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Conflicting Truths and Contrasting Realities: Are Official Statistics on Agrarian Change Reliable?

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CONFLICTING TRUTHS AND CONTRASTING REALITIES: ARE OFFICIAL STATISTICS ON AGRARIAN CHANGE RELIABLE?

V Anil Kumar*

Abstract

In this article, we contrast the official secondary data with independently collected primary data regarding some key aspects of agrarian change in rural Andhra Pradesh, India. The main argument of the paper is that while the official statistics on certain aspects are reliable, on other aspects of agrarian change such as land holding structure can be misleading when taken *prima facie*. In order to get closer to the truth, we need disaggregated original primary surveys, which can portray a nuanced picture of agrarian change over time. This is particularly the case with the longitudinal data pertaining to land ownership.

Key words**: **agrarian change, census data, primary survey, irrigation, land inequality, Andhra Pradesh, India

Introduction

Capitalist development has been defined in various ways. Maurice Dobb, in his discussion in *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, while reviewing the definitions of capitalism, points out the employment of wage labour in the market as the ultimate characteristic of capitalism[1].

While employment of wage labour is an important indicator in itself, another most important indicator, especially concerning agriculture, is the polarisation of the class/agrarian structure in terms of the concentration of means of production (in land in particular) on one side and the formation of the absolutely landless labouring class on the other. The exposition of this process has come to be widely known as the polarisation thesis.

Polarisation thesis was first propounded by Marx in volume-1 of *Capital* in the chapter, 'So Called Primitive Accumulation', while dealing with the enclosure movement in Britain. Later Lenin raises the issue in his *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*.[2] Lenin argues that land concentration inside the Russian countryside had been taking place and also that it is an inevitable process during the development of capitalism – in any country, with the small and middle peasants getting swept away by the juggernaut of capitalism in the process. In the Russian debate the process came to be called the 'depeasantisation' process. The process, otherwise, also has come to be known as the proletarianisation process.

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However, a different view on the theme was the German debate around the same time within the SPD (Social Democratic Party) between Karl Kautsky and a group of Social Democrats headed by Eduard David.[3] In this debate, while Kautsky believed that Polarisation could be a long term tendency --- and not necessarily visible in the short run --- Eduard David *et al* categorically held the view that small and middle peasants had sufficient resilience to withstand the force of agrarian capitalism; further, David and his group questioned the alleged superiority of large scale agriculture --whether capitalist or socialist. They (David *et al*) claimed that small scale farming was more viable and rational than large scale farming. They even considered small scale farming an effective alternative to collectivisation. While these debates are of great relevance in the context of socialist agriculture, they are also of significant importance to the study of capitalist agriculture. In fact, they provide insights into the understanding of structural processes on the basis of which politics operates and evolves.

The Indian debate on 'Mode of Production' in agriculture too raises questions with respect to the definition of capitalism.[4] The major bone of contention has been whether to limit the definition of capitalism to the employment of wage labour alone or to include the criterion of accumulation and reinvestment (on farm). It has been argued by Utsa Patnaik that while the emergence of labour power as a commodity is a necessary condition, it is not a sufficient condition; further, she held a view that reinvestment and accumulation are the sufficient conditions, which means that Polarisation process --- which in turn is a product of reinvestment and accumulation --- is a basic feature of capitalist development in agriculture.

The concern of the present article relates to the examination of polarisation thesis and the entailing politics in particular empirical situations. The emergence of the above said process is a complex phenomenon. As Lenin in the Russian context, and the noted European historian Robert Brenner in the European context[5] have noted, the process is contingent on the specificity of the circumstances; and, also it takes place over *longue duree,* and depends on the long established socio-historical structures. The above discussion, though brief, covers the essentials of the debate over the definition of agrarian capitalism.

In this article, we examine the above proposition by contrasting the secondary official data provided by the government with the independently collected primary data regarding agrarian change over a period of more than two decades, and attempt to compare the two and discuss the differences. The official data, mainly from the *Statistical Abstracts* prepared by the government of Andhra Pradesh[6], pertains to Nalgonda district of AP. In this article we have attempted to compare the district level official data with the data and information collected firsthand through primary survey, besides discussing the data contrasts between the two are sought to be discussed. This paper is divided into three parts: in the first part of the paper, we discuss the official data and the findings; and in the second part of the paper, we discuss the findings of our original field survey. Finally we attempt to examine what implications these differences hold for policy.

First, the official data that we have collected has been sourced from these *Statistical Abstracts* of Nalgonda District, covering the period 1970-90. (Some of the official data does begin at 1957 but this does not pose any computational problem as this data, such as, area sown under food and non-food crops, is only illustrative and does not affect the central arguments of the paper). *There are some*

limitations to this data, for example, we have not been able to collect data on land reforms, as official information on the implementation of land reforms is scanty, and difficult to get. Nowhere in the government statistics do we find a mention of either the land distributed or designed to be distributed. The degree of reliability of official data varies within the secondary data with respect to different aspects. Information and data on certain aspects is more reliable than the others and on certain matters only the government can provide data - such as rainfall, for example. At the same time regarding certain crucial aspects such as the number of agricultural labourers and cultivators in the district, the government data is quite unreliable; it follows from this that while depending on the secondary data is inescapable in respect of certain matters, it has to be taken with care in certain other matters. Following this in the second part of the paper, we discuss the results of primary survey. In conclusion, we state our viewpoint that, particularly regarding agrarian change, primary data collected either through survey or qualitative methods is imperative as the reliance on official statistics *per se* may not always provide a correct reflection of the reality.

Trends observed in the official agricultural data

The official data presented here basically relates to the trends observed at the district level of Nalgonda district in Andhra Pradesh. Below an attempt is made to discuss the trends regarding different aspects of the data for the years 1970-1990. Data on agrarian structure has been basically collected from the S*tatistical Abstracts* which were prepared out of the information collected by the government as part of the World Agricultural Census (WAC). This information is collected for every five years and the WAC data is available from 1970-71.

The official data on agrarian structure:

The data on agrarian structures is provided through bar diagrams in this paper in order to make the comprehension of trends easy. The data on agrarian structure has been divided into two heads: 'Area Operated According to Holding Size' and 'Percentage Distribution of Area Operated' --- for two decades 1970-1990. The following figures show both the aspects.

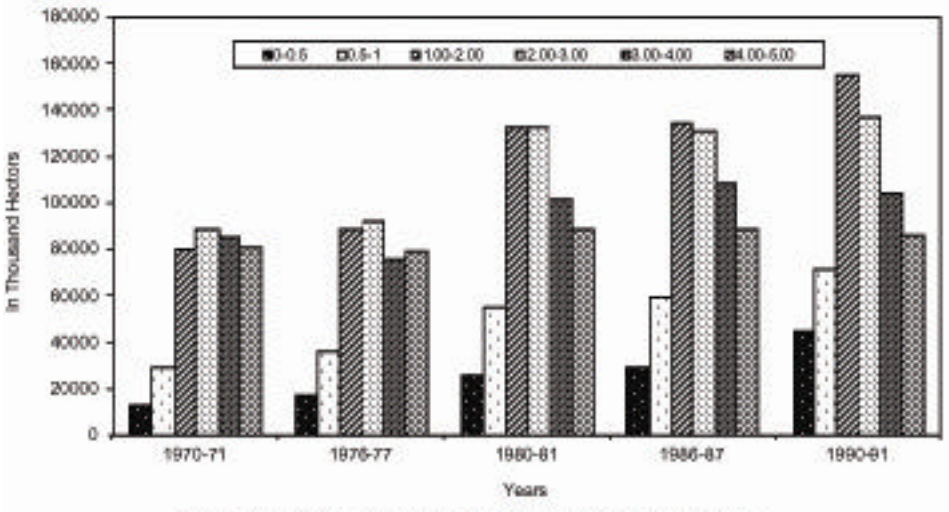

Figure 1: Area Operated as per holding size (0-0.5 to 4.00-5.00)

Over the years 1970-90, we can see that the area operated under the land holding sizes 0-05. to 4-5 hectares has increased substantially. One also can see that the area operated under the land holding sizes 5-10 hectares to 50 plus hectares has declined drastically, *which means that over the years the area operated under smallholdings has increased, while the area operated under bigger holdings i.e., 5 hectares and above has decreased.* This means that smaller holdings particularly between 1 and 4 hectares have increased rapidly at the expense of big holdings of five hectares and above. This can safely be interpreted as a trend towards land fragmentation rather than a trend towards land concentration. Particularly the area operated ha's increased at a very fast pace under the size holdings 1-2 hectares and 3-4 hectares.

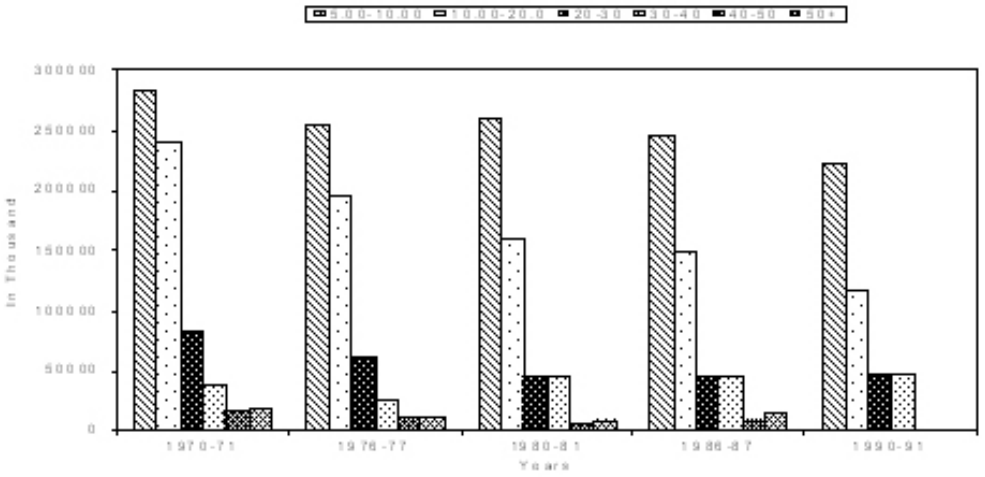

Figure2 : Area Operated as per holding size (5.00-10.00 to 50.00 +)

The percentage distribution of the area operated across different size classes of holdings also supports the above claim. But the bar diagrams present a slightly different picture. According to this data, while the percentage of area operated under large holdings i.e., 10 hectares and above, has decreased, still a substantial amount of area i.e., about 17-18 percent of the total cultivable area is observed operated for 1990-91 under large holdings of ten hectares and above. This is graphically presented below in figure – 3.

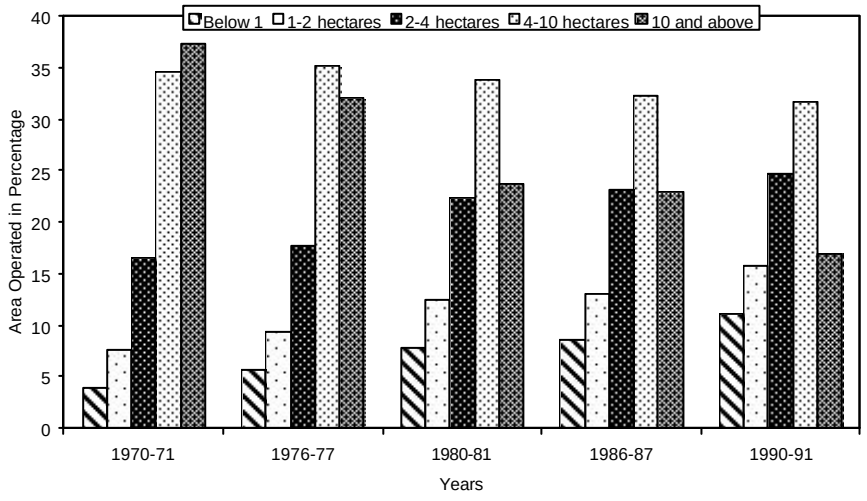

Figure 3:Percentage Distribution of Area Operated in Different Size Classes(1971-91)

The general trend even when stated in percentage terms is the same. Over a period of twenty years, i.e., 1970-71-1990-91, the percentage of land under small and medium holdings has increased, while the percentage of area operated under large holdings(i.e., ten and above hectares) has come down approximately from about 38 percent to 17 percent: this finding leads us to a generalisation that while a *substantive land deconcentration* has taken place, there is still a significant proportion of land under large holdings and that landlordism of whatever variety is prevalent.

These data show that land fragmentation i.e., the multiplication of small and tiny holdings has gone on at a fast pace. The figure-3, presented above, shows that in 1990-91 nearly 47 percent of the total land holdings were in the category of zero to one hectare. The trends are also clear that the percentage of holdings about ten and above hectares have prominently come down. *So the trends are two fold in the main regarding the agrarian structure*: *first, there is a clear and obvious trend towards deconcentration. Secondly, within or along with the process of deconcentration, there has been a process of land fragmentation*. There are, of course, important limitations to this picture. *This exposition does not give much clue to the qualitative aspects of agrarian structure and agrarian relations.*

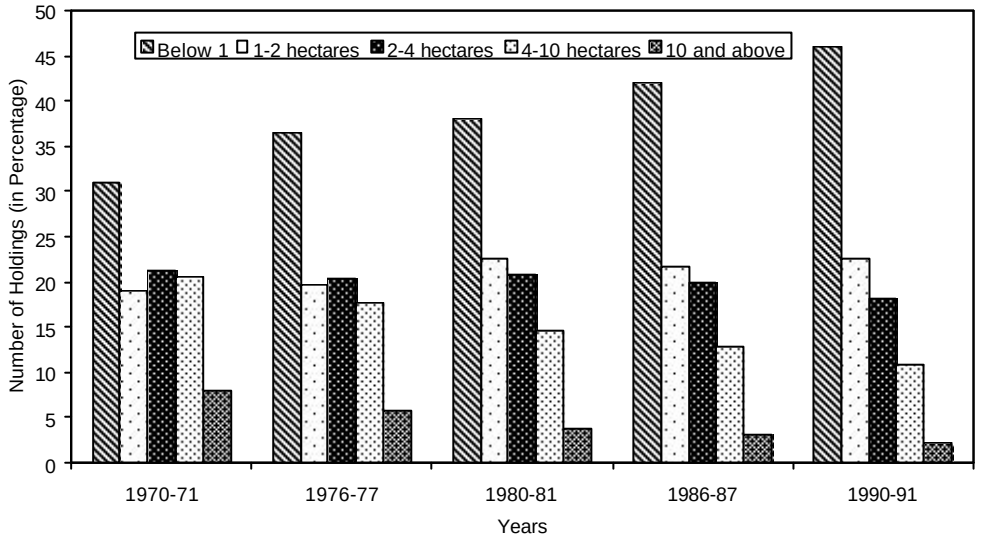

Figure 4: Percentage Distribution of Number of Holdings according to different size classes

Official data on agricultural labourers and cultivators

Secondary data on agrarian structure also provides information on the number of labourers and cultivators. We have this data for the entire period of 1960-90. The absolute numbers of agricultural labourers and cultivators have been collected at four decadal time points i.e., for the years 1960, 70, 80 and 1990.

Figure 5: Percentage of Agricultural Labourers and Cultivators

The data provided by the *statistical abstracts* shows interesting trends, which are presented in the above figure-5. In 1960-61, the absolute number of cultivators is observed more than that of the absolute number of labourers. In 1970-71, the absolute number of the both categories for Nalgonda district is found equal. In 1980-81, the data shows them again equal but in larger absolute numbers. But in contrast to that, in 1990-91, the number of agricultural labourers goes significantly up while that of the cultivators remains the same as in 1980-81. This raises some questions. *Why did the number of labourers increase between 1980-81 and 1990-91?* Is it simply because of the absolute growth of the number of people in the labouring class? Returning to the reliability of the data on the number of cultivators and labourers, we may note that the definitions of these categories change form one census to the other. Often in the definition of agricultural labour, for instance, the children and old people coming under particular age groups of definite age are found excluded. This in turn leaves out a large number of child labourers and elderly labourers. Therefore in the actual reality a large proportion of the labour force does not get included in the official list of labourers. This makes the data with regard to labourers unreliable for any year; the same can be said of the data relating to the number of cultivators, because the notion of 'cultivator' is vague. Who, for instance, can be called a cultivator when many labourers also own some land and many land-owning cultivators also hire out their labour power? Owing to these problems, it is difficult to generalise on the agrarian change process mainly relying on the official data. Only a primary survey can give a true picture.

Impact of irrigation

Irrigation and availability of water is a major determinant of agrarian change over time and the data on the pattern of irrigation too shows interesting trends. We have data for the period 1957-1990. In Nalgonda district, irrigation takes place basically through three major means: canals, tanks and open wells. Although there is a boom observed of late in tube well sinking we do not have any data on that.

The canal irrigation in the district was minimal in 1957 but it increased steeply during 1965-66. The land irrigated under canals increased rapidly during that year. This was probably because of the expansion of irrigation under the newly constructed Nagarjuna Sagar Project. From 1966 onwards the land irrigated through canals has remained steadily high, except during the year 1987-88 when canal irrigation dipped to some extent. Otherwise there are only minor fluctuations observed in the canal irrigation profile.

Irrigation under tanks, on the other hand, shows a decreasing trend. Not only the land under tank irrigation is declining, it is also prone to the greatest amount of fluctuation. This is understandable because tanks are filled only by rainfall and the rainfall fluctuates drastically for this district. We can see from the official statistics that the land irrigated under the category 'other wells' is low, but steadily increased during 1957-90. What appears from the above description of the trends is that for the district as a whole, the importance of tank irrigation has come down, whereas the importance of canal and electrified tube wells has increased. Which means that besides canal irrigation, there is an increased reliance on ground water. A major drawback with this data is that it does not give any scope for intra-district comparison. Given the fact that canals irrigate only a part of the district, we are compelled to understand that a major part of the district is exposed to vagaries of nature.

Changes in the cropping pattern

The trends in the cropping pattern are shown in the figure-6, and these are for the period 1960-90. The graph showing the area sown under food and non-food crops clearly indicates that the area under food crops is consistently larger than the area under non-food crops. While both are fluctuating over time, it appears that the area under food crops has fluctuated more than the area under non-food crops. The data in the final analysis suggests that Nalgonda is a region where the growth of commercial or industrial crops is much less when compared to the traditional food crops. The data also indicates that this has remained consistent over the period 1960-90. Although the gap has been closing in, since early eighties it is still quite large.

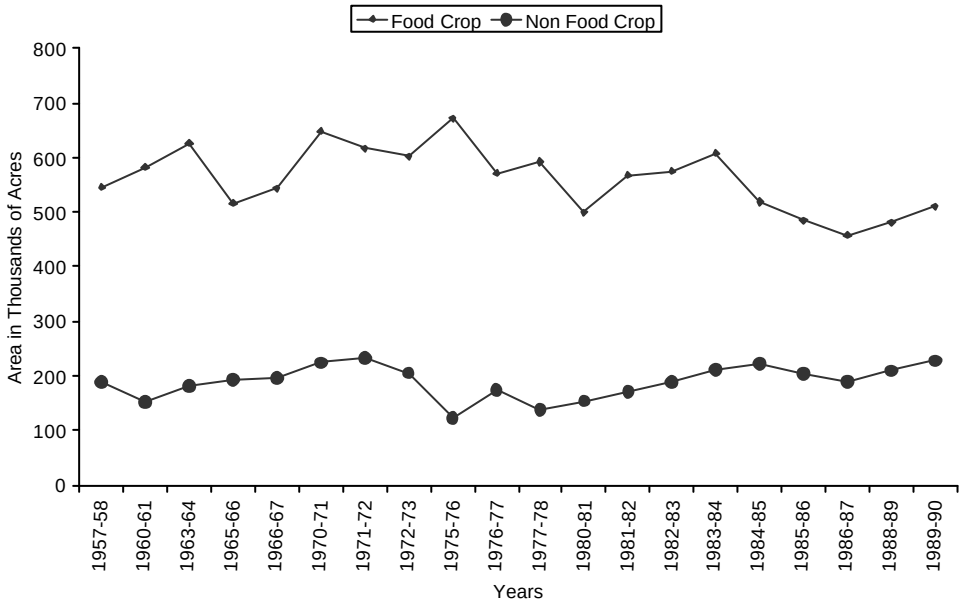

Figure 6: Area sown under Food and Non Food Crops

One fact that stands out is that the percentage of area under paddy cultivation has gone up tremendously, while that of other food crops has come down. For 1960-61, the percentage of area under paddy cultivation is found to be only around 17 percent, whereas for 1989-90, the percentage of area under paddy cultivation exceeds 37 percent. The percentage of area under jowar has steadily come down since 1960. While the percentage of area under jowar cultivation is found around 32 percent, the same for 1989-90 was around 12 percent. Among non-food crops, the percentage of area under castor cultivation has grown only modestly from 15 percent to 23 percent. Considering the fact that castor is the only major non-food commercial crop grown in the region the increase in its production is important.

From 1984-85 onwards, there has been a marginal appearance of cotton as well on the scene. In 1989-90, the percentage of area under cotton cultivation of the total area sown was a moderate 20 percent, but this was a sign that in future commercialisation of agriculture was going to be important. The second most important commercial crop grown in the region is groundnut. The percentage of area under groundnut cultivation, (though has seen an overall increase), has been fluctuating: from 5 percent in 1960 to groundnut cultivation rose to around 10 percent of the total area sown in 1990. In between, in 1978-79 groundnut cultivation increased up to 14 percent of the area but again fell down to around 7 percent of the area in 1984-85. *All in all, the trends in the cropping pattern for the district in toto show that there has been a marked increase in paddy cultivation. It has become a part-commercial part-food crop. Other food crops such as bajra, jowar have declined in importance.* This indicates that, in sum, it is a food crop based economy.

The discussion presenting the macro trends with respect to aspects of agrarian change in the district are based on secondary data, as provided by official statistics; but do they reflect the reality accurately? In order to ascertain an answer to this question, we conducted a primary survey in the semi- irrigated and irrigated parts of the district. The picture that has emerged is interesting and quite contrasting to the one presented above. In the following section we present the data collected during the primary survey and discuss its findings.

A picture from primary statistical survey

To have a quantitative idea of the scenario of agrarian change, a primary survey was conducted in four villages. A proportionate stratified random sample of fifty households in each of the four villages in semi-irrigated region-- Somaram and Prajapalle, and in irrigated region--Yadpalle and Gudur, was selected[7]. The sample comprised of five identified major agrarian classes namely marginal peasants, small peasants, middle peasants, rich peasants and landlords. The criterion for defining classes was the ownership of land[8] as given by The World Agricultural Census (WAC*), based on which the sample was prepared. However, we would like to reiterate here that it was the sample which was based on WAC data and not the entire data itself. The primary data was collected by the scholar using interview schedule and interviewing peasants in the field.* WAC also provides data in acreage terms and the *sample used herein is based on the 1995-96 data of WAC* for the region under study. The primary survey provides data on the above-mentioned aspects for four decadal points (1960, 1970, 1980, and 1990) retrospectively from 1960 to 1990. *The primacy of primary survey can not be questioned because*

primary data was collected from the field and was not borrowed from NSSO or, Census and or from WAC.

For discussing the caste status of classes, we have classified different castes and sub castes into three categories: the Scheduled Castes, the backward castes, and 'other' or upper castes. In the following section, we present a discussion on the survey results under four sub-headings, namely: i) Land ownership pattern among different peasant classes; ii) Percentage distribution of land holdings among different peasant classes; iii) The average size of land holdings among different peasant classes and lastly, but importantly, iv). The caste composition of different classes; First, we present the data for the semi-irrigated region and then for the irrigated region.

Semi-irrigated region:

i) Pattern of land ownership among different classes in the semi-irrigated region.

Based on the data we have generated during the primary survey, we are able to present two tables on the pattern of land ownership and land control for both the semi-irrigated and irrigated regions: one, on the land ownership pattern, the other, on the percentage distribution of land holdings among various peasant classes. They are as follow.

Marginal peasants in the semi-irrigated region (33 sample households) owned and controlled 26.38 acres in 1960, whereas in 1990, they owned and controlled 33.28 acres. This amounts to an increase of about 6.9 acres i.e., an increase of about 20.9 percent.

Table 1: Land ownership pattern among different peasant classes in the semi-irrigated region

Peasant classes	Land owned				No. Of House Holds
	1960	1970	1980	1990	
Marginal peasant	26.38	28.35	30.6	33.28	33
Small Peasant	84.32	93.5	103.59	130.95	43
Middle Peasant	60.75	60.75	73.75	85	14
Rich Peasant	156.88	96.88	97.38	84.38	7
Land Lord	125.00	105.00	87	91.5	3
Total	**453.33**	**384.78**	**392.32**	**425.11**	**100**

Source: Primary survey

Small peasants in the semi-irrigated region, i.e., 43 sample house holds, owned and controlled about 84.32 acres in 1960; whereas in 1990, this increased to about 130.95 acres. This is an increase of about 46.63 acres, substantial increase. Middle peasants in the semi-irrigated region (14 sample house holds) held about 60.75 acres in 1960, whereas in 1990 the land under their control increased to about 85 acres. This accounts for increase of about 24.25 acres. Rich peasants (7 sample households) held

about 156.88 acres in 1960 whereas in 1990 they held about 84.38 acres. This amounts to a decrease of about 72.5 acres, in fact a substantial decrease. Landlords (3 sample households) owned and controlled about 125 acres in 1960, while in 1990, they held about 91.5 acres. This works out to a decrease of about 33.5 acres.

Certainly the above presented data shows that in the semi-irrigated region, between 1960 and 1990, the first three peasant classes i.e., marginal peasants, small peasants and middle peasants had increased land ownership, while the rich peasants and land lords lost some land. The gains observed are substantial for small and middle peasants; while for marginal peasants the gain was not as substantive.

ii) Percentage distribution of land among classes in the semi-irrigated region

The marginal peasants of the semi-irrigated region in the sample owned about 5.81percent of land in 1960, while in1990, this increased to 7.82 percent, a steady increase.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of land across various peasant classes in the semi-irrigated region

Peasant classes	1960	1970	1980	1990
Marginal peasant	5.81	7.37	7.79	7.82
Small peasant	18.60	24.31	26.43	30.83
Middle Peasant	13.40	15.83	18.79	19.99
Rich Peasant	34.62	25.19	24.82	19.84
Land Lord	27.57	27.30	22.17	21.52
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source: Primary survey

The small peasants of semi-irrigated region owned about 18.60 percent of land in 1960 and this increased to about 30.83percent in 1990.The middle peasants in the semi-irrigated region owned land of about 13.40 percent in 1960 and this increased to about 19.99 percent in 1990.The rich peasants and landlords show a different trend. The rich peasants owned and controlled about 34.62 percent of land in 1960 and this decreased to 19.84 percent in 1990.Landlords too have lost land. The landlords of the semi-irrigated region are observed controlling land to the tune of 27.57 percent in 1960, This has decreased to 21.52 percent in 1990.

iii) Average size of holdings among different size classes during 1960-1990

In the semi-irrigated region, the average size of the holding of marginal peasants increased from 0.79 acre in 1960 to 1.00 acre in 1990. The average size of the small peasant holding in the semi-irrigated region was about 1.96 acres in 1960, which increased to 3.04 acres in 1990. The average holding of the middle peasant class in the semi-irrigated region saw an increase from about 4.33 acres in 1960 to 6.07

acres in 1990. The average holdings of the rich peasants and landlords, however, declined during the period 1960-1990. The average land holding size for the rich peasant class came down from 22.41 acres in 1960 to 12.05 acres in 1990.

Table 3: The average size of land holding across different size classes

Peasant Classes	Average size of land holding in acres			
	1960	1970	1980	1990
Marginal Peasant	0.79	0.85	0.92	1.00
Small Peasant	1.96	2.17	2.40	3.04
Middle Peasant	4.33	4.33	5.26	6.07
Rich Peasant	22.41	13.84	13.91	12.05
Land Lord	41.66	35.00	29.00	30.5

Source: Primary survey

The average size of land holding in respect of landlords too decreased from 41.66 acres in 1960 to 30.5 acres in 1990. These trends are consistent with the trends observed in the official data in the previous section i.e, Part-I.

iv) Class and caste composition in the semi-irrigated region

In the semi-irrigated region, of the 33 marginal peasant households, 15 households belong to the scheduled castes and 18 households to backward castes. There is no single 'other caste' or upper caste household among the marginal peasants. Marginal peasant class totally consists of scheduled castes and backward castes. Among the small peasant class 6 house holds (out of a total 43 house holds) belong to the scheduled castes, while 29 house holds belong to backward castes and 8 to 'other castes' or upper castes.

Table 4: Class/caste composition of the sample households in the semi-irrigated region

Peasant Class	Scheduled Castes		Backward Castes (classes)		Other Castes (Forward Castes)		Total Households
	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%	
Marginal Peasants	15	45.45	18	54.55	0	0	33
Small Peasants	6	13.95	29	67.45	8	18.60	43
Middle Peasants	1	7.15	11	78.57	2	14.28	14
Rich Peasants	0	0	2	28.57	5	71.43	7
Land Lords	0	0	0	0	3	100	3
Total	**22**		**60**		**18**		**100**

Source: Primary survey

Among the middle peasant class house holds in the semi-irrigated region (out of the total sample 14 house holds) only one household belonged to the scheduled castes, 11 belonged to the backward castes and 2 belongs to the 'other castes' or upper castes. Of the rich peasant class households, (out of the 7 sample households) none belongs to the scheduled castes and only 2 to the backward castes. Rest of the five households belong to the other or upper castes. Among the landlords, the presence of scheduled and backward castes is nil. All the three landlords interviewed belong to the 'other' or upper castes.

Irrigated region:

i) Land ownership pattern among different peasant classes

In the two villages of the irrigated region, the data we have gathered through a primary survey shows different and mixed trends. Land ownership pattern presented in Table -5 for five different classes shows that marginal peasants in the irrigated region (39 sample households) owned and controlled 24.9 acres in 1960, whereas in 1990, the land they controlled formed about 25.70 acres. This was only a marginal increase of about 0.8 acres. Small peasants (40 sample households) held about 77.7 acres in 1960. In1990, they held and controlled about 67.32 acres. This amounts to a drop of 10.37 acres. The small peasants in fact (between 1960 and 1990) lost some of their landholdings. Middle peasants (11 sample households) in the irrigated region owned and controlled land holdings of about 30.78 acres in 1960. In 1990, they held land of about 39.94 acres, a gain of about 9.16 acres for by middle peasants. Rich peasants in the irrigated region (6 sample households) owned and controlled 113.52 acres in 1960, whereas in 1990 they controlled only 58.50 acres. Here is a drop of about 55.02 acres of land ownership. Landlords in the irrigated region (4 sample households) controlled 84 acres in 1960; whereas in 1990 they controlled about 94 acres, a gain of about 10 acres. Landlords observed to have gained during the period, 1960-1990 in the irrigated region.

Table 5: Land ownership pattern across different peasant classes over the period 1960-1990

Peasant classes	Land owned				No. of House holds
	1960	1970	1980	1990	
Marginal peasants	24.9	18.7	29.82	25.70	39
Small Peasants	77.7	65.91	54.48	67.32	40
Middle Peasants	30.78	52.77	32.14	39.94	11
Rich Peasants	113.52	80.47	56.5	58.50	6
Land Lord	84	74	84	94.00	4
Total	**330.9**	**291.85**	**256.94**	**285.46**	**100**

Source: Primary Survey.

ii) Percentage distribution of land among different peasant classes

Percentage distribution of land ownership across different peasant classes within the sample as presented in Table -6 shows that the marginal peasants increased their share of land ownership from 7.52 percent in 1960 to 9.00 percent in 1990. However, this is not a steady increase and there are ups and downs observed over time. In 1980, for example, the marginal holdings accounted for about 11.60 percent but between 1980 and 1990 they decreased from about 11.60 percent in 1980 to 9.00 percent in 1990. There is not much change observed in the percentage of land owned by small peasants in the irrigated region. Small peasants owned about 23.50 percent in 1960, where as in 1990, they held about 23.60 percent, a marginal increase of about 0.10 percent. The middle peasants in the irrigated region have fared better than small and marginal peasants. In 1960, the middle peasants owned about 9.30 percent of land, while in 1990 this has increased to 14 percent.

The rich peasants of the irrigated region, however, show a trend different from that of middle peasants. In 1960, the rich peasants held land to the tune of 34.30 percent. In 1990 this decreased to 20.50 percent. The landlords, however are found to have increased their land ownership between 1960 and 1990 in that they held about 25.38 percent in 1960,and about 32.90 percent in 1990. That means there has been an increase in land ownership by landlords, *particularly in the irrigated region.* The situation becomes clearer when we look at the average size of land holdings among the peasant classes.

Table 6: Percentage distribution of land by various peasant classes over the period 1960-1990

Peasant Classes	1960	1970	1980	1990
Marginal Peasants	7.52	6.40	11.60	9.00
Small Peasants	23.50	22.60	22.20	23.60
Middle Peasants	9.30	18.08	12.53	14.00
Rich Peasants	34.30	27.57	21.98	20.50
Land Lords	25.38	25.35	32.69	32.90
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Source: Primary survey.

iii) The average size of holding among different peasant classes

The average size of holding among the five peasant classes provided in Table -7 shows that the average size of holdings among the marginal peasants of this irrigated region increased from 0.63 acres in 1960 to 0.65 acres in 1990.However, this increase is too small to be called as an increase indeed. The middle peasant holdings show a different trend in the irrigated region. The average size of holdings among middle peasants worked out to 2.79 acres in 1960 and it has increased to 3.63 acres in 1990. This surely is an indicator of an increase in the land ownership among middle peasants. Rich peasant holdings in the irrigated region, according to the data we have, indicated a decrease. The decrease is observed from 18.92 acres in 1960 to 9.75 acres in 1990, a drastic decrease of around fifty percent.

Interestingly the average size of holding has not decreased among the landlords of the irrigated region. In fact, it shows an increase from 21 acres in 1960 to 23.50 in 1990. The average size of holding among the small peasants is, however, found to have declined from about 1.94 acres in 1960 to 1.68 acres in 1990.

Table 7: The average size of holding across different size classes over the period 1960-90

Peasant Classes	Average size of the land holding in acres			
	1960	1970	1980	1990
Marginal Peasant	0.63	0.47	0.76	0.65
Small Peasant	1.94	1.64	1.36	1.68
Middle Peasant	2.79	4.79	2.92	3.63
Rich Peasant	18.92	13.41	9.41	9.75
Land Lord	21.00	18.50	21.00	23.50

Source: Primary survey.

iv) Caste/ class composition among different peasant classes

Our survey results also provide information about caste/class relationship. In this region, among the marginal peasants interviewed i.e., out of 39 households, nine of them belonged to scheduled caste while a bulk i.e., 30 of them belong to backward castes . In respect of small peasant class of irrigated region, out of 40 sample house holds, five come under scheduled caste category and again a bulk, i.e., 34 of them belong to the backward caste category; and there is only one small peasant household which belongs to the 'other' or upper castes. In respect of the middle peasant class in the irrigated region, out of 11 sample households, none belongs to Scheduled Castes while nine belong to backward castes and two to upper castes. With regard to the rich peasant class in the irrigated region, out of six sample house holds, none belong to Scheduled Castes and three (i.e., exactly 50 percent) belong to backward castes and another three, i.e., the rest of the 50 percent to the upper castes. Among the landlord class households, four of the sample households--all of them belong to the upper castes. The landlord class in this region is 100 percent upper caste. The data pertaining to the region shows that there is cent percent association between caste and class at the upper end of the class spectrum, i.e., vis-à-vis the landlords. But vis-à-vis the lower end of the class spectrum one finds a mix of the Scheduled as well as backward castes.

Table 8: Class/Caste composition in the sample (No. of HHs)

Peasant Class	Scheduled Caste		Backward Caste (classes)		Other Castes (Forward Castes)		Total Households
	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%	
Marginal Peasants	9	23	30	77	0	0	39
Small Peasants	5	12.5	34	85	1	2.5	40
Middle Peasants	0	0	9	81.81	2	18.19	11
Rich Peasants	0	0	3	50	3	50	6
Land Lords	0	0	0	0	4	100	4
Total	**14**		**76**		**10**		**100**

Source: Primary survey.

Discussion of primary survey results

First, the trends observed based on the secondary data and primary survey pertaining to semi-irrigated region clearly indicate that the land owned and controlled by marginal, small and middle peasants has increased over time, while that of the rich peasants and landlords has declined. *The data we have generated for the two semi-irrigated villages clearly coincides with the official data. The trends in the primary data, which show that there is a deconcentration of land ownership in the semi-irrigated region, are consistent with the official statistics*. The marginal, small and middle peasants who have improved their land ownership status also constitute a major chunk of backward and even scheduled castes. The tables on class-caste composition clearly bring out that the rich peasants and landlords whose land ownership has declined belong to upper castes. Here class and caste overlap. In the semi-irrigated region, those who have witnessed a decline in land ownership over the period 1960-1990 not only belong to rich peasant and landlord classes but also to upper castes.

Secondly, in the irrigated region, the trends observed are mixed but here is a case for strengthening of landlords. The data pertaining to the irrigated region shows that there is cent percent association between caste and class at the upper end of the class spectrum: ie., in relation to the landlords. But regarding the lower end of the class spectrum, one finds a mix of scheduled as well as backward castes.

Thirdly, a word may be needed about the semi-irrigated region. The semi-irrigated region is statistically more important for Nalgonda when compared to the irrigated and totally unirrigated regions; because it is geographically a large part of the district. Could it be that this explains why in the secondary data i.e., in the official statistics, the trends of deconcentration are so starkly prominent?

Conclusion

In the foregoing analysis we have presented both the official statistics and statistics generated through a primary survey. The official data clearly shows the trends towards deconcentration and fragmentation of land holdings for the *entire district*. *This means that during the period 1970 to 1990 the small and marginal holdings proliferated in Nalgonda secularly all over the district. This view however is found to*

be misleading. The primary survey shows that while there has been a strengthening of small and marginal holdings in the semi-irrigated region, in the irrigated region, on the other hand, there is a strengthening of upper caste landlords. Thus the general picture presented for the whole of the district based on official statistics is debatable. This being the case, the governments and social scientists using the official data at the State and national levels, have to exercise lot of care. But what if the official statistics are not portraying the reality, as they should? The point is that official statistics are used in official policies, which affect people. Therefore, they need to be as dose to the truth as possible. Different data can lead officials and social scientists to different policy decisions and advice. For example, in the case discussed in this paper, the information about land inequality despite deconcentration and fragmentation of holdings, can lead to the consideration, given ideal circumstances, of land reform measures. And also it can lead to the consideration of the fact that irrigation can have the effect of strengthening pre-existing inequalities and, therefore, can lead the government to consider equity measures along with improving irrigation. Or conversely, the proliferation of small holdings in the large semi-irrigated region ought to propel governments to take policy measures for ensuring the survival of marginal, small and middle peasants particularly in the present circumstances when the cases of farmers' suicides are frequently reported[9].

Notes

[1] Dobb, Maurice (1963) *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers) pp 6-7.

[2] V I Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1956).

[3] Athar Hussain and Keith Tribe (eds), Fowkes, Ben (translations), *Paths of Development In Capitalist Agriculture: Readings from German Social Democracy, 1891-99*, (London: Macmillan, 1984).

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[5] T H Aston and C H E Philipin (eds), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[6] The *Statistical Abstracts* are prepared mainly from Indian national Census data and other official sources such as World Agricultural Census and land revenue department of the government of Andhra Pradesh. As our focus in this paper is on the period 1960 to 1990, it is largely dependent on Censuses of that period. We intend to contrast this secondary data with primary data collected from the field.

[7] The peasant size classes are derived in the same manner as in the secondary data so that they are comparable. The village names adopted are pseudonyms of the villages and not the real names.

[8] Land ownership has both economic and non-economic aspects associated with it; such as income, social status and social prestige, political clout for generating patronage and so on. The non-economic parameters of land ownership are as, if not more, important as economic parameters. This is particularly so with the case of irrigated areas where both economic and non-economic parameters are very, very significant.

[9] These aspects are important given the huge emphasis that the present government of Andhra Pradesh is paying towards irrigation; and given the magnitude and complexity of the problem of farmers' suicides taking place in several States of India including Andhra Pradesh. The agrarian policies therefore crucially matter regarding the well being of the farmers. As Professor Utsa Patnaik puts it in one of her writings 'what is cooked in the kitchen [i.e., agricultural sector] is largely determined [by the policies] outside the kitchen'.

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