Viewing Global Futures Through Rural Transformations: Lessons from India

by Pratyusha Basu

The most dramatic economic and political upheavals in today's world are linked to rural areas. The two most prominent examples of this phenomenon are the shocks experienced due to rising food and oil prices and the development of social movements against the privatization of rural resources.[1] In Asia, the future of rural populations is an especially pressing concern because a majority of the people are directly dependent on the agricultural sector for their livelihoods. Within Asia, rural India provides a significant illustration of the promises and pitfalls of contemporary rural change.[2] As an emerging economy that is linked to global networks of information technologies, India is also characterized by a deepening urban-rural divide. The economic disparities inherent in these two broad trends have important implications for both national and global development.

The increasing importance of rural India in economic and political calculations at national and international levels is finding expression in two contradictory ways. First, there are concerns about the equitable distribution of economic growth. Underlining this trend is a protracted debate on the extent to which rural poverty has declined in India and its specific significance. Many argue that the economic liberalization that began in the 1990's has greatly reduced poverty in rural India.[3] Conversely, an alternative explanation stresses that the decline is inferred from the selective interpretation of improperly defined measures, and that claims regarding the extent to which poverty has actually been reduced are exaggerated.[4] Second, a focus on rural India also encompasses the consideration of strategies for catering to the growing clout of rural consumers. Indeed, new consumers are being sought within rural segments, suggesting that rural India can no longer be characterized in terms of its exclusion from the habits of consumption usually attributed to the urban middle classes. A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* asserts that,

> *Growth has slowed in the new India of technology outsourcing, property development and securities trade. But old India, the rural sector, that is home to 700 million of the country's billion-plus peoples has signs it can pick up the slack.*[5]

Pratyusha Basu is Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography at the University of South Florida, Tampa.

In a similar vein, Prahalad has argued for marketing to the "bottom of the pyramid" (those who earn less than $2 per day), and for including the rural poor within networks of business and entrepreneurial opportunities.[6]

Drawing on these recent trends in rural India, this article seeks to reflect on the ways in which currently unfolding rural transformations can be used to understand future trajectories of global development. Specifically, it aims to add complexity to existing debates about growth and distribution by focusing on two prominent features of change in contemporary rural India. The first of these is linked to the rise of new technologies, including both bio- and information-technologies. These areas are likely to have crucial consequences for agricultural production and rural connectivity, and thus will play a major role in the equitable spread of economic growth. The second set of transformations is linked to transfers of rural land and resources to national and multinational capital interests. These transfers often result in the violent displacement of existing forms of ownership and livelihoods in rural India. Given that such displacements are likely to intensify within a restructuring and recessionary world economy, the rise of rural social movements has wide implications for explaining the forms of conflict that currently characterize contexts of underdevelopment and often spiral outwards from them.[7]

Before delving into the specificities of these transformations in rural India, it is useful to reflect on the broader meanings of the *rural* in the contemporary context of economic globalization, ranging from the persistence of small-scale farming in parts of Asia and Africa to the issue of farm subsidies and rural depopulation in the developed economies of the West. In this context, the experiences of rural India can be seen as unfolding within a global regime of urban-rural disparities. The objective of the next section is to build a more nuanced understanding of this global regime.

Global Overview of Rural Futures

The population of the world is currently almost evenly divided between urban and rural areas, even as predictions that a majority of people will soon live in urban areas are being made with growing intensity by international development agencies.[8] Does this presage an eventual decline in the value of planning for rural futures? In fact, the opposite is more likely to be the case. Since the impending urbanization of the world has to proceed through a transformation of rural places, and rural resources remain valuable for new forms of economic accumulation, a focus on rural areas actually becomes even more imperative Moreover, variations in the characteristics of rural populations across the globe (Table 1) with a highly urbanized Global North (mainly Europe, the US and Australia) standing in marked contrast to a predominantly rural Global South (including Asia and Africa)[9] make it apparent that rural planning has to be tailored to fit regionally specific needs.

Across the North-South division, rural places face similar challenges related to uneven trajectories and unpredictable downturns in the demand for their agricultural commodities. Coffee cultivation is one notable example of this phenomenon, illustrating the problems associated with uncertain markets.[10]

Table 1: Rural Population as Percentage of Total Population

	World	Asia	Africa	Mid and South America	North America	Europe
1950	71%	83%	85%	58%	36%	49%
1970	64%	77%	77%	43%	26%	37%
1990	57%	68%	68%	29%	25%	29%
2000	53%	63%	64%	25%	21%	27%
2010	49%	57%	60%	21%	18%	26%

Source: U.N. World Urbanization Prospects. The 2007 Revision Population Database (http://esa.un.org/unup), cited from Vanhaute, The End of Peasantries? Rethinking the Role of Peasantries in a World-Historical View, 43.

Additionally, the more recent use of corn for the production of bio-fuels has shown the problems of subjecting food crops to commodity pressures.[11] Meanwhile, the attempt to coordinate agricultural trade regimes under the World Trade Organization (WTO) has often floundered in the face of Southern governments and farmers who view subsidies provided to Northern farmers as unfair competition.[12] The role of farmers' movements in opposing the unbridled privatization of agricultural production and marketing should not be ignored, both within national contexts and increasingly through the formation of international alliances.[13]

The challenges facing rural areas are also associated with a shift away from agriculture towards other land-based livelihoods. One example of this in developed economies is tourism.[14] The promotion of rural tourism has led to economic opportunities being connected to selling a rural ideal rather than actually practicing it.[15] Further, the ability to devote rural areas in the Global North to tourism and preservation is also partly driven by a shift towards dependence on distant food producers in the Global South. The sustainability of such long-distance food chains has been subject to much criticism by Northern environmental activists, who often espouse the promotion of local foods and the revitalization of once significant rural farming communities.[16] However, the negative consequences that arise from the loss of markets for Southern agricultural products should temper the progressive meanings of local food. Meanwhile, controversy over subsidies to American and European farmers has led to a redefinition of uncultivated land as an entity that provides environmental services, and, thus, Northern subsidies have continued

through the transposition of agricultural with environmental meanings.[17]

In the Global South, small-scale subsistence farming is increasingly under threat from the turn towards agribusiness geared towards serving corporate agricultural interests.[18] Harvey[19] has identified this privatization of rural resources as a new round of "primitive accumulation," and the rise of new forms of rural protest seem likely to the extent that the dispossession of small farmers is not always matched by the creation of new rural or urban employment opportunities.

The focus on rural productivity has to be tempered with consideration for how the benefits of economic growth will be distributed.

Accentuating the significance of the rural is the fact that across many countries poverty has a rural face.[20] Within the larger discussion of rural poverty, it is often argued that poverty in Asia has been more successfully tackled than in Africa, and differing histories of agrarian transformations across the two continents are thereby invoked. The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA),[21] a program to utilize science and technology for the vitalization of agricultural productivity in African countries, is one prominent example of the importance attached to agricultural growth for rural development.[22]

There are two ways to approach this shift in global attention from urban growth to rural productivity. The first is to argue that international development agencies are actually attempting to correct the emphasis on unbridled market penetration and seeking to promote more beneficial forms of participation in global economic flows. The second is to argue that a focus on the rural merely signifies an even more intensive exploitation of rural resources for capitalist accumulation, especially as the global economy continues to languish in the throes of a recession.[23] Thus, the focus on rural productivity has to be tempered with consideration for how the benefits of economic growth will be distributed if the more hopeful view of current interests in rural development is to be realized.

This broad global overview can be sharpened through a specific focus on India for several reasons. First, small farmers continue to comprise the largest segment of India's rural population.[24] (Table 2) Second, traces of colonial policies continue to be apparent even today, as exemplified in the substantial concentrations of population that marks India's metropolitan centers and the disproportionate share of economic growth that emanates from them. Third, India becomes an interesting lens through which to view rural development because of its value as a comparative case study. The recent turn by the World Bank towards South-South development has led to India being promoted as a model for agricultural development in Africa.[25] For all these reasons, a focus on rural India illuminates pressing issues that are likely to be pertinent to economic and political futures in the wider context of the Global South.

Table 2: Distribution of Land Holdings in India

Category / Size of Land Holding	1976-77	1980-81	1985-86	1990-91
Marginal (less than 1 hectare)	54.6%	56.4%	57.8%	59.0%
Small (1-2 hectares)	18.1%	18.1%	18.4%	19.0%
Semi-medium (2-4 hectares)	14.3%	14.0%	13.6%	13.2%
Medium (4-10 hectares)	10.0%	9.1%	8.2%	7.2%
Large (10 hectares and above)	3.0%	2.4%	2.0%	1.6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Planning Commission, Data and Statistics. Available at: http://planningcommission.nic.in/data/dataf.htm (last accessed April 14 2009).

Case Study: India

Agriculture continues to be the economic mainstay of India, even as the productivity associated with the Green Revolution has more recently been overshadowed by a focus on the boom in information technology-led growth.[26] Yet, the cost of ignoring the interests of rural India were clearly revealed in the results of the 2004 elections, in which the defeat of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party, the principal entity in the coalition then ruling at the national level, was traced to its injudicious use of the slogan "India Shining."[27] Since a large part of rural India was excluded from sharing in the benefits of the growth purportedly illuminating the rest of the country, the 2004 elections led to a reappraisal of the meaning of India's economic growth.[28] Especially striking was the defeat of the pro-information technology Chief Minister in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, which further underlined dissatisfactions with existing patterns of development. It should be noted, however, that the installation of a supposedly left-leaning coalition at the center in India has not led to deviations from the path of economic liberalization. This is a testament to the hegemonic hold of privatization as the primary means to deliver economic growth and further development within policy circles in India and international development organizations.

Imbalances in economic development in India, however, are not just the consequence of a neoliberal turn. They also reflect the extent to which spatial developments associated with colonialism have not been dislodged. Thus, the continuing dominance of the major metropolitan areas of Delhi, Mumbai, and

Kolkata serve as both key motors and central obstacles to economic growth in India. Evidence of this metropolitan dominance is provided by the inflow of migrants from India's rural hinterlands, especially from the northern heartland of underdevelopment comprising the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The rise of anti-immigrant tensions in Mumbai is one manifestation of the economic and social pressures created as a consequence of such migrations.[29] Specifically, these migrations equate to the displacement of rural populations in favor of providing access to resources for industrial development. This also coincides with the displacement of urban populations, especially slum dwellers, in order to improve the visual quality of cities. As a result, political struggles against the state have been launched across both rural and urban areas. Moreover, these struggles have occurred against a backdrop that has seen the rise of various right-wing fundamentalist movements and left-based people's movements. Thus, given the severity of problems in rural India and the volatility that characterizes its political atmosphere, the rise of these groups means that rural discontent is likely to be implicated in more trenchant ideological struggles.

Despite the massive increase in food production that has occurred as a result of Green Revolution technologies, these technologies have not been able to overcome economic inequalities in rural India.

The next section seeks to delve into the economic and political transformations that are occurring in rural India in order to understand how the future of the country is linked to its rural segments. In the process, it provides some material for speculating on the ways in which Asian economic successes, in which India is a new and still uncertain participant, are likely to unravel if the future needs of rural populations are not tackled with more urgency.

Economies of the Rural: New Technologies, Entrenched Inequalities

The need to incorporate rural India in the information technology revolution has seen the unleashing of a plethora of information technology programs since the 1990s.[30] The evaluation of some of these programs suggests that rather than making quick pronouncements on the benefits of information technologies, it is more important to be aware of the ways in which the inequalities that characterize rural society and structure urban-rural differences cannot be magically dissipated through technological fixes.[31] Comparisons between the economic and social impacts of Green Revolution technologies and new information technologies are one useful way in which to understand the intersections of agricultural livelihoods and technological inputs. In the case of the Green Revolution, high-yielding hybrid seeds performed according to potential when associated with the increased use of chemicals, access to irrigation, and mechanization. The use of such seeds was therefore more feasible for large landowners.[32] On the other hand, the inability of small landowners to adopt

Green Revolution technologies, as well as the displacement of agricultural labor due to mechanization on large farms have been cited as reasons for an increase in rural economic and social inequalities. Shiva[33] links the rise of a separatist movement in the state of Punjab, one of the places where the Green Revolution has been most successful, to transformations wrought by the Green Revolution. Thus, despite the massive increase in food production that has occurred as a result of Green Revolution technologies, these technologies have not been able to overcome economic inequalities in rural India.

Inequitable access is also pertinent in the context of new information technologies. Access to a regular and assured supply of electricity is the bedrock of the ability to participate in digital information flows, and it is often not available in rural areas.[34] Indeed, a recent emphasis on the privatization of power has led to fears that electricity may soon be even more restricted due to rising costs.[35] The spread of information technologies should also be linked to the provision of education in rural India. To the extent that the quality of rural schools continues to languish,[36] the provision of information technologies is likely to promote digital literacy without any concomitant improvement in the more broad-based skills required to increase employment and expand opportunities to advance in the new knowledge economy.

Two studies on access to education and training in rural India illustrate some of the complicated ways in which development is currently being experienced at an individual level. Jeffrey et al.[37] focus on educated young men in northern India who are stymied in their search for employment befitting their skills. Their inability to obtain jobs is attributed to their marginalized position in the rural class hierarchy, which reduces their ability to invest in the job search process. Given that this study focuses on lower-caste men, it also points to the ways in which education alone is not sufficient for upward mobility. Further, when aspirations of mobility are not fulfilled, there is a potential for withdrawal from the education system itself. The article thus argues that there is a need not just for more and better educational opportunities, but also for greater and sustained state efforts to address the sources of rural inequalities through land reform and agricultural taxation. More broadly, the article can be viewed as arguing for a more realistic appraisal of the entrenched nature of social inequalities in rural India.

Rural-to-urban migration is instead fueling unsustainable population pressurees in urban India, and, therefore, a policy focus on strengthening agriculture seems likely to be the more effective option for ensuring equitable growth.

Xiang Biao focuses on the migration of information technology workers from India to international destinations, mainly Australia and the US[38] Xiang[39] briefly mentions the ways in which rural youth are moving into urban employment through information technology courses provided by private institutes. Information technology networks are thus as likely to draw upon rural youth as urban youth, and Xiang usefully points out that a study of the rise of new information technologies has to straddle the rural-urban border. Going beyond the specific focus of Xiang's

study, rural youth become part of information technology networks even without resort to migration. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that new information technology programs are often focused on promoting entrepreneurship though the establishment of rural computer kiosks. These programs become even more valuable in the absence of other employment opportunities because they can serve as a supplement to agricultural incomes. Yet, in many cases, these programs are also a means to enable penetration into rural markets by private business interests because they favor famers who are already well positioned.[40] Thus, the long-term sustainability of rural employment is not their primary imperative.[41]

Another example of how technological pathways have had uncertain impacts on agricultural productivity is through the introduction of new biotechnologies. In India, the use of genetically engineered seeds, especially Bt cotton, is a prominent example. The higher costs of new technological inputs have been implicated in the recent wave of farmer suicides across India.[42] Even as the link between new biotechnologies and farmer suicides cannot be conclusively proved,[43] it is clear that lack of profits from commercial agriculture due to rising costs of inputs and fluctuating market prices has decreased the profitability of commercial agricultural operations. Given that suicides have been most often associated with cotton growing regions, especially Vidarbha in the state of Maharashtra in western India, it can be speculated that the spread of Bt cotton has not produced the desired economic results. But Bt cotton has been relatively more successful in the state of Gujarat, and the rise of illegal varieties of Bt cotton there suggest that farmers do seek to draw benefits from genetically engineered seeds.[44] Thus, new agricultural innovations are both constraining the economic viability of farming even as they are being creatively reconstructed by farmers themselves.

Overall, the viability of agricultural livelihoods continues to be a concern that cannot be completely alleviated by new technologies. This viability is further threatened by attempts to transfer agricultural land and natural resources to urban and industrial uses. While it can be argued that a shift from agricultural to non-agricultural pursuits, the trajectory of development that has characterized Western economies, should also occur in India and across the rural South, the lack of viable non-agricultural employment opportunities makes such a transition less feasible at present. Rural-to-urban migration is instead fuelling unsustainable population pressures in urban India, and, therefore, a policy focus on strengthening agriculture seems likely to be the more effective option for ensuring equitable growth. As the loss of land and livelihoods is becoming a principal feature of rural India, the next section considers the political implications of such dispossessions.

Politics of the Rural: Displacements and Movements

Rural development policies have usually required the clearing of space. This comprises both actual physical displacements of existing populations to make way for new projects, as well as ideological reconstructions of existing agricultural and environmental practices. This process ensures conformity with the needs of

capitalist strategies of accumulation. To return to the example of the most massive transformation in rural development—the Green Revolution was dependent on the construction of large-scale dams requiring the displacement and submergence of land for reservoirs and canals.[45] This occurred even as the introduction of new forms of farming, made possible through the use of hybrid seeds, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides, contributed to the loss of indigenous knowledge and methods of cultivation.[46] Informed by these consequences of previous agrarian transformations, current social movements in India are thus skeptical of the value of displacing and dispossessing rural populations in the interests of national development.

The ways in which economic liberalization coexist with hardening religious identities are noticeably apparent within India. This drawing of rural constituencies into religious conflicts has the potential to aggravate existing social inequalities and further interrupt the progress of development.

One of the most prominent new social movements is the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Movement to Save the Narmada River),[47] which began as a protest against the lack of compensation for those displaced by the construction of dams along the Narmada River.[48] The movement soon began to oppose the construction of dams in general, especially large-scale building enterprises. Specifically, these projects were criticized for wreaking havoc on local communities and upstream environments, and for failing to provide promised benefits to downstream populations. Further, in post-colonial India, the building of large-scale dams, for instance the Bhakra-Nangal project, have been glorified as part of the task of constructing a strong nation.[49] Taking this into perspective, the Andolan's struggle casts doubt on the link made between dams and development. Indeed, in Nilsen's[50] analysis of the Andolan's politics, the rise of resistance to dams is one part of a wider unraveling of the postcolonial compact where the promises embedded in the Indian state at the time of independence in 1947 are now being increasingly viewed as unfulfilled for the vast rural majority. This disillusionment has led to the construction of alternative forms of resistance, exemplified clearly in the rise of rural social movements.

What is noteworthy about the Andolan is that it draws on the strength of transnational environmental alliances. Specifically, links with environmental organizations in the US have been part of its strategy to represent itself to audiences beyond local and national borders. Since 1997, the Andolan has also found a supporter in Arundhati Roy, an internationally celebrated author and social activist whose essays have made anti-dam struggles known to a wider national and international audience.[51] Among the major victories of the Andolan was the 1992 withdrawal of World Bank funding for the Sardar Sarovar dam, the largest dam within the Narmada Valley Project. Ultimately, however, the withdrawal of World Bank funding was not enough to halt the construction of the Sardar Sarovar dam, and even as members of the Andolan filed a case in India's Supreme Court, the stay

on dam construction was eventually lifted in 2000.[52] International alliances have thus been stymied by national power structures, which points both to the limits of transnational organizing and the extent to which the Indian state's pro-development agenda proceeds despite costs to rural constituencies.

The rise of Maoist struggles in tribal belts characterized by underdevelopment show the link between extreme forms of marginalization and the turn towards more radical politics.

Criticisms of the Andolan have focused on the ways in which its emphasis on the formation of broad coalitions elides economic and social differences among its participants.[53] Thus, people displaced by the Narmada dams are differentiated into well-off farmers and agricultural laborers, fisher people dependent on the river rather than on agricultural land, and adivasis (indigenous or tribal groups) who depend on both farming and forest resources. While antagonistic economic and social relations between these various groups have been surmounted in the face of a common struggle against displacement, the extent to which such alliance signals a desire to address or transform existing rural inequalities is uncertain.

Over time, however, the Andolan has become part of local agrarian politics, serving as a forum for questioning the two main political parties in India the centrist Congress (I) and the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party. Significantly, this has occurred even as the movement has remained separate from specific party-based politics in India. Additionally, it is noteworthy that farmers' movements have a long history in India, and that they have often been criticized for privileging the needs of landowners over those of agricultural workers.[54] Specifically, demands have traditionally focused on securing higher minimum support prices for crops rather than on raising minimum wages, because wage demands have not been made within the context of farmers' movements.[55] Thus, given that existing movements traditionally represent these class biases, the extent to which the Andolan can serve as an alternative that will realize meaningful social change is a question that remains significant for the future of collective politics in rural India.

More recently, another instance of a prominent struggle against rural displacement has unfolded in the state of West Bengal in eastern India.[56] This is noteworthy because since 1977 the state has been dominated by a leftist political party, the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M). One of its main achievements has been rural land reform, which has built a strong political base for the party. Recently, however, the leftist government has sought to promote capital investment and has become more accommodating towards policies of economic liberalization. However, efforts to transfer land to India's Tata company for a car manufacturing plant and to Indonesia's Salim company for a chemical hub had to be abandoned due to opposition from people whose lands were sought. The opposition was framed mostly in terms of inadequate compensation for what was valuable farmland, but it is also reflective of the continuing power of rural constituencies in India. While Tata has succeeded in shifting its Nano plant to more amenable

locations in India, the publicity accorded to resistance in West Bengal has enabled a focus on the political possibilities embedded in organized rural struggle.

These possibilities are apparent in the linkage between the Andolan and West Bengal movements. Indeed, representatives from the Andolan were also active in the struggle against displacement in West Bengal, and this highlights the role it has played in building the framework for a wider linkage of social movements across India under the National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM). One of the recent struggles launched by the NAPM is against the displacement of slum dwellers in Mumbai.[57] As the city has been targeted for a makeover in order to become more conducive to capital investment, slums have come under a renewed attack. What is noteworthy in this case is that slums constitute the other side of rural displacement, often serving as a refuge for those driven out of villages. Indeed, the inability to gain access to space within the city does not bode well for the new ranks of displaced rural people. Thus, the focus of the NAPM on both rural and urban displacements enables an interconnected understanding of urban and rural poverty.

The vitiated atmosphere of identity politics in India also has to be brought into considerations of rural politics. This is especially the case given the rise of right-wing Hindu political movements. For example, the state of Gujarat, often cited as a shining example of economic development, has seen extremely violent expressions of Hindu-Muslim conflict.[58] Thus, the ways in which economic liberalization coexist with hardening religious identities are noticeably apparent within India. This drawing of rural constituencies into religious conflicts has the potential to aggravate existing social inequalities.

On the other side of the political spectrum, rural India is also characterized by leftist organizations, which follow the Maoist tradition and engage in acts of armed rebellion against state authorities. The rise of Maoist struggles in tribal belts characterized by underdevelopment show the link between extreme forms of marginalization and the turn towards more radical politics. As Sundar[59] has shown, governments have not addressed the Maoist insurgency by expanding development options, but have instead merely intensified a security discourse that promotes militarization in tribal regions. The success of the Maoist struggle in Nepal has further aided the construction of a military discourse for combating leftist struggles in India. An especially pernicious instance of combating leftist organizations is the Salwa Judum (roughly translated as Purification Hunts), which under the guise of being an anti-left people's movement has unleashed further violence in areas dominated by leftist organizations.[60] Thus, the ways in which genuine economic grievances underlie the turn towards leftist forms of political struggle are not being considered in official pronouncements, which could end up conflating violence from left and right wing movements.

Towards the Prioritization of Rural Futures

While the need to provide opportunities in rural places is essential to ensuring equitable forms of growth in India, the most recent World Development Report[61] takes a step backwards by arguing that concentrated growth is not inimical to processes of development. This report argues for the recognition of the "economic benefits" of migration, a position that can be considered part of wider fears that policies of economic liberalization will be curtailed in the presence of urban-rural disparities. But in a context where rural populations constitute the majority, programs targeted towards rural places cannot be avoided. Moreover, the various forms of rural social movements in India indicate the extent to which it is willing to organize to further enable access to development.

According to Vanhaute,[62] the value of a continuing focus on "peasantries" has never been clearer than at the present moment. Given that food continues to be available to a large extent through rural social arrangements, and that the loss of access to subsistence agricultural livelihoods produces a more pernicious form of poverty than simple exclusion from the market economy, the significance of rural development cannot be overstated. However, a focus on the rural should not be read as a plea for the strengthening of pre-industrial cultures. Instead the larger argument is that meddling in rural environments without an appreciation of the social and political structures that comprise them is likely to lead to incomplete development projects that intensify exclusions under the guise of increasing productivity. A more equitable and sustainable future for the global economy would thus require an engagement with the differentiated social segments that comprise it.

The social structure of rural India reveals a complexity that is relevant both to understanding obstacles that beset the formulation of rural development strategies and for building an argument for continued state support of rural segments. The problems facing rural India cannot be addressed through a simple introduction of modern technologies into rural places. The spread of new information technologies does not deviate in its social implications from the previous round of technological innovations introduced through the Green Revolution. Moreover, it should also be kept in mind that rural places are not passively awaiting the next round of technological fixes for their economic problems. In fact, the vibrancy of rural politics should be drawn on in the construction of development policies rather than suppressed in an effort to maintain the hegemonic power of development as usual. Given that the urban-rural differences that characterize India are also a crucial feature of newly rising economies in Asia and Africa, a consideration of the problems rural populations face cannot be left out of calculations of the possible trajectories of our global future.

Notes

[1] Fred Magdoff, "The World Food Crisis: Sources and Solutions," *Monthly Review*, May 2008. Available at: http://www.monthlyreview.org/080501magdoff.php (accessed June 10, 2009); and World Bank, Rising Food and Fuel Prices: Addressing the Risks to Future Generations, October 2008. Available at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DEVCOMMEXT/Resources/Food-Fuel.pdf?resourceurlname=Food-Fuel.pdf (accessed June 10, 2009).

[2] In 1951, 82.7% of India's population was rural. In the 2001 Census, 72.2% of India's population was classified as rural.
Available at: http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/rural.aspx (accessed June 10, 2009); P. Ramachandran, The Double Burden of Malnutrition in India. Available at: http://www.fao.org/docrep/009/a0442e/a0442e0d.htm (accessed June 10, 2009).

[3] Angus Deaton and Jean Dreze, "Poverty and Inequality in India: A Re-Examination," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no. 36 (2002): 3729-3748; Utsa Patnaik, "Neoliberalism and Rural Poverty in India," Economic and Political Weekly 42, no. 30 (2007). 3132–3150; and M. H. Suryanarayana, "How Real Is the Secular Decline in Rural Poverty?" Economic and Political Weekly 35, no. 25 (2000): 2129–2140.

[4] Peter Wonacott, "India Defies Slump, Powered by Growth in Poor Rural States," *Wall Street Journal*, April 10, 2009. Available at: http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123931787215706747.html (accessed June 10, 2009).

[5] C. K. Prahalad, *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid: Eradicating Poverty through Profits*, Wharton School Publishing, 2006; For criticism of Prahalad, see Aneel Karnani, "Misfortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid," Greener Management International, June 2007.

[6] Michael Mayerfeld Bell, *Mobilizing the Countryside: Rural Power and the Power of the Rural*, 2008. Available at: http://www.cis.yale.edu/agrarianstudies/papers/22bell.pdf (accessed April 14 2009); Michael Mayerfeld Bell argues for an examination of the rural roots of 9/11.

[7] David Whitehouse, "Half of Humanity set to go Urban," *BBC News*, May 2005. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/4561183.stm (accessed June 10, 2009).

[8] South America is majority urban and an exception to the dominance of the rural in the Global South. Yet, with economies dependent on export-led agriculture and the presence of powerful rural social movements in Brazil and Bolivia, the significance of rural South America cannot be discounted.

[9] John Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement: The Political Economy of the Coffee Commodity Chain* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

[10] Magdoff, "The World Food Crisis: Sources and Solutions."

[11] Clive Potter and Jonathan Burney, "Agricultural Multifunctionality in the WTO-Legitimate Non-trade Concern or Disguised Protectionism?" *Journal of Rural Studies* 18 no. 1 (2002): 35-47.

[12] Bettina Kohler and Marcus Wissen, "Glocalizing Protest: Urban Conflicts and the Global Social Movements," International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 27 no.4 (2003): 942-951.

[13] Saturnino M. Borras, Marc Edelman, and Cristóbal Kay, "Transnational Agrarian Movements: Origins and Politics, Campaigns and Impact," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8 no. 2-3 (2008): 169-204.

[14] Michael Woods, *Rural Geography: Processes, Responses and Experiences in Rural Restructuring* (Sage, 2004).

[15] E. Melanie DuPuis and David Goodman, "Should We Go "Home" to Eat? Toward a Reflexive Politics of Localism," *Journal of Rural Studies* 21 no. 3 (2005): 359-371.

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