

Capitalism and the Common Man: Peasants and Petty Production in Africa and South Asia

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Abstract

In 1976, the political sociologist of Africa, Gavin Williams, controversially ‘took the part of peasants’ in an essay, the critique of which had far-reaching impacts. Africa’s common man was then a peasant. In this article, the method of his essay is used to structure a review of petty commodity production (PCP) in India four decades later. India’s ‘common man’ is a petty producer. In neo-liberalizing India, PCP is numerically the commonest form of production and contributes roughly as much to GDP as the corporate sector. Reproducing by multiplication rather than accumulation, it drives growth in Indian livelihoods. Without pretence to being exhaustive, the article uses eclectic micro-level literatures to explore the internal logics of PCP (found to be varied), the circuits and relations of exchange in which PCP fails to accumulate (also very varied), the state’s economic project for PCP (incoherent), and the politics of PCP (mediated, marginalized and divisive).

Keywords

agrarian change, peasants, petty commodity production, capitalism, informal economy/politics

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Introduction

Forty years ago in Africa and South Asia the common man and woman were usually described as peasants.¹ The present article was originally stimulated by my teaching colleague, Gavin Williams, particularly his long engagement with debates on capitalist transformations and their impacts on African peasantries. By ‘taking the part of peasants’, as he famously did in 1976,² he was understood to be arguing a case for populism, in which African states would give priority to servicing the interests and demands of their peasant constituencies, to exploring the transformative potential of local solidarity institutions and developing the superiority of democratic collective productive organization (Bernstein and Byres 2001: 7, footnote 9; Idahosa 2004). In his teaching, Williams was continually engaged with ‘populism’—by which is meant anything from a rural development strategy directed at transforming small farmers (see Harriss 1982a: 119), to political projects for the rural and urban masses as opposed to the elites.³ One of the strengths of his argument lies in its structure—which I think is highly relevant to debates about development today. In what follows, I summarize and comment on Williams’ original argument and then use its structure to fast-forward to the current era, cross continents to India, abandon the focus on agriculture alone and, rather than focus on peasants—for I will argue they have disappeared—review literature to scratch the surface of the question of the position and roles of petty-commodity production (PCP) in the neo-liberal era.

Williams’ Argument

Peasants are regarded by others as technologically and culturally backward and must either provide the resources for other classes to develop the urban industrial economy, or must give way to capitalist production or state farms—and themselves be liquidated as a class—neither of which happens without recalcitrance, resistance, and violence. Peasants have been defined, on the one hand, as ‘traditional’ and, on the other, as modern and efficient producers. In fact, peasants are neither mired in tradition (to be reformed or replaced), nor narrowly economically rational nascent capitalists (to be integrated into an otherwise integrated market economy). Williams draws on Chayanov, Marx and Lenin to

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define peasant agriculture differently, as a source of livelihood for families in which wages and profit cannot be distinguished from each other, which are always incompletely integrated into the market economy (in which production for subsistence is a significant component) and subordinated to other classes and the state,⁴ and which become differentiated under commodity relations into capitalist and proletarian classes.

But Williams (1982: 387) himself argues that ‘peasants survive the development of capitalism and the expansion of commodity relations’. Inequality and wealth by themselves are not indicators of the existence of a capitalist class, just as the existence of wage work does not by itself define the working class—these features of rural economies may be integrated into peasant production. External impositions—such as new technology generating economies of scale, the reorganization of production to reap collective advantage via co-operatives and development projects by big business/capital or the state—can all be undercut by peasants producing more cheaply using self-exploitation, local knowledge and existing institutions.⁵ Forms of development engineered and imposed from outside are anyway prone to failure for several kinds of reasons Williams discusses. Tendencies to differentiation are argued to be balanced by relations and institutions containing it—including the migration of labour, (re)distributive practices, and the investment of savings outside the agrarian economy.⁶

Capitalist (and, in the 1970s, socialist) agriculture is, therefore, often only possible if peasants and pastoralists are physically eliminated or displaced. Alternatively the autonomy of peasant households must be weakened, so that the peasant economy can be squeezed to provide the resources needed for industrial, urban development. The classic agrarian question asks how this can happen. Williams’ answer stresses the control of exchange relations for both inputs and outputs, and the signal importance of state marketing boards as the mechanism able to create the condition of there being no alternative. ‘The underdevelopment of peasant production is the condition of development of capitalist and the state production, in the interests of the state and its beneficiaries’, he concludes (Williams 1982: 392).

These economic dynamics are associated with a distinctive peasant politics in which the colonial or post-colonial state aligns itself with local leaders, while peasants—especially middle peasants who control their own means of production—use what James Scott (1985) famously

called the ‘weapons of the weak’ to resist. Their clashes with local elites are not due to class differentiation, but rather to the former’s loyalty to the state and treachery to the peasantry. Their clashes with the state (and their differences with ‘socialist intellectuals’) are due to exactions of tax, forced labour, imprudent land use changes (either suggested or imposed) and agricultural regulation. Peasant resistance never succeeds in eliminating their dependence upon the state or market; but it limits it. In this sense, peasants ‘remain committed to the institutions which are the means of their exploitation and oppression’ (Williams 1982: 394).

Peasants are not lacking in political nous, they are sceptical that development will bring material benefits or improve their wellbeing or security; they also lack access to the state or the institutions controlling exchange and marketing. Mao Tse-Tung’s strategy for peasants reacts to all three debilities. Putting agriculture and light industry first responds positively to what we now call mass ‘basic needs’ or ‘capabilities’, while it generates resources for heavy industry. Mobilizing peasant initiative balances and galvanizes the developmental preference of the state for agriculture and encourages their interaction.

Controversies and Comments

Three Controversies

It is evident from this summary that Williams recognized the peasantry as internally diverse (and he also compared and contrasted conditions in Nigeria and Tanzania). Nonetheless, Williams is used by Henry Bernstein and Terry Byres as a lucid champion of peasant essentialism, functionalism and agrarian populism (Bernstein 1982; see also Bernstein and Byres 2001, written with the inevitable benefit of hindsight). So their critique has three elements.

The first critique is of Williams’ ‘methodological essentialism’, that is, questioning whether Williams identifies a logic to peasant economy which can survive changes in, even the destruction of, the external relations which exploit or oppress it. This is not exactly an easy question to answer historically, and they do not attempt it. Instead, they paint the challenges to peasant essentialism issued by the reproduction of peasants in a wide range of different modes of production and social

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formations and through ‘external relations’ with different classes; between agriculture and industry; and locally, nationally and globally. They analyze class differentiation as the effect of ‘contradictory class relations intrinsic to peasant production’ (Bernstein and Byres 2001) and reveal complex relations of wage labour in peasant households in which labour is not integrated into peasant production, but the other way round: peasant production is integrated into wage labour forms.

The second critique is that of ‘functionalism’ in the analysis of the relation between capital and peasants (Bernstein 1982: 160), in which the latter are reproduced by the former in its interests—as in Williams’ conclusion quoted above. It could be counter-argued that the persistence of small forms of production might well serve the interests of, and be functionally useful for, capital. But the point at issue is that the intervention by capital into other modes or forms of production is more accurately conceived as processes of struggle between conflicting classes, rather than as functionally useful for capital and/or the state (Harriss 1982c: 23). ‘The peasantry’ reproduces itself through its own labour, and a better question to ask is how the conditions in which peasants produce and reproduce are shaped and contested by the operation of capital in particular social formations (Bernstein 1982).

The third controversy pertains to agrarian ‘populism’. Williams cannot be dismissed as a romantic. He was taking the part of people who showed by their actions that capitalism could not deal with them by the Leninist route. Byres (1977) is the most accessible exponent of the counter-case to agriculture-first strategies, namely that development requires the expansion of the productive power of ‘industry’, to which peasantries must inevitably be subordinated. Even if current returns to agriculture exceed those to other sectors and commit capital for less time, the dynamic multipliers of heavy industry are greater in the long term. To which—relevant to the concerns of this essay—it may be countered that heavy industrialization was never intended to maximize livelihoods (Byres 1977; Harriss 1982b: 42–43).

Three Further Comments

First, on the ‘transition’ of the agrarian economy to capitalism, Williams was writing at a time when few doubted the transition would be to the

polar classes of industrial (state) capitalism. The possibility that peasants might, as human beings, survive the development of capitalism, but be liquidated ‘as a class’ through the consolidation of PCP, was not a path of transition developed by Williams, nor was it relevant to the historical conditions in John Harriss’ collection on rural development (1982d). It was dealt with by Bernstein and Byres (2001) in their compendious retrospective review of research in agrarian studies, by introducing Friedmann’s distinction between the peasant form and the (American) family farm, and the possibility that there are ‘other ways of theorising PCP/SCP’.⁷

What Bernstein and Byres (2001: 26–27) conclude, which requires quoting at length, is that ‘peasant production’ is:

constituted within generalized commodity production, conceived as the imperative of integration in commodity relations to social reproduction... Among the implications of this approach are (i) its provision of an adequate theoretical specification of the *tendency* to class differentiation, postulated as the contradictory combination of the class places of capital and labour in peasant production in conditions of generalized commodity production; (ii) the uneven allocation of those class places within PCP enterprises (‘households’), for example, by gendered divisions of property, labour and income; (iii) what determines whether, how, and how much, the tendency to class differentiation is realized in actual *trends* of class formation (including the effects of counter-tendencies) and (iv) that one possible outcome of differentiation, according to specific circumstances, may be the consolidation of middle peasant strata and/or ‘capitalized family farms’. (Bernstein and Byres 2001: 26–27)

The relation between PCP and peasant production, between a capitalist form, middle peasant strata (in plural), and a non-capitalist mode, is not entirely resolved here. Given the general tendency to differentiation, and conceding the effects of counter-tendencies, what may be consolidated as ‘one’ of the ‘*infinitely diverse* combinations of this or that type of capitalist evolution’ that are possible (Lenin 1899) is not a self-sufficient enterprise, for the following reasons:

1. It is a form of production that is heavily, if not completely, dependent on capitalist markets for the circuits of production and reproduction (these markets will be socially, as well as state-regulated and therefore ‘imperfect’).

2. The ‘middle peasant strata’ will not necessarily be self-sufficient in labour either. While the middle peasant maintains control over some means of production (and is not necessarily averse to new technology), s/he will also hire labour in and out according to circumstance (and in a way that is not necessarily balanced in either work-days or income).⁸
3. PCP may be a form of enterprise congruent with a household, but it can also occupy socially/culturally regulated class places within it. This is consistent with a household’s having a portfolio of activity, elements of which are not part of peasant production.

Even in this simplified account of PCP, the conditions for considerable, if not quite infinite, diversity are established—just as the capitalisms consolidated from phases of transition are also diverse. Even in the era of globalization, there are many forms of capitalism, not one.

The second comment is that a clearer distinction between peasant production and PCP lies in the development of PCP as a form of independent productive activity for the market in the spheres of ‘manufacturing, trade and services’. A mass of activities for use are transformed from craft goods to mass commodities in the post-production agricultural economy and the non-farm economy. Such activities are not just for food production from agriculture, but from hunting, fishing, gathering and from the production of meat, poultry and their associated non-food products. Such activities also include crafts of preservation, of energy generation, of the means of communication, as well as other craft activity which is nature-based, such as milk products, beer, paper, spinning, and weaving. They also include the construction of houses, storage, stairways, fencing, irrigation equipment, as well as the manufacture of tools, weapons and items of adornment. Finally, they include technological and labour capacities to make new, already commodified goods and services, and to commodify the repair and maintenance of all these commodified goods and the new commodities that are ‘imported’ and locally developed. Although commodification offsets the effects of labour displacing, cost-reducing technological change by creating new fields of accumulation, it is theorized as subject to the same pressures. But it also takes petty forms.⁹

Third, in the twenty-first century, PCP very rarely dominates or completely populates a ‘territory’, it co-exists with other forms—for some of which it may be necessary. Three types of co-existence can be

distinguished. The first is ‘process-sequential’, in which PCP and wage work are deployed at different ‘stages’ in a system of commodity production; the second is ‘process-segregated’ in which certain ‘sectors’ of the informal economy are populated by PCP and others by wage work; and the third is ‘process-integrated’ in which PCP and factory production using wage labour are ‘mixed at all stages’ of a commodity supply chain.¹⁰ In India among the tribal states of the Northeast, rural Arunachal is set fair to be a twenty-first century exception as a territory where PCP predominates—although research which might challenge this conclusion remains to be done, for example, on the implications of the state’s utter dependence upon metropolitan revenue transfers, the leaking multipliers of the huge standing army with its own provisioning system, and the trans-Himalayan articulation of local production via a system of pack caravans, laden with (often counterfeit) globally-branded consumption goods, mass produced in China (Harriss-White et al. 2009). Process-sequence and process-integration are hard to explain. Where PCP and wage work co-exist in close proximity, it may be the case that the wage labour supply is tightened by the existence of this alternative. On the other hand, where PCP undercuts the wage, it may discipline the wage relation. It is to the question of the balance of logics and relations that we turn in the next section.

Anyway, despite compelling evidence for the prevalence of PCP, the concept of peasant production is still a necessary category for historical research. Due to a general reluctance to recognize and situate PCP, the concept of peasant production is far from extinct in analyses of contemporary agrarian relations both in Africa and in South Asia (Harriss-White and Heyer 2010).

Seizing the Indian Nettle: Taking the Part of Petty Commodity Production

In the late 1970s, one aspect of Williams’ argument that did not cause controversy was that peasant societies were backward. In the 1980s, it was routinely observed that despite planning dedicated to the development of small farms, this did not always happen; often something else was happening, and the rural economy was being differentiated.

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The question was whether this (not-always-planned) process was leading to the formation of polar classes, as modelled by Marx and anticipated by Lenin.¹¹ But in the twenty-first century, two tendencies that could be little discussed by scholars of the agrarian question then are now unavoidable. First, PCP in manufacturing, trade¹² and services is the robust backbone underneath the advanced manufacturing and service sectors of social formations like India, just as it is the fragile constraint on the development of the national market. India's capitalist transition and ongoing transformations have created a complex social formation. Despite rampant differentiation and the creation of advanced forms of corporate capital—mighty businesses grounded in family dynasties, often in turn grafted to former colonial managing agencies, and now wielding global clout (Mukherjee-Reed 2004)—together with a substantial working class (Hensman 2010), PCP is the most common form of production. It is not transitional. If it is but a stage in the differentiation of individual capitals, it is constantly being replenished and reproduced.

Under liberalization, an explosion of self-employment drives the growth in Indian employment, and is a significant component of India's economic growth (Sinha 2007). Own-account firms are 64.4 per cent of all non-agricultural 'firms', and although this proportion has declined from 71 per cent in 1990, their absolute number has doubled.¹³ The average labour employed has dropped from 3 to 2.4 workers, and 95 per cent of firms in India employ fewer than five people. All but 2 per cent of PCP is in the informal economy and out of direct regulative control of the state (Kannan 2008: 8). At the last count, 53 per cent of total 'livelihoods', including those in agriculture, took the form of self-employment, smallholder production, own-account enterprise, household production, cottage industry or micro-enterprise (NCEUS 2009).¹⁴ That is over 200 million livelihoods. PCP is more common than wage work, despite the latter's rapid relative increase in agriculture (Harriss-White and Janakarajan 2004).

Second, unforeseen in the 1970s and 1980s, agrarian differentiation has been contained except at the very extremes: the structure of holdings is pear-shaped. India is now an agrarian society where more than 60 per cent of its producers own holdings of less than 2.5 acres (or one hectare) and 78 per cent own less than 2.5 hectares (NCEUS 2008). It is also a pauperized society, where the National Commission on Enterprises

in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) has calculated that in 2004–05, 77 per cent of people survived on less than ₹ 20 per day (that is, more or less US\$0.50).¹⁵ This is a larger proportion of the population than the wage labour force and their dependents. Not only is about half of Indian PCP unable to rise above a culturally defined subsistence, but it struggles against a nutritionally-defined biological minimum. Half the workforce living on under \$2 per day (the equivalent in purchasing power of the Indian Poverty Line) is self-employed (Lerche 2010). Prabhat Patnaik (2012) has called this outcome, after Polanyi, a ‘perverse transformation’.

To ‘take the part of PCP’, as Williams did for peasants, is then to take the part and examine the position of the great majority of Indian enterprises in India’s ‘perverse transformation’. It is emphatically not to construct an essentialist argument, or to imply a homogeneous category, nor is it to argue that PCP is an ‘economy’ or a mode of production, nor is it to regard it as confined to any particular sector of the economy. It is a ‘form’, operating among others. PCP co-exists with, but is not what Bernstein and Byres (2001: 23) call ‘peasant capitalism’, which exploits wage labour. India’s ‘intermediate classes’ are a rung above PCP (McCartney and Harriss-White 2000). PCP stands between labour–hiring capital, on the one hand, and hired labour, on the other, though it may be merged with both. Its existence does not imply a teleology of development.

In the following sections, we use the structure of Williams’ argument about peasants, and we review literature to discuss, first, the processes internal to PCP which (re)produce it; second, the external relations that generate, exploit and preserve it; third, the socially engineered projects for it; and fourth, its politics. This is an indicative and preliminary—not an exhaustive—review.

The Economics and Internal Logics of PCP

PCP is co-produced alongside other forms of capitalist production relations. The question is how? The existing literature suggests several internal logics that might be at work beneath the deceptively simple surface form.

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The logic of simple reproduction

Simple reproduction is a relation between production and consumption ensuring a constant level of both. Under capitalist production relations, simple reproduction involves the capitalist consuming and reinvesting surplus value only to the extent that production is constant. The wage worker is paid at a rate ensuring the subsistence and supply of labour for work. But the worker cannot improve his/her levels of consumption, let alone save; the firm ticks over and does not grow, and the social relations of production do not change. While the peasant produces for subsistence, or under conditions not fully commercialized, under PCP, even when producing food as a cash crop, the producer (and his/her family) cannot withdraw to subsistence. Reproduction does not depend on food alone. PCP depends on market exchange for day-to-day consumption needs. These will be shaped by targets for culturally defined subsistence. Non-market forms of exchange, co-operation, and sharing may be practised. Surpluses are accidental. 'Enrichment as such was not its direct purpose', says Marx (1863: XXI–1305) of handicraft production. PCP is thus vulnerable to what Bernstein (1982) has called the simple reproduction squeeze, in which food price inflation (with or without lower support for input prices) reduces the consumption even of food producers, and/or intensifies labour effort on production. Such compulsions may, and do, result in drawing children out of school and lowering the quality of future labour, or the future capacities of PCP (Olsen et al. 2010).

The logic of disguised wage work and alienation

In labour statistics and labour law, own-account enterprise and wage work are normally conflated. The connection of PCP to markets for products and money, 'before' work can be converted into the means of subsistence, qualifies the independence of PCP—and the responsibility of the petty producer for the product. The terms and conditions of exchange on these markets may vary from the 'stray customer' (Marx 1863), to relations tied by money advances which vertically integrate PCP to interest-bearing, commercial, or manufacturing capital. Control over production then resembles that of the employer over the wage

worker, in which labour is ‘really’ subsumed under capital. ‘The labour process remains the same—depending on the relations from which it has developed’ (Marx 1863: XXI–1305). PCP is, then, ‘formally’ subsumed under capital.¹⁶ The return to PCP is equivalent to the wage. In practice, considerable fluidity is observed between PCP and wage work. Bernstein (1982: 170) argues, following Lenin, that the possession of some means of production contributing to subsistence subsidizes the wage that members of the household earn on other farms—or outside agriculture altogether—and therefore transfers resources to the owners of capital. The reverse can also be observed: wage work outside agriculture can contribute through the PCP household to the reproduction of petty forms of agriculture—or to PCP entirely outside agriculture, such as weaving (Jayaraj and Nagaraj 2006).

It is this logic of disguised wage work that encourages Lerche (2010) to place PCP among the ‘classes of Indian labour’. He argues that PCP is differentiated, in turn, according to the precariousness and scale of its asset base, and to status differences between the self-employed and family members working for them.¹⁷ The implication is that nothing halts the real process of differentiation. And if PCP is disguised wage labour, then its surplus value, itself disguised in interest payments and in the prices paid for raw materials and finished products, is appropriated in ways which enable expanded reproduction in forms of production other than PCP.

These arguments are the more powerful because PCP is ‘commodity’ production. As Umar Salam (2010: 34) writes, quoting Marx in the context of the commodification of knowledge, from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*:

The objectification of labour, the sale of labour power as a commodity to the capitalist, creates the object of labour as something alien to the worker: ‘The more the worker expends himself in work, the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself, and the poorer he himself becomes in his inner life, the less he belongs to himself... The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, takes on its own existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, and alien to him, and that it stands opposed to him as an autonomous power’.

Commodities become fetishised, the value relation between the labour which produced them having ‘no connection’ with their physical properties. From this contradiction comes reification in which social relations between human beings become conceived of in terms of objects. ‘It is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things’ (Marx 1867: Pt. 1, Ch. 1, Sect. 4). Whether the direct producer is exploited on one market as labour or on several markets as PCP, s/he produces commodities and can reproduce only through relationships mediated through the exchange of commodities.

The logic of self-exploitation

However, while the separation between wage work and PCP may not be complete, neither is the separation of the producer from the means of production. For some analysts, this endows the PCP form with the potential for ‘entrepreneurship’.¹⁸ For others, this is a constraint on the real subsumption of labour to capital and its dynamic of technical change and rising labour productivity. The petty producer owns or controls a restricted and specific means of production, on which the value of work-time, measured by the realized product, can be ‘less’ than that of wage work. The capacity to self-exploit (and not to pay family labour), and the greater labour time invested in production at less than the prevailing wage than under formal capitalist production relations, does not just undercut capitalist labour-displacing technical change, it is a mechanism for transferring resources/value from PCP to those consuming the product. While rural economists interpret this capacity as super-efficiency¹⁹—and it can result in the more efficient use of capital and scale-neutral production technologies than under capitalism—it is actually super-self-exploitation.²⁰

The logic of the contradictory class place

But while the previous argument focused on PCP as labour, under PCP there is no contradiction between labour and capital, or between labour and management, or labour and entrepreneurship (Sankaran 2008a).²¹ As P.S. Jha (1980: 95) explains:

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[i]ts earnings can neither be classified as a reward for labour, nor as a payment for risk taking (*i.e.*, profit) but are an amalgam of the two. The self-employed thus lie midway between the large scale, professionally managed capitalist enterprises of the private sector, and the working classes.

Since capital and labour are embodied in the same enterprise, and since the capital of PCP (land, artisanal tools, etc.) is not to be presumed fungible, the petty producer does not seek to alter the material content of his/her capital in a way that would correspond to a search for profit maximization. It follows that there is no particular internal dynamic leading to differentiation, and that if differentiation occurs, it must be due to external dynamics.

Risk aversion

In the absence of state-mediated security, unprotected risks—meteorological (rain, temperature), biological (sickness to plants, animals and poultry, as well as to human beings), agro-ecological (soils in interaction with rain), economic (price spikes and shifts, the indifference of capital to the toxicity of products), political (sudden changes in physical security, or in economic regulation)—have special effects on PCP. They are the triggers for pauperizing debt which may force the PCP household into (migrant) wage work or destitution.

Micro level research in a wide range of sites reveals that ‘risk aversion’ as a logic of production and as a way of life has ‘long-term and cumulative’ implications related to selective disengagement from markets, to efficiency losses, and to a reluctance to expand production by innovating (Dercon 2006). Petty producers may act collectively to insure themselves against some of these risks, but again at the cost of surplus for purposes of accumulation.²²

Logic and practices of solidary economy

Many scholars have made the point that non-market institutions and practices are essential for the production and reproduction of commodity economy (see the review by Hodgson 2001). But of late, in a literature

flourishing in Latin America (Hart et al. 2010), a lexicon of non-market exchanges has been given scholarly recognition as an (innovative) alternative in the 'informal economy' to incorporation into the circuits of capitalist exploitation. The concepts of 'human', 'solidary' and 'popular economy' encompass economic protective activity and social solidarity on the part of holders of small individual property rights, by means of practices such as sharing, pooling of rights, help in time of need, material expressions of 'kindness', mutualism, the rotation of credit and of other resources, such as fishing rights. They have been explained as forms of social resistance to generalized conditions of alienation (Hart 2008), but they are also open to interpretation by the formalist risk-analytical school as forms of insurance, compensating for the lack of socialized insurance.

Relations of learning, gifting, non-commercial loaning of money, and trust-based co-operation are acts of reciprocity. PCP may deploy reciprocal exchange and forms of collective action to resist exploitation and/or the physical appropriation of resources (Adnan 2011). Alternatively, as in the case of the apprenticeship or rotating chit funds, acts of reciprocity may be preconditions for entry and incorporation into the circuits of capital. However, the existence of these individual relations of non-market exchange has not yet been shown to have a role to play that is either special to PCP or inconsistent with incorporation into the social circuits of commodity relations.²³

The logic and multiple practices of exploitation and oppression

PCP is empirically found under oppressive conditions, by which is meant non-economic coercion in exchanges on the markets with which the petty-commodity producer is compelled to engage. Two points are relevant. First, and contrary to wage labour which is exploited on a single market (that for labour), PCP is more comprehensively exploitable through exchange relations in at least four kinds of market: those for property (land, water, premises), money, inputs, and the product/commodity. Second, these exchanges also reflect extra-economic forms of authority. In his *Economic Essays*, Marx (1863) refers to these as 'patriarchal and political admixtures', which he expects to be eliminated from relations of exploitation. But the dogged persistence of relations of caste,

gender, ethnicity, religion, locality, and generation reworked as social structures of modern capitalism—and co-existing with relations dissolving them—is a challenge to most social scientific theories of modernity and institutional change (see Harriss-White 2009). Mushtaq Khan (2004) has gone so far in the opposite direction as to term all non-market exchange ‘primitive accumulation’ (discussed below). This dilutes the concept of primitive accumulation beyond recognition. But between primitive accumulation, non-market exchange and non-economic coercion in market transactions, there is a continuum of expressions of unequal status and authority in contracts of exchange which have the dual effects of structuring PCP, as well as weakening its capacity to accumulate.

Thus, while all these relations suggest that accumulation does not take place, the form of PCP does not indicate any particular or definitive internal relations—its logics are many and varied. The balance will depend on local histories, including those of incorporation into global ‘supply chains’. Without empirical evidence, however, PCP certainly cannot be reduced to disguised wage labour. The same indeterminacy of logic and role may be found in the case of certain forms of contract, the best researched and most controversial being that of sharecropping (Byres 1983).²⁴

The Persistence and Reproduction of PCP

PCP proliferates not only through its many possible internal logics but also through its ‘external relations’. Since PCP is inserted ‘in markets (so) that its conditions of existence subject it to the full competitive conditions of commodity production under capitalism’ (Bernstein and Byres 2001: 26, following Friedmann 1978), it is not entirely possible to separate the internal from the external. In this section, we do not have space to examine the breaking of subsistence relations and direct production for use, but have to confine our discussion to the relations through which PCP reproduces and expands but does not accumulate.

While the conditions of commodity production are rarely ‘full’ or ‘competitive’—being instituted and socially regulated in many ways—we cannot avoid locating PCP in much wider relations of production,

circulation, and consumption. But quite how wide the relations are is not easily resolved. PCP is regarded as ‘residual’ when advanced technology is used to increase the productivity of only a small fraction of the labour force. In Altvater’s (1993) political–ecological analysis of ‘The Future of the Market’, for instance, PCP is the preserve of the informal economy and constitutes a scarcely disguised reserve army of surplus population (see also P. Patnaik 2012). But it is rarely completely unemployed for long—since that means destitution—and acts as an economic discipline only to other cognate segments of the informal economy. It can be created and reproduced as ‘structural’ when capital is able to use (a) low returns; (b) the exploitation and oppression on many markets of more or less independent producers; and (c) the lack of need of high levels of consumption among those producers, as an organizational technology to sustain and expand profit. And this cannot be other than an ‘advanced’ organizational technology when capital also uses ‘advanced’ information technology (IT) to measure, codify and control this process over vast geographical distances and different social formations (Huws 2003; see also Ruthven 2008, on the use of IT in the control of the Moradabad metal cluster).

Failure to accumulate: Expansion by multiplication

In agriculture, there are limits to investments that may be made in land. In non-agriculture, capitals may be specific to the skill-set of the producer, with limits set by techniques of production. But the inability of PCP ‘to generate a more developed capitalism’ (Bernstein and Byres 2001: 29) implies a teleology, the lack of evidence for which we are problematizing in this essay. The common explanation, that the persistence of pre- or non-capitalist social relations and forms may be at the root of this lack of dynamism (Bernstein and Byres 2001), privileges only one aspect of the logic of PCP, at the expense of the rest (discussed above). It also ignores the possibility that pre-capitalist relations may be re-worked to have content which sustains capitalist relations. Capitalism hardly ever undresses to its bare essentials, but is almost always clothed in non-class social structures and relations (Harriss-White 2003). Equally draped, PCP proliferates and ‘expands the productive forces by

multiplication' rather than by the accumulation of individual capitals. The form may multiply using mechanisms such as inheritance, institutions of (re)distribution, very low entry requirements, small loans, and/or apprenticeships. To this extent, the definition of simple reproduction, given earlier, needs qualifying. For while production remains more or less constant in an individual firm, a social surplus may be generated and invested in ways that can multiply PCP.

Constraints on agrarian accumulation

Relations of 'blocked differentiation' have been widely invoked to explain the persistence of petty production in agriculture—not in terms of the internal logic of PCP, but, instead, in terms of the failure to form polar classes. In turn, there are two literatures. The first, from the economics of institutions, focuses on the point of exchange of the individual producer. The independence of PCP may be considerably, if not completely, undermined by the terms and conditions of interlocked contracts. Despite the convergence of stylized models of contractual inter-linkages on land-money-commodity markets, there are in fact a vast number of permutations and combinations of such contracts involving markets for land, water, labour, money, machinery, irrigation equipment, seed, chemical inputs (fertilizer, weedicides, insecticides and pesticides), products, transport, storage, processing, consumer goods, repair and maintenance, insurance and even markets for political access to the state. Bernstein (1982: 173) has described these relations as a struggle at the point of exchange 'over the conditions of labour in the sphere of production'. But there are very many points of exchange and it is these that distinguish it from the (disguised) wage relation. The terms and conditions are such as to tie the producer, constrain their present and future choices, stabilize the marketed surplus and reduce returns to production.²⁵ Over and above interlocked contracts, simple delays in payments increase working capital requirements and may pitch PCP into debt relations to cover peaks in production costs. The terms of these relationships may also depress returns to production. PCP can be tied through money advances in ways which make it hard to distinguish from 'neo-bonded' labour (Bremen et al. 2009).

A second literature from political economy shows how, like peasant production, PCP is subordinated to other classes. The literature on merchant and usurer or interest-bearing capital (Harriss-White 2008: Appendix 1), and on compulsive exchange relations and distress commercialization (Bharadwaj 1974), has these exchange relations at its heart. The merchant or moneylender has no incentive to assume direct control over tiny, scattered parcels of land. Apart from the logic of wage work versus self-exploitation, which involve greater wage costs for the capitalist,²⁶ the assumption of direct control has non-trivial transition and co-ordination costs. This family of explanations indicate a characteristic of PCP avoided in the discussion so far—namely, there is nothing in PCP per se that prevents the potential to generate a surplus and then to invest in such a way that expands production. It is the relations of exchange and the transactions on markets which prevent this from happening.²⁷ Removing these constraints would unleash a capacity to accumulate. Other things being equal, differentiation towards polar classes would then proceed apace.

Constraints on non-agrarian accumulation

Differentiation does not have to be blocked or contained by merchant capital, for PCP to proliferate. Whatever happens in agriculture, differentiation into the polar classes can intensify with the development of a vertically integrated agro-industrial sector and with ‘diagonal’ investment in other sectors of the non-farm economy. However, the surplus generated in agriculture (via rent, profit, interest and by the returns to permutations of trade, post-harvest processing, transport and storage) is not transferred outside agriculture (via the terms of trade, savings and investment and taxation) on terms which release a classical accumulation process outside agriculture. PCP proliferates in the non-farm economy with the same relations of constraint as in agriculture. Under more or less competitive capitalism, vertically-integrated finance, insurance, commercial, and/or manufacturing capital can be linked with the supply of working-sites, technology, and raw materials, and develops an active control over production in such a way that it prevents accumulation by the direct producer. The analogues to agricultural production

under interlocked contracts and contract farming are sub-contracting, out-sourcing, ‘in-sourcing’,²⁸ and home-working. Cost and risk may be shed by capital; legal and social obligations to labour are offloaded.²⁹ PCP is flexible and dispensable; it survives the tying of firms at peak seasons through delayed and partial payments, while being shed at will. Using small satellites, the hub firm can discard the capital and repair costs of equipment, working capital, bespoke services and the need for infrastructure. This kind of firm also avoids inspection by the state. It does not shed all supervision costs, since the finished product requires scrutiny (and often deductions are made from payments as a result). Through this ‘flexibility’, PCP may subsidize the permanent wage labour force of a factory enterprise.

Constraints on collective action by PCP

Connections among producing units create interdependence between petty commodity producers (using their own means of production) and petty or other capitalists. Clusters and industrial districts have been found to generate economies of collective organization and collective political ‘voice’, the effects of which include lowering the costs of information, the acquisition of skills, technical innovation and organizational flexibility, often theorized as being based on trust (Basile 2011). Artisan clusters stratified by caste or ethnicity appear to express the institutional pre-conditions for flexibly specialized production—and they may organize collectively. In practice, however, locked into pauperizing exchange relations embedded in caste as well as class relations, they are rarely able to escape ‘low equilibrium’ social organization and productivity (Cadene and Holmstrom 1998; Harriss-White 2009).

Poverty-creating processes: Primitive accumulation and the creation of PCP

Evidently, PCP is not a tabula rasa—though in the development literature the small-scale farmer and small enterprise are continually being re-discovered and celebrated as such. On the contrary, PCP is (re)created

as an outcome of contradictory processes of capitalism which prevent accumulation and create poverty, even while they create unprecedented wealth. These processes will not all necessarily create PCP, being able to create wage-work and destitution too (Harriss-White 2006). Primitive accumulation is a poverty-creating process of capitalism of particular interest. Treated by most scholars of the agrarian question as an epoch of history—of colonial plunder, slave raiding, etc.—it is the process (of unequal power relations) used to separate labour from the means of production. But it is also an ‘original’ amassing of resources prior to their productive capitalist investment. An epoch of history for sure, it is also a process which necessarily continues to this day (Patnaik 2012; Perelman 2001). Yet, it is evidently incomplete. For example, in India between 1947 and 2004, it is estimated that about 24 million tribal people have been displaced by development projects, mainly dams, some up to five times, all without due compensation and most without any.³⁰ But in the non-agricultural economy of tribal regions, including regions of multiple displacement, ‘own account enterprise’ by scheduled tribal people persists and has multiplied since 1990—evident in the records of the Economic Census (Harriss-White and Vidyarthi 2010; Lerche 2010). Though tribal business trajectories have been little researched on the ground, it is known that tribal households combine ‘self-employment’ with hunter–gathering, subsistence activity and wage work (Shah 2012) such that PCP even survives contemporary practices of primitive accumulation.

Social institutions and PCP: Pre-capitalist relics or structures of accumulation?

While faction and patronage, or caste, ethnicity and religion do not need to be introduced into the argument to explain why PCP persists, they are so widely regarded as constraints on, or ‘impurities’ in, ‘modern ways’ of transacting (Hodgson 2001) that their Janus-faced role needs noting here. On the one hand, such institutions, and the technologies that they regulate, lose their economic force wherever they hinder accumulation (for that reason among others, the collective management of tank irrigation using the corvee labour of dalits has, to all intents and purposes,

disappeared from South India). On the other hand, where they can sustain accumulation, they tend to be reworked and persist.³¹ Because of the flexibilities built into PCP, the petty producer is not compelled to realize an 'average' rate of profit or face bankruptcy, as in a capitalist firm. Over wide swathes of India, Dalit business, Muslim artisanal production and tribal traders in non-timber forest products are kept subordinated. Their accumulative possibilities are suppressed and resisted by upper caste financiers, merchants and state bureaucrats (see Contractor 2010; Firdos 2010; Kanungo 2010; Prakash 2010). 'Non-market' social institutions also can be mobilized to protect labour, guard entry and challenge its exploitation and oppression (Gooptu and Harriss-White 2000). Furthermore, social regulations, norms and practices may operate to prevent pauperization and destitution, not only through redistribution and insurance but even through mechanisms of price formation (Caille 1994).

The sphere of reproduction and the reproduction of PCP

Just as labour and capital are inseparable in PCP, so the sphere of production cannot be separated from that of reproduction, the fact which defines 'own account enterprise' in labour-force statistics (NCEUS 2008: Para 3). There are many ramifications. There is no economic division between the public and private spheres; the unit of production is the unit of consumption; the firm is the household; profit and surplus for investment cannot be separated from consumption. The firm may exploit labour, family labour, but it is not paid a wage. Such labour works, but is not a wage worker (Sankaran 2010). Family labour, its reproduction, is paramount. Without that there is nothing; production is for reproduction, rather than vice versa.

Like the other social institutions mentioned in the previous section, gender relations regulate market exchange (Harriss-White 2003); but their role in the reproduction of the petty-producing household is paramount. While gender relations regulate 'economic' change, gender, also expressed throughout the spheres of production and reproduction, is one of the social institutions that are most resistant to change. In India, women own far fewer assets than men. They reproduce PCP indirectly when their access to micro-credit is appropriated by men, which is common, and directly when they manage to use it to create assets of their

own, which is rarer.³² They reproduce PCP when their returns from PCP are spent on a household's collective necessities, while that from male PCP may be privately appropriated and used or saved. They also reproduce it through unvalued household work for uses which subsidize the undervalued work in PCP carried out by household members—though as the domestic labour debate emphasized, not in a way that is directly commensurable (Garikipati 2010).

Capacities to resist external destructive forces

That PCP persists and reproduces could mean that there is no change to its internal logic and external relations; but it does not need to mean this. Persistence and proliferation do not have to imply a lack of struggle or 'agency'; they can equally mean that forces and relations which constrain accumulation are matched with forces and relations resisting it. The internal logics of PCP can be understood as mechanisms policing change, as must happen in any social institution. The dynamics of institutional change—creation, dissolution, persistence and reworking—result from the balance of forces between those requiring change and those resisting it.

There is *no* 'essential' logic to PCP; its external relations are specific to different conditions and its internal logics are many, varied, and disputed. On the one hand, this form has immense flexibility; on the other, it generates enduring relative and absolute poverty. And Indian capitalism has not been challenged by this extremely hardy form. On the contrary, it seems to benefit from it.

Economic Development for PCP

The contemporary Indian case does not resemble that of Africa in the 1970s, whose literature is suffused with the damage inflicted by area-based (capitalist or state) development projects which could not undercut peasant production (Williams 1994). In South Asia, only in a few regions have state-backed co-operatives taken root successfully. The neo-liberal turn to India's agrarian capitalist transformation has attended

to post-harvest distribution before reforming production itself. It has succeeded in de-reserving food-grains processing from the category of small-scale industry, giving state support, under the cover of ‘markets’, to a new scale of agro-industrial capital, out of all proportion to local merchant capital; regulating for joint ventures in food retail (Froding 2010; Rashid et al. 2008); attacking street vending (TeLintelo 2009); encouraging contract farming; and—prior to lifting land ceilings (Sud 2008)—issuing invitations to expand the plantation form (Raman 2009), and using the state to back private Indian capital in the land-grabbing spree in Africa (Adnan and Dastidar 2011; Vidal 2010; Von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009). The African development solutions that vexed Williams are not widely relevant to India’s own land surface.

Very much alive, the Indian state’s development project remains strategic, extractive, energetic, heavy-industrial and infrastructural (though the latter are increasingly mediated through public–private partnerships). The state also retains partial control over a distribution system for essential commodities, paramount among which are food-grains, along with other kinds of food (oil, salt, lentils), essential clothing, and kerosene. Despite the state regulation of finance capital, India also has a serious problem of undeclared capital flight (Srinivasan 2007). Much of the economy is out of state control: the informal economy is two-thirds of GDP and the black economy estimated to be from half to two-thirds the informal. At this point, to ‘take the part of PCP’ means to ask the analytical question regarding what is being done to address PCP in the informalized economy and under the neo-liberalizing state of India.

The fact that in the 20 years since 1990 the proportion of own-account enterprises in the non-agricultural economy fell by 6 per cent, from 71 per cent, indicates a shift in the balance of logic. Since labour-hiring firms are rarely created from scratch in that form, this statistic also suggests that some petty production is able to change its logic and/or free itself from the constraints of its engagement with capital and grow. Likewise, some PCP activity may have been destroyed to fuel the supply of wage workers—and some created new (Bhaduri et al. 1986). But is this a big change compared with other shifts in the structure of the economy? Much more dramatic developments in the social structure of production can be found in India. In northern Tamil Nadu, for instance, over a similar span of 20 years, the wage-labour force in agriculture increased by 50 per cent (Janakarajan 1997). Does the state, as Taussig (1982: 180)

quotes Kautsky as suggesting, have an interest in subsidizing this form of production? Does the state take the part of PCP?

There are reasons for doubt. The answer that it does not has several strands. Prabhat Patnaik (2011), for instance, points to the persistence of extra-economic and extra-legal coercion, the army of jobless people of working-age despite growth, and the state's lack of response to the victims both of growth and of accumulation by dispossession. Chakrabarti et al. (2008), argue differently, seeing PCP as the 'invisible other' and the result of 'theoretically informed' ignorant neglect—or poor theory. The analyses of Chatterjee (2008) and Sanyal (2007) are consistent with the answer 'perhaps'. Their 'needs economy'—the entirety of the non-corporate sectors—operates with a non-capitalist logic in their eyes, much being the fall-out of a new era of primitive accumulation for the pauperizing consequences of which the state makes amends by 'stability transfers'.

The opposite can be argued. Yes, the state does have a project for PCP, though it does not use the concept of PCP; it is not responding to a needs economy, which is not a recent product of liberalization; nor is it compensating for the new wave of accumulation by dispossession. Like Africa, India has listened to a torrent of international policy advocacy of an agrarian 'populist' kind. Unlike Africa, India has experimented with agrarian 'populist' development, but in a project derived from Uncle Sam rather than Mao Tse-Tung.

As early as 1959, with the Ford Foundation's *India's Food Crisis and Steps to Meet It*, agricultural production technology started to be transformed by targeting the already advanced regions and most well-endowed producers, in a rhetoric of developing 'small farmers'. In fact, the green revolution was a dynamic interaction of (a) state owned and controlled investment, in agricultural research, irrigation, fertilizer, electricity, and co-operative and state banking credit, in which PCP had no part except as the destination; (b) state regulated markets, such as sales yards and contracts; (c) corporate capital, selling fertilizer, agrochemicals and machinery for land preparation and irrigation; and (d) local intermediate or petty capital, in credit and product markets. A massive economic superstructure developed above the petty producer, whom the scale-neutral elements of the green revolution did manage to reach in regions with good water 'governance' (Farmer 1977).

As early as 1976, John Mellor's 'New Economics of Growth' (1976) was pressing the case for 'agriculture first' to galvanize the non-farm

economy by generating consumption linkages that would create demand for products created by small firms in rural sites under labour-intensive production conditions. This is PCP in disguise (rather than disguised labour). It would stimulate the creation of the home market. In India, despite the multiplication of rural sites (and credit) for small-scale industry, evidence soon appeared indicating the likelihood that the structure of demand of those in possession of agricultural surpluses would be indistinguishable from that of metropolitan consumers at the same income levels (Harriss 1987). More recently, under neo-liberal assumptions about markets and states, small farmers are found to champion economy in labour costs, as well as improvements in equity. That subsistence production ‘saves the costs of marketing’ has been re-discovered. A minimalist state project for them would involve the rule of law, infrastructure, and the encouragement of producer associations and NGOs for scale and information. To address adverse exchange relations or price instabilities—other than through relying on new agricultural commodity exchanges, where futures markets will be developed, or on physical infrastructure for supermarkets—is to sit uncomfortably outside the aegis of the neo-liberal state (Hazell et al. 2007; World Bank 2008).³³ In the face of decades of relative neglect, indifferent agricultural growth, and evidence of growing agrarian crisis, the 2007 Finance Ministry Report on *Agricultural Debt* (GoI 2007), otherwise an outstanding analytical achievement, repeats these sorts of policy recommendations uncritically.

At its best, this literature understands PCP as capital. Its role as labour is ignored. The efficiencies on which such agricultural populism builds are of an exploitative kind, and might not exist without being articulated with capital. Exchange relations are generally excluded in ‘populist’ plans. Or they are described as market failures to be overcome by collective action, or characterized as hostile opposition against which the escape hatch of ‘political will’ is invoked (see Hazell et al. 2007).

In India’s non-farm rural and urban economy, small enterprise locates itself deep in the gullies of the informal economy, far from state scrutiny. And 40 per cent of India’s manufactured exports are generated by what it does not regulate. Much informal activity, however, takes place ‘as if’ the state regulated it, while the state itself has reserved and regulates certain sectors quite expressly for PCP.

The state does ‘not’ promote PCP through ‘small-scale industries’, since SSI is a giant leap in scale from PCP. It protects PCP in certain

sectors, such as, until recently, handloom weaving, and in the 'tiny' scale of enterprise, which is also a quantum order larger than most PCP. To these, as also to a slate of handicrafts and village industries, it provides development templates and funds for subsidized capital, infrastructure, marketing, and technology upgrading.³⁴ The project looks coherent and supportive until examining the resources devoted to it, which are inadequate; the goods produced, for which there is little demand; and the competition, which the state either cannot prevent (Chinese garments overwhelm the handloom sector),³⁵ or seeks not to prevent.

From 2004, the United Progressive Alliance, dominated by the Congress Party, has dealt with the poverty of its voters in a shift towards rights-based development—in particular, the rights to information, employment, education and food. It has also embarked on a project of Inclusive Development. Although the main criticism levied at these projects is that the first is uneven and underfunded at the local level, while the second stuck in the aspic of commissions of enquiry, draft legislation, and consultation documents for the Planning Commission, this latter project needs mention here. Exclusion from development is now being developed not so much in terms of lack of access to the means of production, and not so much by lack of income and lack of access to core attributes of human development, but in a post-modern way by identity: dalit, tribal, and minority religion. After the Sachar Commission on Minorities, the project of inclusive development has introduced the further complexity of creating formal space for religious identity, particularly that of Muslims, inside the secular state (Hasan 2010).³⁶ In the name of development, it adds to the politics of identity-based competition, since the 'development' at issue is, for the most part, reserved employment in the state. 'Inclusive development' is not realizing a project for PCP.

The NCEUS, which produced nine substantial reports in less than five years and whose informative website has been wiped off the face of the Internet, has attempted to outline a strategy specifically for PCP/'self-employment', reeling from the impact of the Wall Street crisis on the real economy. Along with universal social protection, this emphasizes the improvement of industrial capabilities (to respond innovatively to threats to labour-intensive export sectors) and the need to resuscitate growth poles to generate economies of agglomeration. Skills, technology, credit, services and human development, all currently restricted to the formal

sector, need investment (Kannan 2008; NCEUS 2009). But the crisis plan was not taken up (Breman 2010).

If there is a range of projects to stabilize PCP, they are not set up explicitly to prevent differentiation. Yet, if they succeed, it tends to be in precisely that respect.

The incoherent state project for PCP

No, the state does not have ‘a’ project for PCP. The Indian state’s relation to the PCP form is better understood as ‘incoherent’ and even ‘contradictory’, simultaneously endorsing actions which destroy PCP, protect it, promote it, and permit it through enforcement failures and neglect.³⁷

First, the state destroys PCP by such means as physical eviction and displacement, as a result of promoting capital-biased technology and organization. Resistance to land seizures for Special Economic Zones (SEZs), involving an entirely new scale of capital, has drawn blood, and also drawn management consultancies into taking note of the level and phasing of compensation, if not of the need to provide alternative livelihoods.³⁸ Controversies around the Indian supermarket revolution include destruction of ‘kirana’ or ‘mom and pop’ (mostly pop) stores, as well as the destructive effects of strict quality/hygiene standards and the costs of trace-ability to street traders at one end and small farmers at the other (Hazell et al. 2007; Reardon et al. 2010; TeLintelo 2009).

Second, the state protects small enterprises through the circuits of reproduction, via a large set of arbitrary, general purpose infrastructural and social sector interventions aimed at sustaining the lives of poor households outside the workplace (Finer and Smith 2004). Gains against rank poverty and improvements in human development may be secured through a combination of income transfers, compulsory education, school feeding schemes for children, universal pensions pegged to a minimum wage and secure procurement from petty producers (Sousa and Chmielewska 2010a, 2010b). In so far as they stabilize the costs of reproduction, they act as a non-market insurance against risk. In so far as they reduce the costs of reproduction of a PCP household, they release resources with which to expand production. But in India, this kind of approach, unlike that of the Green Revolution, is not conceived in package form. It is very far from universalized and its elements are developed

in an ad hoc manner (Mahendra et al. 2008). Even the Bills to provide social security to the unorganized sector are fractured between agriculture and non-agriculture, and float in the doldrums of the Parliamentary process (NCEUS 2007).

Third, the state actively promotes production by small enterprises, not just ring fencing certain labour-intensive sectors, such as textiles, a sector which is second to agriculture in importance to the labour force—and is unravelling. While the most successful co-operatives were organizations of labour-hiring capitalists (milk and sugar), and the least successful were agricultural credit co-operatives, co-operatives for certain sectors of PCP, such as *beedis*, have managed to create ‘capitalism without capitalists’.³⁹

Fourth, to prevent mass unemployment and widespread malnutrition, it implements, more or less exiguously, policies that prevent the destruction of, or tolerate, small-scale production, trade and services. For instance, it provides municipal marketplaces (Harriss-White et al. forthcoming 2012) and sites for periodic markets; it rations credit for agricultural production and the tiny sector (Ramachandran and Swaminathan 2002).⁴⁰

From 2005 onwards, the state has subsidized and permitted a mass of more or less experimental micro-finance arrangements, currently targeted at (‘self-help’) groups of women (Fouillet 2010; Garikipati 2010; Thorat 2008). But the state also condones and does not police the onward lending of ‘formal’ credit on unregulated terms and conditions, which were shown earlier to prevent borrowers from accumulating. And micro-credit is commonly shifted from less endowed individuals within a household (women) to more endowed ones (men) (Garikipati 2010).

Fifth, the unintended effects of other interventions sustain PCP. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme providing, by law, 100 days of work per family demanding it, has certainly tightened the market wage in some areas (Reddy and Upendranadh 2010). But in raising the wage floor locally, the employment guarantee makes it easier for PCP to undercut wage work.

The state’s infrastructural responsibilities to employers are avoided when production is outsourced to petty producers. Labour law is irrelevant or evaded (Harriss 1985). The state does not enforce laws through which the super-exploitative advantage of petty production would be

abolished. In these ways, the state permits and preserves small enterprises it cannot regulate, while doing nothing about the forces restricting accumulation. The state implicated in this account of PCP is one which may have had a 'passive' or 'bourgeois revolution' as its project (Chatterjee 2008; Kaviraj 1991), but which has actually set in motion a 'petit-bourgeois revolution' for which it does not have a coherent project—other than trickle down.⁴¹

States have 'populist' projects only by electoral accident in cases like Tamil Nadu. Elsewhere, where the common woman and man, and low castes, have gained electoral power, their objectives appear to be confined to the political. Where dalits have gained power there is little sign of a state-mediated economic project by dalits for dalits. Apart from the limited scope of land reform,⁴² there has been no project for PCP under democratically elected communist party rule.

The Politics of PCP

Following the example of Williams, we turn last to consider the politics of PCP. Unlike Williams on peasant politics, we cannot aspire to his certainty, so the argument is developed here by testing competing possibilities. Much has been written about the politics of 'intermediate capital' and 'intermediate regimes' involving an alliance between 'rich peasants', the 'self-employed' outside agriculture, and the bureaucrat who is self-employed through the supplements he corruptly earns over and above his salary. The grand coalition of intermediate classes fosters state capitalism to promote and nationalize economic growth, from which it specifically benefits to the detriment of more broad-based development. Intermediate classes have a mode of accumulation that acts through politics, particularly through manipulating a politics of scarcity.

Whether an intermediate regime existed in India is hotly debated. While liberalization has certainly threatened the existence conditions of such a regime (McCartney and Harriss-White 2000), the three elements of the intermediate classes all thrive in liberalized India. Petty or local capitalism—the embodiment of capital and labour in family firms that are also able to employ and exploit small labour forces too—has flourished,

and shows a capacity to accumulate. The question at issue here concerns smaller firms and farms. Is there a distinctive politics of petty production that encourages multiplication rather than accumulation? We can examine five interpretations of the role of PCP in Indian class politics.

Populist mobilization: Movement politics and PCP as capital

Despite the dispersed locations of PCP, which are widely understood to prevent organization, there is compelling evidence for PCP as an active partner in cross-class coalitions within agriculture and in corporatist politics in the informal economy. Wherever they develop, farmers' movements incorporate PCP and capitalist farmers on a slate of common interests in input-product price relationships and higher and stable returns to production (Brass 1994; Omvedt 1988). This requires appeals to the state to improve the relations of incorporation, while the relations preventing this are actually market-mediated. Interlocked, tied contracts and delayed payments link unequal parties within coalitions of agrarian interests. Petty producers are rarely net producers with the same interests in high prices for wage goods; as net consumers their interests align with those of wage labour. So PCP has been incorporated but ignored.

The analogue in the non-farm economy is the trade or business association where PCP also finds common cause with petty and not so petty local capital. The definition of proper contracts, collective insurance, collective representation to the state, and the control of labour and prices in derived markets all link PCP activism with a class which may simultaneously oppress and exploit them. Yet these business organizations often evolve from caste associations and, although they are being de-exclusivized, caste solidarity has distinct micro-political productive and reproductive advantages for PCP. These take the form of entry, apprenticeships, contacts, information and other such characteristics of guilds. When it comes to the organization of the spatial territory of the marketplace or the settlement of disputes, the interests of PCP rest at the foot of the caste-corporatist agenda.

As Williams (1982: 394) concluded for peasants, so here, petty commodity producers 'remain committed to the institutions which are the means of their exploitation and oppression'.

Labour mobilization and PCP as labour

Much of what we know about PCP is derived from the labour statistics. These classify self-employed own-account workers (who may use family labour but who do not hire-in labour) in the informal sector alongside the self-employed who 'do' hire labour. This is due to the high probability of such employers being small-scale, lacking social protection and contracts and being vulnerable to arbitrary regulation. So the labour laws have created a remarkable anomaly. Exploitative employers are classified as equal to their employees. Both are de-classified (Sankaran 2008a). This has implications for the politics of PCP *qua* labour.

In law that regulates the employer-employee relationship, PCP is also weakened by being an anomaly. Under the Contract Labour Act (CLA), the *beedi* industry is the only one where the law has conferred employee status to PCP out-workers and home-workers, giving them legal protection of wages and social security benefits.⁴³ In all other industries (including those dominated by state corporations), it has not been possible for courts to rule that the employer of a sub-contractor is the employer of the direct producers. As a result, not only does PCP have no labour rights but regular wage-workers also cannot raise a dispute on behalf of sub-contracted labour.⁴⁴

From 2002–06, the ILO argued for PCP to be organized by workers in their own tripartite organization, but has handed the veil of vagueness that masks the work relationships of PCP as labour market ones over to national labour policy to be lifted on a case by case basis. Neither the demands of the 2009 NCEUS report, nor the draft social security bill languishing in Parliament do this. They incorporate all PCP in the informal sector as labour.⁴⁵

While only 8 per cent of India's workforce is unionized, mostly in the formal sector, now that certain unions have striven to reach out into the informal, 'unorganised' economy, they have been able to recruit PCP disproportionately to casual wage workers. Yet, as Lerche (2010: 76) writes, '[t]he focus appears to be on establishing a regulatory framework for conditions of work and pay, and promoting welfare issues, rather than undertaking more classical grassroots union activities concerning day-to-day conditions of work and pay within enterprises'.

It is a paradox that in classifying and mobilizing PCP as labour, and in acknowledging that self-employment can include small labour forces,

the role of capital in its combined PCP form, or as ‘capital’, remains unnoticed (Breman 2010: 43). Meanwhile, distributive shares among labour-employing firms in the informal economy have swung massively towards profit and capital.⁴⁶ A new labour politics in which the social security of PCP is resourced through cesses levied at the points of market transactions currently faces denial in courts, and is in a foetal stage as a political project (Sankaran 2008a, 2008b, 2010).

PCP for PCP

In the mobilization of PCP specifically for itself, India’s Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) has played a unique role. First, it is the largest union of informal workers worldwide, and has led to smaller and more specific adaptations. Nearly 40 years ago, it started by training the wives of textile mill workers, but now it has over 1.2 million mainly urban self-employed members. Even so, this is but one percent of the urban self-employed workforce. SEWA mobilizes self-employed women in over 80 trades ‘to obtain work security, income security, food security and social security (at least health care, child care, and shelter)’.⁴⁷ It has developed a politics of organization and bargaining with the state rather than employers, who tend to refuse to engage in that capacity. Second, SEWA is a legal federation including a trade union, a bank, a health insurance collective, a pension fund, co-operatives, an academy, a housing trust, a non-profit trade facilitation centre, a set of SEWA organizations for research, training and communications, an eco-tourism enterprise, a cleaning co-operative, housing, the provision of sanitation and infrastructure services, health, child care and legal services—each moving on a track from being subsidized towards commercial viability and cross-subsidy. Third, it also is a movement working with the state producers’ groups, social security NGOs, co-operatives, savings and credit groups, with gains to its credit in social security (Jhabvala and Subrahmanya 2001), and collective action in production and micro credit. Unlike the case of the trade unions, it has made some political inroads into production conditions. Like trades unions, its considerable achievements are a drop in the ocean.

In addition, SEWA has strong international networks and funding. These facilitate its international lobbying and policy-making activity, but

are not so easily replicable.⁴⁸ When outside funders act as trustees of PCP, it is not so much the *outside* funding that is politically unreplicable. The problem is that, to be effective, this mobilization needs funding on a scale that needs outside involvement. This permits it in the first place, but in creating a political mobilization articulated with institutions of foreign development philanthropy, its scope is defined.

The Maoist mobilization: The revolutionary potential of PCP

Williams concluded that a Maoist agriculture-first politics would best serve the interests of the African peasantry. In India, the Maoist movement is said by the Prime Minister to have a significant presence in a quarter of its districts and 20 of its 28 states (Shah 2010). In contrast to the Maoists in Nepal, it is difficult to find material theorizing their political-economic project. A remarkable report by the Government of India (GoI 2008) on *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas* argues that support for Maoists stems from decades of severe neglect—in regions where the state effectively does not exist and where the people are not citizens in any sense.⁴⁹ In emphasizing land to the tiller, several earlier Maoist movements had a project speaking to the most elementary form of economic security needed by such people. Other scholars reason that Maoist revolutionary politics resonates with people whose experience is not one of neglect, but rather of decades of violation: first their forests were taken by the state, then land was seized for infrastructure, notably hydro-electric power schemes; and now they are engulfed by a wave of forced and poorly or uncompensated separation from the means of production—even from their newly reformed rights in forests—by land seizures and by Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) in regions with metals and minerals underneath (Kanungo 2010; Shah 2010).⁵⁰

India's advantage is in cheap production conditions; it relies on transfers of technology through foreign ventures that will never allow 'India' complete acquisition of technological frontiers. India will be continually dependent on imported components generating balance-of-payments imbalances. Faced with China's power in manufacturing and lacking the skills required to dominate the global service economy, a growing fraction of the Indian capitalist elite is turning to extraction to generate

foreign exchange and profits. We saw earlier that compensation for development-induced displacement is the rejected orphan of Indian development policy. For some of those whose livelihoods are compromised by the Indian state and corporate capital, where NGO activism and indigenous rights movements have little success in resistance or compensation, there evidently is no alternative to extra-parliamentary movements which educate and mobilize them and also use armed struggle.

The two main factions of the Maoists merged in 2004 and prepared a document for the CPI (Maoist), *Strategy and Tactics*, in which there is a disaggregated analysis of classes of PCP—subsequently, in June 2009, the CPI (Maoist) was banned as a terrorist organization. The document includes: (a) semi-proletarian petty production (handicraftsmen, hawkers, fishers, rickshaw drivers and pullers, and domestic service), which are ‘continuously becoming part of the proletariat’; (b) the middle peasant, the rural petty bourgeois, described as self-sufficient or exploiting others and subject to exploitation by others: a ‘reliable ally’; (c) the labour-hiring rich peasant, who is ‘neutral’ or a ‘vacillating ally’ due to class conflicts with feudalism, comprador bureaucrat capitalism, and imperialism; and (d) the petty bourgeoisie, classified into three sections according to earnings, the lower strand of which (the small traders and artisans, and the lower level professionals) are ‘reliable allies’ (CPI [Maoist] 2004: 19–28).

The CPI (Maoist) asserts the ‘organizational discipline’ and revolutionary potential of an alliance of these classes against imperialists, feudal landlords, and comprador bureaucrat capitalists. Their strategic project is to use armed struggle to seize feudal agricultural land, reform land rights, and establish co-operative production; to mobilize labour for irrigation works, stop the plunder of forest wealth, halt repayments of debt, reject taxation by the Indian state, and replace it with progressive levies of their own; establish control of rural tracts, establish courts, schools, and health centres, and lay siege to towns, while recruiting urban workers (CPI [Maoist] 2004: 67; Shah 2010). Yet, virtually nothing is known about the interests of agricultural and non-agricultural petty producers in this ‘peoples’ war’. Rather than struggle for big revolutionary ideas, the ‘revolution within the revolution’—the immediate political aspirations of local people—appears to focus on improving existing conditions of production, such as wages and terms of sharecropping contracts, and of exchange, for instance, for non-timber forest products, with

effects on local commercial capital, about which we know nothing (Shah forthcoming).⁵¹

By Way of Conclusion

The application of the structure of Williams' argument about African peasants in the 1970s to Indian PCP in the early twenty-first century discourages any conclusion other than that just as there is no single distinctive internal logic to PCP, there is no distinctive politics of PCP either. There is not even a distinctive politics preventing PCP from expanding in ways other than through multiplication. PCP is disempowered through several kinds of mediated politics. Unlike the African peasants of the 1970s, PCP is discursively incorporated in grand alliances of capital and in mobilizations of labour; in practice, its politics range from participating in focussed alliances with fractions of capital, through those with labour, via attempts to mobilize self-employed producers as a movement for themselves. Only the latter is at all successful, but on a small scale compared with the ubiquity of PCP. Despite its power of numbers and flexibility, PCP is certainly not a 'society' in the way peasants have been described, it is not a class force for itself, and it is unlikely ever to be one. It has never generated a political party. The class which acts most consistently as a trustee for PCP is labour, but labour itself is a fractured and pulverized class in India and, despite the conclusions of the CPI (Maoist), the potential of PCP for differentiation makes it unlikely both in theory and in practice to be a reliable ally.

So PCP multiplies but, as Cook and Binford (1986: 24) concluded for Mexico in the mid-1980s, so in India now, it does not 'lead to more advanced forms of accumulation'. In Williams' 'peasant society', inequality did not indicate differentiation, but twenty-first century India even lacks evidence that, despite its heterogeneity, there is much inequality in PCP. Relations of exchange, of reproduction, the behaviour of social institutions in which PCP is embedded and contradictory relations with the state all contrive to prevent accumulation trajectories from PCP from being anything but a rare event. PCP may sometimes be the unintended outcome of development projects, but it is more commonly the outcome of capitalist development, here to stay, as modern a kind of

capitalism as the corporation, but with an incoherent set of economic projects imposed on it and developed from it, and with a plurality of political expressions which serve to disenfranchise it. One next step for scholars would be to make a detailed mapping of the economic sectors, ecological-political regions, technologies, exchange relations and trajectories of multiplication associated with PCP.

Agriculture is leaking labour as never before, while capital-biased plans are laid for the hitherto most labour-absorptive sectors of the non-farm economy. What is to be done, what can be done, for the common man and woman who are petty producers in India today are most important development questions with different kinds of politics: whether and how to release constraints through a new wave of politically engineered collective activity, through the destruction of obstacles to accumulation, through the destruction of PCP itself, through ignoring work but expanding social protection to lower the risks of reproduction or by other means that are at present uncelebrated in the literature that has been reviewed here. It would seem that the stakes are high.

Notes

1. This article was originally prepared for the retirement event celebrating the work and teaching of Gavin Williams. I am grateful to Gavin for the best learning experience of my teaching life; to IEDES, University of Paris-1, Pantheon-Sorbonne, for the visiting fellowship which released sabbatical time to prepare this essay; to Sattwick Dey Biswas, Tom Brass, Isabelle Guerin, Ali Jan, Jens Lerche, Gautam Mody, Prabha Mohapatra and Kamala Sankaran, for their discussions on labour and petty-commodity production; to Olle Frodin and Alpa Shah who helpfully shared literature on the agrarian question and on the Maoist mobilization; and to the reactions by Henry Bernstein and Jean-Michel Servet to a prior draft. I am also grateful for all the discussion generated by the presentation of the draft essay in Oxford University; SOAS, London University; Graduate Institute, Geneva; University of Geneva/ILO; Hyderabad University; and the Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Chennai. A much reduced version of this essay is being published in a book edited by R. Mustapha, *Citizens and Producers: Rights and Livelihoods in Contemporary Development* (Oxford: James Currey).
2. The article first appeared as Williams (1976) and, subsequently, in a volume edited by John Harriss (1982d), which is the version referenced here.
3. See Rudolph (1961) on the competitive social transfers of the two main Dravidian nationalist parties in Tamil Nadu, South India.

4. Others, such as Harriss (1982b: 24), have added subordination to dominant culture.
5. See Williams (2010) on the lengths employers will go to cheapen wage labour in the case study of the *dop* in the South African wine industry.
6. Others have emphasized demographic factors, social practices of distribution, mutual insurance institutions and inheritance laws.
7. SCP means simple commodity production, for the logic of which see later in this essay; also see Bernstein and Byres (2001: 26). Debates about the middle peasantry—whether its numbers and its self-sufficiency (which can be empirically disputed) give it power to dominate peasant politics—may be found in Harriss (1982d).
8. See the germinal exposition of this point in Utsa Patnaik (1976: A82 *et seq.*).
9. See Bernstein (1982: 162). See also Huws (2003) on the commodification of domestic production; Leys (2001, 2007) on the commodification of the state; and Harriss-White (2005, 2006) on petty commodification in India.
10. For an elaboration of the conditions for these three kinds of co-existence, see Harriss-White (2010).
11. This was problematized in Harriss (1982d).
12. Marx famously argued that trade was unproductive but necessary. But insofar as trade shifts the site of a commodity, it makes it possible to realize it in final consumption, and as such is a productive activity; storage is productive, insofar as it prevents deterioration; and processing changes the physical nature of a commodity, and is thus also productive; see Harriss-White (2008).
13. Also see data in Sankaran (2008a, 2008b). Harriss-White et al. (forthcoming 2012), have used data from the Economic Censuses of 1990, 1998 and 2005. As was done in earlier censuses, the following activities were kept out of the purview of the Fifth Economic Census: (a) establishments of shelter-less and nomadic populations, which keep on moving from place to place, and camp either without shelter, or with makeshift shelter; (b) establishments engaged in some activities, such as smuggling, gambling, beggary and prostitution; (c) domestic servants, whether they work in one household or in a number of households, drivers and those who undertake jobs for others on wages; (d) all wage-paid employees of casual nature; (e) household members engaged in household chores; (f) persons doing different types of jobs depending on the availability of work, such as loading, unloading, helping a mason or a carpenter, and doing earthwork for a contractor; (g) household members working for other households and earning some money which is insignificant; (h) households in which none of the members is engaged in any gainful activity, such as households depending on remittance, rent, interest and pension; and (i) owners of tube-wells, tractors and bullock carts,

- who utilize their spare capacity to earn extra money, if the spare capacity utilization is occasional and not on regular basis. The National Commission on Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector included these categories as well as agriculture in its estimation of total livelihoods; see NCEUS (2009).
14. Sometimes in social science, a given word has been appropriated by more than one paradigm and has many meanings—capital is one such—but we are dealing with an instance of the inverse: the proliferation of terms for a single given entity by different approaches. ‘Self-employment’ is the term of labour economics; ‘own account enterprise’ is used in the Economic Census, and ‘petty production’ or ‘simple commodity production’ by scholars of the agrarian question and of classical political economy. ‘Household production’ is used by Harriss (1982b: 22) to introduce ‘the dominant process of change in contemporary agrarian societies’. Cottage industry has a ministry devoted to it, inspired by Gandhian philosophy, and for some time experiencing deteriorating PCP production conditions. Micro, small and medium industries also have their own ministry. Entrepreneur and micro-enterprise are the phrases of the micro-finance literature.
 15. NCEUS (2007) derived this result from published household data of consumption by the National Sample Survey (NSS) for 2004–05. The NCEUS divided the population in terms of per capita consumption into six groups: extremely poor (up to 0.75 per cent of the official poverty line [PL]), constituting 70 million; poor (0.7 to 1 per cent PL), 167 million; marginally poor (1 to 1.25 per cent PL) and vulnerable (1.25 to 2 per cent PL), together 599 million (above which were two categories: middle income [2 to 4 per cent PL]; high income [above 4 per cent PL] which amount to 250 million people). In total, 836 million live under Rs 20 a day. Also, 87.8 per cent of the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), 85 per cent of Muslims and 77.9 per cent of all Other Backward Classes, except Muslims, bring in less than ₹ 20.
 16. In a classic paper on this topic, now re-published, Banaji (2010: 280–83) refines a concept of pre-formal subsumption as being technologically ‘continuous with earlier modes of labour’ and able to develop outside the capitalist mode of production, to which it would be expected to cede as the process of differentiation and capitalist relations expand.
 17. For a similar classification, see Harriss (1981). Lerche (2010) develops the argument, initiated by Bernstein (2006), that the classic agrarian question is irrelevant to developing countries because the responsibility of agriculture in terms of releasing resources for non-agriculture can now be by-passed by other means in a globally connected economy. All that is left is an agrarian question for labour. That this has been thoroughly critiqued by Brass (2007) does not mean that this attempt to position and explain PCP is irrelevant to the argument being developed here.

18. Small business and entrepreneurship has a large literature; on micro-credit, see Guerin (2011).
19. There are enduring controversies about the inverse size–productivity relation, concerned with its logic and the interpretation of statistical evidence, because of the centrality of the argument both to land reform and to a range of agrarian populist development policies; see Narain (1962) versus Patnaik (1972).
20. The physical energy efficiency of output from inputs can be greater under PCP than under capitalist relations. For an agricultural example of the energetics of the petty commodity as an adjunct to wage work, see Taussig (1982: 182–83).
21. This watering down of the concept bears no relation to the Schumpeterian sense of the word, in which novel productive arrangements are stressed.
22. For risk reducing agrarian practices such as intercropping, crop–animal–fish combinations, and non-co-variation in the exploitation of fisheries, see Ellis (1992).
23. The collective management of collective property or common pool resources is a large field that is outside the scope of this essay; see Orstrom (1990). In India, water and forest management have been an important empirical focus; see Agarwal (2012).
24. It is another argument altogether that principles other than market exchange co-exist in the economy, neo-Polanyians recognizing redistribution and reciprocity. Space does not permit to develop this here, but see Hart (2009) on non-contractual elements in market contracts. The Neo-Chayanovian argument that the consumer-worker ratio is a further principle defining simple reproduction has been argued to be inadequate as an explanation for conditions in which family co-operation across genders and generations mobilizes resources leading households to cross the difficult threshold between PCP and petty capitalism (Cook & Binford 1986).
25. Of course, they may also reduce transaction costs, above all on information. The above conditions are different from tied labour provided with land or dwellings on estates, plantations, or latifundia, but they have the same effect of tying them, creating a production relation, and enabling the concentration and fragmentation/miniaturization of land (Djurfelt 1982: 141–42).
26. Though share cropping is one way the capitalist may depress wage costs of production on his directly owned land (Byres 1983), and sharecropping is appearing in regions of India where it has never previously been recorded (first hand field observation by the writer, northern Tamil Nadu, 2010).
27. It is a small step from subordination through tied contracts in non-land relations to the rigorous debates over the significance of neo-bonded labour, with which some scholars equate unfree PCP. The question at issue concerns

- whether unfree labour is a diagnostic of pre-capitalist or semi-feudal production relations or is consistent with capitalism. Space does not permit discussion. For the contours: Brass (capitalists may tie or bond labour) versus Breman (whether bonded labour is capitalist or a semi-feudal production relation depends on the nature of the bond), see Breman (1993) and Brass (2000, 2009). For an argument over the significance of the concept of freedom in the wage contract or the contract as an instrument of coercion (Banaji vs Brass vs Ramachandran), see Banaji (2010).
28. In-sourcing happens when 'independent' petty producers bring their own machines and equipment into a factory not owned by them; see Ruthven (2008).
 29. See Sankaran (2007) for the debate about the Labour Laws and whether PCP is part of a pre-emptive strategy by employers.
 30. Along with the gross dereliction of laws intended to protect their status, their rights to forest and development; see Bandhopadhyay (2010).
 31. As in the evolution of caste associations into corporate business associations (Basile and Harriss-White 2000).
 32. Da Corta and Venkateshwarlu (1999) have argued that the class position of rural women is consistently lower than that of men; see also Da Corta (2010).
 33. Brass (1994) has also presciently explained the ease with which (romantic) populist development projects can be incorporated into, and engulfed by, the neo-liberal project.
 34. For details, see the Indian Export Import Portal, <http://exim.indiamart.com/ssi-policies/policy-tiny-sector.html> (accessed on 19 June 2010).
 35. This competitive advantage is thought to be due not only to economies of scale in China, which can undercut self-exploitation in India, but also due to the undervalued currency.
 36. Of course, the state has been informally de-secularized from the start; see Prakash (2010), for relations between the state and dalit business. In the constitution of independent India, provision was made for positive discrimination for caste and ethnic groups which have suffered centuries of contemptuous treatment. Positive discrimination has been confined to education and the state bureaucracy. There are lively debates about whether the descendants of those benefitting from positive discrimination should be ineligible; whether social taint endures improvements in well-being and justifies positive discrimination in perpetuity; whether positive discrimination should be extended to the (formal) private sector; and whether the divisive politics of identity that has emerged in part as a result might be better addressed by a universal income guarantee (Aryama and Negi 2005; Standing 2000).
 37. Combinations of these forces may operate at a given time and place, and it would be very difficult systematically to test any one of the relationships

- between the state's ambivalence, contradictions and selective failure to enforce its procedure, on the one hand, and the flourishing of self-employment, family firms and small enterprise, on the other.
38. See the confidential 2001 McKinsey Global Institute Report to the Government of West Bengal summarized in <http://www.bannedthought.net/India/PeoplesMarch/PM1999-2006/publications/social-fascism/growing.htm> (accessed on 18 April 2012). See also the interview on the advice to industry commissioned by West Bengal's CPM Minister for Industry and Commerce from Arthur D. Little and Price Waterhouse, 1997, *Frontline*, 14(14), 123, and KPMG/CII 2007, *Sustainable Economic Development in West Bengal*, KPMG in India, Mumbai, http://www.in.kpmg.com/TL_Files/Pictures/West_Bengal.pdf, accessed on 18 April 2012.
 39. As Djurfelt (1982: 146) explains, this is '(c)entralising capital without expropriation'.
 40. Credit is currently in an expansion phase (Fouillet 2010).
 41. According to Papola (2005: 6), the NCEUS 'struggles to bring the informal economy to the policy agenda'. This section has been developed from Harriss-White (2009).
 42. Land reform amounted to securing and regulating the rights of sharecroppers through registration. It affected eight percent of cultivated land in West Bengal; see Rogaly et al. (1999).
 43. The CLA is an addition to the Industrial Disputes Act and the Industrial Employment Act, which regulate work, including wages, working hours, terms and conditions, leave and conditions of dismissal.
 44. Sankaran (2008a, 2008b, 2010) argues that it is a proper response to the complexities of work arrangements to include PCP under labour laws, rather than setting about creating a different legal regime for them.
 45. Their demands include an eight-hour working day, a rest day, minimum wages, prompt payment without arbitrary deductions, and the right to organize; see NCEUS (2009).
 46. There is little research on this. One long-term study of local agro-capital found the distributive share (profit to total wage costs) had shifted from 25:75 to 85:15 against labour over the 20 years from 1973 to 1993 (Harriss-White 2011).
 47. See www.sewa.org (accessed on 19 June 2010).
 48. As Lerche (2010) notes, they include organizations for the self-employed in the informal economy, such as SEWA and the National Alliance of Street Vendors (NASVI), as well as slum movements and new unions, such as the fish workers' union, the National Fish Forum (MFF), and the *adivasi* forest workers association (VIKALP). In 1995, the National Centre for Labour (NCL) was set up as a coalition of informal sector unions to provide an umbrella for many of them.

49. T.H. Marshall (1950) distinguished political, economic, and social citizenship, arguing that achieving each was a political process which would involve class struggle. Indian research has privileged political citizenship (Mitra 2012), while economic citizenship as a political project is in its infancy (Prakash and Harriss-White 2010).
50. Shah (2010), in interview with the CPI (Maoist) leader Gopalji, records that it is not development that Maoists oppose, it is seizure without compensation. Shah (forthcoming) further shows that, over and above this, Maoists have recruited educated upper-caste youth, seized control of the informalized markets in protection, and exploited conditions sabotaging trust.
51. The Chhattisgarh police have coined the term Operation Green Hunt, epitomizing the state's ongoing militarized, rather than developmental, response to mobilizations, whose own idioms and moral economy are that of family and kin (Shah forthcoming).

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