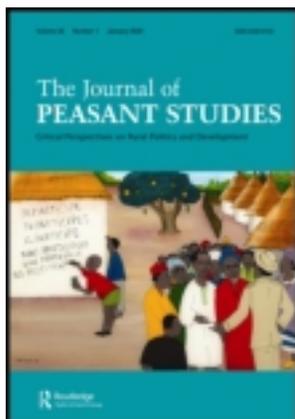


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Staffan Lindberg^a

^a Department of Sociology, University of Lund, Box 114, Lund, 221 00, Sweden

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New Farmers' Movements in India as Structural Response and Collective Identity Formation: The Cases of the Shetkari Sanghatana and the BKU

STAFFAN LINDBERG

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the early 1970s the new farmers' movements, or farmers' agitations as they have often been called, have become some of the most important non-parliamentary political forces in various states of India. From one state to another farmers have formed organisations to struggle for better economic conditions in an increasingly commoditised agricultural economy. The main target is the state and its intervention in the agrarian economy, supplying many of the inputs and regulating the markets. Farmers demand lower prices on inputs like seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, lower tariffs on electricity and water, lower taxes, and debt relief. Likewise they demand higher prices for their products of grains, cash-crops, vegetables, milk and so on. 'Farming is not remunerative after the coming of the Green Revolution' is their message, and they claim that the calculations of the Agricultural Price Commission (APC) have not reflected the real costs involved. They also hold that terms of trade between industry and agriculture is increasingly developing in favour of industry and against agriculture.¹

The movements, which started in Tamil Nadu and Punjab in the early 1970s, later spread to Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh (UP) and some regions in neighbouring states. Today the most important movements are the Shetkari Sanghatana, in Maharashtra, led by Sharad Joshi, and the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) in Western Uttar Pradesh, led by Mahendra Singh Tikait. The Punjab BKU, though very much affected by the conflict in the state, is also fairly strong. The movements in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka were very strong in the 1970s and early 1980s, but have now become fairly weak.

Staffan Lindberg, Department of Sociology, University of Lund, Box 114, 221 00 Lund, Sweden. This article is based on a research project on 'The New Peasant Movements in India' at the Department of Sociology, University of Lund, Sweden. It has received financial support from SAREC, Stockholm and NIAS, Copenhagen. Thanks are due to Tom Brass for his comments and suggestions.

The movements have strong charismatic leaders like, for example, Sharad Joshi and Mahendra Singh Tikait. Though very different in character and style – Joshi is a retired UN official, while Tikait is a Jat peasant and clan leader in Uttar Pradesh – these leaders formulate much of the analysis and take the lead in agitations and other actions. Equally important is the role of intellectuals at various levels, from the academy to the village, who develop the everyday discourse of the movement and defend it against attacks from the outside.

Before the outbreak of communal violence on a large scale in the late 1980s, the peasant unions staged agitations reminiscent of the classic civil disobedience movement. Demonstrations (*dharnas*, *gheraos*) were truly massive, involving lakhs of peasants and lasting for many days. Roads and railways were blocked (*rasta rokko*), and villages were closed to government officials and politicians (*gavband*). In some states stocks of produce (onions, cotton, tobacco) were withheld from the market, causing steep price rises. The latter type of agitation has, for example, been common in Maharashtra under Sharad Joshi's leadership. Moreover, in some states peasants have refused to pay tax arrears and electricity bills, or to pay interest and amortisation on loans from banks and credit cooperatives. Of late (1990–92), however, the unions have refrained from these types of agitation. One reason for this, according to Sharad Joshi, is that the methods used in the 1970s and 1980s have become ineffective as they have been taken over by the communal forces. He says that 'We were prepared to die one by one for our cause, but they are sending thousands to death. Violence dominates the political scene today, and there is less room for our type of confrontation with the state.'

The central message is the simple and powerful slogan formulated by Sharad Joshi: *Bharat against India!* *Bharat* is the indigenous name for India, with positive connotations, while *India* is the westernised name, symbolising exploitation. They stand for the rural and the urban-industrial populations respectively. On this point Joshi has observed (interview, March 1989): 'The real contradiction is not in the village, not between big peasants and small, not between landowners and landless, but between the agrarian population as a whole and the rest of the society.' Another peasant leader, Gujarat's Bipin Desai, expresses it in the following way:

The inner core is different ... our struggle is not for issues like electricity tariff or land legislation. We have a wider vision. The whole of the rural economy should be changed. It should not be a field for exploitation as it has been since British rule, a generating centre for the national economy. The surplus should remain in the

villages, and from this the appropriate growth of village-based industries and development should be made rather than exploiting the villages to create a surplus for urban-based industries which only create unemployment and poverty (quoted by Omvedt [1989: 8-9]).

For the supporters of the movements, the veracity of such pronouncements is confirmed on a daily basis in the form of the opulent living standards of the urban middle classes displayed in or referred to by the media (television, radio and the press). As Mahendra Singh Tikait put it after one of his visits to Delhi: 'Let's talk about land reforms when there is a ceiling on urban property - look at those skyscrapers!'

Union and state governments have been strongly affected by the massive political and economic agitations and demonstrations. The most common reaction has been repression by the police and military, and the peasant movements now count their martyrs in hundreds. Since the farmers are too powerful to be crushed in this manner, such policies have also been combined with negotiations and concessions of a temporary duration.² There are strong indications that the farmers' movements played an important role in the overthrow of the Rajiv Gandhi government in the 1989 general elections. In Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, for example, the BKU worked decisively for the National Front opposition, which won an almost complete victory over the Congress. The National Front government later tried to carry out a new policy, involving the moratorium of debts up to Rs 10,000 and the preparation of a new agricultural policy, still incomplete when the government fell in early 1991. There are, however, also many other signs that today almost all political parties have been affected by farmers' agitations, at least on the level of rhetoric. When the new Congress government tried to increase fertiliser prices 40 per cent in July 1991, there was such massive opposition from all political parties that the proposal had to be changed drastically. Similarly, when the same government decided to import wheat in 1992 to keep prices down, it also resulted in countrywide protests by the peasant movements and opposition parties (cf. Lenneberg [1988: 451-2]).

How are we to understand these farmers' movements? Are they related to the so-called 'new social movements', which have emerged globally and especially in the Third World over the last two decades? In India the new farmers' movements have been seen by some observers [Omvedt, 1992a] as part of a new wave of movements, which also includes environmental, women's and Dalit's movements. What is the substance of this claim? On a more general level it is important to ask how the new farmers' movements are related to the agrarian and overall economy, to

the class structure of rural society, and also to the ideological and political formations in contemporary India. Finally, do we deal with one homogeneous movement, or many different regional movements which differ in important respects?

STUDYING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS—STRUCTURES AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Social movements are usually defined as organised groups of people mobilised from below in pursuit of goals that challenge the established order, especially that of states and of political parties running of the state. Thus, by definition, social movements are autonomous of the state and their goal is to change society or parts of it or other relations crucial to them. As such, social movements are based on and express social and other conflicts. They differ from local protest groups by being more permanent and also by their potential to appeal to groups of people beyond a particular locality.

It is important to note that this definition represents my perspective in studying the farmers' movements as social movements. It is far from the only possible way. It is, in fact, hard to find a commonly agreed upon definition of social movements. Different forms of collective action, mobilisation from below, mobilisation from above, in various historical contexts (working class, peasant, or fascist movements) have all been called social movements. The definition varies over time depending on who says what in relation to what movement [Heberle, 1968: 438–44]. A very early and lasting perspective, however, links the definition to the movements of the industrial working class, which is also the perspective adopted here. A recent development is the definition of so-called new social movements emerging gradually from the 1950s with the civil rights movement, through the student movements, to the women's and environmental movements in the 1970s. Here, a contrast is constructed between 'modernist' and 'postmodernist' movements, in which the latter are said to represent 'the transcendence of "material" or industrial values by a new set of 'postmaterial values' [Eyerman and Jamison, 1991: 7]. We will briefly return to this issue in the conclusion of the article.

Social movements are also analysed in quite different ways by various sociologists and historians. One approach is that of the *resource-mobilisation* theorists: for example, the work of Tilly [1975, 1978], Oberschall [1973] and Jenkins [1983]. They concentrate on how movements are able to organise social and material resources and 'stress such "objective" variables as organization, interests, resources, opportunities, and

strategies to account for large scale mobilization' [Cohen, 1985: 674]. They also seem to 'share' the following assumptions:

- (1) Social movements must be understood in terms of a conflict model of collective action.
- (2) There is no fundamental difference between institutional and non-institutional collective action.
- (3) Both entail conflicts of interest built into institutionalised power relations.
- (4) Collective action involves the rational pursuit of interests by groups.
- (5) Goals and grievances are permanent products of power relations and cannot account for the formation of movements.
- (6) This depends instead on changes in resources, organisation, and opportunities for collective action.
- (7) Success is evidenced by the recognition of the group as a political actor or by increased material benefits.
- (8) Mobilisation involves large-scale, special-purpose, bureaucratic, formal organisations [*ibid*: 675].

Looking at many typical works within this 'paradigm' one is struck by the fact that they are often concerned with historical movements. In such cases, where the outcome of the movement is known or thought to be known (though it may be understood quite differently from various vantage points), it is hardly surprising that the study of social structures and social change takes precedence over the internal characteristics of a movement. But what about movements that are still growing, and where the outcome is far from clear? We are thinking of movements that do not look like those encountered before, with new types of members, new and perhaps diffuse goals, and with a new definition of the contradictions on which they act.

A Danish political scientist, Thomas Hansen [1991: 45 ff.], has recently written on the shortcomings of going from forms and contents of social structures, structural changes, and social processes to the explanation of collective organisation and action. In such schemes, he claims, analytical levels are transformed into a determinant hierarchy of explanation where collective action is seen as an outcome of the structural changes and social processes, not as a co-determinant of these. Besides ascribing a functional determinacy in a hierarchical manner to social systems, it also tends to leave out the very 'process whereby a social contradiction is turned into a collective action and social change' [1991: 50, my translation]. In a similar manner Hansen also criticises various forms of cultural analysis of social movements, in which cultural continuity is made the major explanatory variable. Culture is not static but part of an ongoing process of

change: movements always create their own culture, whether traditional, modern or indeed something else [*Hansen, 1991: 51-4*].

If we want to understand new processes of collective identity formation and action, therefore, we have to go about in a manner which is different from the usual one of making suppositions about the correspondence of movements and transformations in the social structure. We have instead to go into the movements themselves, and examine them in terms of a specific combination of political action, cultural and ideological interpretations, and organisational forms [*Hansen, 1991: 54-9*], and to apply a process-oriented perspective in which movements and societies are seen as constantly moving along a continuum of change and institutionalisation [*Laclau, 1990*]. Social movements are continuously working on and articulating existing social relations and cultural interpretations. They are not just expressions or representations of given classes or social groups or cultural configurations, they also create social conflicts (out of a number of existing or possible contradictions), social relations and culture in a dialectical way. Looking closer at social movements one finds that they are composite phenomena comprising many social relations, world-views and identities, about which there is constant negotiation. In short, they are volatile and changeable structures [*Hansen, 1991: 60*]. It is precisely this potential on the part of social movements to create something new that should be taken seriously. The alternative is to allow traditional movements to 'weigh like a nightmare' on our brains, in which case we will be unable to perceive of the germs of change that new movements may carry.³

This emphasis on studying open-ended processes of collective identity formation and action should not be taken to mean that the social structures and social contradictions, in which these processes take place, are equally open-ended. Marx's [1967: 120] classical contention still holds: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.' What is stressed here, therefore, is only that these circumstances can be defined in more than one way, and also changed in more than one way. Far from relapsing into an idealistic 'everything-is-possible' position, this is to realise only that 'nothing is historically necessary.' The two perspectives outlined above, could be expressed as a contrast between emphasising social structure on the one hand and social interaction on the other. In this study we will attempt to apply both perspectives in order to see what kind of insights can be gained from such a combination into the formation and dynamics of the new farmers' movements.⁴

NEW FARMERS' MOVEMENTS: A STRUCTURALIST INTERPRETATION

A look at the history of peasant movements in India brings out an important feature, which can be interpreted as a historical shift in the patterns of alliance. This shift can be summarised in the replacement of one slogan, 'Land to the tiller!', by another, 'Remunerative prices!'.

'Land to the tiller!' is the slogan of a peasants' movement organised around the major contradiction in a landlord-dominated, class-divided agrarian society – the contradiction between landed and non-landed groups. The demands of a movement acting on this contradiction can be varied, from land reform to rent reduction, and a place to stay (that is, the demand for houseplots). Since Independence, peasant movements in India have primarily been of this 'land-to-the-tiller' type: they have organised land-hungry peasants – that is landless labourers, small tenants, and poor peasants are pre-dominant in the mass base.⁵ Landed groups had to form counter-organisations, both in order to defend their interests and in order to wean off small and middle peasants⁶ from the influence of such radical movements.⁷

Since the late 1970s, however, the rural political scene in India has been dominated by another type of movement, acting on another contradiction. These movements did not, of course, suddenly spring into existence: many of them are as old as organisations which have experienced renewed activities and recruitment.

These 'remunerative-prices' movements have acted not just on the issue of the price of agricultural produce but also on the price of inputs like fertilisers, electricity, and terms of credit from state-owned or state-sponsored financial institutions. Accordingly, it might be said that these 'new' movements articulate interests which are common to a *commodity-producing peasantry*, or to be more precise, a peasantry which is not only producing commodities but which is also using commodities as inputs. That is, movements based on a peasant economy in which the process of reproduction has to a certain extent been commoditised. As a consequence, the terms of trade between the commodities produced and those consumed (productively or not) have become an essential determinant of the level of reproduction. The peasantry is now linked to a market where to a significant degree price formation is influenced by the state, which in effect regulates the conditions of reproduction of the peasantry. The contradiction on which the 'new' peasant movements act is therefore one *between the state and the peasantry*: it is the state which is seen as the main target of agitation, not the local landlords as in the traditional type of peasant movement.⁸

The relation between the two contradictions outlined above is an

interesting one: if the 'old' peasant movements primarily acted on the contradiction between landed and land-hungry groups, and if the 'new' movements act on that between the state and the peasantry, then what is the interrelationship between the two?

When the 'new' movements first emerged in the late 1970s, many observers (see for example Omvedt [1980; 1993]) – including myself – regarded them as 'rich peasants' movements'; that is, the kind of organisation for the defence of landed groups that was mentioned above.⁹ However, this interpretation seems to be wrong on two counts. First, it underestimates the mass base of the new movements – their mass base apparently being the middle peasantry – and, second, it also underestimates the degree of structural transformation brought about in Indian agriculture since Independence. One can argue that this transformation has defused some of the dynamite in the land question, and enhanced the level of commoditisation (cf. Athreya, Djurfeldt and Lindberg [1990: 314–15]), thereby bringing about a historical shift in the patterns of political alliances among the peasantry.¹⁰

These points can be illustrated with data from two Panchayat Unions in Tiruchy District in Tamil Nadu where the two major ecotypes in Tamil Nadu agriculture are represented: that is, what could be called a wet and a dry ecotype (cf. Athreya *et al.* [1990]). In the wet ecotype, land concentration is heavy, sharecropping is widespread, and the level of proletarianisation is high. In the dry area, on the other hand, the distribution of land is much less skewed, the middle peasantry is numerically dominant, and proletarianisation is low. In both areas, the level of commoditisation is high, and it has increased in recent years, as a consequence of the so-called Green Revolution. The impact has been most dramatic in the dry area, where peasants have invested on a grand scale in wells and pumpsets, financed by credit from official institutions.

The history of the peasant movements in this area also fits into the pattern outlined above: until recently peasant mobilisation was mainly a characteristic of the wet area, where the sharecroppers have been active since Independence in fighting for security of tenure and rent reduction, a struggle which to a certain extent also has been successful. The landless labourers have been less active than in other parts of the Tanjore delta, probably because they have better employment opportunities here than anywhere else in Tamil Nadu (due to the extremely high cropping intensity in the area). Moreover, labour gangs function as a kind of *proto-unions*, securing comparatively good wages for their members, both compared to labourers not organised in gangs and compared to other areas in the state (cf. Athreya *et al.* [1990: Ch. 4]).

In 1979/80 this 'old' movement was not very active in the area, but

the 'new' movements were there,¹¹ and the level of activity struck us as higher in the dry area than in the wet one. This impression is also borne out by our survey data, although the difference between the two ecotypes is less than we had expected (see Table 1 below). The table also shows a correlation between membership and class, and although neither very strong nor very neat, it roughly confirms the pattern outlined above: the middle peasantry have rates of membership which are higher than the average in both areas, while the poor peasants rarely are members. In the dry area the capitalist farmers have the highest rates of membership, but since they are numerically weak as a category, this does not contradict the statement that the middle peasantry makes up the mass base of the movement.

TABLE 1
RATES OF MEMBERSHIP IN FARMERS' ASSOCIATION BY ECOTYPE AND CLASS (OWN SURVEY DATA)

Class:	<u>Ecotype:</u>			
	Wet area:		Dry area:	
	% households	% members	% households	% members
Landless agricultural labourers	30	0	16	0
Poor peasants	19	6	28	4
Middle peasants	21	20	46	30
Rich peasants	6	16	4	0*
Capitalist farmers	5	2	0	64
Landlords	3	0	0	-
Others	16	25	6	17
Total (all households)		11		17
Total (farming households)		15		20

Note: * This estimate is uncertain since it builds only on four sample cases.

To explain this influx of middle peasants into a movement that appears to so many observers as a rich peasant movement, one has to go into the determinants of the class structure and the character of the division of the peasantry into different classes.

An important feature of the middle peasantry, as we have defined

them, is that they are a divided group in both the wet and the dry area. The middle peasantry proper, that is, those who reproduce themselves fully and autonomously, thanks to their own labour power, comprise only a small group (24 per cent of all middle peasants in the wet area and nine per cent in the dry area). The majority of the middle peasants are pressed below this level of autonomous reproduction and have to turn to non-farm sources for their reproduction. How should one interpret this? Let me quote from the previous work:

One way to interpret this finding is to say that there is no middle peasantry to speak of in any of the areas, except those that we have labelled upper middle peasants. We prefer another interpretation: there is a sizeable middle peasantry, especially in the dry area, but it is squeezed so hard that few of them can subsist only on their farming.

The squeeze is exerted by market forces, and is made effective by the significant inroads of commoditization both into consumption and into farm reproduction. In the process the middle peasantry has become more vulnerable to unfavourable fluctuations in the prices paid for consumer goods and farm inputs, and prices received for labour hired out.

In this interpretation, price and market conditions exert a profound influence on the agrarian class structure. But the poor peasants are relatively less influenced by movements in the price of farm produce, since they are not commodity producers to any significant degree. They are, however, affected by market forces to the extent that they use purchased inputs and to the extent that prices of industrial consumer goods affect the real value of the wages they earn from hiring-out. There is, however, a certain fluidity in the class structure, between the different types of middle peasants and even between the middle and the rich peasantry, which is due to the movement of the prices. A more favourable relation between prices received and prices paid might have resulted in more rich and upper middle peasant households. Seasonal and yearly variations in yield induce a similar fluidity.

This fluidity might seem alien to the concept of class, since class has some robust and viscous connotations. A critical reader may conclude from this lack of viscosity that we have not managed to capture the class structure in our area. We prefer another interpretation, namely, that the agrarian class structure is quite fluid, except at the extreme poles

The price-induced fluidity in the class structure brings to focus the

role of the state in the formation of the agrarian class structure. Agricultural prices, both on the output and the input side are to a significant extent administered prices, and thus there is a political element hidden behind the 'invisible hand' of the market [*Athreya et al.*, 1990: 231-2].

It is precisely the contradiction between the commodity producing peasantry and the state over policies affecting the terms of trade between agriculture and industry which potentially unites the middle and rich peasantry with capitalist farmers in the farmers' movements. Moreover, recent studies of agrarian structure and change in India confirm the view that the middle peasants or the family farmers have not been marginalised by the Green Revolution, as predicted by many theorists (see, for example, Harriss [1981], Cain [1981], Attwood [1979], Rao [1972], and Bhalla [1977]). The size and composition of the middle peasantry may vary from region to region, but together with the rich peasants, they make up a considerable part of the agrarian households.¹²

This argument should not be taken to mean that one contradiction has been replaced by another, but that the two contradictions are both actively influencing the shape of the peasants' movements in India today. The land question, as is well known, remains conflict ridden and unresolved in most parts of rural India. Moreover, the sharp contradiction that exists in most areas between agricultural wage labourers and mostly rich peasants and capitalist farmers adds a third important dimension to this 'drama'. Since agricultural wage labour is also supplied by poor and middle peasants, one would expect them to be unstable partners in the alliance mobilised by the farmers' unions [*Athreya et al.*, 1990: 315].

This 'contradiction between contradictions' can perhaps also explain the heterogeneous nature of the peasant movements in India, from the Maoist-inspired uprisings in remote so-called tribal areas,¹³ to the onion-growers' protests against unremunerative prices in Maharashtra. To study how movements based on these various 'contradictions' have developed over the past two decades and how they have related to each other, should therefore be an important contribution to the understanding of what the future holds in store for the Indian peasantry and agricultural labourers. In this article, however, the study is limited to some aspects of the new farmers' movements.

AGRARIANISM?

It is tempting to see the farmers' agitations as expressing the type of broad social contradiction, that under certain conditions (the introduction of industrial inputs into small-scale agriculture, combined with admini-

stered pricing) and in certain contexts (North America and Western Europe) has become generalised with the commodisation of peasant agriculture. In such situations, the cleavage tends to be one between the peasantry as a whole and the state/urban-industrial interests. As the historical experience from the industrialised countries shows, this is potentially a very stable and generalised social contradiction, which involves the dilemma of an industrialising economy: peasants are expected to produce most of the surplus that is required as investment for industry, while they are left a diminishing role in the economy and the society. The state has often acted as the coordinator of these agrarian policies, implying, in many instances, that the old landlord class has lost much of its previous domination over the state. It is also well known that these changes have led to a broad agrarian mobilisation in the western countries, ranging from 'agrarianism' in the USA to associations, co-operatives, and political parties in the Scandinavian countries.¹⁴

Are we witnessing the same thing in India now? Rudolph and Rudolph [1987: 334] hold this view: 'When agrarian politics became national in the 1970s and early 1980s, it was not the agrarian radicalism of the rural poor but the demand of independent cultivators and capitalist farmers ["bullock capitalists"] for remunerative prices that rallied agricultural producers generally in support of the new agrarianism.' It is, however, clear that this type of development is not automatically bound to happen in India or the Third World as a whole. Neither is it certain that the economic conditions of the peasants in India or elsewhere in Asia, Africa or Latin America can develop in such a way that the external contradictions to the state and the industrial economy become more important as a basis for mobilisation than the internal differences and contradictions between agrarian classes. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the new peasant movements in India have had their first strong bases in the dry rainfed areas (the Deccan) or irrigated tracts, where a middle peasantry dominates, while the peasantry in those river-irrigated deltas, which are dominated by big landlords and capitalist farmers, have shown much less interest. In areas dominated by an internal class polarisation of the latter kind, types of politics and alliances other than that practised by the new farmers' movements may still hold sway.

However, the strength of the new movements and the reactions to them by the state may in fact alter this balance between agrarian classes. States do not just react to classes, they may also have a strong impact on class formation itself:

while states can be shown to be shaped, produced, and determined by class interests, and action, they have also produced class struc-

tures, transformed them or made them disappear, as when a bourgeoisie or a peasantry has been created by deliberate state policy ... Both of the possible routes of determination must be considered [*Shanin*, 1982: 316].

If the emerging class of middle and rich peasants, as manifested by the new farmers' movements, can bargain successfully with 'the components of the predominantly urban organized economy and society', they may become the 'hegemonic agrarian class' in India [*Rudolph and Rudolph*, 1987: 342]. In this scenario, state policy could then further strengthen the position of these sections of the peasantry *vis-à-vis* other agrarian classes, as has been the case in Western Europe and North America during the last hundred years.

What are the prospects for such a development in India? An attempt to interpret the new farmers' movements with regard to development theory may offer some clues. However, before trying to answer that question, it is necessary to consider the actual mobilisations and collective actions of regionally-based farmers' movements.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND ACTION

Above we have sketched an interpretation of the context of the political economy and class conflicts in which the new farmers' movements have emerged, as well as some current ideas of its potential effects. Let us now turn to an interactionist approach to these movements.

Melucci [1985: 794-5] has suggested that a social movement is

a form of collective action (a) based on solidarity, (b) carrying on a conflict, (c) breaking the limits of the system in which action occurs ... conflict [is] a relationship between opposed actors fighting for the same resources, to which both give value. Solidarity is the capability of an actor to share a collective identity, that is, the capability of recognizing and being recognized as part of the same system of social relationships. Limits of a system indicate the range of variations tolerated within its existing structure. A breaking of these limits pushes a system beyond the acceptable range of variations.¹⁵

According to Melucci [1992: 243], the analysis 'should focus on the processes through which actors produce an interactive and shared definition of the goals of their action, studying the fields upon which such action takes place'. He clarifies:

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To speak of goals implies putting accent on ends and on meaning. The notion of a field refers to the possibilities and limits within which goals are pursued; the definition of these goals is something which actors co-produce and is thus neither a representation nor a reflection of structural determinants. This entire process is an active relational process, a process which for lack of better term I call 'collective identity'. Collective identity is an achieved definition of a situation, constructed and negotiated through the constitution of social networks which then connect the members of a group or movement. This process of definition implies the presence of cognitive frames, of dense interactions, of emotional and affective exchanges. What holds individuals together as a 'we' can never be completely translated into the logic of means-ends calculation, or political rationality, but always carries with it margins of non-negotiability in the reasons for and ways of acting together. The important question then becomes how 'we' becomes we. How and why do social aggregates arrive at a definition of themselves as a collective, capable of acting as a group? [Melucci, 1992: 243-41].

This approach implies studying how individuals get involved in collective action, how actors construct collective action and unity, and how one can get at the meaning produced out of heterogeneity and pluralism. Melucci suggests that a social movement is the product of continued tensions, negotiations and cognitive processes within a 'multipolar action system' or a 'composite action system', in which widely differing means, ends and forms of solidarity and organisation converge in a more or less stable manner. Instead of studying the product as such (the movement) one should study the process of interaction, negotiation, conflict and compromise among a variety of different actors, which either succeed or fail to produce the unity of collective identity of movements. We are concerned here with networks, or sub-networks, which constitute the submerged reality of movements, before, during and after visible events. 'Networks are the small groups, submerged in everyday life, which require a personal involvement and produce alternative frameworks of meaning. They are networks of meanings, or sign, which put into practice the alternative meanings, which they produce and reproduce. The form of the movement is thus itself a message' [Melucci, 1989: 70].

Besides social interaction there is another dimension which is crucial to the formation of social movements. As has been emphasised by Eyerman and Jamison [1991] in a recent contribution to the field of movement studies, a central place in identity formation must be given to knowledge or what can also be called cultural renovation, especially the develop-

ment of new knowledge about the world, social and material relations, and the political and cultural modes of organisation. In this way intellectuals and intellectual activity are given an important role in identity formation and the rise of social movements. By interpreting the world, by anticipating things, and by formulating new types of knowledge and values based on science, cultural traditions, and so on and spreading this knowledge, they represent an important social force, which acts upon the social formation of new social movements. Utopian and experimental as they may often seem, they nevertheless act upon their contemporary milieu in such a way that not only are there chances that they may give rise to new movements based on these understandings, but they also help to bring about social and cultural conditions conducive to the emergence of new movements. Eyerman and Jamison's book gives several interesting examples of such cognitive processes.

However, this perspective easily leads to the idea that social movements are created by great men or women. It is important to stress that the cognitive praxis and its interaction with social movements, takes place not in the corridors of cultural institutions or learned academies but in a concrete social and historical world that we call society. A situation where economic, political and cultural structures already exist, where classes and cultural groups are already constituted and involved in processes of reproducing and/or changing that very world. It is when the cognitive praxis 'meets' the real world, or the way in which existing institutions and groups react to the emergence and actions of new social movements and their cultural renovation, that the real dynamic of social movements is generated. Eyerman and Jamison have stressed the role of the political culture and mass media in this dynamic: successful movements must define their own political space outside of the established political culture, and they must counteract or adjust in their own way to the definitions clamped on them by the mass media and to the way these mass media create knowledge in the contemporary world.

Central to the cognitive dimension is a sociology of knowledge, which can analyse the ways in which knowledge is constructed. It is the range of epistemological possibilities or opportunities which characterises different social actors which must be understood. How is it, for example, that the same classes of peasants in different parts of India can define the world so differently? In West Bengal and Kerala, under the mobilisation and influence of the communist parties, peasants understand society quite differently from the way peasants, under the mobilisation and influence of the farmers' movements in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh understand a very similar reality.¹⁶ Standard views on history, political conditions and cultural and ideological dominance can provide some

clues to the analysis, but the full answer to this question is not given by theory but by concrete studies of structures, processes, interaction and the construction of meaning.

The sociological imagination thus needs both an insight into how collective identities are formed and into the social forces making those identities possible. To accomplish that one needs to draw not on one theoretical tradition alone, but on a plurality of traditions. In the following sections we will take a look at what are currently the most active farmers' movements: the Shetkari Sanghatana in Maharashtra, and the Bharatiya Kisan Union in Uttar Pradesh.

CASE STUDY I: SHETKARI SANGHATANA IN MAHARASHTRA¹⁷

This is the story of Maiah, a 40-year-old woman activist, who had worked as a schoolteacher in Western Maharashtra for many years:

We went to Yavatmal district in 1980, and at that time we went there for the landless labourers. We had read about their situation. Even my grandfather was a landlord, and we had seen that the exploitation of the labourers gives nothing to them, and how the landlords squeeze them. We had a sort of communist theory that the landlords are the exploiters.

So we went there to work against farmers and for the cause of the labourers. For two years we were working in about 35 villages on the landless labourers' cause, the minimum wages act and all this. All the farmers were against us, that is, me and my husband, threatening to kill us. They said 'You are the ones that have come and now we have to give extra wages.'

While we were doing that work I myself had to buy a small piece of land. It was a great struggle for us just to live in the villages. Whatever extra room there was, was only with the landlords, and they said 'No, no, you don't stay here.' And there was no house to live in, so we decided to buy a small patch of land so that we can build our own hut. I purchased according to the government act and all that. One must have at least three acres, so we purchased near about 5 acres of land.

From whom did I purchase this land? He had 30 acres of land. When I went to his house and saw what he eats and how he sleeps, his mattresses and so on, I realised that he was a very poor man. According to my theory, 30 acres of land, that is, a farmer owning 30 acres of land must be a rich man. But when I really saw, whatever we had read in the books, what I saw on the land was that the people

owning 30, 40 or 50 acres of land were hardly living an ordinary life of a clerk or even of a 'chaprassi' in the towns and cities. They had a very low standard of life.

At the same time Sharad Joshi was doing his work in Poona. We happened to come across Sharad Joshi at one of his meetings. That meeting was arranged to discuss – what do you call it – EGS, the Employment Guarantee Scheme; that is, bread for the labourers. Sharad Joshi had come there. We were discussing that 2200 calories is essential, and for that much this much wage is essential. Then Sharad Joshi stood up and said: 'Are you talking about hens and pigs, that he requires this much. He is a man, he is a person. He has his cultural life, he has his other entertainment needs. Where is the money that you are thinking of?'

Then my husband thought: 'Here is a man working for the farmers and he is really thinking for the labourers.' And then we met again with Sharad Joshi and we had quite a discussion with him. We realised that the problem is really with the farmers. That is, the farmers don't get enough. Whatever information we had about landlords and labourers, we had some confusion in our minds, no clear vision as such. There was some confusion. There is some disturbance. Whatever is written in that communist ideology and the practical things are two different things.

Then we started working with the farmers, started going to them and asking about their problems, and what prices they get for their crops. And we started to work along with Sharad Joshi. My husband was the first person in Yavatmal district to start Sharad Joshi's work there in 1981.

The Shetkari Sanghatana of Maharashtra is a modern type of organisation and movement. The caste composition is very mixed, and it is hard to find any dominant caste in the movement as a whole, since the Sanghatana is found in widely different regions of the state. The leadership and cadres are drawn from among many different groups, extending from the political left to the right; groups which were originally mobilised in the late 1960s and now participate in a second round of mobilisation. Among them are found urban intellectuals from the Jaya Prakash Narayanan's movement, the Lal Nishan Party and so on. Local activists are often farmers' sons who have studied at colleges and universities, but have returned to take up farming because they could not find a job in the urban economy.

Shetkari Sanghatana has focused its actions on one crop at a time, with the objective of enabling farmers to retain control over a substantial

portion of what is harvested. This strategy, which is often thought to have been invented by Sharad Joshi, is in fact an old tactic used by previous peasant movements: it was, for example, used by the cotton farmers of Vidarbha district before Joshi entered the scene [*Sahasrabudhey*, 1989: 28–37]. The particular contribution of Sharad Joshi is that he has applied the strategy with great skill to cover a large area, and has managed to make it into a national issue.

Sharad Joshi is the undisputed and charismatic leader. His leadership is not contested, but the organisation is highly fluctuating from a low of almost no activities to a high of massive and strong mobilisation. The movement is highly dependent on its ability to raise a relevant issue and fight it out. At times when there is no agitation, it is as if the organisation does not even exist.

Thus the organisational form is anarchic or 'post-modern' in the sense that, much like new social movements in the West, it builds structures around actions rather than routine organisation. There is no fixed membership, no fixed rules of organisation, or strict tiers between local, intermediate and top levels in the organisation. Anybody who wears the badge, who participates in agitation, goes to gaol and so on, is a member.

Sharad Joshi is a modern leader whose message is as much directed at the evils of the rural social structure as against urban exploitation. Rural society is seen to be backward because of urban bias, which leaves no surplus for the development of agriculture and rural industries. Joshi has developed a whole world-view around this core, which he has elaborated in a number of speeches and writings [cf. *Dhanagare*, 1990]. His language and ideology is that of economic and cultural reform, with strong reference to previous works in Marathi of social reformers like Jotiba Phule and Ambedkar [cf. *Omvedt*, 1991a]. It must also be seen against the background of social transformations in Maharashtrian society during the last century, where the caste system has been eroded by Harijan and anti-Brahmin movements, and where gender oppression is less pervasive than in North India [*Dhanagare*, 1990]. More recently, this emphasis on cultural reform has taken the form of endorsing anti-Brahmin religious traditions [*Omvedt*, 1991b; 1992b].

At the same time the Shetkari Sanghatana is actively involved in furthering a broad-based process of social transformation, of which the massive mobilisation of rural women is perhaps the most interesting and novel feature. Nowhere in India, and rarely in the Third World generally, can one find such a large-scale politicisation of women. The normal pattern of feminist politics is that of urban middle-class women working in small groups, supporting peasant and working class women, but rarely generating any major movement as such. In Maharashtra, by contrast,

thousands of women have participated in the farmers' agitations, hundreds have gone to gaol, and tens of thousands have held women's meetings on a grand scale, the first taking place in Chandwad in 1986 with more than 150,000 participants [Omvedt, 1993]. The main demand of the *Shetkari Mahila Aghadi* (women's front of the Shetkari Sanghatana) is that women should have equal rights to land and property, and there have been attempts to make farmers transfer a part of their land to their wives. So far this has happened only in a few areas, but the women's front attaches symbolic significance to this process, not least because of the increasing incidence of abandoned wives, and question of support or alimony in cases of divorce. Another important issue taken up by Shetkari Sanghatana is violence against women. In these ways the peasant movement has also created a space for women's collective action, although there are extensive discussions between Shetkari Sanghatana, the *Samagra Mahila Aghadi* and other women's organisations over the wish of Sharad Joshi to subordinate the women's front to the goals of the farmers' movement. The Shetkari Sanghatana also receives support from activists engaged in other social movements, such as the Dalits, the Science forum, health-to-the-people, and green movements [Omvedt, 1993].

Shetkari Sanghatana is currently one of the most powerful popular groups opposed to the spread of Maharashtra's Shiv Sena in small towns and rural areas. At the moment, however, the communal tide is strong, and there has been a formidable upsurge of these forces recently, which Shetkari Sanghatana may not be in a position to stop.

CASE STUDY II: THE BKU IN UTTAR PRADESH¹⁸

When compared with the Shetkari Sanghatana in Maharashtra, the Bharatiya Kisan Union of Uttar Pradesh has a very different origin. The movement is confined to four districts of western UP, and is completely dominated by the Jat caste. While farmers of other castes and religions (including Muslims and Christians) have also joined the movement, it is under the traditional caste leadership that has dominated the region economically and politically for a very long time.

From an interactional and cognitive point of view, the most interesting feature of the BKU is its seemingly traditional form and content. The Jat khap organisation (based on clan structure) is the backbone of the movement, with one of the foremost khap leaders, Mahendra Singh Tikait, as leader. Some observers [Madsen, 1991; Hasan and Patnaik, 1992] claim that it was by using his position in this traditional system that Tikait was able to take over the leadership of the BKU in 1986. Yet the

local, district and state units are organised in a modern organisational form (which, as is well known, developed in the transition to a capitalist industrial society in the West starting with the clubs in towns and cities). Formal membership, annual fees, rules, and boards with chairmen, secretaries and treasurers, exist at all levels from the village to the state level. Similarly, BKU members sometimes invoke Arya Samaj¹⁹ and argue against excessive dowry gifts occasioned by marriage; the practice of inter-caste village meetings organised by Arya Samaj may also have prepared the ground for collective inter-caste action. In other ways, however, the ideology of the BKU is highly traditional and parochial, invoking Hindu religious symbols and the virtues of traditional rural society. Social reform has little or no relevance in agitations, and women have no role in the BKU except as housewives and servants. ('The women are standing behind us', is what Tikait replies when asked about women's participation in the movement and women's issues). This is also a reflection of the patriarchal gender relations in Jat society.

The strength of the BKU is very much related to the charismatic leadership of Chaudhari Mahendra Singh Tikait. However, Tikait's dominant position is also a basic weakness: there is a constant conflict below the surface on how to conduct the struggle, what issues to take up, how to relate to political issues and parties and so on. There are even entrepreneurs who use the networks of the BKU for building alternative organisations for more or less personal gains. One important aspect of this dominance of Tikait is the authoritarian claim to represent not only UP, despite the BKU having a strong presence only in its western parts, but also the whole of India: Tikait is the self-styled All-India President of Bharatiya Kisan Union of India. When he summons an All-India meeting, only district presidents and secretaries from UP turn up; it is nevertheless considered an All-India gathering. Discontent with Tikait in many movement sub-networks has not so far lead to any serious split within the BKU as such: it is widely believed that the BKU is nothing without Tikait. Thus, his position seems to prevent the emergence of alternative ideologies and strategies within the movement.

Because it is where the temple struggle in Ayodhya is taking place, the rise of Hindu fundamentalism and politics have been particularly strong in UP. In the recent state elections (May-June 1991) the Bharatiya Janata Party²⁰ (BJP) was voted into power, which it held up to December 1992. BKU leaders and members stress the non-communal character of the peasant union. Mahendra Singh Tikait also emphasises this point strongly, and it is reported that he very often begins a public meeting by greeting the participants with both a Hindu and a Muslim slogan. In 1991 when asked about their relation to the BJP and the temple issue,

Mahendra Singh Tikait answered: 'We don't participate in those kind of struggles. It is not an important issue for us. So we are strong, and our community is strong, that is all.

A number of interviews with Muslim farmers who are also members of the BKU confirm that the BKU is a multi-communal organisation. These Muslims are not afraid that the temple struggle will split the movement: 'It will not affect the village situation' some claimed. They maintain that the BKU has worked for communal harmony.

There are, however, consistent rumours that, in order to get concessions out of an emerging political force, the BKU indirectly supported the BJP in the last elections. Although in my recent fieldwork no leader or supporter was willing to confirm such rumours, Tikait himself answered in the following ambivalent manner:

Election is one thing and BKU is another. We don't ask people to vote either this side or that side. People vote according to their conscience, so they can vote any way they want. However, political leaders like Abdul Akadi, who is a muslim leader, made some wrong deals, as a result of which the votes got divided on communal lines. So the muslims voted for Janata Dal, while others voted for BJP. That is a political issue with which we have nothing to do, so it does not affect BKU.

BKU or not, it is quite clear that a number of those involved in the recent demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya came from those very villages in Western UP where the BKU has a large following.

ONE MOVEMENT OR TWO?

As we have argued above it is possible to see both Shetkari Sanghatana and the BKU as offsprings of the same structural features of the agrarian transformation after independence. They have mostly appeared as non-political mobilisations, and they have also been treated very similarly by intellectuals, journalists and political parties. Most of these observers and commentators are not very sympathetic, seeing them only as spokesmen of the rich peasants and capitalist farmers. An interactionist and regional analysis as outlined above reveals, however, that the farmers' movements in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh are indeed very different types of mobilisations. What are the reasons for this difference, and what are the implications for the future mobilisation and impact of the farmers' movements in India?

Important reasons for the differences are of course the political and cultural variations to be found between the regions, and the way social transformations have taken place. There is, however, also a very important difference of ecology and political economy. In UP and Punjab (and Haryana) there are very favourable ecological conditions for the application of the green revolution strategy and a stable agricultural growth. The Indian State is very dependent on the food and cash crops produced in these states for feeding the rest of the country [Patnaik, 1991]. It would seem, therefore, that the supporters of the BKU in UP and Punjab are in a strong bargaining position. They have economic resources to fall back on, and their production is crucial to the country as a whole. Very little new thinking on agricultural development has been developed in these unions: they simply ask for the best deal since they are fulfilling the objectives of the green revolution. However, so far their struggles have not met with much success.

The situation in Maharashtra is very different. Because of unstable agricultural growth due to poor soils and lack of water, the Green Revolution has not been much of a success in the state. It is easy to imagine, therefore, that Shetkari Sanghatana's bargaining position would be much weaker than that of BKU in Punjab and UP. Nevertheless, the struggles in Maharashtra have generally been much more successful in achieving their targets.

The agricultural background in Maharashtra is also reflected in the recent thinking of the Shetkari Sanghatana on issues of alternative agricultural development: small-scale and water saving irrigation schemes, new water sharing systems, new bio-technology, as well as rural industrialisation, all form part of their discussions and demands. A report from a large meeting of Shetkari Sanghatana on 17-18 September 1991 notes that:

Shetkari Sanghatana has found its new direction: it is going to take up the cause of natural/organic farming, of 'self-sufficient agriculture': peasants will refrain from using chemical fertilizers and pesticides, will rely as far as possible on locally-developed seeds. They will do their own primary processing, even if only packaging and winnowing, before bringing any produce to the market. They will produce with a bare minimum of industrial inputs, and they will export (farm products can be India's best earner of foreign exchange, Sharad Joshi argued), and peasants will take responsibility for 'saving the nation' (in this respect) but without importing, without expense on petroleum-based inputs. They will be interested in building links directly with consumers, particularly to the extent

that a market for organic foods develops in India. They will reserve the option of not going to the market – and women in particular, will cultivate the land that is being given in their names under the ‘Laxmi Mukti Campaign’ in the traditional manner, without expenses on inputs and with the aim of providing basic family needs [Omvedt, 1991b: 2289].

This change from the ‘one-point programme’ to what has been described by Joshi as a ‘battle of production’ may still be more of a plan than a real strategy [Omvedt, 1992b], but it certainly signifies a shift of emphasis and a profile which is not visible in any of the other new farmers’ movements in India today. This suggests that there is indeed a potential for the construction of a variety of social movements among the peasants depending on regional and political characteristics of the peasantry to be mobilised. This variety may also in the long run have important bearings on the development of the agrarian economy as such.²¹ This will be discussed below.

PEASANT MOVEMENTS AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

One way of understanding the new farmers’ movements is to see them as spokesmen for an alternative economic development strategy, in which capitalism and market relations as such are not questioned, but which gives emphasis to agriculture and the rural economy. The message is that if more surplus is left in the rural areas and with rural households, it will be invested in agriculture and small scale industry, thereby creating employment and development for all [Skarstein, 1991]. Because of its labour-intensive character, agriculture is presented as a desirable alternative to large-scale industrial development, which provides fewer jobs.

This analysis has been seen by Byres [1979] and others as a variant of populist ideology which has followed in the footsteps of industrialisation and urbanisation the world over for the past 150 years, an expression of people left behind by development. The main targets of this critique are Lipton [1977] and Schumacher [1973]. What this critique tends to forget, however, is that such ‘populist’ ideas were crucial in the development policies pursued by countries such as China and Tanzania, and also in the development strategies advocated by the ILO in the 1970s [Kitching, 1982: 70–84].

Proponents of these views are in good company. Several theories [cf. Bairoch, 1973; Adelman, 1980; 1984; Adelman and Taft-Morris, 1980; Senghaas, 1985; 1988] of institutional economics stress the role of agriculture in capitalist economic development, and the conventional view

that agriculture should produce cheap food and raw materials, feed urban areas with cheap labour, earn foreign exchange and otherwise be relegated to a dwindling role in the overall economy as capitalist industry and services develop, is now being challenged in a major way: it is the development of agriculture through land reforms, institutional reforms and increased production which is seen as crucial. Even success such as Taiwan and South Korea are seen as examples of how the development of labour intensive agriculture goes hand in hand with successful industrialisation [Skarstein, 1991]. On the example of Taiwan, Gunnarsson [1992: 92-3] writes:

Agricultural modernization gave increased incomes and higher purchasing power to the rural population, thereby enabling it to form a market for industrial goods. The question is how this could happen when agriculture was being so heavily exploited at the same time. The answer lies in the increased productivity resulting from the restructuring of agriculture, chiefly because the land reform was accompanied by a series of institutional changes at the local, regional and national levels, which brought positive effects in terms of diffusion of technology, credits and infrastructure

Perhaps the most important institutional change was the organisation of the so-called Farmers' Associations at the bottom level. The removal of the landlords had left a lacuna with regard to land management and rural credit. If this problem had not been resolved, the land reform would not have been successful. A Farmers' Association was an independent financial association with local management, which organised credit and marketing and helped with the introduction of new technology. Through land reform and its accompanying institutional reforms the marginal cost of land was reduced, which facilitated investment in new technology. Moreover, the incentives reached down to the producers at the bottom level instead of being confined to the big landlords as before.

This line of thinking claims that dynamic agricultural development needs strong organisations and co-operative institutions. In short, the organisation of peasants into autonomous movements which address development issues, press for more efficient administration, credit, infrastructure, and the diffusion of knowledge. Such a view suggests that the farmers' movements must ultimately take the step from agitation to a more positive type of organisation (economic associations, co-operatives and so on) if they are to be successful. The state, on the other hand, must

be strong, so as not to yield to the partial interests of the farmers' movements alone, but simultaneously be responsive to farmers' needs; that is, encouraging increased productivity via a combination of price incentives and institutional reforms so as to organise the conditions of production in an efficient way.

Analysed in this perspective, one could say the Indian farmers' movements at least have the potential for this kind of development. At the same time, depending on their class basis and ideological standpoints, they may also prevent the state from carrying through further necessary land reforms, adequate agricultural taxation, new types of irrigation schemes and other institutional changes. In that case we are dealing with a variety of agrarian populism dominated by an emerging agrarian bourgeoisie of rich peasants and capitalist farmers, which mobilise part of the middle peasantry with a rhetoric that hides their real intentions.²²

The farmers' movements, therefore, are volatile social constructions, which can serve potentially both as promoters of a dynamic agrarian capitalism based on family farms, and also as hindrances to an efficient implementation of such agricultural development. To a large extent this is a class issue, a question of whose interest will ultimately dominate the movements: the middle peasants, the rich peasants, the capitalist farmers, or combinations of these. Whichever class or classes and tendencies prevail is an open question, and depends very much on a number of internal and external factors. It is in this context that the development of the internal discussions and negotiations in the various farmers' movements are crucial for the choices ahead. Since they are regionally specific movements, the outcome will also reflect this difference. For example, the ecological policies now being discussed in Maharashtra may be one such sign of variation.

Equally important in this regard are the policies of the Indian state and international capital, which by setting terms and conditions for the development of the agrarian economy, may determine the way in which peasants/farmers can be mobilised in the future. In fact, it is the interplay between these forces and the various farmers' movements that in the end will determine the outcome. It is clear, however, that these processes and forces are not bound a priori to favour the interest of rich peasants and capitalist farmers alone. Other outcomes are possible. If, for example, middle peasants cum family farmers can achieve a strong influence in these movements, this would possibly put pressure on the Indian state to pursue policies more friendly to small and intermediate producers rather than to the big capitalist farmers. This in turn could facilitate a scenario of agrarian development not unlike that of Western Europe and parts of the United States, where family farming and its vertical concentration under

state agencies, co-operative institutions and agro-industrial capital have become the dominant features (see, for example, Djurfeldt [1983: 152-4]).

CONCLUSION

The New Farmers' Movements in India represent a major change in rural social mobilisation, and must be seen as a response to the structural transformation in the agrarian economy brought about in India since independence. These Farmers' Movements have some features in common with other new social movements across the world in the 1970s and 1980s, but it is a similarity in form rather than in content. Farmers' movements are classically within the mould of popular movements, which, like the working class movements, are formed around a basic class contradiction in capitalist society. The new movements, in contrast, address other issues in contemporary capitalist society, such as gender, the environment, and the crisis of community, urban renewal and re-democratisation. As such, they tend to straddle class borders rather than polarise along them. However, as was shown above, there are several possibilities for alliances between the farmers' movements and these new movements.

An interactionist analysis of the regionally-specific farmers' movements in India suggests that such mobilisations are not predetermined to represent any particular class of farmers or type of agrarian transformation. Indeed, both its class content as well as its impact on agrarian development and transformation are open to considerable variation, depending on a number of factors, including regional ones.

NOTES

1. The best overview of the new farmers movement so far is Nadkarni [1987].
2. An exception to this may be Tamil Nadu, where in the 1970s farmers conducted massive agitations. In the early 1980s M.G. Ramachandran, then chief minister of the state, ordered the police to intervene and disperse demonstrations and mass meetings with brutal force. At the same time he started a political campaign directed against the rich farmers leading the movement. He also gave debt relief and other concessions to poor and middle farmers. Today the farmers are split into several fractions, of which two are registered political parties.
3. This emphasis on identity formation in the study of social movements has been called the identity-oriented paradigm [Cohen, 1985]. For examples of this approach, see Alberoni [1984], Touraine [1984], and Melucci [1985].
4. To many colleagues, I am sure, there would seem to be a mutual incompatibility between on the one hand a structuralist perspective, in which classes and class conflicts take precedence, and on the other hand open-ended processes of identity formation, in which social interaction and ideology play a crucial role. However, the analytical

synthesis formulated here in what I call a process-oriented sociology is an attempt to overcome this duality, in the belief that only such a sociology can capture the complex interplay of various variables. It certainly does not mean that I subscribe to the view presented by, for example, Laclau, that Marxism and class analysis is an irrelevant approach derived from a Eurocentric perspective [Laclau, 1985].

5. For an overview see, for example, Sen [1982].
6. The class analysis here and in the following is based on the theoretical and empirical analyses in Athreya *et al.* [1990: Ch. 6]. The main criterion is that of reproductive levels and appropriation of surplus from agricultural production. Poor peasants are defined as those peasants who cannot cover the grain requirements of the household from the income from its farm production. Middle peasants, on the other hand, comprise a range of peasant households, from those who can just about cover this requirement up to those households who are fully reproductive, that is, who are able to cover also the non-grain requirements of the household and the cash cost for production itself. Rich peasants are those households who can appropriate a surplus from the farm production, over and above the needs mentioned above (cf. Athreya *et al.* [1990: 196-7]).
7. See, for example, Alexander [1981: 214-15].
8. It should be pointed out that there have been many previous peasant movements agitating for higher prices on their produce, so even in this respect there is a certain historic continuity between peasant movements. However, this does not invalidate the claim that there has been an overall shift towards new peasant movements. It is commonplace to analyse the new peasant movements as mobilizations of rich peasants and capitalist farmers, who have succeeded in winning over middle peasants to their cause. Behind the facade of rural interest, it is argued [Nadkarni, 1987; Banaji, 1990], is hidden these very particular class interests, which means that the demands of the farmers' agitation actually go against the interests of other rural classes and the economy as a whole. This interpretation is disputed here, in the sense that the 'new' farmers' movements can also represent the interests of middle peasants or family farmers. Whichever tendency dominates will also be of decisive importance for the future development of these movements.
9. Omvedt has, as is well known, completely reversed her earlier position on the new farmers' movements, and now regards them as a progressive mass movement representing also the middle peasants, and the rural economy as whole in relation to the urban-industrial economy [Omvedt, 1988, and later works].
10. The 'Tamilaga Vivesayagal Sangam' led by Narayanaswami Naidu. This movement was started in 1966 and launched its first violent agitation in 1972.
11. Vanaik [1990: 206-7] gives a number of references to studies supporting this picture.
12. See CPI(ML) [1986].
13. For this type of agrarian politics or agrarianism see, for example, Hicks [1931], Sorokin *et al.* [1930], Lipset [1950], Crampton [1965], and Gerschenkron [1966]. For a world-wide survey see Esman and Uphof [1984], and Flores [1970]. For studies on agrarian politics in the United States see, for example, Benedict [1953], Block [1960] and McKenna [1974]. For Germany see Raschke [1985]. For the agrarian politics in Eastern Europe before the Second World War see Köll [1992]. Among the more recent treatments there is for example Österud's study [1978] of agrarian structure and peasant politics in Scandinavia, and Gundelach's study [1988] of social movements and social change in Denmark over the last two centuries.
14. Again, in the words of Melucci [1985: 795]: 'These dimensions, which are entirely analytical, enable one to separate social movements from other collective phenomena which are very often empirically associated with "movements" and "protest": one can speak of deviance, regulated grievances, aggregated-mass behaviour, according to which of these dimensions is present or absent. Moreover, different kinds of movements and collective actions can be assessed according to the system of reference of action.'
15. I refer here to the fact that despite differences in the implementation of land reforms and other rural reforms, very similar conditions for the rural economy prevail in these

states. On the peasant movement in West Bengal, see, for example, Bandyopadhyaya [1992]; on the farmers' movement in Maharashtra, see, for example, Dhanagare [1990]; and on the farmers' movement in Uttar Pradesh, see, for example, Hasan [1989] and Gupta [1988].

17. Useful studies of the Shetkari Sanghatana include Omvedt [1988-92], Lenneberg [1988], Sahasrabudhey [1989] and Dhanagare [1990].
18. Useful studies of Uttar Pradesh BKU include Gupta [1988; 1992], Hasan [1989], Hasan and Patnaik [1992], Dhanagare [1991], and Singh [1992].
19. Arya Samaj is one of the religious and cultural reform movements stemming from the 19th century, which like the Brahma Samaj tried to modernise Hinduism and other social and cultural practices in society. Arya Samaj was founded by Swami Dayananda (1824-83). It tries to unify all sections of Hindu society on the basis of the Vedas, denounces idol worship and the caste system. It has been regarded 'more a school of nationalism than of religion proper' [Sarma, 1953: 43-4]. It has been very popular in both Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.
20. The political party of the Hindu fundamentalists and activists.
21. It is important to stress that these varieties are here conceived of within a framework of a more or less state guided capitalist market economy, which is to a large extent dominated by international capital. The point stressed here is that there is room for variations not only in form but also in content. We are not dealing with the desirability of one form or the other, but rather with the actual potentialities. It is also my conviction that these variations may have important bearings on the future for poor peasants and agricultural labourers, also beyond the present limitations of capitalist market economies, be it a kind of socialist market economy or something else.
22. Populism is certainly a very elusive term. Populist movements are usually defined as either non-class movements, or popular movements in which the real class content is hidden. Since the term lacks any rigor I prefer not using it. It is clear, however, that most class movements do have an element of 'populism' in them, in as far as they purport to appeal to people outside their own class base. With Gramsci one could perhaps say that they attempt to make their own views and objectives hegemonic. It is also clear that 'populist' movements do not represent one single variety of movement, and that we have to make a detailed assessment of each one of them, what class(es) and alliance(s) they represent, and so on before understanding them fully.

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