

Emerging contradictions in farmers' movements around suicides and prices in Vidarbha, India



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Vidarbha is a region in central India that became infamous for exceptionally high numbers of 'farmer suicides'. Several small movements of farmers are active to address the 'agrarian crisis' that, so they argue, causes these suicides. Academics and activists in India have been grappling with this crisis since the onset of neoliberal policies in the mid-1990s. The movements mobilise small and medium farmers engaged in capital-intensive, groundwater-based, commercial agriculture in semi-arid zones and are characterized by the difficulty to capture the new realities of farmers stranded between the neoliberal policies and older forms of oppression such as caste. The way that farmers and activists frame their analysis of the present situation suggests a fine-grained, differentiated understanding of the 'agrarian crisis' as a web of structural inequalities and risks (such as price risk or droughts). But when it comes to demands, they hardly discuss the tensions inherent in all the groups' main demand – better prices for agricultural produce. Rather, they tend to hold on to the idea of a 'peasantry' and of an eventually benign capitalist development. This becomes crucial now when a right-wing government tries to deal with multiple protests by farmers across the country along with strengthening traditional forms of inequalities. In this context, the discourse around 'farmer suicides' opens up a space to talk about the implications of capitalist agriculture and particularly neoliberal policies for farmers.

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#FarmerSuicidesIndia

Date: Tuesday, 23 October 2018

Time: 13h00-14h00

Venue: PLAAS Boardroom

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