income of Rs. 4,694 for a household with two working members) (*Vasavya Mahila Mandali*, 2018).

Just two years later in March 2017, an independent assessment by the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI) found that the average income for landless labourers was Rs. 8,476 per person per month (ASCI, 2018). But this was based on a survey of a much smaller sample size of 193 individuals in affected villages. That same year, during focus group discussions (FGDs) organized by the APCRDA, labourers reported significantly different incomes than what was recorded during the March 2015 survey (ASCCDP, 2017). Men stated that they earned between Rs. 300 and Rs. 400 a day and women between Rs. 120 and Rs. 160 a day. Extrapolated to a six-day work week, this would translate into an income of Rs. 7,200 to Rs. 9,600 a month for men and a further Rs. 2,880 to Rs. 3,840 a month for women. Together, the income of a two-worker household would fall between Rs. 10,080 and Rs. 13,440 on average per month.

These numbers were revised yet again when the VMM launched another set of FGDs in the villages over a one-month period in January 2018. Data was collected from 383 landless agricultural labourers and much of this was used to inform the CRDA's application for World Bank funds. Submitted documents indicate that there were 20,529 registered laborers in the capital region, earning an average of Rs. 8,476 *per family* a month prior to land-pooling.

These figures were contrasted against reported incomes after land-pooling. Men earned on average between Rs. 7,200 and 9,600 monthly and women, between Rs. 2,880 and Rs. 3,840 (APCRDA 2018: 93-94). Thus, according to the government, monthly household income after

land pooling, was estimated to be Rs. 9,636 – or approximately Rs. 1,000 a month more than the average monthly income reported prior to land-pooling. This number includes the monthly pension of Rs. 2,500 from the CRDA. The average number of days worked in a month was 15 for men and eight for women. The increase of wages on average (despite working fewer days) was explained by the diversification of income sources: it was reported that 15 to 20 percent of male respondents had moved to alternative jobs such as driving, construction labor, and operating shops and eateries.

#### **8.1.2 Working conditions for landless labourers and tenant farmers prior to the LPS: Sustainable livelihoods, reliable incomes**

Despite some of the lower projections of incomes prior to land pooling, in interview after interview, landless labourers and tenant farmers spoke to me about how much *more* they earned prior to land pooling, describing a life that was largely comfortable, even if not well-off. Yet, most were able to meet their daily expenses, pay for their children's education and benefit from the financial stability offered by having a steady stream of income. This was particularly true in Nidamaru and Undavalli, two of the three villages in which I spoke to the greatest number of farmers. In these villages, landless labourers have historically had more employment opportunities and options due to the multi crop nature of the lands.

In Nidamaru, the huge variety of crops grown combined with the burgeoning year-round cultivation of flowers, have resulted in entire families—husbands, wives and even sometimes children—dependent on work in the fields. In contrast to Undavalli and Thullur, the agricultural labourers and tenant farmers here tend to be more stratified: they come from every caste and are not exclusively limited to people in the Scheduled Castes (N. Reddy 2017, personal communication, 1 April). Women are generally hired as flower pickers and men as farmhands responsible for spraying pesticides and fertilizers (Nagaiah 2017, personal communication, 30 March). This also often means that women earn more during high season as their wages are dependent on how many kilograms of jasmine buds they are able to pick in a given day. One woman told me that on average she earns between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 15,000 a month during high season, whilst her husband who also works in the fields earns Rs. 6,000 (Lakshmi 2017, personal communication, 30 March). She further specified that in low season (February to



August), her earnings might be between Rs. 150 to Rs. 200 a day, but during high season (running from August to January, with the most lucrative period being from August to October), she could earn up to Rs. 600 to 700 daily. In all seasons, she had work six days a week. The phrase “full-time work 365 days a year” was a common refrain from many in Nidamaru, from agricultural workers to tenant farmers to landowners.

Many tenant farmers also benefitted from the lucrative flower fields of Nidamaru. One such farmer told me that he rented one acre for Rs. 70,000 a year, on which he cultivated jasmine flowers. He further employed 15 people on his land and could earn up to Rs. 1.5 *lakh* per per year (K. Sambaiah 2017, personal communication, 30 March). Another told me that he rented four acres and hired 300 people per month to work his land. His leasing rates ranged from Rs. 55,000 to Rs. 65,000 per acre, depending on the quality of the land. While he sometimes made losses, in a good year, he could earn up to Rs. 10 *lakh* (Nagaiah 2017, personal communication, 28 March). He claimed to have had five such good years in the last decade. Moreover, once a flowering tree (usually a jasmine bush) is planted, it can last for 25 years (though it takes two years to mature), which means that there are no recurrent seed costs. The largest landowner in Nidamaru, a woman named Jayamma who owns over 30 acres of land and is a staunch opponent of land pooling and employs approximately 70 workers per acre year round (Jayamma 2017, personal communication, 30 March).

Another landowner and staunch opponent of land pooling, Nagi (Master) Reddy, provided an overview of the economy in Nidamaru. He stated that landowners rent their land to tenants at the average rate of Rs. 1 *lakh* per acre per year. On the rich red soil areas, profits could be as high as Rs. 1 - 1.5 *lakh* per acre per year for tenant farmers and in low lying black soil areas, they were significantly lower at Rs. 30,000 to 40,000 per acre per year. One acre requires approximately 10 people to pluck flowers, with each worker earning up to Rs. 600 a day during high season (increasing stage) and Rs. 200 a day during low season (decreasing stage). The average monthly income for workers tends to be approximately Rs. 10,000 (or Rs. 1.2 *lakh* per year). At all times, there are at least 1,000 workers in Nidamaru from other villages (with the number increasing in the summer high season). In this way, the economy of Nidamaru was both sustainable and profitable, benefitting all categories of cultivators—from owners to

tenants to landless agricultural labourers—almost equally (N. Reddy 2016, personal communication, 03 December).

Undavalli, meanwhile, benefits from its close proximity to the city of Vijayawada. As a result, many of the men from landless families are able to work in the city, whilst most women continue to undertake agricultural labour. Therefore, women undertake most of the agricultural work in this village. While male-female mixed households may be able to diversify their income sources, female-headed households are particularly vulnerable to changes in the agricultural sector. In Thullur, the scenario is more mixed: Agricultural labourers told me they earned upwards of Rs. 700 a day during the cotton-picking season (approximately four months a year) and had more variable incomes during the other seasons, when they sometimes travelled to other villages to work. During the cotton-picking season, workers from elsewhere would also arrive in Thullur mandal (which includes the villages of Paremi, Ananthavaram, Nekallu and others in addition to Thullur) to pick cotton. Even in low season, however, most families reported earning about Rs. 1,500 to Rs. 2,000 a week at the least. One woman told me that before LPS, she was earning Rs. 500 a day. This, combined with her husband's income, ensured that her household income could touch Rs. 18,000 a month (Kattepogy 2017, personal communication, 30 March).

## ***8.2 Impacts on landless people in the immediate post-LPS period: Job loss, breakdown of relationships between landowners and labourers, and increasing debt***

The numbers produced by the government was vastly different to what I found during interviews in the field. According to a census from 2011, 30,000 people in the Amaravati capital region depend primarily on agricultural labor (Census of India, Guntur District, 2011). This is likely an underestimation of the number of landless people entirely dependent on daily agricultural work. For instance, during an interview with M. Ravi, the CPI (M) Secretary of the Rajdhani (capital) division and a state committee member of the All-India Agricultural Workers (AIAW) Union, he claimed that the 2015 CRDA Survey found that there were 53,373 agricultural labourers in the 29 villages that comprise the capital region. Vakulabharanam and Prasad (2017: 72) estimate elsewhere that there were 60,000 agricultural workers in Thullur *mandal* alone. In Nidamaru, it was claimed that there were 18,000 labourers working in the fields as of early

2017— an astounding number, in a village where the population is only 8,000 (Bhagya Raju 2017, personal communication, 30 March).

LPS especially represents a major loss for the residents of Nidamaru as it is considered an employment powerhouse: workers come from a 40 kilometre radius—from Kantheru, Koppuravuru, Mangalgi, Konduru, Vallabhapuram, Bethapudi, Kuragalu, Ainovolu, Ananthvaram and others—to work in the flower fields. According to one gentleman: “Earlier, people from other regions used to come to Nidamaru for work. Now, the situation has reversed: most of us have to leave to find work” (*Ibid.*). By some estimations, the amount of available work plummeted by as much as 95 percent in some villages after the announcement of the LPS, with some local level variations. The MPTC of Nidamaru village, Ms. Nagaratnama, stated that before land pooling, people had work for up to 30 days a month if they needed it. After land pooling, there is barely 15 days of work per month (Nagaratnama 2016, personal communication, 05 December).

Meanwhile, Ch. Babu Rao, capital region convener for the CPI(M), was convinced that the government is engaged in bringing down the number of pensioners eligible to receive the monthly pension: “Initially, while the government estimated that there were nearly 30,000 landless labourers in the 29 villages of the capital city area, this figure was revised to just over 16,000” (Ch. Babu Rao 2017, personal communication, 30 January). He further stated: “after another round of filtration, which included disqualification over such things as the lack of an *Aadhaar* card, the total number of beneficiaries came down to about 11,000 people.” As an example, it was noted that in Tallayapalem, a hamlet of Mandadam village blessed with rich alluvial soil due to its proximity to the Krishna River, the authorities initially identified 2,425 beneficiaries. However, this number was eventually brought down to 1,219, with the government distributing pensions to only 517 people by 10 October 2015 (The Hindu, 2015). Meanwhile, a well-known opposition party MLA for Mangalgi, Mr. Rama Krishna Reddy, told me that the selection of beneficiary families was suspect. He claimed that few families were selected and a *janma bhumi* committee comprised entirely of TDP leaders undertook the task. According to Reddy, “it was independent only in name.” As a result, he claimed that manipulation of the numbers was possible (personal communication, 05 December 2016).

These numbers however have been revised more recently, perhaps because the APCRDA has been actively courting the World Bank for a loan to build infrastructure. The deadline for declaring and registering oneself landless with the APCRDA for pension benefits was moved back to July 15, 2018 from 08 December 2014, for the purposes of receiving livelihood restoration measures. As of this latter date, the official number of registered landless people that are impacted by “land assembly processes” and may be eligible for a pension and other livelihood-related benefits was estimated to be 21,374 (APCRDA 2018: 8).<sup>102</sup>

### **8.2.1 Broken relationship between landowners and labourers catalyzed greater debt**

Several people pointed out that with the change in land use and agricultural patterns, the social fabric of the villages had changed. One effect was that “the relationship between landowners and labour has been broken.” A prominent SC Malla activist and CPI (M) member in Thullur, stated that prior to land pooling, “labourers could ... borrow money with little to no security from landowners, relying on a relationship of trust built over time. This is no longer the case” (J. Verlankaya 2017, personal communication, 1 February). Another *Dalit* activist, KY Nagaiah, added:

The relationship between landowners and landless people used to be indivisible. The landlord used to lend money for particular needs. But this relationship has been cut. Who will now support the landless? (personal communication, 21 April 2017).

This was confirmed by yet another *Dalit* activists, Mr. Francis Siripirapu, a lawyer from Vijayawada who stated during a speech to rally gathered *Dalit* cultivators in Uddandarayunipalem:

The link between farmer-landlords and coolies [agricultural labourers] has been destroyed. They were previously able to get loans for emergency needs, now no more (personal communication, 28 January 2017).

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<sup>102</sup> The latest estimation of landless labourers was included in the Resettlement Policy Framework (RPF), which was drafted as part of the Amaravati Sustainable Capital City Development Project (ASCCDP) that the World Bank is currently supporting. ASCCDP is aimed at supporting specified components identified by the APCRDA / Government of Andhra Pradesh, related to the initial and most critical infrastructure to help develop the city. However, note that the wording in the document is inconsistent: it first claims there are 21,374 landless *households*, then states it is in fact the number of landless labourers.

In addition to activists, local workers everywhere also lamented the lack of available funds from every angle. For instance, one woman stated: “There’s been a change of relationship between those with land and those without. We find it harder to talk to them now (Khusumbhi 2016, personal communication, 15 December).” Several more female agricultural labourers from the ST community repeated this sentiment.<sup>103</sup> One in particular avowed:

Before land pooling, we could borrow money from landowners from time to time. They would usually charge us interest between 3.5 percent and 10 percent...Now, we cannot borrow money from landowners because we do not know one another since many of us have to travel to different villages for work... There are also now more workers looking for jobs, so landowners are less dependent on us (L. Bhimudu 2017, personal communication, 16 February).

Borrowing from landowners was often the only form of credit or loan that was available to poorer (mostly *Dalit*) families. Currently, many have to resort to moneylenders who sometimes charge greater interest rates than landowners once did. More women are also joining and borrowing from DWCRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas) thrift and credit groups. Women were eligible to borrow up to Rs. 25,000 from the DWCRA groups and if they are able to repay, they are eligible for higher loan amounts. However, several women indicated that they are in danger of defaulting and sometimes have to resort to moneylenders to pay their DWCRA loans. Therefore, the livelihoods of agricultural labourers have become increasingly more precarious with the advent of LPS due to a series of factors, which include the loss of jobs and lack of access to credit. Inter-dependent and symbiotic relationships built on trust between landowners and workers are also breaking down in the process.

### **8.2.2 Inadequate incomes and lack of jobs**

Landless labourers and tenant farmers across every village unanimously lamented their financial situation after the LPS, stressing that the agricultural pension that the government had provided since mid-June 2015 was insufficient to meet their daily needs. The government pension of Rs.

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<sup>103</sup> The discussion took place in a very poor section of a village, wherein I was surrounded by numerous (about 10) women, with three being particularly vocal. The women each provided details on life before and after LPS. Most of the women were from the ST community, although this particular neighbourhood had a mix of impoverished people from the ST and SC communities, as well as very poor Kammas.

2,500 rupees per household often amounted to just a fraction of what entire families used to earn, as prior to LPS, a household with two primary wage earners who worked in the fields could bring home a salary of up to Rs. 15,000 to 20,000 a month (R Ratnamma, personal communication 21 January 2017). Moreover, some of the children in a family also often contributed to household income by working in the same or adjoining fields as their parents, after coming of age.

Nearly every agricultural worker told me that the monthly compensation sum of Rs. 2,500 rupees could barely cover their costs. One person stated that it was barely enough to cover costs for about 10 days, after which additional work had to be found to be able to feed a five-person household for the rest of the month (K. Kumar 2016, personal communication, 30 November). However, this was often difficult to find and options limited as there were now very few jobs available. One woman stated:

We barely have work now. Look at the barren fields! We used to work in many of these fields, plucking flowers, drumsticks, maize, sorting them, drying them as required. We survived on this soil for years, but now, everything has been given away for the capital. Now we compete with the other workers for the little work that remains (Kotheshwaramma 2017, personal communication, 2 April).

Despite the lack of income in many households, the agricultural pension often remained a paper-based promise for most families. The money often came late, delayed for months at a time for a variety of reasons. In the months I was in the region, the government blamed the delay on a “social enumeration” exercise that they had to complete to identify the number of landless families in the region and to assess the type of alternative occupation available. In the meantime, many families complained of not having received their monthly stipend for four or five months in a row.

To compensate for the loss of agricultural work and the unreliability of timely pensions from the government, some people found petty jobs in the village, or engaged in mercantile activities in nearby towns and cities like Guntur and Vijayawada to replace their lost jobs in the field. The possibility of working as vendors or shopkeepers was greater in villages like Undavalli and

Penumaka because of their proximity to Vijayawada, though these jobs were also limited. However, in Thullur and Nidamaru, travel costs and time could be exclusionary. Even then, many travelled long distances to find agricultural work outside the region—and still others (particularly women and older workers) were forced to remain idle at home. As for promised jobs in construction in the capital region, the reality is that for most large government projects, cheap labour is imported from other parts of India. For example, during an interview, the deputy *Tasildar* of Thullur admitted that workers from Orissa charged below Rs. 400 a day, whereas local workers demanded Rs. 500 a day (CH, Srinivasa Rao 2016, personal communication, 25 November).

### **8.2.3 Women bore the brunt of the burden due to feminization of agricultural labour**

At the time of research, it was found that female agricultural labourers were forced to travel longer distances to work after the LPS was implemented. One woman, who was a single mother of two children, head of her household and the *motta maistry* or head worker/organizer of a group of female agricultural workers, claimed that instead of finding work in her own village, she had to travel to neighbouring villages (either outside the land pooling area or to villages with some standing crops within the land pooling area) to find work. While she earned slightly more money per day than she used to (Rs. 200/day versus 150/day prior to land pooling), she also has to work longer hours and incur greater risk to get to and from work. She claimed that she did not know her employers in the other villages and they did not always pay the agreed upon wages, nor did they pay on time. She claimed that one employer owed her and her entire group of 20 workers Rs. 50,000, amounting to two months of wages. She further stated:

Sometimes it is necessary to go as a group and demand money. At this point, they may give money, but might argue it should be less or that we have worked fewer acres than we did. There is no trust (Khusumbi 2016, personal communication, 15 December).

Babu Rao, the capital region convener for the CPI(M) Party, estimates that 90 percent of female agricultural labourers had lost work after land pooling was announced. Most were not prepared to switch to construction work (Miriam, personal communication, 30 January 2017). As a result, there was worry that some women may be pushed into prostitution because of the severe need for finances and the increasing debt accrued through dealings with money-lenders. Several

other people casually also mentioned the rise of prostitution across the villages in various discussions.<sup>104</sup>

Unequal power dynamics, information asymmetries and a trust deficit all contributed to making the livelihoods of those women who still worked far more unsustainable. The same woman was explicit in stating that conditions were much better when living and working in the same village: “at least I was aware of how much land people own and we trust each other more.” She now worked longer hours than before and saw her children less. Additional dangers were involved in travel. Many women pool together and take an autorickshaw to go to their field sites. Sometimes upwards of 18 women fit would ride together in one auto, leading to a greater chance of accidents (Nageshwar Rao, personal communication, 30 March 2017).

In addition to the added hardships associated with coping with uncertain and unsustainable livelihoods, nearly every woman I spoke with lamented the fact that the Rs. 2,500 monthly pension distributed by the government was almost always transferred to the male head of household. It was only in cases where the woman was the head of the household (i.e. someone with a deceased or divorced husband) that she could claim the pension herself—and even then, she often faced additional difficulties, including the problem of registering as a landless labourer before the deadline to be eligible for various benefits. Many women bitterly complained that the men in their household were squandering the cash on alcohol. Some would stop me on the streets or during meetings, asking if I could ask a government official during one of my interviews if the stipend could be transferred to their names.

The anecdotal information I received from several people, including liquor vendors in Thullur village and the majority of the married women to whom I spoke, indicated that the announcement of the capital region came with a related spike in the number of alcohol shops in the capital region, and greater incidences of men drinking. Though this phenomenon was not limited to those who were agricultural labourers, in cases where money in poorer households is being squandered, the women (and children) were placed in even more precarious positions.

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<sup>104</sup> While Babu Rao mentioned the issue of prostitution most directly, others pointed out houses where women who were paid for sex lived whilst I travelled across the villages in the region. This included farmers I was interviewing, my driver and my translators.



The message I got from various sources (including from landowning families) was that the agricultural pension had exacerbated alcoholism in landless labourer households as this money was considered ‘free’ since no one had worked to earn it. These findings were mirrored in Still’s field research (2014) in a similar area, which found that unemployed men would sometimes assert their dominance within the household by beating their wives.

#### **8.2.4 Older landless people were left especially vulnerable**

In the changing work scenario of the Amaravati capital region, men who formerly worked as agricultural labourers were often forced to switch into other forms of work, including construction or building work. Some also worked as watchmen and attempted to do ‘cement work.’ However, this type of work is extremely laborious and requires young, healthy workers. Often the salary was also not comparable to what they used to earn as agricultural daily wage labourers prior to land pooling. For instance, one man I spoke with in Thullur claimed that he used to earn between Rs. 8,000 and Rs. 9,000 a month as an agricultural labourer. At the time of the interview, he was earning nearly half that amount—about Rs. 5,000 a month—working in construction (P. Rao 2016, personal communication, 8 December). He further stated that many of the contracts for construction had gone to external workers who were being bused in from other states or districts as they worked for less money. His wife claimed that he suffered from a dust allergy and his health was deteriorating. Their lives had become more difficult in the aftermath of land pooling. Similarly, older men were often unable to perform the more taxing manual labour involved in urban construction work. They also tended to be ineligible for government skill development programmes (due to the education requirement), thus rendering them unable to work entirely.

### **8.3 Government promises: Welfare schemes for landless labourers**

The government committed to paying a pension of Rs. 2,500 a month per household for 10 years to *households* classified as landless and under the poverty line (annual income under Rs. 60,000) through the “Amaravati landless poor pension” scheme.<sup>105</sup> The state government initially proposed to set up the Capital Region Social Security Fund to pay annuity to

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<sup>105</sup> In order to be eligible for the compensation, labourers must also prove that they were residing in the villages of the seed capital area before 8 December 2014.

approximately 12,000 displaced families of agricultural labourers and tenant farmers. The period of 10 years was estimated as the time needed for the capital city to fully develop, transitioning to an urban area with predominantly non-agricultural income generating activities. In addition to the Rs. 2,500 pension, a general compensatory package, which included access to social development schemes and additional livelihood programmes was offered to 'poor and vulnerable groups' in the 29 affected villages.

According to the ASCCDP Resettlement Policy Framework (APCRDA, 2018: 21), key elements of the social development and livelihood programmes included:

(i) waiver of agricultural loans; (ii) access to interest-free loans for self-employment; (iii) access to skill development training; (iv) access to employment under MGNREGA program; (v) free education<sup>106</sup> and health benefits<sup>107</sup> in designated medical facilities.

The government also promised to provide subsidized food in every village.

For lands acquired under the LPS, a separate entitlement matrix, which also applied to landless labourers, was provided under the APCRDA Act of 2015 and under the AP Capital City LPS (F&I) Rules of 2015:

Care has been taken to provide compensation in kind—i.e. developed residential plots and commercial plots besides other benefits to compensate livelihood loss not only to the landowners but also to all the landless families depending on such lands and losing livelihood, due to such land pooling scheme (APCRDA 2017).<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> G.O. Ms. No. 125 under the Municipal Administration and Urban Development Department of the APCRDA promises free education to the children of all residents of the capital region who had claimed residency as of 08.12.2014.

<sup>107</sup> G.O. Ms. No. 52 issued under the department of Health, Medical and Family Welfare, provides for free medical facilities to the residents of the Amaravati Capital City, who were resident there as of 08 December 2014.

<sup>108</sup> This quote is taken from an earlier version of the APCRDA (2018) Resettlement Policy Framework report. This wording is no longer present in the final (version 5) report published in July 2018.

LPS participants officially began to receive these benefits as of May 2015. Since then, it was claimed that these livelihood restoration measures had been extended not only to LPS participants, but also to all residents of the capital city area, including landless labourers.

The Resettlement Policy Framework by the APCRDA summarizes the results recorded under various livelihood restoration initiatives as of July 15, 2018 (APCRDA, 2018). This information is summarized in table 7. Even prior to this, the former Commissioner of the CRDA, Srikant Nagulapalli, claimed that the government had actively addressed the concerns of landless labourers through making work available through the MGNREGA for 365 days a year (Kumar, 2015). During my interview with the current Commissioner of the CRDA, Cherukuri Sridhar, he specified that: “landless families are being provided training in fields as diverse as construction or manufacturing by the APSSDC [Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation]” (personal communication, 20 April 2017).

*Table 7: Progress on implementation of livelihood restoration measures as of July 15, 2018*

People trained in skill development institution set up in July 2016	1,568
<i>Landless beneficiaries</i>	794
Out of the total trained, number of people gainfully employed	1,296
<i>Landless beneficiaries</i>	637
Agricultural loan waivers awarded (for land owners)	19,709
Job cards issued (MGNREGA)	16,676
Employment generated under MGNREGA (person-day)	69,326
Students applied for/found eligible for reimbursement of tuition fees	49/21
Beneficiaries of mega health camps conducted by network hospitals	4,011
Number of health cards issued	38,438
Number of people using canteens	537,006
<i>Source: APCRDA (2018: 21)</i>	

#### **8.4 Government failure to deliver on welfare promises: Bluster over commitment**

Despite the many proclamations, an independent study by ASCI in 2017 noted that:

[A]fter the implementation of the land pooling scheme in the capital region of Amaravati, the living standards of the landless families have deteriorated. About 65 percent of the landless

families are worse off than before, 21 percent are better off than before, and 14 percent have stated that their situation has remained unchanged.

The assessment also found that many landless families included in the study had not in fact received loans for self-employment, canteen benefits, education fees reimbursement or livelihood training. In addition, women who were heads of household had lost, or feared they would lose, employment opportunities due to the LPS. In my interviews of landless labourers across the 29 villages of the capital region in late 2016 and early 2017, these fears were borne out to be true: In addition to the loss of incomes and livelihoods, many of the landless residents of these villages described more vulnerable and uncertain livelihoods, particularly for female agricultural wage workers; inadequate government reskilling programmes; a rupture in existing social structures between landowners and workers (described above); no big change in terms of accessing education and healthcare and the constant fear of having to relocate due to a lack of opportunities. Each of these concerns are described in turn below.

#### **8.4.1 Few people were reskilled despite government promises**

To compensate for the lost jobs, skill development programmes administered by the APCRDA were meant to facilitate the transformation of the economy in the capital area region. For example, in a government document entitled 'Vision 2029,' the Government of Andhra Pradesh aspired to generate a "cultural shift in the economy" by "transforming excess agricultural labour-force into productive and skilled manufacturing labour-force [that] will be active stakeholders in double digit growth path" (GoAP, undated: 28). Cost-free skill development programmes intended to "provide training with stipend to enhance the skills of cultivating tenants, agricultural labourers and other needy persons" were meant to be one of the cornerstones of this change.<sup>109</sup>

This sentiment was echoed by various CRDA officials I interviewed in early 2017, including the officer in charge of social development, Mr. Prasad, as well as the land director, M. Chennakesava Rao. The social development officer claimed at the time of the interview (23 February 2017) that 287 people had shown interest in being trained and that eight courses

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<sup>109</sup> See Schedule III of GO. Ms. No. 1 dated 01.01.2015: Municipal Administration & Urban Development Department – Rules for voluntary Land Pooling Scheme in the Capital City Area.

related to the service sector had already been implemented. Each course varied in length from 45 days to five months. At the time of our discussion, a second round of courses was being launched, and a further 64 people had shown interest in learning a new skill (in this case, driving).

However, one of the issues that authorities face in the area was what they perceived to be a general lack of interest in skill development programmes. Mr. Prasad claimed that many local people “lack vision: as they do not yet see the opportunities inherent in a newly urbanizing context. Consequently, most people had to be convinced to join skill-training programmes (personal communication, 23 February 2017). To some extent, several residents I interviewed corroborated this sentiment. One local journalist told me that it was true that there was a lack of demand for these programmes, but he also said that the government had failed to provide job placements for those who had received training. Several other people also repeated that agricultural labourers were simply uninterested in reskilling programmes as no placements had materialized as of yet. Moreover, many people still continued to pine for agricultural work (Chandrashekar 2016, personal communication, 25 November). The ex-TDP party president of Thullur mandal, however, claimed that once more companies arrived in the capital region, more people would become interested in skill development courses (J. Kiran Kumar 2016, personal communication, 30 November).

Finally, the quality of the courses offered was sometimes reported to be a problem. For instance, one gentleman who took part in a three-month training course on computer literacy told me that the training was “wasteful and of bad quality” (personal communication, 16 December). Apparently 24 people from various villages, including Dondepadu, Thullur and Rayapudi, 9 of whom were women, attended the training one-day a week, only to find that there was hardly any instruction offered. Instead, he claimed:

They just fed us food but didn’t teach. We learned nothing. No one got jobs at the end and if anything, those who found work were doing things unrelated to the training we received. They arranged jobs in a *chappal* [shoe] shop; or carrying saris in a sari shop (K. Kumar 2016, personal communication, 30 November).

Irrespective of interest or quality, the CRDA advertised these courses through several means, including through distributing pamphlets and making public announcements in each village. There were age (participants should be between the ages of 18 and 40), education (interested parties should have passed their intermediate – or higher secondary – studies) and residency (they should be living in the capital region) criteria for being eligible for training. As of 15 August 2018, the APCRDA reported that 1,619 people were trained under the skills development programme, with 865 people directly placed in jobs.<sup>110</sup> In comparison to the 6,575 graduates and 3,168 intermediate (10+2) graduates in the region, this is a rather modest number. However, the figure is miniscule compared to the estimated 20,000 to 50,000 people (depending on the source) who have (or will) lose their livelihoods as the city develops. It is important to bear in mind that many landless agricultural labourers had not necessarily completed secondary school education. Therefore, if the criteria for selection for skill development programmes continued to include a basic education component, there may be very little ‘reskilling’ taking place of the majority of agricultural labourers in the capital region.

#### **8.4.2 Stalled application of MGNREGA**

According to one government official, prior to land pooling, people had not expressed high demand for MGNREGA because intensive agriculture was already practiced in the region. But he also stated that the scenario had changed since the announcement of the capital city. At the time of our discussion (in February 2017), he claimed it would be revived in the next 20 to 25 days, with an expected 1,500 jobs to be created per day (Prasad 2017, personal communication, 23 February).

The evidence for how many jobs had been created remains mixed. According to one source, as of February 2017, only a few—15,471 people—had received job cards.<sup>111</sup> From the date of declaration of the capital to the date of interview (February 2017), only 19,956 days of work had been provided, amounting to 0.35 percent of the promised allocation. Meanwhile, the

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<sup>110</sup> The data is available online at:

<https://crda.ap.gov.in/APCRDA/Userinterface/dashboard/DashboardMainVer.aspx#>. Accessed 16 August 2018.

<sup>111</sup> These numbers are accurate up to the date of the interview (February 2017). Recent published material from the APCRDA dated, March 2018, states that: “over 16,603 job cards have been issued; (v) over 34173 person-days of employment have been generated during the current financial year...”

dashboard on the official government website claims (as of August 2018) that 16,866 job cards have been provided so far, amounting to 30,477 person days of work.<sup>112</sup> The discrepancy between the number of job cards provided and person days of work is much bigger in the government source.

Meanwhile, discussions with several people in early 2017 revealed significant issues with government employment programmes. As an example, I was told that an official nursery plantation programme was launched in Velagapudi, where there was initially work. However, by early 2017, most of the work was suspended, as there was nowhere to plant the trees, given much of the development elsewhere in the capital region had not yet begun. During an interview of women working at a nursery located in one of the villages, they told me that initially, about 100 people began working there, but this number had dwindled to 15 or 20 (personal communication, 21 April 2017; B. Rao 2017, personal communication, 30 January). Moreover, they had not been paid for six full months. They currently only earned Rs. 70 a day, whilst earlier, they received Rs. 180 per day. When the women approached the divisional forest officer of the Social Forestry Department in Guntur to ask why their salaries had been decreased, they were told that it was because the programme had too many workers and as such had to reduce their work force—which occurred two weeks prior to my interview.

The women further stated that they continued to work at the nursery because they had no other options: there was no other work in the village and they held out hope that it was better to work for a government department than for a private landowner. They were afraid that if they stopped working now, they would not get paid for all of the months prior for which payment had been delayed. Delayed payment had become the norm for many workers due to the lack of coordination between the social forestry department and the district rural development agency (DRDA). This resulted in many families emigrating to other districts for work. For those who stayed, they had to endure insecure daily travel to other regions and contend with lower or uncertain wages.

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<sup>112</sup> The data is available online at:

<http://www.nrega.ap.gov.in/Nregs/FrontServlet?requestType=CMDashBoardRH&actionVal=CMAbstract&id=07>. Accessed 16 August 2018.

#### 8.4.3 Misleading promise of reimbursement of student fees and medical expenses

One of the promises of voluntary land pooling in the capital region was that the government would provide: “free education and medical facilities to all those residing [in the region] as of 8th December, 2014” (APCRDA 2015: 15). However, this promise was slightly deceptive in intent. While the CRDA held three “mega-health camps” slightly before and during my time in the villages comprising Amaravati, where local people received free medical treatment (APCRDA 2016: 24), many (though not all) agricultural daily wage workers already had medical cards. This was as a result of earlier welfare programmes initiated by the opposition YSR-Congress Party when they held power and later adopted by the TDP party when it took power after bifurcation in 2014. Under the populist government of YS Rajashekara Reddy, who was the Chief Minister of unbifurcated Andhra Pradesh from 2004 to 2009, an elaborate agrarian and welfare policy regime was enacted (Srinivasulu, 2009). This included measures relating to agricultural waivers, housing, pension, free electricity, irrigation projects, education and medical coverage. In fact, one of the refrains I heard, even in heavily TDP-supportive areas was “the one thing that Rajashekara Reddy did for us was give us medical coverage” (S. Babu 2017, personal communication, 27 March).

The YSR-Congress party introduced the *Rajiv Aarogyasri* health insurance scheme in 2008, which was designed to provide health care for white ration card holders—or those earning below Rs. 18,000 a year. Several hundred thousand people received health insurance because of these efforts. By 2012, government sources stated that even those people who did not hold white ration cards could access the government health scheme for free, as long as they applied for a letter from the Chief Minister’s office and presented this with necessary health documents (The Times of India, 2012). While the ultimate record of the health scheme (and other related social welfare schemes) is replete with accusations of patronage and corruption,<sup>113</sup> they nonetheless resulted in some public health schemes for poor people. Later, when the TDP and Chandrababu Naidu came to power in 2014 in a post-bifurcated Andhra, they converted the earlier *Rajiv Aarogyasri* scheme into the *NTR Vaidya Seva* health insurance scheme. The new scheme

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<sup>113</sup> It is alleged many of these programmes helped to strengthen the YSR-Congress party’s collusion with real estate developers and corporate operators and reportedly allowed Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy to amass large amounts of money during his tenure as Chief Minister from 2004 to 2009. See Rao, 2011.



covered approximately 1.2 million people and the number of health services reportedly increased, though funding was limited (Andhra Pradesh State Government, undated; Lanka, 2017).

In terms of education, Andhra Pradesh has historically provided assistance for underprivileged students, in particular, those students belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC), as well as those deemed to be minorities. In addition, provisions are in place for female, rural, and physically disabled or handicapped students, and those living below the poverty line (BPL). For example, a fee reimbursement scheme introduced during the tenure of then-Chief Minister YS Rajashekara Reddy in 2008, covers the cost of tertiary level professional courses for eligible students. All students whose family income is less than Rs. 100,000 per year other than those who are from SC and ST families are eligible for a scholarship. The income ceiling for students from the SC and ST communities is capped at Rs. 200,000 per year.

Despite these already established welfare programmes, at the time I was in the capital region (from October 2016 to May 2017), I did not speak to a single person who had applied for the new fee reimbursement programme promised by the CRDA. The government had not launched it during my time in the field—nearly two years after the announcement of the capital. Moreover it can be argued that most of the true beneficiaries of the announced health and education schemes will in any case be those who are slightly better off (i.e. those without white ration cards or are above the BPL) as many of the most underprivileged are already eligible for existing government programmes.

#### **8.4.4 Slow to no establishment of food canteens**

The APCRDA promised that subsidized food canteens would be set up across the villages under Schedule 3 (1)(iii)(c) of the Land Pooling Scheme. This was a particularly popular promise amongst a large number of people belonging to poor and middle-class households. The proposed canteens were to be modeled after the Amma canteens that were immensely popular in Tamil Nadu and intended to provide subsidized food to around 100,000 people in labour-intensive locations (in order to target labourers) across the state in the first phase of the project. During my time in the field, only one canteen had been opened on a pilot basis near the interim

government complex (IGC) in Velagapudi. It was only after my departure in June 2017 that three more canteens were opened in the capital region: in Thullur, the IGC NTR and Yerrabalem (Economic Times, 2018). The delay was mostly blamed on continuing financial constraints by the government. Most recently, with election assembly polls just a few months away, the government announced additional plans to open 203 *Anna* canteens across Andhra Pradesh (Economic Times, 2018).

#### **8.4.5 Other unmet promises**

Finally, there has been little to no fulfillment of the additional promises made by the APCRDA to establish homes for the elderly and construct houses for the homeless. The Land Pooling Act further provides for up to “Rs. 25 *lakh* to all the poor families for self-employment” to compensate for job losses.<sup>114</sup> Little has happened on this front after farming activities were halted. On the whole, the welfare programmes stipulated under the LPS have been woefully ineffective and in most cases, remained undelivered. Many of the promises were populist efforts to temporarily manage the fallout from land pooling whilst creating what Ramachandraiah (2016) has called a “regime of co-optation.”

#### **8.5 Scuttled protests and scant mobilization of farmers and advocacy groups**

In light of these failures, the *Dalit* communities in the capital region were curiously weak or ineffectual in mounting a sustained challenge to the capital city project. Several organizations, however, urged for agricultural pensions to be raised. These included the *Dalit Bahujan* Front and the National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM) and to some extent, the CPI(M). The *Dalit Bahujan Front* (DBF) initially asked that the agricultural pension of Rs. 2,500 be paid to each individual, not household. The CPI(M) argued that agricultural workers earned on average Rs. 300 a day and as such, the government should pay at least Rs. 9,000 to landless individuals in the capital region. NAPM, meanwhile, demanded that the government provide a monthly pension of Rs. 15,000 for landless people.

In addition to this, there were some efforts to bring greater attention to the plight of landless agricultural labourers in Amaravati. For instance, the *Raithu-Coolie Sangha* and the Assigned

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<sup>114</sup> Cited under Section III 1 (ii)(e).

Land Farmers' Welfare Association, amongst a few other associations, represented the interests of landless labourers. PM Kamalamma, a member of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) also tried to rally various *Dalit* communities around a common cause in order to unite protests under the same umbrella. The efforts of the NAPM and NCSC were particularly evident during the time I spent doing fieldwork in Amaravati. In addition, several members of the dominant castes from Undavalli, Penumaka and Nidamaru worked furiously behind the scenes (and sometimes in front of the cameras) to bring greater attention to the issue of mass job loss of landless labourers. Each example of dissent is discussed in some detail below.

#### **8.5.1 Engaging the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC)**

During my interview with the head of the Guntur DBF office, Bhagya Rao, he told me that his organization had tried to approach various government officials at the district level, including the then-Collector (who himself is a *Dalit*), the CRDA Commissioner, and additional district and regional level authorities, to lodge complaints regarding the treatment of *Dalits* in the capital region. However, all officials claimed to be helpless under the command of the Chief Minister. As a result, they resorted to appealing to the NCSC, the social welfare department and the revenue department at the national level for help (B. Rao 2017, personal communication, 27 January). Meanwhile, as far back as May 2015, Anumolu Gandhi, a prominent (Kamma) activist and S. Francis, a *Dalit* lawyer based in Vijayawada, brought the cause of *Dalit* cultivators in the capital region to K. Purraiah, then-head of the NCSC. He in turn referred the case to Ms. Kamalamma, who visited Vijayawada to familiarize herself with the situation of agricultural labourers and assigned landholders in the region. However, higher government officials continued to neglect the complaints (PM Kamalamma, speech at a public roundtable for assigned land farmers, Lingayapalem, 6 April 2017).

Finally, five representatives from the *Dalit* community went to New Delhi to present their grievances to the NCSC on 24 January 2017 (KY Nagaiah 2017, personal communication, 28 January). As a consequence of this protest, PM Kamalamma, held a public hearing in Vijayawada on 2 February 2017, where she used her power to summon and enforce the attendance of any person for the purposes of an inquiry to call the CRDA Commissioner, Mr. Sreedhar Cherikuri

and the Guntur district Joint-Collector, Krutika Shukla to the meeting.<sup>115</sup> At the same time, a rally to create awareness of the hearing shortly before it was to occur was scuttled by the police, as they claimed activists had not obtained permission for it (B. Rao 2017, personal communication, 30 January). This is just one example of protests that were silenced by authorities. For example, an increasing number of arrests and intimidation, led to organizers to move several activities, such as relay fasts to agitate for fair compensation for lost livelihoods, from public locations (i.e. in front of the CRDA building in Thullur) to private residences (B. Rao 2017, personal communication, 30 January; J. Verlankaya 2016, personal communication, 12 November). Activists further claimed that the government engaged in intimidation tactics through for example, deploying police forces to various locations around the capital city.

Despite these impediments, a range of activists, local residents and members of the media were present for the public hearing with PM Kamalamma on 2 February 2017. During the course of the hearing, she proceeded to ask the summoned officials from government questions related to the main grievances reported by *Dalit* cultivators. The complaints centered on four key issues: 1) the unlawful occupation and dispossession of *lanka* lands in the capital region and the implementation of differentiated compensation under G.O. 41; 2) the illegal mining of sand on the banks of the Krishna River and the *lanka* lands without compensation, which was leading to a reduction in the amount of land for cultivation and increasing the water to soil ratio in mostly *Dalit* cultivated lands; 3) the rampant unemployment of agricultural labourers as a result of the LPS, combined with the inadequate monthly pension they were receiving from the government; and 4) discriminatory housing allocations that placed *Dalit* plots in a separate area to other plots within villages. The net effect of these trends was that greater numbers of mostly *Dalit* residents found no option but to move out of a region in which they had worked and lived for generations, in search of jobs.

During the hearing, various people described the land pooling process as being unjust. One person stated that *Dalits* were entirely unaware of the content of the Land Pooling Act and

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<sup>115</sup> Under Clause (8) of Art. 338A of the Indian Constitution, for investigation and inquiry, the NCSC is vested with the power to: a) summon and enforce attendance of any person and examine their statements on oath; b) Ask for the production of any related documents; c) Receive evidence on affidavits; d) Requisition any public record or copy thereof from any court or office; e) Issue Commissions for examination of witnesses and documents; and f) Dealing with any matter which the President, by rule, may determine.

intimidated into signing away their land, stating: “The government brought forward the CRDA Act and compelled people to subscribe to land pooling or face the threat of their land being taken away anyway by the government.” It left most *Dalits* with no other option and so, many either sold their lands or finally gave in to the clauses of G.O. 41. Many *Dalit* cultivators were told by presiding authorities that any compensation they were receiving—whether it was for assigned lands or monthly pensions for lost livelihoods—was a form of ‘mercy.’ Several more lawyers spoke from Vijayawada before Ms. Kamalamma began cross-examining the CRDA Commissioner and the Deputy Joint-Collector in public.

She began by asking several basic questions in English regarding the region, the area of land being pooled and the type of acquisition being used to acquire lands. Thereafter, the questions became tougher and took on a more populist or activist tone: she asked how many *Dalits* were already assigned plots, whether *gramma sabhas*—or community meetings—were held before land pooling took place and how the rules of the 2013 Central government LARR Act was being applied. The CRDA Commissioner was silent for many of these questions or reported that he would submit necessary records in the next 10 days. At some point, Ms. Kamalamma addressed the crowd in Telugu, exclaiming: “What do you say, petitioners!?” She further asked the Commissioner to submit reports on the number of people who were receiving the monthly Rs. 2,500 stipend, along with the electoral rolls for comparison. After she received no reply to the question of whether Rs. 2,500 a month was a sufficient amount of money for a family of landless labourers to live on, she retorted:

You seem to be evacuating people to build the capital. If that’s true, who are you building the capital for? If it’s for the people, then *Dalits* should be given equal treatment.

She then declared unequivocally that G.O. 41 should be struck down on the grounds of discrimination and inadequate compensation. With respect to landless people, she asked what the CRDA’s solution would be, and whether MGNREGA was even applicable in a newly urbanizing context such as Amaravati. She further asked:

How is it that Rs. 2,500 is given per family when in the 2013 Act, it is calculated per head? Are you creating a scenario where the SC should not exist at all within the capital city?

Given the public berating of government officials and the number of declaratory statements made by Ms. Kamalamma to rally the assembled crowd, it was obvious that the hearing was an advocacy exercise designed to achieve large-scale coverage of key *Dalit* grievances in national newspapers the next day. This may be because while the NCSC has the power to summon public officials to meetings to answer relevant questions, it cannot compel them to act or change their policies. Therefore, a public hearing to gain media attention and rally public support is one of the only tools available at its disposal.

### **8.5.2 Advocacy by the National Alliance for People's Movement (NAPM)**

As earlier chapters have indicated, a group of dominant caste farmers also approached NAPM, an organization dedicated to advocating for livelihood rights for individuals, for assistance in the wake of the announcement of the capital. NAPM thereafter spearheaded a fact-finding mission in Amaravati, to study issues related to development of the capital and government efforts at land pooling at the end of 2014. Ultimately, they produced a mission findings report that was extremely critical of the land pooling process, claiming that:

There is no legal basis for land-pooling arrangement so far. Even the most basic requirement of preparing a feasibility report has not been done.... Reports and statements from the government indicate that 52,000 acres are going to be taken for building the capital city and this can go beyond 1 lakh acres in later phases. This defies all imagination (NAPM, 2015).

Moreover, they stated unequivocally: “decisions regarding land for capital cannot be considered merely as a matter of negotiation between government committees and the land owners” (*Ibid.*). They further referred to government figures, which showed that 32,153 persons in the affected villages being mainly dependent on agricultural labour, and a further 10,556 persons being dependent on cultivation activities. According to their estimations, about 80 percent of the people involved in agriculture in the studied villages were landless or marginal farmers who were dependent on agricultural labour and tenancy. They stood to completely lose their secure livelihoods.

Thereafter, two roundtable meetings with experts were held in Hyderabad and New Delhi in early January where key experts agreed that the conversion of such large tracts of land was destroying a vibrant agrarian community. Raju claimed that “the CM’s focus [was] on building a showcase city, to build a real-estate dealer’s vision” (B. Ramakrishna Raju 2017, personal communication, 14 April). He further stated:

A people’s chief minister should have helped the farmers to double their market access and capacities. Instead, he will entirely displace them.

Despite these efforts little political traction was gained amongst *Dalits* themselves during that time to oppose the capital city. There was no internal unity amongst landowners or cultivators or even between cultivators and landowners in wet and dry lands. However, further small-scale protest events continued to be held from time to time during my stay in the villages. For example, a rally was held in Vijayawada on 8 April 2017, led by Medha Patkar, one of the founders of NAPM, and involving various activist organizations, including the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), the Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS) and the opposition YSR Congress party. Each speaker sought to inspire the crowd to oppose the government and the LPS, and further urged for greater unity of farm labourers.

### **8.5.3 Support from some members of dominant caste land owners**

Finally, much of the push against land pooling in the capital region came from a small but vocal group of dominant caste—Kamma, Reddy and Kapu—landowners residing in the capital region or nearby, in Vijayawada. Many of them vehemently protested against the LPS for various reasons, but were not above using the issue of *Dalit* dispossession and loss of jobs as a lever to bring greater national and international attention to their cause. Together and separately, they organized and attended various town hall meetings, appealed to *Dalit* communities to protests, hired lawyers to file cases against the government, called press conferences and even staged press events to point out what they perceived to be continued intimidation by the government, implementation of unfair or unjust government ordinances and malfeasance and corruption by public officials. The question of why they have so vehemently opposed the LPS, when they had much to gain from it, is still largely unanswered. However, it can be surmised that political motivations (in the instance of those who support opposition parties) and economic

considerations played a role in the strategizing around organizing landless labourers against the TDP and land pooling. For instance, some people wondered whether these elite dissenters had taken up the cause of the landless labourers and assigned landowners as it provided them with the space to dissent under a more 'legitimate' banner of grievances, when in fact, their motivations may have been less benign, ranging from wanting a greater compensation package for lands forfeited, to possibly angling for a political career.

## **8.6 Conclusion: Deployment a regime of co-optation to fracture and break dissent**

Taken together, there was a curious lack of political mobilization around job loss amongst the largely *Dalit* population of landless labourers caused by the implementation of the LPS. For instance, there was little to no coordinated demand for land redistribution towards landless people, or even for specific issues like conferring greater access to credit to them. However, there were indications that resentments were boiling over amongst some *Dalit* communities in the villages by the summer of 2017. But this occurred only in tandem with a resigned sense of acceptance of worsening living conditions. Many landless labourers lamented their loss of a personal relationship with landowners. There was a sense that their former employers were getting rich and no longer cared for the fate of the people who worked for them for so long. One person told me that they were "residents in name only" (T. Rao 2017, personal communication, 18 February). Somewhat paradoxically, many also hoped that the capital would benefit their children, even if it meant years of hardship for many families due to a lack of work and money.

In addition, the government continued to utilize a curious mix of carrot and stick co-optation strategies. Each is described in turn below.

### **8.6.1 Material promises that were ultimately unmet**

In the early days of land pooling when there was a fair deal of confusion combined with hope, looming dissent and dissatisfaction seem to be dissipated by government assurances of a monthly stipend, skill development programmes, financial assistance/compensation, and jobs, although these promises has largely not materialized. In fact, a closer examination of various government programmes also indicate, not just a lack of delivery but also a lack of commitment to deliver high quality programmes altogether. With respect to the monthly pension, the



government compensation amount for landless labourers of Rs. 2,500 per month per household was ungrounded in law, precept or even in a social-impact assessment or needs assessment. Interviews with a wide range of daily wage labourers and even landowners who used to pay their workers corroborated the view that the compensation amount is highly unrealistic, given the fact that prior wage rates were already high in this region. Moreover, payment was often delayed, sometimes up to three to four months, throwing families into even more uncertain and insecure situations. Thus, the model of development that was purported by the government in the capital region was highly regressive:

Instead of providing people with jobs and livelihoods, the government is taking these away from people. These people were not previously relying on governments or corporations for their livelihoods. A tenant farmer with two acres could previously earn Rs. 2-3 *lakh* per year. He used to have a decent life. But overnight, he has been asked to move. It would be near impossible to find such a sustainable set up and place again (B. Ramakrishna Raju 2017, personal communication, 14 April).

Elsewhere, information gleaned from several interviews suggest that while some people were interested in skill development programmes, a large majority were not interested in them because of what they perceived to be the low quality of the instruction and the lack of job prospects and placements afterwards. Many people were also ineligible for the programmes due to age and prerequisite education requirements. While local officials were exacerbated by the lack of demand and what they called a 'lack of vision' on the part of local villagers, part of the problem also seemed to stem from an inadequate effort on the part of the government to undertake an appropriate needs assessment of different segments of the population that stood to lose jobs.

Moreover, where people pined for agricultural jobs, the government's promised programme to confer access to employment under MGNREGA also fell short. At the time of my interview, the programme had not been implemented in Amaravati and very few people of the estimated jobless had received job cards. Moreover, promises of student fee waivers and coverage of medical expenses were also to some degree, misleading, as most underprivileged people, were already eligible for fee assistance for education prior to land pooling, as well as for a medical insurance scheme. In this regard, the benefits would accrue mostly to those who were already

well off and previously ineligible for such programmes. Only one food canteen (as opposed to the promised 24 across the main villages) near the interim government complex, was set up during my time in the villages. Taken together, while some material compensation, particularly the monthly stipend, might have seemed curiously attractive to landless labourers in the early days of land pooling, it became quick very quickly clear that landless labourers stood to lose the most out of the government's plan to convert all the land into the region into an urbanscape.

### **8.6.2 Creation of an economy of anticipation**

But despite the worsening living conditions, some people continued to hold out hope that things would improve in the future. The lofty promises that were heavily promoted by the government reverberated to some extent even with landless agricultural labourers: One woman in Thullur expressed hope that more jobs would come in the future as Amaravati grew and that perhaps her daughter could eventually benefit from this through obtaining a government job (personal communication, 6 April 2017). Another man hoped that he could get a job as a night watchman for new apartment blocks in the future (personal communication, 8 December 2016). In fact officials of the CRDA often told worried local residents that they could expect to benefit enormously from the transition of Amravati from a rural backwater to a capital city. Some people—including landless labourers—sometimes actively bought into this dream. Yet, four years after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu laid the foundation stone for the city, it remained deserted.

### **8.6.3 Manipulation of discourse**

One of the more interesting aspects of how the authorities were dealing with those without land was through engaging in a discourse that promoted the idea that landless people were not true residents of these villages. In some (dominant caste) circles, landless labourers were largely considered “migrant workers,”—and therefore outsiders—particularly if they engaged in seasonal work across the villages. This was true even if they lived in homes within the capital region or *gramma kanttams*. Moreover, because land pooling rested completely on the cooperation of landowners, even the concept of ‘belonging’ to a region was premised on land ownership. Therefore, there was a sense that it was only those who had rights over land in the capital region that had a real voice. This was underlined by the fact that the government was

always more willing to negotiate with landowners than with mere land users and those residents who had worked for generations on fields that they may not necessary have owned. In fact, many landowners I interviewed repeated the phrase that landless labourers were “lucky” to receive Rs. 2,500 for “doing nothing,” and should therefore be satisfied.

#### **8.6.4 Spread of misinformation and fear**

A fair deal of misinformation was also circulated with respect to the wages earned by landless labourers. Initial reports by the government in 2015 minimized their income loss, reporting that the average income earned by an agricultural worker prior to land pooling was just over Rs. 2,000 per month (or about Rs. 4,500 a month per household, assuming each household had two workers). This figure was adjusted upwards over time, when estimates of monthly *household* income were reported to be over Rs. 8,000 prior to land pooling. It should also be noted that these estimate were further made with the assumption that most households had two working members in them, when in reality, many of the agricultural labour households I visited had more than two working members, particularly if a couple had older children who also worked in the fields. Moreover, household and individual incomes were sometimes used inter-changeably, which also tended to skew income estimates for agricultural labourers in the region.

The government further claimed that incomes after land pooling for landless agricultural labourers had actually risen due to the diversification of income sources since LPS was introduced. Unfortunately, this was not the case for the majority of landless people to whom I spoke: many were either jobless or alternately, had to leave the villages for months at a time to earn a wage elsewhere. They were in fact, being driven out. Yet, out of fear of losing even the small amount of compensation they were given, many were afraid to speak out.

#### **8.6.5 Direct intimidation and arrest**

Finally, when softer tactics to quell dissent failed, the government resorted to arresting activists. For example, when government-sponsored functions were planned at the CRDA offices in any of the villages, it was often the case that members of farmworker organizations and agricultural labour rights activists were arrested in advance to scuttle protests. For example, there were allegations that when the Chief Minister attended a function in the capital region during

*Ugadi*—the Telugu New Year—in March 2015, AICS and MRPS activists were arrested from their homes the night before the function and only released after he had left the area.

Thus, any cursory analysis of the costs and benefits of land pooling would find that the landless working class had lost the most in a new regime defined by neo-liberal forms of development. When the capital city project was announced, this group—many of whom were *Dalits* or members of the OBC community—was not asked if they supported the development of the capital city in their region. No social impact assessment was completed. According to B. Ramakrishna Raju, “choosing a capital requires expertise, inclusion, discussion and taking into account people’s voices. None of this occurred” (personal communication, 14 April 2017). While there were some efforts to galvanize workers to protest, which in turn led to some small forms of contestation over time, cultivators nevertheless seemed to be resigned to accept almost the complete loss of their incomes, jobs and livelihoods as time wore on. They realized that they had little power within the legal framework set up by Andhra authorities, which exclusively hinged on convincing landowners (not users) to forfeit their lands for a ‘stake’ in the future of the capital.

## 9 CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS: PROTRACTED DISPOSSESSION AND EXACERBATING CASTE-BASED INEQUALITIES IN AMARAVATI

When I first arrived in Thullur, a largely Kamma-dominated village, I encountered a heady mix of excited, bewildered and even euphoric residents. They almost immediately began to speak to me in rapturous terms about the coming city and of the then-Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu. Amaravati to them was a dream come true, an opportunity to “lift [themselves] from the dirt” (S. Chowdury 2016, personal communication, 1 November). Elsewhere, one person even compared Chandrababu Naidu to a God, whilst others claimed he was like a son to them. Still more told me excitedly about the money they had accrued almost overnight—so much, in fact, that they sometimes kept it in cash in storage lockers for fear of it being taxed if deposited in a bank.

This initial elation was however dampened with the Central government’s sudden decision to demonetize overnight—scrapping Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000 currency notes—on 8 November 2016. Almost immediately alarm and panic spread amongst landowning families that had become rich with the announcement of the capital. They were suddenly unable to either withdraw money (for the lack of notes) or deposit the huge wads of cash they kept either at home or in storage lockers, which they had earned from various real estate deals. They were having an especially tough time converting the old currency they had on hand and were at risk of being heavily taxed when they brought these into the bank, thereby lowering their net income. Worst of all, the construction of homes and businesses were halted due to the cash crunch, as were land transactions, since so much of it was occurring on the black market. This had a significant (even if temporary) negative effect on land prices and on private investment and expansion.

It was also the first time—within two and a half weeks of my arrival—that the precariousness of the fantasies and dreams of these farmers, and the (future) economy on which all their aspirations rested, emerged: while those who had owned land were better off than most, so much of their fortunes were also dependent on the promises made by the government. These included assurances by the government that land prices would continue to escalate steeply, thereby generating even more wild speculation and the opportunity to make huge sums of money through land sales. There were guarantees of exemptions on capital gains tax, and a

pledge of continued, increasing deposits of yearly annuities and pensions in people's accounts. The government continued to advertise that all landowners would become 'stakeholders' or 'partners' in the coming, futuristic city and their reconstituted plots would also fetch high prices in the future. Moreover, even those who did not own land in the capital region, could still benefit through the possibility of working urban jobs in industry and government. Altogether, these promises amounted to the assurance that the transition from rural livelihoods to an uncertain urban lifestyle would be relatively painless, even glamorous, and would occur within an extremely short period of time.

These strident assertions were part and parcel of a common refrain I would come to hear often, of so-called 'mind games' being played by the authorities. In time, the fear and uncertainty underneath the initial bluster was palpable even amongst relatively well-connected, wealthy farmers, who had apparently 'voluntarily' surrendered their lands for land pooling. As I spent more time in Amaravati, it was obvious that the LPS, and the concomitant strategies used to cajole and coerce people into consenting to give their lands to the LPS, were part of a concerted and manipulative strategy wielded by the state government to accumulate land and ultimately dispossess farmers. While the manner in which this occurred did not immediately incur violent protest or opposition, it did catalyze deep changes in the livelihoods of local residents of the capital region, particularly on those who had tenuous or no ownership rights over land. In the process, it generated new contours of engagement between the government and those being dispossessed and displaced.

To put succinctly, the Amaravati project generated a negotiated form of dispossession that resulted from a dispossessing authority (the state government) using a sustained protocol of co-option, control and consent, rather than the use of force. Force was also eventually used, but only after all other methods were exhausted. Thus, the newly minted city became a terrain of struggle between a state-capital nexus that sought, through the deployment of a specific strategy of engagement and negotiation, and the application of a novel and supposedly 'voluntary' land assembly method—land pooling—to ultimately dispossess and displace landowners and cultivators. Due to the negotiated nature of the transfer of land, a dialectic was formed between a dispossessing authority from above, which was successful to some extent in

fragmenting the opposition, and the popular politics and resistance of some local residents, ultimately resulting in a protracted form of dispossession.

### 9.1 *Revisiting research questions*

Before providing a recap of how dispossession occurred as an outcome of state interests and strategies and who were most affected by it, it is first necessary to revisit the core research questions of the dissertation. One of the primary initial curiosities of Amaravati was how and why so many people were turning over their lands to the LPS as protracted battles over land grabs were occurring across the country at the same time. If the answer lay in the manner in which the government was willing to engage with and negotiate with the residents in Amaravati, then it was necessary to ask why the state government chose LPS as its primary land assembly tool and what strategies it used to negotiate with residents. Why was it so successful initially and why was there such little protest by those most affected by the large-scale urbanization project—particularly from dispossessed farmers (who stood to lose land) and landless labourers (who were losing jobs)? The second set of questions revolved around the conditions of negotiation, consent and compliance in Amaravati: How can we now understand and assess the process and nature of negotiation that took place in Amaravati? And how does this relate to the hegemony of the dominant castes and the ruling party? And finally, how did an ambitious urbanization project that involved the takeover of thousands of acres of land impact and interact with pre-existing caste-based inequalities in the villages that comprised Amaravati? What happened in particular to those at the bottom of the social spectrum, namely *Dalits* who comprised the majority of the assigned land owners in the region as well as the landless agricultural labourers?

To begin answering these questions, this concluding chapter will recap the key findings of the dissertation—both in terms of the socio-political trends in Andhra Pradesh prior to land pooling, and the key outcomes that were generated as a result of land pooling. It will end with an assessment of what Amaravati tells us about the direction in which land dispossession is moving in India.

## 9.2 *Socio-political trends in Andhra Pradesh prior to land pooling*

This dissertation began with a review of key issues in land reform efforts in Andhra Pradesh in the post-Independence period and its relationship to caste-based aspirations in the Krishna and Guntur districts of coastal Andhra Pradesh. Key trends in this regard are outlined below.

### 9.2.1 **Significant caste-based inequalities existed in the Krishna and Guntur districts prior to land pooling**

Caste has long served as an important dimension of social articulation and political mobilization in coastal Andhra Pradesh. A survey of the political history of social formation in the state indicates that the Kammas were already the most powerful agricultural caste in both Krishna and Guntur districts, as they comprised the main landowners as far back as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was a result of the complex political ecology of the region, which enabled the upper classes of the forward castes in the region to preserve and increasingly consolidate power. The trend was further cemented during the period of major land reform in the early 1950s when the advent of irrigation schemes, an increasingly commercialized agrarian economy and finally, the Green Revolution, strengthened the process of land and power consolidation by the Kammas. By this time, they had accumulated large tracts of fertile agricultural land and made inroads into manufacturing, industry, trade, construction, commerce, communication and trade within the state.

At the same time, incomplete land reforms in the post-Independence period, combined with continued Kamma domination, which included political activism, had the unintended consequence of increasing the number of landless SC/ST households in the state. This stratification was caused by early tenancy reform efforts, which had the net effect of facilitating the transfer of land from upper caste landowners to middle caste tenants, whilst so-called 'inferior tillers,' who included poorer tenants, share croppers and landless labourers, many of whom were from more backward castes or were *Dalits*, lost access to cultivable land entirely. Therefore, it can be argued that land reforms, once regarded as crucial to social transformation by groups on the political left, may have lost their salience within Andhra (Suri and Raghavulu, 1996: 32) as inequalities between middle-caste tenants and poorer share croppers and landless



labourers continued grow, even as land inequality between upper and middle caste tenants decreased (Besley *et al.* 2013).

### **9.2.2 Andhra Pradesh had a considerable programme to redistribute land to landless poor people via land ceiling reforms and assignment of surplus lands**

However, the passing of the AP Assignment (Prohibition of Transfers) Act, 1972/77 placed some limited constraint on the general trend of accumulation of land in Andhra. Combined with the mobilization of rural cultivators who were inspired by more radical political parties and the Naxalite movement in the state, this resulted in a considerable amount of land—amounting to 4.25 million acres of land—being redistributed and assigned to 2.91 million poor, landless households. It also represented the most amount of land assigned to the greatest number of assignees in any one state, even if in practice much of the land did not reach its intended beneficiaries. Thus, two curious and contrary trends were already evident in the agrarian sector in Andhra Pradesh in the post-Independence period: Inadequate tenancy reforms that conferred minimal benefits—if any at all—to poor share croppers, and the passing of quite an ambitious land ceiling law, which saw at least the beginnings of land redistribution to landless, poor people. As a result, the demography of the villages that comprised the (then) newly declared city of Amaravati had also reflected these greater trends: Whilst the majority of the land was owned by members of the dominant Kamma, and to a lesser extent, Reddy and Kapu castes, most (though not all) landless agricultural labourers were from the SC/ST community. However, there was also a subset of mostly *Dalit* holders of assigned lands in the riverfront villages of the new capital—a topic I will return to later in these concluding remarks.

### **9.2.3 The historical antagonism between Kammas and Reddys was reflected in the rivalry between the YSRCP and TDP**

Political allegiances in the state, as well as in the new state capital, were also determined by caste. When Andhra Pradesh was first constituted in 1956, members of the Reddy caste took over the Congress party leadership whilst pushing the other main land owning caste, the Kammas, to the second line leadership. In fact, the Congress Party, at the time the only dominant party in the state and almost entirely associated with Reddy dominance, relied heavily on the politics of co-option and patronization. This however came under strain in later years due

to a number of external factors, including the then-Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi's, leadership style and increasing intraparty factionalism. The party also began to lose support from its traditional strongholds of: *Dalits*, *Adivasis*, minorities and other intermediate OBCs. This was despite the fact that the Congress Party often used the state apparatus to consolidate support through various welfare policies and programmes, as well as populist measures like land reforms, a rural housing policy and distribution of health cards. By the 1980s, the party could no longer ignore the clash of interest between the rising agricultural elite (Reddys) and the *Dalits*, whose socio-economic plight was deteriorating.

At exactly this time, a new regional political party, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), formed and headed by a Kamma movie star, Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao (NTR), broke the rival Reddy domination in state politics. Members of the Kamma caste were able to utilize their extensive land wealth and economic clout to push forward the TDP, which it saw as a symbol of its overdue assertion of power. Once in power, NTR openly promoted many of his caste members to higher positions in both the bureaucracy and legislature, creating a Kamma elite. The party also initially implemented populist programmes designed to gain the support of backward castes and the lower classes. The TDP has therefore been, and continues to be, a vehicle for Kamma demands in Andhra, particularly in the Krishna and Guntur districts, where they are particularly dominant.

This stark contrast in support between the TDP and the YSRCP was clearly reflected in Amaravati: Whilst nearly every single member of the Kamma caste supported the TDP, the converse was also largely true with members of the Reddy caste: most supported the then-opposition YSRCP, as did most members of the SC/ST caste (with some exceptions). Virtually all landless people also supported the opposition party. The only moving base of support came from the Kapus, whose support was largely determined by their landownership status and where and if they owned land within the capital city.

#### **9.2.4 Caste was a key determinant for the choice of Amaravati as the capital region of Andhra Pradesh**

With the election of Chandrababu Naidu as the head of the TDP and Chief Minister of the bifurcated state of Andhra Pradesh, the prominence of the Krishna and Guntur districts was raised even further. Given the historical dominance of the Kammas in the Guntur and Krishna districts and the creation of the TDP party as a vehicle for Kamma articulations, there can be little doubt that caste-based factors were behind the choice of Amaravati as the location for the new capital city of Andhra Pradesh. By extension, it can also be argued that the historic land pooling experiment in Amaravati was (initially) successful only because of the heavy presence of supportive Kamma landowner—particularly absentee landlords—in the capital region. Many of the people I spoke with (both within Amaravati and as far away as Hyderabad and other parts of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh) expressed the view that Naidu selected Amaravati as the capital for the sole purpose of further strengthening the political power—and caste hegemony—of the Kammas.

#### **9.2.5 The villages that comprised Amaravati were marked by significant geographical and demographic differences**

To complicate matters, the 29 villages in Amaravati differed from one another based on their proximity to the river and to the nearest city or town (i.e. Vijayawada or Guntur), the type of soil they contained (i.e. alluvial versus black or red soil; wet versus dry land; irrigated lands), the land ownership structure (i.e. few big landowners versus many small landowners), their size, and demography (caste composition). The area contains rich, alluvial soil in the villages nearer to the Krishna River, fertile red soil in flower producing regions, and less fertile black soil farther inland, which was in large part, irrigated through various pump irrigation schemes. In addition, approximately 10,000 acres within the capital region was at risk of flooding due to its proximity to Kondaveeti Vagu, a major canal that originates in the Kondaveedu Hill Range. The net effect of these soil differences, as well as the distance of each village from both a water source and the nearest village, was that land prices differed considerably between the villages prior to land pooling: the price of land in inland so-called dry land villages was Rs. 7-10 *lakh* per acre prior to land pooling and land in villages nearer to the river with more fertile soil was sometimes worth well over Rs. 4-6 *crore* per acre.

Moreover, in terms of demographics, members of the Kamma caste owned nearly all of the land in the dry land villages. While there were many smallholder farmers in these villages, there were also landowners who had very large holdings of land in these villages. Many of those in this latter category were absentee landlords. In the wetland villages, the size of land holdings on average was much smaller: even the wealthier, dominant caste farmers owned smaller amounts of land than their counterparts in the dry land villages. However, farming was also more lucrative per acre in the wetland villages. In fact, some of these villages—for example, Undavalli and Nidamaru—were epicentres for sustainable agricultural labour: the fields in these villages provided year-around labour to a large contingent of agricultural labourers, as well as sustainable incomes.

Meanwhile, many of those who owned land in wetland villages—for example, in Undavalli, Penumaka and Nidamaru—were from the Reddy caste. Perhaps most interestingly, where *Dalits* owned land in significant numbers, this tended to be in wetland villages, as many were assigned land either near the riverbank or on islands in the middle of the river. This complex mix of pre-existing demography and geography in the villages had profound implications for how land pooling would later be either embraced or rejected by the residents of Amaravati.

### ***9.3 Key outcomes after landpooling: Assessing the promise of Amaravati on different segments of the local population***

In the eleven months I spent in the 29 villages that comprise Amaravati, I listened to many of the hopes, wishes, dreams and desires of different categories of residents in the aftermath of the implementation of the LPS. Based on these extended conversations, as well as from analysis of the theoretical premise of dispossession and the everyday politics and coping strategies of local people in the region, I contend that the announcement of the capital city in the Krishna-Guntur region, along with the LPS had multiplying and intensely differentiated impacts on residents. The scale, scope and direction of these effects were mediated by the institution of caste, class and even political allegiances. For landowners, the type of land and the area in which they owned the land had a bearing on outcomes, as did the nature of their land rights. Regardless of these factors,

On the other end of the spectrum, the government launched a concerted and strategic effort to fragment the opposition and co-opt and coerce those who had reservations about the LPS. These developments in turn led to a slow, protracted form of dispossession and job loss in the capital region, which ultimately served to exacerbate pre-existing inequalities in the area. Together, they weave together a narrative that explains how so much land was assembled in such a short period of time, and what consequences this had (and continues to have) for different social groups in the region.

### **9.3.1 Differentiated prices for landowners in dry land and wetland villages**

The announcement of land pooling left an immediate impression on land prices in the villages. Almost overnight, a speculative bubble was created with heightened real estate activity evoked by investor interest. In the dry land villages, land pooling was a boon: prices shot up by at least ten times to Rs. 1.5 – 2 crore. However, in wetland villages, real estate prices collapsed as land prices for the entire capital region (for both dry and wet land) equalized (or came close to equal) across the 29 villages. Like the dry land villages, the price of agricultural land in these villages was valued at 2 crore (or very slightly higher) an acre—a net reduction in price in places like Undavalli and Penumaka. The reverse swing in land prices—an increase in the dry land villages and a decrease in the wet land villages—created, in turn, a level of enmity and competition between residents in these villages.

### **9.3.2 Support for land pooling varied according to ownership status, caste affiliation and political party allegiance**

In fact, support for land pooling was determined by several key factors, including whether people owned land and if so, the type of land they owned and where this was located, as well as their caste affiliation and political party allegiances. Nearly all Kamma landowners, for example, supported the land pooling exercise because of their trust in the ruling TDP government, their secure land ownership status and the future benefits they anticipated would accrue from the land pooling process. Moreover, if they owned land in the dry land villages, they suddenly benefitted hugely from the steep appreciation of prices after the announcement of the city. Meanwhile, members of the other main dominant group in the region—the Reddy caste—were

vehemently against land pooling, despite owning land. This was because many of them owned land in the more lucrative wetland villages, where land prices fell after the announcement of the capital. In addition, the historical rivalry between the Kammas and the Reddys, as well as their caste-based allegiance to the YSRCP meant that many were automatically suspicious of the promises made by the then-ruling TDP government. However, even they stood to lose less if they were forcibly dispossessed of their lands than holders of assigned land or landless people.

### **9.3.3 Assigned land grabs: Reversal of welfare gains from land distribution**

The largely *Dalit* holders of assigned lands in the riverfront villages were especially jolted by the implementation of the LPS in the new capital region. Many of them had received their lands as part of a government programme to assign lands to landless poor people who directly engage in cultivation, since Independence. The passing of the AP Assigned Lands (Prohibition of Transfers) Act of 1977 further cemented the precept that this lands was meant to stay in the hands of landless poor persons, as it prohibited its sale or transfer to anyone. Only members of the household could inherit it. While much of the lands assigned to poor households were found to have gone out of their possession even prior to land pooling, this trend only accelerated after land pooling.

Under the controversial G.O. 41, the government mandated less compensation for holders of assigned lands. The government further deployed a narrative that led holders of this land to believe that it was '*sivoijamadar*'—or government land—which had to be returned to government in any case. The lower compensation was framed as a 'generosity' offered by the authorities. Moreover, there were widespread allegations that influential TDP leaders with advance knowledge of the announcement of the capital city area had been buying assigned lands illegally at cheap rates and getting the records regularized. Many of the *Dalit* owners I interviewed told me that they had been manipulated into 'selling' their lands for a pittance under threat of misinformation, blackmail or ultimately, intimidation (for example, P. Prakash 2017, personal communication, 16 February).

#### **9.3.4 Mass job loss and immizerization for agricultural labourers**

Finally, as land pooling proceeded in the early months of 2015, almost all cultivation in the fields (apart from in some of the dissenting villages such as Undavalli, Penumaka and Nidamaru) was unilaterally halted. This almost immediately resulted in devastating mass job loss for the bulk of agricultural labourers living in the region, which was estimated by different sources to be anywhere between 30,000 and 60,000 people. While government sources told me that provisions had been made to replace these jobs and provide a social safety net—through for example the provision of a basic monthly household pension of Rs. 2,500, the application of MGNREGA, the implementation of reskilling programmes and the promise of future ‘urban’ jobs—in reality, most labourers were left struggling. The promised Rs. 2,500 per household rarely arrived on time and was wholly insufficient for their needs. It was also much less than what agricultural labourers earned prior to land pooling. Moreover, replacement jobs—for example in petty jobs in the village or in nearby towns—were scarce.

#### **9.4 Amaravati: From dream capital to capital loss**

Taken together, the manner in which land pooling was implemented in Amaravati displays some characteristics of previous examples of dispossession and land grabs in India, whilst also displaying some new features. One of the newer features of the case study of Amaravati was the so-called negotiated and ‘voluntary’ manner in which land was transferred between owners and the government. This was facilitated by a slick government strategy of dispossession that included a neoliberal urbanization plan—which amounts to an inscription device that facilitated land loss on the part of local residents—a slick media and communications strategy that included the use of what Ramachandraiah (2016) calls the ‘rhetoric of urgency,’ and the skillful deployment of a hegemonic new law that on the surface seemed to encourage a ‘voluntary’ submission of land by local cultivators, but in fact was a vehicle for a neoliberal restructuring scheme.

#### **9.4.1 Elements of land pooling: Local residents trade land for dreams and the government employs inscription devices to facilitate dispossession**

Even as people ‘voluntarily’ signed consent forms that conferred their land rights to the CRDA, it was striking that much of this was done on the basis of a series of untested promises. The primary of these was that the future value of land in the capital city would multiply to such an extent that owning even a tiny fraction of it constitutes becoming a ‘stakeholder’ of the city. The premise of land pooling was simple: privately held land would be pooled by a public agency, who would in turn build infrastructure such as roads and water and electricity facilities on the pooled land, before returning a portion of it to the owners in proportion to their original share. In this exchange, virtually no cash changes hands, apart from a yearly annuity. The exchange also rests on the vision of a futurist mega city and the transformation potential it holds for ordinary villagers, who were convinced that they could aspire to an affluent urban—and urbane—lifestyle. As Cross (2015: 426) puts it: “judgments about the future that appear to be based upon the careful calculation of risk are inseparable from the play of whims and sentiments.” Therefore, dreams of profit and improvement amongst those were about to be most affected by the construction of Amaravati converged with images of skyscrapers, apartment buildings and shopping malls to convince a majority of farmers to hand over their rights in exchange for virtually nothing tangible.

For the government, this was a coup: In a context where a new Central government Land Acquisition Law (LARRA, 2013) was just passed, it had managed to pass its own Capital Region Development Authority Act (Act. No. 11) and the associated land pooling scheme. The use of LPS allowed the government to bypass several mandatory provisions in the LARR Act, which sought to make the process of acquisition more participatory, whilst providing a level of protection against the forcible takeover of land. These included the requirement of obtaining consent from landowners and land users alike, conducting a social impact assessment, abiding by restrictions on the acquisition of irrigated multi-cropped lands and ensuring resettlement and rehabilitation of affected populations. Many of these stipulations were ignored in the years that followed the announcement of the new capital city.



In this way, the LPS represented a prime example of an inscription device—a modality that allowed the government to create a regime of exclusion that differentiated between legitimate and illegitimate uses and users of land. Despite the running rhetoric by the ruling government, which claimed that LPS would make landowners ‘stakeholders of development,’ it in fact functioned as a prime vehicle for dispossession, as it made large-scale investment in land imaginable for outside investors. The core of the LPS—G.O. 41—also functioned as an inscription device as it functioned to essentially frighten some people (for example, assigned land holders) into selling their lands for fear of losing it to the government under unfair conditions. In addition, specific statistical devices, including a Resurvey Settlement Register (RSR) or a field survey used for land records dating back to 1903 was used, which declared the majority of the land in the region dry (and hence available for acquisition, even through the more stringent LARR Act). This was despite the fact that much of the land, particularly in all the riverfront villages, was obviously wet, lush with green overgrowth and fertile enough to produce multiple crops per year. Even the drylands had extensive irrigation networks that resulted in several crop yields per year. Moreover, multiple surveyors (and surveys) to measure the amount of assigned lands on the various islands within the Krishna River were also deployed, only for many assigned landowners to find that the amount of land recorded under their names had dwindled from what they were initially assigned. Again, the government utilized a seemingly, scientific process and a statistical inscription device to grab land where it could.

#### **9.4.2 Fragmentation of the opposition through rhetoric, negotiation and ‘mind-games’**

Elsewhere, the dispossessing authority relied on a sliding scale of speculation, rhetoric, negotiation and coercion to slowly dispossess people from their land and livelihoods. The process happened in such a graduated way however, that the bombardment of rhetoric, negotiation, renegotiation and even intimidation became part of every day life of local residents. In fact, the government engaged in a fairly straightforward strategy of fragmenting the opposition through varied use of negotiation and co-option tactics, and where necessary, a campaign of coercion and intimidation. With respect to appealing to its own strong base of Kamma land owners, it mostly succeeded in convincing people to hand over their lands as many were already living precarious livelihoods farming on rain-dependent (i.e. what was eventually perceived as dry) land.

The sudden increase in land prices in these villages offered enough inducement for many to submit their land to the LPS. Where these farmers sold their lands during the speculative bubble and cashed out to buy more land elsewhere, many benefitted. However, where there was some doubt in the early days, the government moved quickly to negotiate better terms and quell early dissent. This included providing higher compensation packages, at first for dry land farmers who comprised the TDP's core support base, and later for wetland farmers who received an enhanced package. The government also promised a waiver of all agricultural loans. In addition, they began disbursing the lease amount early in TDP stronghold areas, even before land surveys and the process of document verification was completed in order to placate early dissenters. These efforts were complemented by a virtual publicity blitzkrieg, which sought to convince local residents of the benefits of building a capital city in the region, raising hopes and aspirations of huge profits to be gained along the way. Entrepreneurial words like "buy-in" "stakeholder" were used to convince farmers that they would be an intrinsic element of the success of the new city, and more importantly would receive a huge windfall from land speculation. As described by both Levien in reference to his research in Rajasthan and by Upadhyaya (2015) in Amaravati, an industry of local real estate speculators and developers was born. This is because the speculative nature of LPS forces "even small and marginal farmers to become speculators [as] they had to make decisions about a future that they could hardly envision, much less control" (*Ibid.*, pg. 5).

Elsewhere with assigned landholders, the situation was more nefarious. As explained above, a set of tactics that amounted to corruption (through turning a blind eye to illegal sales of this land) and coercion was used. Assigned landholders consistently felt that they were intimidated into feeling that their land did not really belong to them, as it was assigned, and as such, were put into the position of handing over their *DK pattas* (papers proving assignment) for low prices to powerful people. It was alleged that many of these buyers were members of the TDP. Even where they 'sold' this land, these deals were not outright purchases: many just entered into 'agreements' wherein in exchange of an advance purchase document, the buyer pays only a percentage of the sale price up front. This put many of the assigned landholders in the worst position possible: they could neither keep their land in peace, nor receive even the reduced value of a parcel of their land, after a sale was made.

Meanwhile, perhaps the most aggressive show of force was reserved for those landowners—particularly Kamma landowners—in dry land villages who continued to refuse to submit their land to the LPS. In this case, the government relied heavily on using the police as an instrument of coercion and intimidation and also utilized legal instruments such as the Section 144 law, which banned assembly of more than four persons and protest. Finally, several coordinated burnings took place in banana plantations in six riverfront villages several months before the first deadline to give land to the LPS. It was widely alleged that government forces set the fires to instill fear in those who refused to part with their land. The burnings also provided cover for the police to arrest several prominent detractors of land pooling, in order to interrogate and frighten them in jail.

Finally, attempts were made to mollify landless labourers, who were perhaps the biggest losers of the enactment of the LPS, as they had no land rights, despite living previously sustainable livelihoods as a result of having year-round agricultural work in the region. The government simply promised them a nominal monthly pension of Rs. 2,500 per household. Whilst the government reported that the yearly sum—Rs. 30,000—amounted to the income accrued from tilling one acre of dry land for one year, this was not true. This was because the premise of categorizing land as ‘wet’ or ‘dry’ was disingenuous (due to the presence of lift irrigation schemes in all the dry land villages) and households often had more than one earner, and as such the total household income was often much higher than Rs. 2,500 a month. Even then, many agricultural labourers felt helpless as the ability to yield political influence was almost completely dependent on land ownership status.

In the process, land pooling entirely obscured the central issue of consent, as people were confronted with such a huge plethora of confusing and sometimes false and misleading information. In this scenario, it was virtually impossible to make an informed choice. This in turn seriously undermines the extent to which this process can be considered ‘voluntary.’

### **9.4.3 Exacerbation of caste-based inequalities**

The generation of mass speculation and the use of a differentiated compensation scheme, which conferred more benefits to dominant caste landowners than to anyone else, only served to exacerbate caste-based inequalities in Amaravati. Whilst Kamma landlords were making some gains through sales of their land, virtually every other social group was living in a state of uncertainty. For instance, many of the Reddy farmers who owned wetlands near the river, refused to hand their land over to the LPS and as such were stuck in a legal limbo. They also had to contend with the threat that their lucrative lands would be acquired under the Central government's LARR Act. Meanwhile, *Dalit* holders of assigned lands were losing their legal papers for these lands at an alarming rate. Many were forced off their land without being given adequate compensation, either through distress sales that did not provide enough income, or through having to submit their land to the LPS for far less compensation. Many tenant farmers—who were mostly members of both the dominant castes and the OBC community—were forced to revert to agricultural labour because there was less land to rent in the region as fields lay fallow. Elsewhere, herders (many of whom were also from the OBC community) had to sell their livestock due to the lack of grazing land. Finally, agricultural labourers were forced into a position of either abject poverty caused by unemployment (as was the case with many women who could not work far from their homes due to their caring duties at home) or becoming migrant labourers. In this way, they were increasingly being driven out of the villages of Amaravati due to a lack of jobs, leaving large contingents of landless people (most *Dalits*) worse off in absolute terms. Altogether, the prospect of urbanization and economic growth in these villages only served to exacerbate the socio-economic inequalities between dominant castes and more marginalized castes.

### **9.4.4 Amaravati provides an example of a protracted process of dispossession**

In this way, a slow, negotiated process of dispossession was generated in the 29 villages of Amaravati in the aftermath of land pooling. While this did not occur in one fell sweep or always under the threat of the use of force, the impacts were nevertheless catastrophic for the most vulnerable segments of society. New contingencies and strategies to mollify and neutralize legitimate demands from the population emerged at every juncture. These included (but are not limited to) the application of a differentiated benefits scheme and the inching transformation of

rules and laws to benefit one (usually dominant) group over another. Meanwhile, some concessions (or promises) to beleaguered social groups were also provided to gain trust and split loyalties. The net effect of these strategies was to create an underlying atmosphere of intense uncertainty and tension, even amongst those who thought they had 'voluntarily' provided their land and expressed their happiness and confidence at their future prospects. Others—namely owners of assigned lands and landless labourers—had to directly contend with the fact that government promises were empty and the threat of coercion was ever present.

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## ANNEXES

### Annex 1: The Sivaramakrishnan report: an early proposal for decentralized development

In the months and days leading up to bifurcation, an expert committee on the new capital for Andhra Pradesh, headed by the late K C Sivaramakrishnan, was constituted in March 2014 by the-then Central government formed by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance. The Committee was appointed with the explicit task of assessing the best location for a new state capital for the residual state of Andhra Pradesh. Furthermore, its terms of reference included, amongst other directives, the requirement of affecting “the least possible dislocation to existing agriculture systems as well as ... minimum resettlement of people and their habitations” (Government of India, 2014: Annexure I). To complete this task, the Committee went to 11 districts in Andhra and accepted 4,728 suggestions from people over a period of six months.

The final report, prepared in accordance with Section 6 of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganization Act 2014, was completed and submitted by 31 August 2014.<sup>116</sup> Sivaramakrishnan—who himself was one of the architects of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution of India, which provided a framework for decentralization and empowerment of rural and urban local bodies—supported a proposal for a decentralized capital based on the precept of ‘distributed development’ as opposed to the construction of a singular greenfield location in which a super city would be developed or even expanding existing cities. In fact, the Committee found the construction of a single large capital city to be unfeasible, citing the adverse affects of the development of such an agglomeration on other parts of the state by “sucking much private and speculative capital into the area” (*Ibid.* 2014: 9, 11, 26). This had particular relevance due to the public perception that Hyderabad’s growth had come at the cost of the advancement of the rural hinterlands in what was then unbifurcated Andhra Pradesh.

The Committee also specifically warned against locating the site of the new capital within the Vijayawada-Guntur-Tenali-Mangalgiri (VGTM) urban area (the current location of Amaravati) due to long-term economic and environmental consequences. The Krishna, Guntur and West

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<sup>116</sup> Hereafter referred to as the Sivaramakrishnan Report.

Godavari districts (within which the VGTM area is located) of Andhra comprise some of the most fertile agricultural lands of the state. It urged for any plan to urbanize the region using a “ring-road approach” to be reconsidered, and cited skyrocketing prices fuelled by speculation as real further problems if the area was further developed (*Ibid*: 11-12). The Committee further noted that the potential impacts on cultivators and agricultural labourers of locating the capital in this region would be huge:

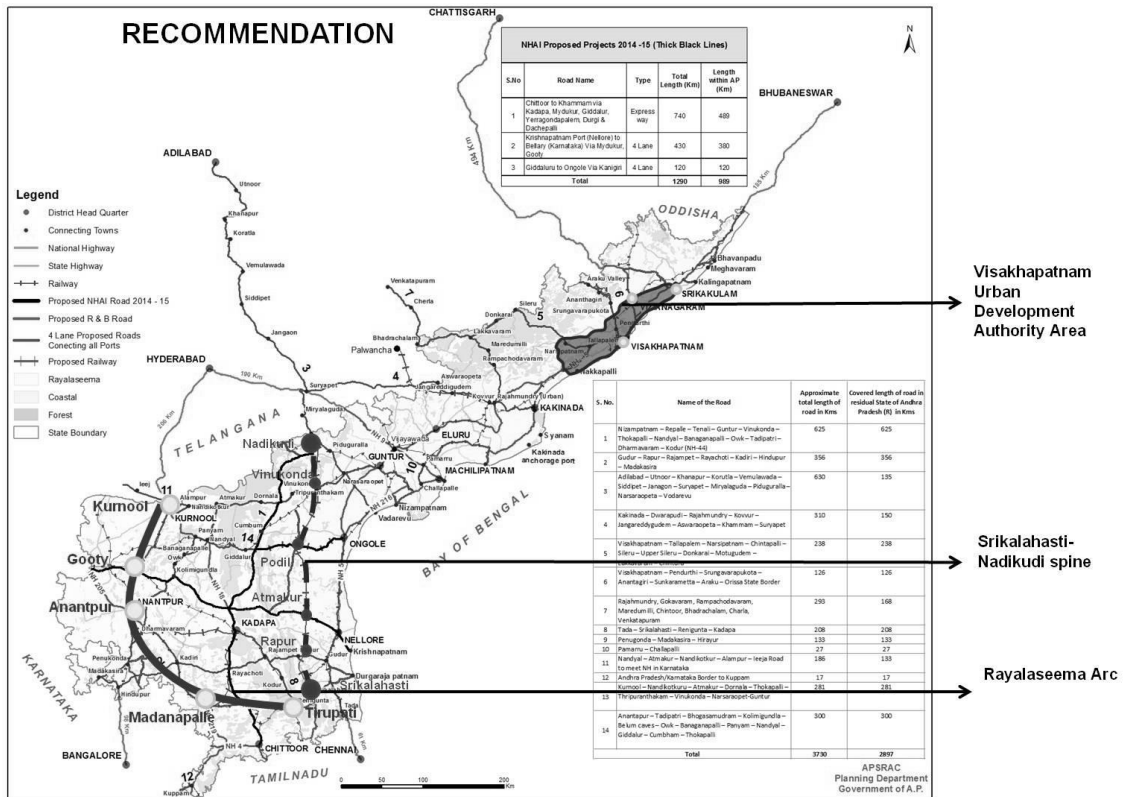
Any attempt to convert agricultural land much of which is located along the proposed ring road, into non-agricultural use will seriously displace this work force rendering them unemployed, loss of valuable agricultural land, disappearance of small holdings and farmers and benefit only land speculation and serve profit for the real estate operators (*Ibid*: 13)

In case the authorities favoured the development of a greenfield capital, the Report recommended a location where large parcels of government land could be identified (Government of India 2014: 26) and made into a city. This was unlikely to be in the VGTM urban area. However, it also recognized the difficulties of acquiring this land elsewhere because of “the assignment of these lands to landless people in recent years” (*Ibid*: 26).

The Report instead strongly favoured a form of distributed development that would forego the paradigm of creating large urban sprawls, which depend on economies of scale and agglomeration (Vakulabharanam and Prasad, 2017). The decentralized model that was proposed envisioned the development of political and administrative functions of government in multiple regions or sub-regions of the state, namely a) the Vizag region of Uttarandhra; b) the Rayalseema Arc comprising of Kurnool, Anantapur, Tirupathi, Kadapa and Chittoor; and c) what is known as the Kalahasti-Nadikudi spine, which refers to land along the proposed Kalahasti-Nadikudi railway line (see map 1). It recommended various government offices pertaining to industry, manufacture, ports, shipping, and petrochemicals, fisheries, amongst other economic ventures, such as a high-tech zone, be located in the Vizag zone. The development of other capital functions and institutions could occur in the Rayalseema Arc, including potentially the ‘seat for the capital.’ Rayalseema was also considered to be an ideal location for building a high capacity transport corridor in South India. The Kalahasti spine was put forward as a possible location to develop a railway junction and an alternative to the Vizag-Chennai Industrial corridor

in order to hedge against environmental hazards such as cyclones and tidal surges, which have previously damaged the coast.

Figure A.1: Map of Vishakhapatnam Zone, Rayalaseema Arc and Kalahasti-Nadikudi Spine



Source: Sivaramakrishnan Report, Annexure - V

## Annex 2: List of relevant GOs

These GOs can be accessed online at [www.aponline.gov.in](http://www.aponline.gov.in).

No.	G.O. No.	Subject	Issuing department	Date of issue
1	G.O. Ms. No. 1	Municipal Administration & Urban Development Department – The Andhra Pradesh Capital City Land Pooling Scheme (Formulation and Implementation) Rules, 2015 – Notification – Issued.	Municipal Administration & Urban Development (M2) Department	01.01.2015
2	G.O. Ms. No. 43	Municipal Administration & Urban Development Department – The Andhra Pradesh Capital City Land Pooling Scheme (Formulation and Implementation) Rules, 2015 – Amendments – Issued.	Municipal Administration & Urban Development (M2) Department	09.03.2015
3	G.O. Ms. No. 59	Municipal Administration & Urban Development Department – The Andhra Pradesh Capital City Land Pooling Scheme (Formulation and Implementation) Rules, 2015 - Amendment – Issued.	Municipal Administration & Urban Development (M2) Department	20-03- 2015
4	G.O. Ms. No. 61	Municipal Administration & Urban Development Department – The Andhra Pradesh Capital City Land Pooling Scheme (Formulation and Implementation) Rules, 2015 - Amendment – Issued.	Municipal Administration & Urban Development (M2) Department	24-03- 2015
5	G.O. Ms. No. 72	MA& UD Department – Capital City Development & Management Corporation – Appointment of Chairman & Managing Director and certain Board of Directors Modification - Orders –Issued.	Municipal Administration & Urban Development (CRDA2) Department	19-02- 2016
6	G.O. Ms. No. 79	Municipal Administration & Urban Development Department – The Andhra Pradesh Capital City Land Pooling Scheme (Formulation and Implementation) Rules,	Municipal Administration & Urban Development (M2) Department	15-04- 2015

No.	G.O. No.	Subject	Issuing department	Date of issue
		2015 - Amendment – Issued.		
7	G.O. Ms. No. 176	Municipal Administration & Urban Development Department– Scheme for payment of pensions to eligible landless families in Capital City area through “Capital Region Social Security Fund” - Administrative sanction - Accorded – Orders - Issued.	Municipal Administration & Urban Development (M2) Department	31-07- 2015
8	G.O. Ms. No. 493	Registration and Stamps Department Indian Stamp Act, 1899-Reduction of Stamp Duty under section 9 of the Indian Stamp Act, 1899 payable on Development Agreement-Cum Irrevocable Power of Attorney prescribed under Sub Rule (8) of Rule (8) of the A.P. Capital City Land Pooling Scheme (Formulation and Implementation) Rules, 2015 framed under Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority Act - 2014 - Notification – Orders - Issued.	Revenue (Registration. I) Department	31-12- 2015
9	G.O. Ms. No. 494	Registration & Stamps Department – Registration Act, 1908–Section 78– Table of Fees– Exemption of Registration Fee on instruments executed by or on behalf of or in favor of the Authority under the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority Act, 2014 (Act 11 of 2014)- Amendment – Orders – Issued.	Revenue (Registration. I) Department	31-12- 2015
10	G.O. Ms. No. 30	MA&UD – APCRDA– Payment of pension to eligible landless families in Capital City Area through “Capital Region Social Security Fund” - Operational Guidelines – Orders - Issued.	Municipal Administration & Urban Development (CRDA2) Department	10-02- 2016
11	G.O. Ms. No. 41	RULES — The Andhra Pradesh Capital City Land Pooling	Municipal Administration & Urban	17-02- 2016

No.	G.O. No.	Subject	Issuing department	Date of issue
		Scheme (Formulation and Implementation) Rules, 2015 - Amendment — Notification - Issued.	Development (CRDA.2) Department	
12	G.O. Ms. No. 125	MA&UD – APCRDA - Amaravati Capital City - Land Pooling Scheme – Welfare of the Farmers and other Landless Poor- Free education to the Children of the all the residents residing as on 08.12.2014 - Implementation of Free Education – Orders – Issued.	Municipal Administration & Urban Development (CRDA.2) Department	16-05- 2016
13	G.O. Ms. No. 52	Health, Medical and Family Welfare – Free Medical Facilities to the residents of the Amaravati Capital City who are residing as on December 8, 2014 – Implementation of free health facilities – Orders - Issued.	Municipal Administration & Urban Development (CRDA.2) Department	12-05- 2016
14	G.O. Ms. No. 165	RULES – The Andhra Pradesh Capital City Land Pooling Scheme (Formulation and Implementation) Rules, 2015 - Amendment – Notification - Issued.	Municipal Administration & Urban Development (CRDA.2) Department	25-06- 2016
15	G.O. Ms. No. 207	Rules – AP Capital City Land Pooling Scheme (Formation & Implementation) Rules, 2015 – Notification – Issued.	Municipal Administration & Urban Development (CRDA.2) Department	08-08- 2016
16	G.O. Ms. No.153	Negotiated Settlement Policy		19.04.2017

**Source:** Taken from APCRDA (2018: 96-98).



### Annex 3: Interview questions

#### Biographical questions

English	Telugu
What is your name?	<i>Nī pēru ēmiṭi?</i>
How old are you?	<i>Mī vayas'su enta?</i>
Where do you live?	<i>Mīru ekkaḍa nivasistunnāru?</i>
How do you make your living?	<i>Mīru ēmi cēstāru?</i> <i>Mīru ekkaḍa pani cēstāru?</i>
What caste do you belong to?	<i>Nīku cendina kulaṁ ēmiṭi?</i>
How many people are there in your household?	<i>Mī iṇṭilō enta mandi unnāru?</i>
Do you own any land? If so, how much?	<i>Mīru ē bhūmini kaligi unnārā? Alā ayitē, enta bhūmi?</i>

#### Before / after questions

Before land-pooling	After land pooling
What kind of work did you do prior to landpooling? ( <i>Mīru landpooling mundu ē rakamaina pani cēsāv?</i> )	Do you have work currently? What kind of work do you do now? ( <i>Mīru ippuḍu pani cēstunnārā? Mīru ippuḍu ē rakamaina pani cēstāru?</i> )
How many people in your household had work prior to landpooling? What did they do? ( <i>Mī iṇṭilō entamandi vyaktulu landpooling-ku mundu pani cēsāru? Vāru ēmi cēsāru?</i> )	How many people in your household work currently? What do they do? ( <i>Prastutaṁ mī iṇṭilō enta mandi pani cēstunnāru? Vāru ēmi cēstāru?</i> )
How much did you earn a day/a month prior to land pooling? ( <i>Mīru lyāṇḍpūliṅku okati rōju/ nela mundu enta sampādistāru?</i> )	How much do you earn now? ( <i>Mīru ippuḍu enta sampādistāru?</i> )

Before land-pooling	After land pooling
What was your household income prior to landpooling? (Landpooling mundu mī gr̥ha ādāyaṁ ēmiṭi?)	What is your household income now? (Ippuḍu mī gr̥ha ādāyaṁ ēmiṭi?)
Was your income sufficient to live before? (Mī ādāyaṁ mundu jīviṇcaḍānīki saripōtundā?)	Is your income sufficient now? What is the difference between before and now? (Ippuḍu mī ādāyaṁ saripōtundā? Mundu mariyu ippuḍu madhya vyatyāsaṁ ēmiṭi?)

*Open-ended questions on impressions*

English	Telugu
What do you think about the capital city project?	Mīru rājadhāni nagara prājekṭ guriṇci ēmi ālōcistāru?
What do you think about the government? Chandrababu Naidu? Do you think it will deliver on its promises?	Mīru prabhutvānni guriṇci ēmanukunṭunnāru? Chandrababu Naidu gurinci? Dāni vāgdānālapai adi baṭvāḍā ani mīru anukunṭunnāru?
Did you give your land for pooling? If so, why? If not, why not?	Mīru landpooling kōsaṁ mī bhūmini iccārā?
Are you happier now than before landpooling?	Nuvvu santōṣaṅgā vunnāvā? Landpooling tharuvatha?

## Annex 4: List of people interviewed

### **Local activists**

- *Anumolu Gandhi, a very wealthy Kamma landlord originally from Lingayapalem, now living in a penthouse apartment in Vijayawada, who headed various efforts to organize people against the land pooling scheme.*
- *Mallela Sesha Giri Rao, a lawyer, vocal opponent of land pooling and member of one of the biggest former zamindar Kamma families originally from Rayapudi village.*
- *Sriman Narayana, the primary plaintiff of the National Green Tribunal Case against the state of Andhra Pradesh.*
- *Dantu Balaji Reddy, a fierce opponent of landpooling from Undavalli who is also a party worker for the YSR-CP and its leader, Jagan Mohan Reddy.*
- *Nagi Reddy, a landowner and prominent opponent of landpooling in Nidamaru.*
- *Nagaiah, a Dalit activist from the neighbouring village of Pedaparimi, who was involved in protests against land pooling.*
- *Rama Krishna Raju, a National Convenor of the National Alliance for People's Movements, who spearheaded a fact-finding mission in Amaravati as early as 2014.*
- *EAS Sharma, a former Union Finance Secretary and activist.*
- *Lenin, the youth representative of the Communist party.*
- *Krishna Rao<sup>117</sup>, a medical doctor whose family owns a large amount of land in Undavalli;*
- *Srilatha<sup>118</sup>, a lawyer fighting against land pooling in the court system alongside her husband, also a prominent lawyer in Vijayawada.*

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<sup>117</sup> Name changed as this person is not listed in any existing print media as an activist.

<sup>118</sup> Name changed as she is a private citizen in Vijayawada with links to the capital area.

**Political figures**

- *Sridhar Cherukuri, the Commissioner of the CRDA.*
- *Several officials within the local panchayat and CRDA offices, particularly in Thullur and Undavalli.*
- *YSRCP MP Rama Krishna Reddy who represented Mangalgiri district*
- *TDP MLA Shravan Kumar, who represented Thadikonda district, of which Thullur mandal is a part*
- *TDP MP for Guntur district, Rayapati Sambasiva Rao*
- *M. Ravi, Secretary of the Rajdhani (capital division) of the CPI(M).*
- *Babu Rao, head of the CPI(M) for the capital region*
- *Dr Madala Srinivas, head of the Land Pooling Association and member of the TDP*
- *Shobanadreshwara Rao, former Agricultural Minister from 1999 to 2004, who was a TDP member but had come to vehemently oppose the land pooling scheme.*

**Policy experts**

- *Rathin Roy, director of NIPFP, and member of the Sivaramakrishnan Committee, tasked with assessing and selecting a place for a new capital of Andhra Pradesh after bifurcation*
- *Aromar Revi, Director of Indian Institute of Human Settlements (IIHS)*
- *KP Krishnan, formerly the Secretary of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.*
- *Hukum Meena, Joint Secretary of the Department of Land Resources.*