

**SHAREHOLDER CITIES:
AGRARIAN-URBAN LAND COMMODIFICATION IN INDIA'S CORRIDOR
REGIONS**

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1: CORRIDOR REGIONS

In 2001, the newly liberalized Indian state¹ launched one of the most ambitious development programs the country has ever seen, comparable in scale only to the massive railway-building enterprises of colonial India: economic corridors. To fill in the “infrastructure gap,” the Central Government started the construction of the Golden Quadrilateral highway-building program to connect the four major cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata. World Bank studies estimate that these upgraded highways will translate into significant annual savings, since faster travel times will translate into lower freight costs and economic gain. Some of these highways were also designated as economic corridors: a bundled spine of high-speed roads and internet, water, and power networks, along which will develop new globally competitive industrial nodes and “smart cities.” The scale and accelerated pace of change along these new transportation networks have captivated the popular press. In a series of stunning photo-essays, various journals have shown rural women covering their heads with their saris as they anachronistically make their way across an expressway that could easily be mistaken for a U.S. highway; bullocks calmly seated in the middle of roads designed for the fastest cars and heaviest trucks; and sacred cows, holy men riding elephants, and other religious travelers sharing the asphalted strip with speeding vehicles. Popular narratives interpret the changes along the new economic corridors as collisions between two Indias: the modern, urban, westernized India and the primitive, rural, superstitious India.

These popular narratives recall older modernization tropes from the 1950s, created by development economists like Walt Whitman Rostow as part of their “take-off” theories.² But, contrary

¹ Though economic reforms had started more a decade earlier, the Central Government of India officially announced its economic liberalization policy in 1991.

to these urban/rural and traditional/modern binaries, a brief survey of some of India's most contentious land conflicts of the past decade reveals that the new economic corridors are not anachronistic but instead accrete on former agricultural modernization programs. Take, for instance, the land conflicts over the 160-kilometer Yamuna Expressway that connects the cities of Delhi and Agra. The “dream project” of the country’s first Dalit woman Chief Minister, Mayawati, the expressway sparked violent protests between farmers and the police, resulting in casualties on both sides. These “farmer” protestors belonged to the powerful agrarian constituency of the Jats, and public officials have since resolved the conflict by paying the aggrieved landowners an additional compensation of 64.7 percent.²

Likewise, the Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructure Corridor in the state of Karnataka in south India has been mired in opposition both on the streets and in the courtroom. This corridor is also known as the NICE corridor, named after the acronym of the concessionaire consortium, the Nandi Infrastructure Corridor Enterprises. During the height of the protests, protestors hung banners and posters around the unfinished corridor that dubbed it the “not so NICE corridor.” Eventually this fracas entered popular culture, inspiring the making of regional movies like *Puttakkana Highway*, which follows the travails of Puttakka, a marginal agrarian landowner, after the state government coercively acquires her agricultural land for the building of a highway. But, crucially, the resistance to the Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructure Corridor received this level of publicity and political visibility primarily because it was led by a specific caste/class constituency of Vokkaliga agrarian landowners, who form the backbone of the region’s electorate.³

² Ajoy Ashirwad Mahaprashasta, “Striking Unity,” *Frontline* 27, no. 18 (Aug-Sept 2010); Uma Vishnu, “Two Sides of an Expressway,” *The Indian Express* (May 15, 2011).

³ On the role of Vokkaligas in urban and peri-urban land politics in southern Karnataka, see Narendra Pani, “Globalization, Group Autonomy, and Political Space: Negotiating Globalized Interests in an Indian City” (unpublished mimeo, 2013); Sai Balakrishnan, “Land-Based Financing for Infrastructure:

As the South Asian scholarship on agrarian studies has shown, from the 1960s to the 1980s the Indian government launched the Green Revolution program with the aim of modernizing agriculture and food production. The state-subsidized provision of water, seeds, and fertilizers was captured by regional caste groups, and by the 1980s the Green Revolution had helped transform these agrarian propertied classes into one of the most formidable electoral constituencies. Some of the most publicized land conflicts of the past decade have been in these former Green Revolution regions, where the economic corridors are encountering not merely farmers but organized agrarian propertied constituents who own the land now getting re-commodified and reallocated for the corridors and corridor cities.

A locational lens, then, allows for a new reading of India's contemporary land conflicts. Once freed of the silos of urban studies and agrarian studies, which rarely converse with one another,⁴ analyses of the economic corridors offer new methodological and empirical entryways into a political economy of land that cuts across the urban-rural divide. I argue that some of India's most decisive conflicts over its urban future will unfold along the new economic corridors, where the electorally strong agrarian propertied classes are coming into direct contact with financially powerful urban firms. By moving the narrative of urbanization out of cities into the economic-corridor regions, new protagonists come into view. One that has hitherto been eclipsed in the analyses of urban real-estate markets is this agrarian propertied class. Much of the scholarship on urban real-estate markets, derived as it is from the experiences of western cities, focuses on the urban fractions of capital, such as developers and mortgage companies. How does the entry of agrarian elites into real estate force us to

What is New about India's Land Conflicts?" in R. Nagaraj and Sripad Motiram, eds., *Political Economy of Contemporary India* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁴ An exception to these silos in agrarian and urban studies is the growing niche of scholarship that interrogates agrarian-urban linkages. See, for instance, Michael Levien, *Dispossession Without Development: Land Grabs in Neoliberal India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018); and Ananya Roy, "What is Urban about Critical Urban Theory?" *Urban Geography* 37, no. 6 (2016): 810-23.

rethink conventional theories on urban property relations? More broadly, what new narratives of urbanization arise when older histories of agrarian capitalism and caste/class formation collide, collude, and recombine with the new economic corridors and corridor cities?

To answer these questions, I will focus on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway, India's first economic corridor, which was completed in 2000. The region around the Mumbai-Pune Expressway is an ideal site for excavating the politics of land across the urban-rural divide, as it is home to three antagonistic groups: an indigenous urban capitalist class that controls Mumbai; the agrarian propertied class of sugar elites, one of the strongest agrarian lobbies in the country; and Dalit and Adivasi groups who earlier worked on the lands of the agrarian elites but are now becoming more politically enfranchised with democratic reforms. Structured around three cases of diverse agrarian property regimes—forest lands, fertile sugarcane fields, and waste land—this book uses a natural experiment within the Mumbai-Pune corridor region to illustrate how diverse agrarian property regimes, shaped by past agrarian capitalism, are now intersecting with the urban governance structures of a liberalizing economy to produce new geographies of land commodification.

Corridor Regions

India's new economic corridors are part of the wider "Make in India" campaign of the current Modi government. The Central Government has proposed five major industrial corridors: the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, the Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor, the Bengaluru-Mumbai Economic Corridor, the Vizag-Chennai Industrial Corridor, and the Amritsar-Kolkata Industrial Corridor. Alongside these corridors are planned "21 new nodal Industrial Cities," which will have such advantages as "large land parcels, planned communities, ICT enabled infrastructure, sustainable living, excellent connectivity by road, rail, etc."⁴ The economic-corridor policy took its inspiration from the Mumbai-Pune Expressway, completed in 2000. In their intent, the new expressways—including the

NICE Expressway that connects Bengaluru and Mysore, as well as the Yamuna Expressway between Delhi and Agra—fit the description of economic corridors; these are not just highway constructions but are envisioned as spines along which new cities will be built. The most publicized of these corridors, the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, is advertised on the website as “a mega infrastructure project of USD 100 billion with financial and technical aids from Japan, covering an overall length of 1,483 km. ... DMIC will intersect 7 states namely Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra.”⁵

These new economic corridors resonate with a renewed interest in megaprojects around the world, with national and subnational governments pouring huge capital and resources into the building of high-speed rail networks, cross-national motorway systems, signature international airports, freight-container harbors, telecommunications networks, cross-border oil and gas pipelines, and energy networks. Variously called “splintering urbanism,”⁶ “infrastructure space,”⁷ and “logistics networks,”⁸ these megaprojects are creating a new geography of post-1970s globalization that seamlessly connects certain valorized nodes within the global economy while simultaneously disconnecting others. The megaprojects create a new sense of capitalist space, in which distance is measured not in miles or kilometers but in minutes and seconds. Nation-states are giddily rushing to build these megaprojects because “power, wealth and status increasingly belong to those who know how to shrink space.”⁹ They embrace new technologies of governance through indicators like the World Bank’s Logistics Performance Index, which ranks the trade competitiveness of different countries based on the quality

⁵ www.makeinindia.com/policy/new-initiatives.

⁶ Steven Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁷ Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books, 2014).

⁸ Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

⁹ Bent Flyvbjerg, Nils Bruzelius, and Werner Rothengatter, *Megaprojects and Risk: An Anatomy of Ambition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

of these megaprojects.¹⁰

However, the desire to “annihilate space by time”¹¹ is hardly new within capitalist societies. Recall, for instance, the critique by nationalist leaders in colonial India in the late nineteenth century that the railways served a colonial capitalist policy and were a “pitiless drain [of India’s wealth] to Europe.”¹² By manipulating tariffs and selectively routing the railways, the colonial state simultaneously disconnected the cotton-growing hinterland from its physically adjacent domestic textile mills and connected it to the textile mills in physically distant Lancashire, via port cities like Bombay.¹³ The current arguments of “splintering urbanism” find precursors in the colonial megaprojects that dramatically changed the economics and experience of distance.

The current infrastructure projects, emerging out of a global supply-chain revolution, open new fields of critical inquiry as the “site[s] of multiple, overlapping or nested forms of sovereignty, where domestic and transnational jurisdictions collide.” They give rise to new forms of private authorities that are often enabled by, but displace, the nation-states as governance actors.¹⁴ Even if not displacing India’s nation-state, the new authorities that govern the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor lean much further toward the private side of the public-private spectrum than earlier, hybrid organizations. The Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation is a newer-generation parastatal “whose main offices occupy a hotel suite rather than a government building.”¹⁵ The development corporation is governed by a CEO, an odd but growingly ubiquitous title for someone who manages not a firm but a public agency. The former CEO, Amitabh Kant, rose to fame

¹⁰ The World Bank’s Logistics Performance Index (LPI), available at lpi.worldbank.org.

¹¹ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, vol. 14 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

¹² Bipan Chandra, “Indian Nationalists and the Drain, 1880-1905,” *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 2, no. 2 (1965): 103-44.

¹³ For more on colonial railway policy and uneven development, see Chapter 2.

¹⁴ Easterling (2014); Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Parag Khanna, *The Rise of Hybrid Governance* (McKinsey Center for Government, 2012).

with the successful entrepreneurial strategies of “Incredible India” and “God’s own country—Kerala,” which branded India and Kerala as tourist destinations. These branding strategies are part of the wider governance shift of the economic corridors, which aim to signal the nation’s transformation from a red-tape bureaucracy to a business-friendly state that rolls out the “red carpet for investors.”

The new economic corridors cast a spotlight on a vast new geography that, though not categorized as urban by the Indian census, nonetheless exhibits characteristics of the urban. The proliferation of census towns,¹⁶ statutory towns, and other liminal categories that lie somewhere between the megacity and the village has been referred to as both “subaltern urbanization”¹⁷ and “unacknowledged urbanization.”¹⁸ Scholars have argued for the need to move away from metrocentricity¹⁹ in order to grasp the scale and nature of urban growth in contemporary India. The development program of the economic corridors allows me to string these vast, seemingly fragmented urbanizing settlements into a new unit of analysis that I call “corridor regions.”

A corridor region resembles what Terry McGee in the 1970s termed a *desakota*—a neologism that combined the Bahá’í Indonesian words *desa* (city) and *kota* (village) to make sense of the

¹⁶ The Census of India defines urban settlements as requiring: a municipality, corporation, cantonment board, or some form of urban local government; a population not less than 5,000; a population density of at least 400 persons per square kilometer; and more than 75 percent of the male labor force employed in non-agricultural work (note the gender bias in the economic criterion). The Census definition, therefore, includes demographic, economic, and administrative criteria. Census towns are settlements that meet the demographic and economic criteria but are not notified by the state government, which means that they continue to be governed by rural local governments. The motivations for state governments not to classify settlements as urban varies; for more on this topic, see for instance Ram Bhagat, “Rural-Urban Classification and Municipal Governance in India,” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 26, no. 1 (2005), 61-73.

¹⁷ Eric Denis, Marie-Hélène Zérah, and Partha Mukhopadhyay, *Subaltern Urbanisation in India* (New Delhi: Springer, 2017).

¹⁸ Kanhu Pradhan, “Unacknowledged Urbanisation: New Census Towns of India,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 48, no. 36 (2013): 43-51.

¹⁹ Tim Bunnell and Anant Maringanti, “Practising Urban and Regional Research Beyond Metrocentricity,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34, no. 2 (2010): 415-20.

“transactive urban-rural environment around Java.”²⁰ McGee was clear that the desakota was not a universal, invariant form of urbanization “in the Asian context.” Instead, the desakota was actively produced by the “uneven incorporation of Asian countries” into a colonial economic system. McGee’s formulation is a powerful reminder that “the existence of [prior] agroeconomic systems provides the possibility for the emergence of certain urban systems and regions.”²¹ Similarly, in this book I trace the evolving relationship between landed property and various forms of colonial/postcolonial and agrarian/urban capitalism by focusing on two moments of postcolonial development: the Green Revolution and the new economic corridors.

The transformation of land from a resource into property is inherently conflictual because of the various meanings attached to land.²² Recent scholarship extends these contested debates on the public/private, resource/commodity attributes of land to various “new” resources—including the air,²³ oceans,²⁴ outer space²⁵ —all of which are being reframed as forms of private property. The commodification of agricultural land in contemporary India takes us back to the old debate about

²⁰ Terence McGee, “The Emergence of Desakota Regions in Asia: Expanding a Hypothesis,” in N. Ginsburg, B. Koppel, and T. G. McGee, eds., *The Extended Metropolis: Settlement Transition in Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991): 3-25.

²¹ McGee’s argument on prior agroeconomic systems, which are embedded in “socioeconomic systems, export trade and class relations,” draws on earlier work by Douglas Dowd, Richard Morse, and others who analyzed divergent patterns of urbanization in the U.S. and Latin America, depending on differences in settlement patterns—between the American west and south in the case of the former, and between the hacienda and plantation systems in the latter. See Douglas Dowd, “A Comparative Analysis of Economic Development in the American West and South,” *The Journal of Economic History* 16, no. 4 (1956): 558-74; and Richard M. Morse, “Trends and Patterns of Latin American Urbanization, 1750-1920,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16 (1974): 416-47.

²² Derek Hall, *Land* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012); Wendy Wolford, *This Land Is Ours Now: Social Mobilization and the Meanings of Land in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

²³ Hung-Ying Chen, *Cashing in on the Sky: Instrumentation of Air Rights in Taipei Metropolitan Area* (paper presented at the American Association of Geographers conference 2017; shared with the author).

²⁴ Fiona McCormack, *Private Oceans: The Enclosure and Marketisation of the Seas* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

²⁵ See, for instance, the Space Law program at Harvard Law School for the development of property rights over outer-space resources, as activities like asteroid mining grow in importance.

landed property but in the new context of a country that is attempting an experiment few other countries have tried: introducing market relations in land in the context of an electoral democracy. The focus on land transformation in the corridor regions fundamentally concerns the changing role of landed property within different forms of earlier agrarian and now urban capitalism. My main argument is as follows:

In the former, state-controlled agrarian society, agricultural land was decommodified. Before 1991 land was privately owned, but it was so tightly regulated by the state that real estate as a sector did not exist. During this period, a key determinant of the economic value of agricultural land was its fertility: the more fertile the land, the more food it could produce and the higher the agricultural profits were for the landowner. Fertility, however, is not necessarily a natural attribute of land: it is often socially produced by irrigation canals. Because the country achieved universal suffrage when it was still a predominantly agrarian society,²⁶ many agrarian landowners who had been part of the anti-colonial nationalist struggle became powerful state-level politicians. In the federal structure of Indian democracy, “subjects,” including land and water, were under the jurisdiction of state legislatures. The agrarian elites who controlled the state legislature helped shape a geography of uneven agrarian development through their control of the water infrastructure. In Maharashtra, for example, these political elites were of the regionally specific caste of Marathas, and the most influential Maratha elites in the 1960s, including the first Chief Minister of the state, Y. B. Chavan, came from western Maharashtra. In the early decades after Independence, and especially during the Green Revolution, political negotiations ensured that irrigation canals were routed through certain lands but not through others. The unevenly routed canals consolidated the power of the Maratha elites by securing their control over well-irrigated and high-priced land. The lands bypassed by irrigation were relegated to

²⁶ Ashutosh Varshney, *Democracy, Development, and the Countryside: Urban-Rural Struggles in India* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

marginalized groups; as a result, the Adivasis in western Maharashtra are disproportionately concentrated on uncultivable waste land. If one wanted to map social power within the Maharashtra state, one could effectively do so by mapping the routing of irrigation canals to see whose lands they passed through and whose got left out.

Now, with liberalization, agricultural lands that were earlier the least fungible commodities in the economy are being transformed into transnational real-estate assets. With the introduction of economic liberalization reforms, location trumps fertility as the main calibrator of land price. And as land markets in the corridor region are recalibrated, plots of land that were undesirable and unproductive in an agrarian economy are now becoming coveted market assets, provided they are located close to the economic corridors. The surprise finding in western Maharashtra is that certain advantageously located waste lands within the Golden Triangle region are now fetching a higher market price than even the most well-irrigated sugarcane fields outside that region. The revaluation of former waste land is unsettling historically produced, land-based forms of social control, with some Adivasi households now finding themselves owners of a commodity that is more desirable than even the most thoroughly irrigated Maratha-owned land.

How does this conflicted process of post-liberalization land commodification in contemporary India speak to general theories on land markets? How do agrarian landed groups fit within theories of urban real estate? How do general theories of urbanization, largely if not exclusively derived from the experiences of western cities, explain the linkages between agricultural and urban land markets? And how adequate are these urban theories for making sense of India's 21st-century corridor regions? I will now introduce the three-pronged analytic of caste/class/space as a key device in understanding the agrarian-urban entanglements in the corridor regions, and I will situate India's contemporary land commodification within three dominant schools of thought: the economics view of location theory, the various strands within Marxist thought, and the Polanyian school.

Economic Views: Waste Land as Frontier

The field of economic geography has long pondered the questions of why cities look the way they do and how land markets shape the structure of cities. An early canonical work in economic geography comes from a nineteenth-century Prussian farmer, Johann Heinrich von Thünen.²⁷ Both von Thünen and later land economists were intrigued by the influence of the “invisible hand” of the market in structuring land use. Von Thünen noted that, even though the farmers in Prussia did not know one another and there was no coordinating planning agency that regulated land use, the farmers arranged themselves around market towns in a pattern that was strikingly similar not just across Prussia but across all the industrializing societies of the West (which formed the sole empirical basis for his work). Von Thünen eventually systematized his observations into a mathematical model that predicted the spatial ordering of land use. This was before the time of refrigeration, when it was imperative for farmers of intensive agriculture (dairy, orchards, market gardens) to transport their commodities to the market place as soon as possible. These farmers were sensitive to distance, and they would bid vast sums for the land closest to the central market place. Farmers growing less perishable commodities were outbid by the intensive agriculturalists, with the result that agricultural land use sorts itself out in space in a pattern of concentric circles: closest to the market town is the zone of intensive agriculture, then comes the zone of extensive agriculture (wheat), then the zone of livestock raising, then the zone of trapping, hunting, and Indian trading, and beyond that “wilderness.” The von Thünen model laid down the foundations of the field of economic geography, establishing that, in market economies, land is allocated through the price mechanism; that the price of land is linked to transportation costs; that the combination of transportation and land price shapes the urban-rural edge; and that any changes to transportation networks will alter urban land markets and their linkages

²⁷ Johann Heinrich von Thünen, *Isolated State*, trans. Carla M. Wartenberg, ed. Peter Hall (London: Pergamon, 1966).

to the countryside.

Some of the most influential models in urban economics borrow from von Thünen's concentric rings. These include Homer Hoyt's famous study of one hundred years of land prices in Chicago, from 1830 to 1933, which showed how transportation technologies—the canals, railways, and highways—reordered land prices, land uses and city form,²⁸ and William Alonso's influential bid-rent theory, which continues to be used today to predict the shape and price of urban housing markets.²⁹ More recently, Paul Krugman's Nobel-Prize-winning work on the “new economic geography” integrates these location theories with new trade theory to predict how and where cities are formed and the links between food-producing hinterlands and manufacturing-based cities.³⁰

Economists often view urbanization as a “set of exchange relations,” an attitude for which they have received numerous criticisms.³¹ What I want to focus on in this book is the property-rights assumptions of these models. Alonso's bid-rent theory assumes that “consumers,” i.e. those who have the market power to bid for land, sort themselves out in urban space. Krugman's model assumes that farmers grow food and manufacturers produce goods, and that farmers and manufacturers smoothly arrange themselves in space. Conflict between farmers and manufacturers over the same plots of land, not for agriculture or industry but for real-estate development, as in the case of contemporary India, finds no place in Krugman's model. Writing at the time of the 1848 revolutions, von Thünen himself was deeply aware of the property assumption underpinning his model, and he stressed that his theory

²⁸ Homer Hoyt, *One Hundred Years of Land Values in Chicago: The Relationship of the Growth of Chicago to the Rise in Its Land Values, 1830-1933* (Washington, DC: Beard Books, 2000 [1933]).

²⁹ William Alonso, *Location and Land Use. Toward a General Theory of Land Rent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

³⁰ Paul Krugman, “The New Economic Geography, Now Middle-Aged,” *Regional Studies* 45, no. 1 (2011): 1-7. See also Masahisa Fujita, Paul Krugman, and Anthony Venables, *The Spatial Economy: Cities, Regions and International Trade* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

³¹ For an excellent overview of critiques against the economic view of land use and cities, see Allen J. Scott, *The Urban Land Nexus and the State* (London: Pion, 1980), 73-82.

represented “the owning classes.”³² He wrote that any class conflict could be resolved by bringing into the market the “free land” at the “frontier of the cultivated plain.”³³ In Europe, with its landed gentry, the assumption of the Isolated State (the title of his book) became necessary to allow for a smooth frontier expansion. North America served as the ideal site for von Thünen’s model because a frontier or wilderness “of unmeasured vastness” existed where land could be appropriated, often through the exercise of force, for little or no market price.³⁴ Now, of course, revisionist histories show us that what von Thünen saw as “wilderness” in North America was actually Native American property, and that the expansion of the market into the American frontier, via transportation networks like the transcontinental railways, was possible only through a violent erasure of existing property regimes.³⁵

In the parlance of economic geography, India’s agricultural land represents the new frontier: until recently, these lands had no market price; they were “outside” the market (a claim that I contest in the Polanyian view below). The expansion of the economic corridors is now opening up these lands to new market relations. But, unlike the colonial conquests of the past, the introduction of market relations for land in contemporary India is taking place in a context where the peasantry, including the marginalized Adivasis, have the power of the vote; the information explosion has substantially increased the awareness of the peasantry on the market price of their land; and social movements are demanding that the state protect the rights of the peasantry and enact strong constitutional barriers against expropriation carried out with the flimsy justifications of the “public purpose.” In this context, the market expansion into the frontier cannot be reduced to a neutral “distance coefficient” in an economic model; on the contrary, it is shaped by vigorous contests on the ground, as enfranchised

³² David Harvey, “The Spatial Fix: Hegel, von Thünen, and Marx,” *Antipode* 13, no. 3 (1981), 2.

³³ Ibid., 4.

³⁴ Ibid., 4.

³⁵ See, for instance, William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991); and Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011).

groups bring their own aspirations of what it means to be global and urban to the changing meanings of land.

Marxist Views: Waste Land as Rent Gap

What the economists called the frontier, Marxist geographers reframed as the rent gap. In his influential rent-gap theory, the Marxist geographer Neil Smith developed the concept by picking up on an “oddity” in Homer Hoyt’s otherwise smooth rent-gradient map for Chicago: the “valley in the land-value curve between the Loop and outer residential areas...that indicates the location of those sections where the buildings were mostly over forty years old and where the residents rank lowest in rent-paying ability.”³⁶ Paying attention to the “valleys” that economists had previously smoothed out in their models, Smith built his theory of the rent gap, which he defined as the difference between capitalized ground rent and potential ground rent, the former being the price of land given its present use, the latter being the predicted price of the land when it is developed to its “highest and best use.” Such rent gaps exist because certain regions are devalued *vis-à-vis* others, an essential process for capitalism, as it allows for the “seesaw theory” of capital: whenever capitalism confronts a crisis of falling profits, it resolves this crisis through a movement from a developed to an underdeveloped region, itself often produced by the planned lack of capital investment in that region in a prior phase of development.

Smith’s influential rent-gap theory was used to explain the process of gentrification in western cities from the 1980s onward, when capital started moving back into inner cities that had been abandoned in the postwar years. The redevelopment of inner-city lands led to rising rents and displacement, and the rent-gap theory became a rallying cry for Marxists to challenge the housing

³⁶ Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996), 58.

crisis. Whether they are the open frontier of the American West or the low-income neighborhoods between the Loop and the outer residential areas in Chicago, Smith's work was seminal in pointing out that these rent-gap regions do not exist on a frontier outside the capitalist economy but are instead actively devalued regions within the system, an intrinsic part of the locational seesawing logic of capitalism.³⁷

Theorizing from a different place, the large-scale land-use changes in the global south are commonly referred to as the “new enclosures” or the “global land grab.”³⁸ National governments, international donor agencies, and investors deploy the narrative of the “yield gap” to justify the conversion of “so-called” marginal, empty, and available lands across the globe” into large-scale, mechanized agricultural production. As with the rent gap, the land grab narrative is mobilized by environmental and agrarian justice activists to challenge transnational and often speculative land transactions.

If we apply the rent-gap theory to India’s corridor regions, the waste lands owned and occupied by the Adivasis are the regions with the highest potential for the rent gap: colonial and postcolonial land policies actively devalorized these lands, and they now hold out the market promise of windfall profits. But, unlike the clear-cut class conflict in Smith’s anti-gentrification struggles or in the land grab struggles, in which the owners and occupiers of devalorized land resisted *en masse* the incursions of financial capitalists seeking to realize the rent gap by dispossessing the existing land-

³⁷ On whether the rent gap theory, now framed as “planetary rent gaps,” fits the postcolonial context, see Tom Slater, “Planetary Rent Gaps,” *Antipode* 49, no. 1 (2017): 114-37; Asher Ghertner, “Why Gentrification Theory Fails in ‘Much of the World,’” *City* 19, no. 4 (2015), 559.

³⁸ See for instance, the Special Issue , eds. Ben White, Saturnino M. Borras Jr., Ruth Hall, Ian Scoones, Wendy Wolford, *The New Enclosures: Critical Perspectives on Corporate Land Deals*, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 39, no. 3-4 (2012).

users, the outcomes in contemporary India have been mixed.³⁹ Under certain conditions, Adivasi owners of waste land support the revaluation of their land in order to assert their autonomy from the oppressive caste hierarchies of Maratha landowners.

Since agrarian classes are at the forefront of protests in India's corridor regions, and it is agrarian land-use categories that are being mobilized for urban change, we need to bring in the South Asian agrarian studies scholarship to understand the distinct variety of agrarian capitalism, produced by the inextricable intersections of caste and class.⁴⁰ In the early decades post-Independence, the Nehruvian state implemented its first phase of land reforms, which aimed at abolishing the Brahmin *zamindars*, the non-cultivating propertied classes that mediated revenue relations between the colonial state and the peasants. The main beneficiaries of these land reforms were the Sudras, who occupy the lowest rung in India's sacralized caste hierarchy (the “upper castes” being Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas). The later Green Revolution further consolidated these beneficiaries into a surplus-

³⁹ In a similar vein, Borras and Franco calls for more analytical clarity in the catch-all land grab phrase: Saturnino M. Borras Jr. and Jennifer C. Franco, “Global Land Grabbing and Trajectories of Agrarian Change: A Preliminary Analysis,” *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 12 no. 1 (2012): 34–59.

⁴⁰ For the regional agrarian histories of Tamil Nadu, see Sharad Chari, *Fraternal Capital: Peasant-Workers, Self-Made Men, and Globalization in Provincial India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); and Barbara Harriss-White, *A Political Economy of Agricultural Markets in South India: Masters of the Countryside* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996). For the Patidars in Gujarat, see Vinay Gidwani, *Capital, Interrupted: Agrarian Development and the Politics of Work in India* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). On Punjab, see Meenu Tewari, “Successful Adjustment in Indian Industry: The Case of Ludhiana’s Woolen Knitwear Cluster,” *World Development* 27, no. 9 (1999): 1651–71; and Surinder Jodhka, *Caste and Power in the Lands of Agri-Culture: Revisiting Rural North-West India*, accessed at sas-space.sas.ac.uk/5649/1/AHRC_1_Jodhka_Northwest_Caste_and_Rural_Power_Shimla.pdf. On the Kammas in Andhra Pradesh, see K. Balagopal and G. Haragopal, *Probings in the Political Economy of Agrarian Classes and Conflicts* (Hyderabad: Perspectives, 1988). On the Vokkaligas in Karnataka, see M. N. Srinivas, *The Dominant Caste and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987); and Scarlett Epstein, “Back to the Village,” Seventh Annual M. N. Srinivas Memorial Lecture, NIAS Lecture No. L2-2007 (Bangalore: National Institute of Advanced Studies, 2007). For more country-wide perspectives on caste-based linkages between agrarian and industrial capitalism, see Harish Damodaran, *India’s New Capitalists: Caste, Business, and Industry in a Modern Nation* (New Delhi: Springer, 2008); and Barbara Harriss-White, Christine Lutringer, and Elisabetta Basile, eds., *Mapping India’s Capitalism: Old and New Regions* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015).

producing agrarian propertied class. The rise of the Sudras, or the “backward classes,” as they are categorized in the Indian Census,⁴¹ into a formidable electoral constituency by the late 1970s has been heralded as the “second democratic upsurge.”⁴² If the first democratic upsurge was universal adult franchise in 1947, when upper-caste elites still retained power in national politics, the 1977 elections were a decisive watershed for the second democratic upsurge: the “backward-class” legislators won more than ten percent of the Parliamentary seats, and their share in Parliament has increased since then. The Sudra varna (or caste) itself is made up of a large number of sub-castes called jatis, and certain jatis have now emerged as “dominant castes,” meaning castes that have a higher ritual status in the sacralized hierarchy than either the Dalits or the Adivasis, and that “wield preponderant economic and political power” in the countryside.⁴³

The Marathas are the dominant caste in Maharashtra. In the first half of the twentieth century, alongside the anti-colonial struggles, they were part of a vigorous anti-caste movement that challenged the ritual superiority of the “upper” castes. The Marathas share kinship networks with another Sudra jati, the Kunbis, and the Maratha-Kunbi caste bloc became consolidated into a numerically strong electoral constituency by the 1960s. This constituency is economically stratified, ranging from wealthy Maratha elites to poor Kunbi landless laborers. It sends the largest number of elected representatives to the state legislature and is concentrated in the western region of the state.⁴⁴

⁴¹ In the 1946 Constituent Assembly debates, the Sudras were categorized as a “backward caste,” along with the Dalits and Adivasis. The “backward castes” criterion was then adopted by the Indian Census, with the categories of Other Backward Castes (Sudras), Scheduled Castes (Dalits), and Scheduled Tribes becoming the foundation for positive-discrimination or affirmative-action programs.

⁴² Yogendra Yadav, “Understanding the Second Democratic Upsurge: Trends of Bahujan Participation in Electoral Politics in the 1990s,” in Francine Frankel, Zoya Hasan, Rajeev Bhargava, and Balveer Arora, eds., *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴³ The concept of the “dominant” caste was coined by M. N. Srinivas; see M. N. Srinivas, “The Dominant Caste in Rampura,” *American Anthropologist* 61, no. 1 (1959): 1-16.

⁴⁴ For an overview of Maharashtra politics, see Jayant Lele, *Elite Pluralism and Class Rule: Political Development in Maharashtra, India* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); Rajendra Vora, “Shift

The Green Revolution is a key development program that facilitated the transformation of certain “backward classes,” such as the Marathas, into “dominant castes.” Unlike the Nehruvian state, which sought to balance economic growth across the national space, the Green Revolution program—piloted in 1961 and implemented in two phases, from 1965 to the early 1980s—was driven by the rationale of “picking out the best and most favorable spots” for intensive agricultural development.⁴⁵ Irrigation water became a crucial precondition for the selection of the “intensive agricultural areas.”⁴⁶ The Green Revolution subsidies of high-yielding seeds, fertilizers, and water were concentrated in areas “where supplies of assured water created ‘fair prospects of achieving rapid increases in production.’”⁴⁷ In Maharashtra, the Marathas who controlled the state legislature had the political power to draw irrigation waters to their constituencies; the Maratha-Kunbis further benefited by capturing the seed, fertilizer, and water subsidies under the Green Revolution program.

In the wake of the Green Revolution, in an intense “mode of production” debate, scholars tried to categorize surplus producers like the Maratha-Kunbis in relation to peasant categories derived from the west.⁴⁸ An elite sliver of Marathas are wealthy; they are capitalist farmers and fit the descriptors of an agrarian bourgeoisie. The vast majority of the Maratha-Kunbis, however, do not fit into this category. In western Maharashtra, most sugarcane growers had control over their means of

of Power from Rural to Urban Sector,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no. 2/3 (1996): 171-3; Suhas Palshikar and Rajeshwari Deshpande, “Electoral Competition and Structures of Domination in Maharashtra,” *Economic and Political Weekly* (1999): 2409-22; and Rajeshwari Deshpande and Suhas Palshikar, “Political Economy of a Dominant Caste,” in R. Nagaraj and Sripad Motiram, eds., *Political Economy of Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2017): 77-97.

⁴⁵ Francine Frankel, *India’s Green Revolution: Economic Gains and Political Costs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015 [1971]), 3.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁸ Utsa Patnaik, *Agrarian Relations and Accumulation* (published for the Sameeksha Trust by Oxford University Press, 1990). See also a series of conversations in *Economic and Political Weekly* in the 1970s among Ashok Rudra, Utsa Patnaik, Amit Bagchi, and others on how to characterize agrarian capitalism in India during this decade.

production—i.e. they had secure access to land in the form of private-property rights. But these cash-crop growers were not large landowners, and their landholding size on average was less than 2.5 acres, which in the Indian census classifies them as marginal farmers. Nevertheless, their marginal plots of land were irrigated: though they did not control the routing and flow of the irrigation canals, their shared caste affinity to the Maratha agrarian elites, who controlled the state-level irrigation department, ensured that they had access to the flow of water and other state subsidies. These marginal farmers also depart from typical “bourgeois” descriptors by not hiring wage labor and thus not controlling labor power. Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph have called these dominant-caste marginal farmers the “bullock capitalists,” “cultivators who rely more on family labor and their own human capital than on wage labor and machines.”⁴⁹ K. Balagopal calls them the “provincial propertied class,” sections of the peasantry that align with the rural rich, “aided by the fact that caste usually functions as a common link between the two classes, though there are plenty of conflicts between them.”⁵⁰ Further complicating the issue are the landless within this constituency, with localized concentrations in the eastern regions of Marathwada and Vidarbha in Maharashtra, where almost twenty percent of the populations are landless Kunbis.

The dominant castes, then, include agrarian elites, the middle peasantry, and the landless. Especially influential in the corridor regions are the “middle peasants,” who have “secure access to land and cultivate it with family labor”⁵¹ but who are also able to gain access to state subsidies by capitalizing on their caste privileges. Even though they are marginal landowners, they remain a formidable political voice in the corridor regions by virtue of their caste- and land-based sources of

⁴⁹ Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 2, 333.

⁵⁰ K. Balagopal, “An Ideology for the Provincial Propertied Class,” *Economic and Political Weekly* (1987), 2177.

⁵¹ Eric R. Wolf. *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 291.

agrarian power. These caste identities make for unexpected alliances that often go against class interests. The Maratha agrarian elites should be in class alliances with the urban industrialists who control Mumbai; the poor Kunbis should align with poor Adivasis. Instead, caste identities divide otherwise aligned class interests and bond otherwise antagonistic class interests. Region here completes the caste/class/space triumvirate, because the dominant caste bloc was shaped by colonial agrarian land-revenue systems and industrial histories. In northern India, the Sudras experienced harsher caste discrimination, making their rise to national politics momentous for plebeian politics, but in southern India the Sudras had already started emerging as “masters of the countryside” long before the 1970s.

Much of the South Asian scholarship is situated within the field of agrarian studies and was written during the peak Green Revolution years. Even more recent work, like Sharad Chari’s, analyzes agrarian-industrial linkages in the 1990s, meaning before the liberalization reforms had taken effect in land markets. In his monograph *Fraternal Capital*, Chari describes how the Gounders of peasant-worker origins in Tamil Nadu became a globally competitive knitwear industrial cluster by the 1980s. Chari refers to the transformation as an instance of “subalterns accumulating capital.”⁵² But this class positioning of the Gounders is debatable. As a regionally specific Sudra jati, the Gounders were formerly subordinate cultivators who gained economic and social power through the land reforms and the Green Revolution. They enjoyed a ritual status higher than that of the Dalits or Adivasis, and, as Chari himself persuasively shows, they were able to draw on their caste identity both to access state subsidies and to perpetuate exclusionary labor arrangements that exploited Dalits. Though Chari’s analysis draws attention to agrarian-industrial linkages, it is still from a period preceding the liberalization of agricultural land markets.

⁵² See Chari’s chapter “Can the Subaltern Accumulate Capital?” in *Fraternal Capital*, 182-239.

My analysis of the corridor regions asks what is happening to these agrarian propertied castes/classes in the current era of urban-oriented land commodification. What are the changes in the land-based sources of agrarian power of the dominant castes, in a context where the price of land increases at a faster rate than either agricultural or industrial profits? The corridor regions are the sites of a new agrarian-urban electoral geography, as the carefully constructed caste/class constituency of a state-controlled agrarian society now unravels in the midst of market and urban shifts.

The new flow of private capital into formerly protected agricultural land is producing new collisions and collusions among agrarian and industrial elites, who are now contesting for the same plots of land. The land-based power of the middle peasantry is being disrupted both by the entry of urban firms into agricultural land markets and by the empowerment of disadvantaged castes, whose formerly unproductive waste lands are now being revalued in a liberalizing and urbanizing economy. I specifically draw attention to the unexpected finding of the valorization of waste lands near economic corridors, asking how this incidental phenomenon might crack open possibilities for a new emancipatory politics for Adivasis. As the South Asian scholarship makes clear, class is an inadequate category for analyzing social relations in India; class relations cannot be understood without refracting them through the lens of caste. And these caste/class relations are unevenly produced through space.⁵³ By focusing on the same economic corridor as it passes through three varied agrarian propertied regimes within the state of Maharashtra, I demonstrate that the analytic of caste/class/space is central to examining the corridor region.

⁵³ Harriss-White et al. (2015) is one of the few works attentive to uneven spatial development. The edited chapters map out first India's old regions of uneven agrarian capitalism and then the new regions of growth, such as regions of Dalit economic participation and luxury consumption (for instance, along the Delhi-Mumbai economic corridor). But the central question I am interested in remains unanswered: how do the new luxury-consumption spaces map onto regions of older agrarian capitalism?

Polanyian Views: Waste Land and the Double Movement

The creation of new economic corridors and corridor cities in former Green Revolution regions raises a question on the sequencing of development. Land commodification is an old debate, but the Indian case is a unique experiment because the market reforms in land are being introduced in the context of a functioning electoral democracy. Scholars have addressed this democratic-market question in a number of ways. Ashutosh Varshey, for instance, distinguishes between elite and mass reforms and argues that the Central Government selectively initiated liberalization reforms, opening up “elite” sectors to the market but leaving untouched “mass” sectors that are bound to affect the plebeian electorate.⁵⁴ In a similar vein, Rob Jenkins argues that the economic reforms have been strategically and selectively implemented. He points to the SEZ (Special Economic Zone) policy as a practical response to the public outcry against the wave of liberalization in a democratic society. In this system, policy-makers capitulated to public opposition to liberalization not by reducing the scope of the economic reforms but by shrinking the extent of the territory to which the new reforms will apply. When the full range of market- and urban-oriented reforms are applied to a “patchwork of tiny hyper-liberalized jurisdictions dotting the country,” political resistance to these policies will be fragmented and less effective.⁵⁵ Partha Chatterjee points to the paradox that, precisely when the state introduced liberalization reforms that allowed “hegemonic corporate capital” entry into land and labor markets, there was also an explosion of social welfare programs aiming to provide the poor with basic safety nets. The conditions of an electoral democracy, he argues, make it unacceptable to leave marginalized groups to fend for themselves, partly because of the threat of political instability if the

⁵⁴ Ashutosh Varshney, “Mass Politics or Elite Politics? India’s Economic Reforms in Comparative Perspective,” *The Journal of Policy Reform* 2, no. 4 (1998): 301-35.

⁵⁵ Rob Jenkins, “India’s SEZ Policy: The Political Implications of ‘Permanent Reform,’” in Rob Jenkins, Loraine Kennedy, and Partha Mukhopadhyay, eds., *Power, Policy, and Protest: The Politics of India’s Special Economic Zones* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

displaced groups turn into “dangerous classes.” The social welfare programs are thus attempts by the state to reverse the effects of primitive accumulation.⁵⁶

Zooming in on the liberalization of land markets, recent books such as *Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and the State* by Nikita Sud and *The Price of Land* by Sanjoy Chakravorty trace a shift in land policy from earlier state-oriented regimes that balanced land reforms and developmental policies to deregulated regimes that prioritize growth over welfare.⁵⁷ Chakravorty’s work is particularly relevant because he identifies pricing as the critical issue in the ongoing land conflicts. He distinguishes between conflicts over “the right price of land” and those over “priceless” land; for the latter, he cites as examples the temples of Khajuraho and other historical buildings that have no substitute and are irreplaceable.⁵⁸ But Chakravorty does not get into the thorny question of who decides which lands have a market price and which are priceless. The difficulty of answering this question has plagued many fields. The relatively new design field of critical conservation seeks to go beyond a mere acceptance of certain buildings as elements of an architectural heritage and instead to ask whose history is being preserved and, in turn, whose future is being made. The scholarship on legal pluralism is deeply attentive to both economic and non-economic claims on land, and how the contesting claims on land drawn from history, religion, *de facto* use, notions of fairness, and other rationales can be resolved, by whom, and through what procedures. Similar questions confront the efforts to urbanize and liberalize India: which categories and geographies of land—irrigated land that produces food, grazing and common land, waste land—should be opened to market relations and which should be protected, keeping in mind that these land categories are not immutable and have themselves been

⁵⁶ Partha Chatterjee, “Democracy and Economic Transformation in India,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, no. 16 (2008): 53-62.

⁵⁷ Nikita Sud, *Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and the State: A Biography of Gujarat* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012); Sanjoy Chakravorty, *The Price of Land: Acquisition, Conflict, Consequence* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁵⁸ Chakravorty, *The Price of Land*, 15-18.

socially produced by earlier development policies? As importantly, who decides?

To answer this question, it is instructive to turn to the political economist Karl Polanyi's insights from *The Great Transformation*, first published in 1944.⁵⁹ Land, Polanyi argues, is a fictitious commodity, in that it is not an object that was originally produced for sale on the market. Polanyi challenges the economic fallacy of a self-regulating land market—the assumptions that a land market can spontaneously regulate itself through adjusting to the demand-and-supply logic of the price mechanism and that land markets can be disembedded from politics, religion, and social norms; he describes this fallacy as a “stark utopia.”⁶⁰ Land can never be reduced to a mere commodity because, as the negative consequences of an unrestrained, commoditized land market become apparent, people resist: “they refuse to act like lemmings marching over a cliff to their own destruction.”⁶¹ This is what Polanyi famously calls the “double movement”: efforts to commodify land being met by counter-movements to slow down the rate of change and/or protect certain lands from the incursions of the market.

If the Polanyian concept of the double movement is applied in India, the liberalization reforms represent the market movement. But, unlike the enclosure movements of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries that Polanyi was writing about, India’s contemporary land-use change is not a first-time transformation of a resource into a commodity. It is well documented that India’s land markets were commodified under colonization.⁶² In postcolonial India, the imperatives of the Green Revolution—to increase food production—required that the fungibility of agricultural land be restricted. The state

⁵⁹ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001 [1944]).

⁶⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁶¹ Ibid., xxv.

⁶² See for instance, Jairus Banaji, "The metamorphoses of agrarian capitalism," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 2.1 (2002): 96-119; Anand Yang, *Bazaar India: Markets, society, and the colonial state in Bihar*. University of California Press, 1999.

introduced various land laws (such as the land-ceiling acts) to disincentivise the conversion of agriculturally productive land into real estate. It was the crops grown on these lands rather than the land itself that was traded by a state-mediated process of price setting. The status of this land as outside the market, then, was produced by postcolonial development policies. The protected land under agrarian capitalism was as fictitious as the post-liberalization attempt to create a transnational real estate market. The making of a new fictitious commodity in land is now being contested in myriad ways, not least by agrarian propertied classes who consolidated power under the earlier phase of agrarian capitalism with their protected lands. Even the most marginalized Adivasi groups, far from being lemmings, have the power to vote and some agency in resisting unrestrained market change. The contests over the making of a new fictitious commodity in land are being fought both on the streets and in Parliament, over the enactment of India's new land-acquisition law, the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act (LARRA).⁶³

In Polanyian terms, the market movement is being resisted by counter-movements, but, departing from deterministic class-based analyses, the reactions to post-liberalization land commodification vary amongst members of the same class. Take the instance the Maratha-Kunbi landowners in western Maharashtra. In one region, the Maratha-Kunbi middle peasants applied pressure on bureaucrats to protect their fertile agricultural land from acquisition; these protective counter-movements have now found their way into the LARRA, which mandates that, as far as

⁶³ A note on the status of LARRA, which has been the subject of intense and protracted debate: after the Act came into force in 2013, strong opposition from industry players and some state governments resulted in the promulgation of three ordinances for amending the Act. In June 2015, the current Modi government introduced the 2015 LARR Amendment Bill, which significantly dilutes the consent clauses of the 2013 LARRA. This bill was passed by the Lok Sabha (Lower House), but it has been stuck since 2015 in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House), where the incumbent National Democratic Alliance does not have a majority. The difficulty in arriving at a consensus over the Act exemplifies the fraught nature of the land question in contemporary India.

possible, the state should use only waste land for urban expansion. But in an adjacent agrarian region, the same category of the Maratha-Kunbi middle peasantry voluntarily converted their fertile agricultural lands into an urban township, choosing both to transform their protected agricultural land into real estate and to transform their stakes in land from those of agricultural landowners to those of real-estate shareholders.

The Adivasi responses to the post-liberalization land commodification are most unexpected. Adivasi property regimes vary across India. In many parts of the country, Adivasis or tribals have collective ownership of their land. In regions like western Maharashtra, Adivasis have private property rights, but only over marginal one- to two-acre plots of waste land that was economically worthless in an agrarian society. As advantageously located waste lands are revalued into desirable market assets, Adivasi landowners are leveraging this moment of change to gain new recognition for themselves. Using their control over a high-demand market asset as a negotiating chip, Adivasis in certain regions in western Maharashtra are now demanding entitlements like water, which they should have had access to as a basic public service but which was denied to them out of caste/class discrimination. They are also refusing to work on the lands of the dominant castes unless they receive higher wages. These advantageously located Adivasis are willing, even eager, to enter the emergent real estate market.

It is not only the revaluation of waste land and their new market power as landowners that increase the Adivasis' negotiating power. Further amplifying their voices are other democratic fixes, including the "reserved seats" policy for Schedule Tribes in local governments and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which guarantees all rural residents one hundred days of employment annually at minimum wage for the building of rural public works. The younger-generation male Adivasis in one of the book's case-study regions, Khed, are using these new changes to break away from their dependency on dominant-caste landowners and to assert a new caste/class identity of autonomy and dignity. Yet these celebratory experiences of post-

liberalization land commodification are also uneven: in the property regime adjacent to Khed, changes to land markets have led to widespread Adivasi displacement.

Contrary, then, to the sanguine predictions of neoclassical economic models and to the Marxist logic of dispossession, the reaction to urban-oriented land commodification in India has been uneven and unpredictable, often with members of the same social category responding differently to land-use change. Polanyi anticipated that we cannot predict the class basis of the double-movement. We cannot assume that the counter-movement will only be led only by the working-class or the non-propertied constituents; periods of economic downturns have shown how the capitalist fractions insist on state protection to shield them from the uncertainties of the market.⁶⁴ Unaddressed by Polanyi is the real estate desire by groups that depend on their land for subsistence food needs and that stand to lose the most from these market deals. To unpack the regional variations of specifically located caste/class constituents to post-liberalization land commodification, we need to view India's ongoing land conflicts not as conflicts over either market or non-market relations in land. Instead, the core of the conflict lies in the complex negotiations about which lands to expose to new market relations and which to protect, and in the identities of the players at the negotiating table when these decisions are made. The corridor regions resemble what Timothy Mitchell calls the frontier, which he defines not as a “thin line” that separates market from non-market relations, but “a scene of political battles” in capitalist societies, where various groups struggle and clash over the inclusion and exclusion of land

⁶⁴ See for instance, Fred Block's introduction to the 2001 edition of Polanyi's *The Great Transformation*: “Although the working-class movement has been a key part of the protective countermovement, Polanyi explicitly states that all groups in society have participated in this project. When periodic economic downturns destroyed the banking system, for example, business groups insisted that central banking be strengthened to insulate the domestic supply of credit from the pressures of the global market. In a word even capitalists periodically resist the uncertainty and fluctuations that market self-regulation produces and participate in efforts to increase stability and predictability through forms of protection,” pp. xxviii. This then leads to the influential Polanyian argument that it was statecraft that shaped the market, i.e. “laissez-faire was planned,” pp. 147.

in market relations.⁶⁵

Democratic-Market Encounters

The political contests in India over the making of a new fictitious commodity in land are situated within the context of the 1991 institutional reforms. In 1991-2, the Central Government introduced two simultaneous sets of reforms: economic liberalization and decentralization. These reforms produced a wave of new market relations in an otherwise tightly regulated, state-led economy. Market advocates argued that the slow pace at which public decisions are made in India resembled a system with the engine of a bullock cart and the brakes of a Rolls Royce.⁶⁶ In the 1990s, the Central and State Governments repealed agrarian-era land laws, such as the land-ceiling acts, which prevented private landowners from consolidating large tracts of land. New laws in 2002 further eased the entry of private capital into agricultural land markets by allowing foreign investment in real estate. In her work on the creation of transnational real-estate markets in Gurgaon, Llerena Searle highlights the fact that global capital does not simply enter a new land market.⁶⁷ Instead, she shows the work involved in the making of new transnational real-estate markets in India: the “booster” stories that persuade investors to buy land in anticipation of future returns; the painstaking standardization of valuing, building, accounting, and marketing that helps to integrate local land markets into a globally legible financial asset; and the emergence of new intermediaries (in this case, real-estate developers) that connect interlinked markets and liaise between foreign investors and local builders.

These market reforms have driven the enactment of new urban laws—such as the Integrated

⁶⁵ Timothy Mitchell, “The Properties of Markets,” in Donald MacKenzie, Fabian Muniesa, and Lucia Siu, eds., *Do Economists Make Markets? On the Performativity of Economics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007): 244-75.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Devesh Kapur, “India’s Promise?” *Harvard Magazine* (July-Aug 2005), 36-39, 87.

⁶⁷ Llerena Searle, *Landscapes of Accumulation: Real Estate and the Neoliberal Imagination in Contemporary India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

Township Act, the Hill Regulation Act, and the SEZ Act—which ease the entry of firms not only into agricultural land markets but also into the governance of the new corridor cities. The laws authorize the formation of new governance structures, in which corporate firms take over traditional local-government functions, including zoning and basic service provision. In effect, they create local private authorities for the governance of the new corridor cities.

If the 1991 liberalization reforms represent the market movement, certain sections of the 1992-3 democratic decentralization reforms represent the Polanyian counter-movement. Before these reforms, the federal nature of the Indian democratic system meant that land in India was a state subject, meaning that land laws were under the jurisdictional control of State Governments, not the Central Government. Since the State Governments controlled the implementation of land reforms and land-use policies, different agrarian regions produced specific configurations of agrarian propertied classes. Local governments, meanwhile, remained largely neglected institutions. It was only with the decentralization reforms that new life was injected into local government politics. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment, enacted in 1993, envisioned the Gram Panchayats (rural local governments) as key sites of democratic decision-making. The reforms constitutionally mandated regular local-government elections. They introduced a quota system mandating that 33 percent of local-government representatives should be women and members of under-represented castes and religions. In the words of Patrick Heller, these reforms introduced “232,278 voter-accountable institutions where none existed before [and created] a whole new political class of 3,000,000 elected representatives [that] in principle included 1/3 of seats set aside for women and proportional representation of SC/STs.”⁶⁸ Most importantly for this book, the reforms created a new democratic

⁶⁸ Patrick Heller, “Making Citizens from Below and Above: The Prospects and Challenges of Decentralization in India,” in *Understanding India’s New Political Economy: A Great Transformation?*, eds. Sanjay Ruparelia, Sanjay Reddy, John Harriss, and Stuart Corbridge (London: Routledge 2011), 164.

institution in the form of the Gram Sabha—a meeting of every adult living in a particular Panchayat.

The decentralization reforms envisioned the Gram Sabhas as necessary institutions conferring power directly to the citizens. They deemed the Gram Panchayat, with its elected representatives, as the executive branch of the local government, and the Gram Sabhas as the village “legislature.”⁶⁹ The reforms mandated that Gram Sabhas be held at least twice a year and that all eligible voters of the village be allowed to participate in these public assemblies. The Gram Sabhas have the power to “discuss and review all development problems and programs of the village, select beneficiaries for the beneficiary-oriented programs, and plan for the development of the village economy.”⁷⁰ If, for instance, the Central Government allocates grants for a specific social welfare program to the Gram Panchayat, the Gram Sabha assemblies can ensure transparency in the selection of beneficiaries and the allocation of funds. As an aspirational ideal, the Gram Sabhas ensure an economic democracy in which all citizens can make their voices heard on the types of development and jobs they want for their villages.

The twin institutional reforms of liberalization and decentralization are fundamentally changing the nature of land and property relations in two inter-related ways: they are changing the role of land within different forms of capitalism (then agrarian, now urban), and they are changing the relationship of the state to land. Formerly, the economic value of agricultural land in a state-controlled agrarian society derived not from the price of the land but from the price of the crops grown on the land. Before liberalization, there was no real-estate market in the way it is understood in the west. Now, as liberalization reforms remake agricultural land into a more fungible commodity, both agrarian and urban fractions of capital compete to stake their claims on the profits from the emergent real-

⁶⁹ Ramya Parthasarathy and Vijayendra Rao, *Deliberative Democracy in India*, Policy Research Working Paper 7995 (World Bank, March 2017).

⁷⁰ Abdul Aziz, “Democratic Decentralisation: Experience of Karnataka,” *Economic and Political Weekly* (2000), 3522-3.

estate markets. At the same time, the dirigiste state formerly expropriated land for developmental projects and paid landowners a compensation price set by government diktat, giving the land occupiers nothing at all; the Central and State Governments retained a monopoly over locational and land-use decisions. Now, the decentralization reforms have reterritorialized the state. When the Central or State Government wants to create a new urban jurisdiction, e.g. a corridor city, they must contend with empowered Gram Panchayats and the newly instituted Gram Sabhas. What we see here is a restructuring of the local state, earlier absent from any locational or land-use decisions but now a key site of conflict over post-liberalization land commodification. The local state itself is getting transformed, mirroring the wider institutional democratic-market tensions, with development companies and Gram Sabhas jostling with one another to make the new rules for governing the corridor cities.

The normative concern of this book is how to keep these processes of post-liberalization land-use change and land commodification contestable and open to the public.⁷¹ The Gram Sabhas are an important new local institution that can ensure the inclusion of previously excluded groups in these processes. But, despite the decentralization mandate that Gram Sabhas be empowered as sites of local democracy in action, the agrarian propertied classes—which were themselves shaped by the uneven flows of resources and subsidies under earlier agricultural modernization programs—exert substantial influence on how the Gram Sabhas are mobilized.

The geographical focus of this book is the Mumbai-Pune corridor region. In Chapter 2, I examine the successful eras of infrastructural development, situated within the dominant development

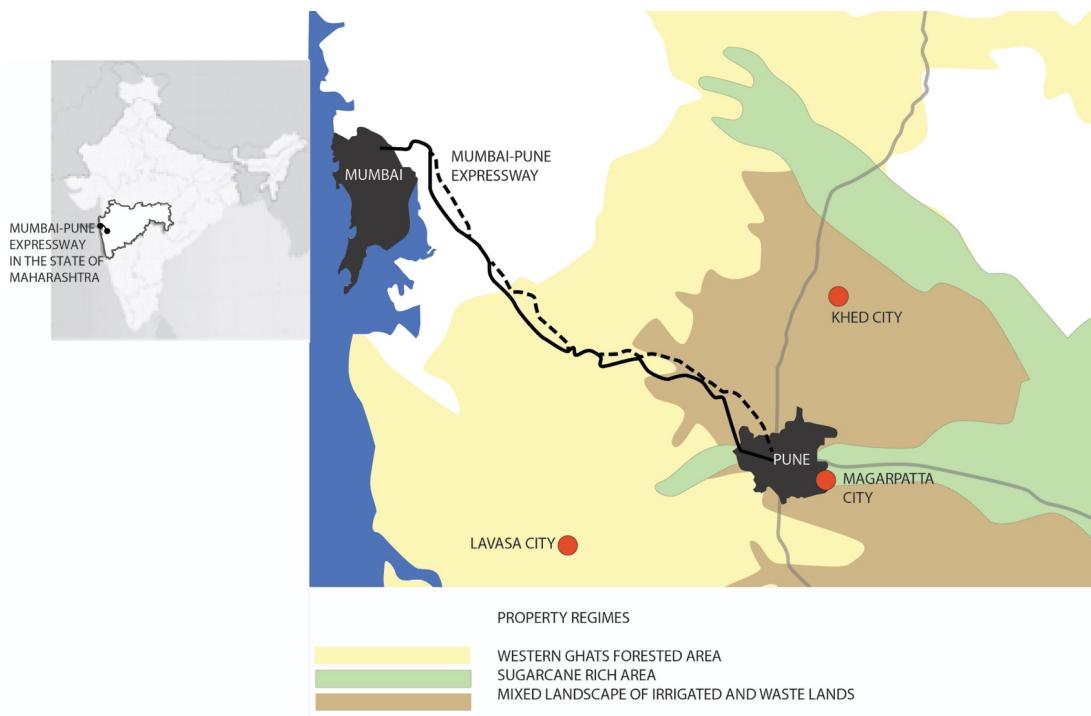
⁷¹ For more on the contestability of property regimes, see Katharina Pistor and Olivier De Schutter, *Governing Access to Essential Resources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). The normative concern for democratic contestation also aligns with the urban scholarship of, among others, Susan Fainstein. Fainstein's work urges planners to not uncritically privilege efficiency as the overriding value in urban decision-making, but instead to bring social justice values front-and-center in these contested processes. See Susan Fainstein, *The just city* (Cornell University Press, 2010).

paradigms of their times—the colonial-era railways, the irrigation canals of the postcolonial developmental state, and the post-liberalization economic corridors—all of which produced distinct geographies of uneven development. One original contribution of this chapter is its mapping of the land prices of 242 villages from 1996 to 2016—from the year when the expressway was announced to almost fifteen years after its completion. Some of these 242 villages are located very near the Mumbai-Pune Expressway; others are more distant from the expressway but received the largest number of irrigation canals in the 1960s and '70s. Mapping the changing land prices in this corridor region illustrates how the economic value of agricultural land, which earlier derived from its proximity to irrigation canals, is now being recalibrated based on the land's proximity to the new economic corridors. This chapter sets the stage for the following three chapters, which track how specific agrarian pasts shape the urbanizing present.

The Mumbai-Pune corridor region contains spectacularly diverse property regimes. The most agriculturally valorized region in Maharashtra is the sugarcane region. At the turn of the twentieth century, this region was an agro-ecological scarcity zone. A dense concentration of irrigation canals has since transformed it into one of the most agriculturally productive regions of the country. India is the second largest exporter of cane sugar after Brazil, and more than 40 percent of India's sugar comes from cooperatives in this region. Magarpatta City is built on former sugarcane fields, and it represents a case of agrarian privileges reproduced in an urbanizing context. Along the western coastline of the state of Maharashtra lies the ecologically sensitive hill range or escarpment, the Western Ghats. A densely forested area and one of the four major watersheds of the country, the Western Ghats are second only to the Himalayas as a “hotspot of biodiversity.” Ironically, these forests, which are home to major rivers and the largest density of dams in the country, also contain vast tracts of agriculturally unproductive waste lands. The Western Ghats represent the excluded zones of an uneven agrarian past: these dammed hinterlands were devalorized in the process of valorizing the sugarcane region.

Now, Lavasa Lake City is being built on these forest lands. In between these valorized and devalorized spaces are mixed landscapes with undulating terrain and patchy areas of irrigation canals. At the intersection of the lower slopes of the Western Ghats and the plains is the Khed taluka. The routing of the canals follows topographical features of this region: the canals traverse the plains but bypass the hillocks |outcroppings on the plains. Khed City is an SEZ development in this mixed region. In each of these three interlinked but differentiated agrarian regions, the precise configuration of agrarian land-based social relations influences how the twin laws of liberalization and decentralization are enacted on the ground. The map below shows the western Maharashtra region and the corridor cities located within each of the three property regimes.

Figure 1: Mumbai-Pune corridor region with diverse property regimes and the three case studies



Chapter 3, “From Sugar to Real Estate,” analyzes the case of 600-acre township - Magarpatta City - located in the former agriculturally valorized region of well-irrigated sugarcane fields. In this

case, a group of sugarcane landowners voluntarily pooled their agricultural land and formed a real-estate company wholly owned by erstwhile landowners, who hold shares in proportion to the acreage of land they gave up for the new township. I argue that Magarpatta City represents a wider movement among the sugar elites from an agrarian to an urban economy. In the former, state-controlled agrarian society, the Maratha elites consolidated power over the countryside through their control of irrigation canals and sugar-rich land. Now, with the restructuring of land markets, the agrarian promoters of the new corridor city are mobilizing the same political linkages to generate urban profits; just as the sugar elites shared the profits of the sugar cooperatives with the Maratha-Kunbi sugarcane growers who were members of the cooperatives, they are now sharing the profits of land redevelopment by including the former sugarcane growers as shareholders of the new company. Left out of both the cooperatives and the new companies are the landless laborers who used to work on the sugarcane fields. In other words, the propertied bias of the agrarian era is being reproduced in the urbanizing and liberalizing era. Moreover, since existing agrarian networks were mobilized for the new land commodification, a Gram Sabha was never formed in this region. Had one been formed, the non-propertied agrarian groups could have exercised their voices on these land-use changes, but the agrarian elites were too strong and, by suppressing the laborers' voices, succeeded in reproducing agrarian privileges and exclusions in the new corridor city.

Chapter 4, “From Forests to IPO,” focuses on Lavasa Lake City, located on the formerly devalorized lands of the Western Ghats. The lake city is the first real-estate development in India financed via an IPO (Initial Public Offering). It sprawls across 25,000 acres and is nearly one-fifth the land area of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai. The Mumbai-Pune economic corridor opened up these forest lands, which previously were remote and disconnected because of a lack of access roads, to new rushes of private capital. Their current development is geared toward foreign investors and distant shareholders. Significantly, the urban promoter of the corridor city is facing

numerous legal charges of fraudulent land transactions and environmental violations. The region contains a mix of some of the poorest Maratha-Kunbi middle peasantry and other Adivasi constituents, many of whom are landless. From the 1920s onward, successive rounds of building big dams to irrigate the sugarcane fields have submerged these forest lands and forcibly relocated their residents to adjacent districts. Gram Sabhas have not been formed in any of the villages because their populations are too splintered. In other words, by denying the residents the right to stay put,⁷² the displacements undermined their capability to come together for collective action.

Chapter 5, “From Waste Land to SEZ,” focuses on the 4,213-acre Khed City, located on mixed lands of irrigated fields interspersed with waste land. This region is representative of a vast majority of former Green Revolution regions. Its irrigated lands in the plains are owned predominantly by Maratha-Kunbi middle peasantry, who grow vegetables for export to Mumbai, Pune, and the surrounding cities. Their lands are interspersed with waste lands relegated largely to Adivasis. When the state government tried to acquire land in four Khed villages on behalf of an industrial firm-turned-SEZ-promoter, the middle peasantry protested. They lacked the forms of capital that the sugar elites possessed to make an urban transition themselves, but they were organized enough as an electoral constituency to make their voices heard. This chapter tracks the initial conflicts between the urban promoter and the middle peasantry and the mediating role of regional bureaucrats in negotiating a solution of a joint land company with agrarian landowners and industrial firms as shareholders. Khed City merits attention both because the SEZ company includes as shareholders historically antagonistic groups—industrial capitalists and agrarian landowners, the middle peasantry and Adivasi agricultural laborers—and because the Gram Sabha became the site for negotiating new land commodification. A

⁷² On the “right to stay put” in the context of the informal residents of Mumbai’s Dharavi settlement, see Liza Weinstein, “The Durable Slum: Dharavi and the Right to Stay Put in Globalizing Mumbai (University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

key insight in the Khed case concerns the revaluation of former waste land, thanks to its conversion into an SEZ development. As stated above, younger-generation male Adivasis are capitalizing on the rising market value of their lands to break away from their patron-client relationships with the middle peasantry and assert a new politics of recognition for themselves.

As these three cases make clear, it is only under certain conditions that the Gram Sabhas can be activated and open up a space for previously excluded groups to challenge inherited agrarian power relations and to exercise their voices in the ongoing negotiations. One of these conditions is the relative power of middle peasantry *vis-à-vis* the agrarian elites and the incoming urban firms. In cases where the agrarian propertied power is either too entrenched (Magarpatta) or too dissipated (Lavasa), past agrarian privileges and exclusions are reproduced in an urbanizing context. Agrarian regimes like Khed, however, hold promise for a new politics of disruption and inclusion, in which agrarian-urban encounters create opportunities for previously excluded agrarian groups to enter the fray and stake new claims for themselves.

For this to happen, the Gram Sabhas must be not only activated in the first place but also conducted in an inclusive way. All three corridor cities entail the making of new jurisdictions; urban promoters are carving territories out of existing local governments and governing these new territories with the formation of new authorities: the Magarpatta Township Development and Construction Company Limited (MTDCCL), the Lavasa Corporation Limited (LCL), and Khed Economic Infrastructure Private Limited (KEIPL). These new authorities are taking over the traditional functions of urban local governments, including zoning and service provision. Yet these market movements are being interrupted by democratic politics: the companies have to jostle for power with the Gram Sabhas. Particularly in regions like Khed, which has the enabling conditions for the activation of the Gram Sabha, what does it mean to engage in the public sphere as a shareholder?

When the promoters of the new corridor cities transform landowners into shareholders, they

are creating a new form of local government, which I call the “shareholder city.” I use the term “city” to emphasize the governance aspects of these jurisdictions. The corridor region resembles what Henri Lefebvre in the mid twentieth century called an “urban society” and what Neil Brenner more recently called “planetary urbanization,” an expanded scale of capitalist urbanization that renders inadequate city-village distinctions.⁷³ In the context of this book, the term “city” remains relevant, as the “city” in “shareholder cities” signifies the legal status of the jurisdiction that links territory-authority-polity in a social contract: the boundary of the city defines a territory; laws, such as the decentralization law, grants a public authority the power to make and enforce rules for governing this territory; and the boundary also delineates the polity that has the power to hold the authority accountable for its actions.

I am critical of the new shareholder cities because they attempt to restructure the local state in such a way as to redraw the public/private boundaries of these new jurisdictions. In his brilliant defense of the public sphere, Paul Starr reminds us that privatization is not merely aimed at returning assets and services to the private sphere; instead, it constitutes a “reordering of claims in a society”:

The terms public and private sum up a whole structure of rules and expectations about the proper conduct and limits of the state. To say some activity is public is to invoke claims of public purpose, public accountability, and public disclosure. To say something is private is to claim protection from state officials and other citizens. The theory of property rights sees privatization as a reassignment of claims to the control and use of assets, but it misses the special claims of the public sphere in a democratic society—claims for greater disclosure of

⁷³ Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, "The ‘urban age’ in question," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38.3 (2014): 731-755. Also see Janaki Nair, "Indian Urbanism and the Terrain of the Law," *Economic & Political Weekly* 50.36 (2015): 54-63, where she analyzes the Bengaluru-Mysore NICE corridor as a “sign of new urbanism” that resembles what Lefebvre called “urban society.”

information... [and] for rights of participation and discussion.⁷⁴

In the shareholder cities, the “rights of participation and discussion” are premised on landownership. These propertied norms threaten to undermine the democratic ideal of one-person-one-vote. The shareholder cities are changing not only the public/private boundaries of the city but also who has claims on the city. At stake here is the notion of the democratic city, where, irrespective of their position in society, every individual should have equal claim-making power on the public authority that governs the city. The shareholder model of compensating landowners with shares in the new real-estate development is, instead, a variant of land readjustment or land pooling, which is gaining popularity as a mode of resolving land conflicts in other parts of the India. In land readjustment, instead of shares, smaller but serviced and higher-priced plots of land are returned to the landowners. Though focusing on the price of land may be the most expedient way of gaining consent from the middle peasantry, what gets eclipsed in these negotiations are the bigger distributional questions about the reallocation of land and land-based social power among new users. Worst of all, the voices of non-propertied citizens in these negotiations are silenced altogether.

A View from the Gram Sabha

This book draws on eighteen months of qualitative fieldwork, from 2011 to 2012, in the western Maharashtra region, followed by annual three-to-five-months visits to the new corridor cities from 2013 to 2015.⁷⁵ The normative focus of the book—on keeping land-use change contestable by entrenching these decisions in the local democratic institution of the Gram Sabha—emerged from my own fieldwork experience of negotiating access to the corridor cities. I started my fieldwork by

⁷⁴ Paul Starr, “The Meaning of Privatization,” *Yale Law and Policy Review* 6, no. 1 (1988), 38.

⁷⁵ See the Appendix for more details on my research methodology.

mapping out the institutional actors involved in the process of land-use change in each of the corridor cities. The agrarian elites, the middle peasantry, and the users and owners of the forests and agricultural lands emerged as central protagonists whose lives and livelihoods are being fundamentally remade by the building of the new corridor cities. My ability to gain access to these protagonists varied in the three cases. “Access” in qualitative research implies not just entry into the research site and into the lives of the participants but the creation of a more enduring relationship, building trust and a rapport with the research participants.⁷⁶ In the course of my fieldwork, the means I had to use for negotiating access to the three corridor cities revealed the degree of publicness of those cities.

The easiest corridor city to gain access to was Khed City. My first set of interviews in Khed City was with the elected representatives of the Khed Gram Panchayats. Norms of access applied here: from earlier fieldwork in peri-urban Bengaluru, I had learned that the “backward class” agrarian landowners are often the gatekeepers in caste-segregated villages. Accordingly, I started the Khed City fieldwork by making contact with the Maratha-Kunbi elected representatives and then spent time in the Adivasi settlements within these villages. Khed City was the easiest corridor city to gain access to because I did not need permission to enter the local democratic offices (including the Gram Panchayat office) or to attend the Gram Sabhas. The public spheres, which were the sites of the land-use negotiations for Khed City, were open and thus truly public.

During one of the Khed Gram Sabhas, I met Meena *tai*, a feisty 60-year-old Mali (a “backward class” but not a dominant caste group) who lived in the village. In 2005, the Central Government had introduced the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), guaranteeing all rural residents one hundred days of employment annually for the building of public works. Meena *tai* had recently filed a Right to Information (RTI) petition to get information from the Gram Panchayat on

⁷⁶ Martha Feldman, Jeannine Bell, and Michele Tracy Berger, *Gaining Access: A Practical and Theoretical Guide for Qualitative Researchers* (Walnut Creek, CA: Rowman Altamira, 2004).

the beneficiaries selected for the MGNREGS, because some of the non-Maratha “backward class” residents suspected nepotism—elected representatives selecting family members and close friends and excluding other citizens. During the Gram Sabha, in front of elected representatives and bureaucrats from the local to the district levels, Meena *tai* demanded that the Gram Panchayat display the list of beneficiaries outside its office, in the spirit of transparency and democratic accountability. It was her duty as a citizen, she said, to *takleef dena*—literally “give trouble,” though a more accurate interpretation would be “ask uncomfortable questions and challenge the status quo.” Citizens like Meena *tai* apply pressure on their elected representatives not just while casting their votes but also through regular interactions in the Gram Sabha. Through the Gram Sabhas, I met many other active citizens influenced by and influencing the building of Khed City.

The corridor city that was most difficult to gain access to was Magarpatta City. During my first few weeks in Pune city, I went to Magarpatta City with the naïve view that security guards or domestic workers would point me to the houses of the agrarian landowners-turned-shareholders. They did not. I then tried to get an interview with Satish Magar, an urban developer of sugar origins. After five months, a family friend who knew a business associate of Satish Magar finally got me a half-hour with him. It was an informative interview, yielding deep insights on real-estate development in India. At the end of the discussion, he agreed to introduce me to one of the agrarian landowners-turned-shareholders, who would drive me around on a tour of the township and introduce me to other shareholders of sugar origins. I had two months of interviews with these shareholders. When I returned to Pune city the following year and called the agrarian landowner-turned-shareholder who had given me the tour, hoping to meet with him again, he kindly but firmly refused to talk to me until I had received permission from Satish Magar for a second round of interviews. I did not follow up with Satish Magar this time, as I was eager to move my fieldwork out of Magarpatta City into the adjacent areas. At the edges, where the corridor city meets other urban and rural local governments, I

experienced the stark distinctions between the private city and the public city.

Equally difficult in terms of access was the Lavasa Lake City. At Lavasa, I gained access to the owners and occupiers of the forest lands through a social movement, the National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM). My earlier attempts to meet residents in the region had proven fruitless: the charged conflict over land had made residents distrustful of outsiders and unwilling to talk. Not a single Gram Sabha meeting had been held in the region; the institution existed only on paper. The NAPM, however, has been closely involved in the region's land struggles, and it was through their Pune activist that I was first introduced to landowners who opposed the development. My interviews with these landowners revealed the fragmented nature of the region's households: earlier dam-induced displacement had scattered families among distant relocation sites; the poor availability of irrigation waters (which had been diverted to the Maratha-controlled sugar-rich regions of western Maharashtra) had forced family members to migrate to Pune and Mumbai in search of work. These families continue to be splintered: I conducted around half of my interviews in the Western Ghats region but the other half with family-members who live and work in Pune but make occasional visits back to their villages. Unlike the Khed region, where the Gram Sabha provides a common public place for all citizens to gather, the Western Ghats region lacks these local democratic institutions.

My varied experiences in gaining access to the corridor cities became a proxy for the varied publicness of the land-use decision-making process. Though corporations have triumphed over the Gram Sabha in the Magarpatta case, the Gram Sabha remains a force to be reckoned with in Khed City. The Khed Gram Sabha granted me, a doctoral student from an elite Western university, with caste/class privileges in her home country, a glimpse into the workings of local democracy as a social practice. It has granted "backward class" women like Meena *tai* the democratic power to demand information, a fair allocation of resources, and respect from her elected representatives. Such public negotiations have opened the land-use decisions to public scrutiny. Of course, the Gram Sabha

meetings remain far from ideal: they can sometimes become “talking shops”;⁷⁷ their politics can be performative; and, even with democratic fixes, access to them is mediated by the intersections of class, caste, and gender. Nevertheless, at their best, these public assemblies are forums where all the citizens can gather as a collective to exercise their voice. Even the powerful Marathas have to articulate their interests in ways that are acceptable to the wider public. Consent by the Gram Sabha grants legitimacy to the rules made to govern the polity. These democratic processes may be painfully time-consuming and slow; they may even be inefficient. But they provide much-needed brakes for slowing down and sometimes reversing the direction of change for a country that is careening at a dizzying pace toward an uncertain, market- and urban-oriented future.

⁷⁷ Parthasarathy and Rao (2017).