Knowledge production among tobacco agriculturalists in India: moving towards a class-based analysis

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Research questions

- How do different classes produce knowledge on the FCTC and its policies?

- What are the implications of differentiated knowledge production for accumulation among farmers?
What knowledge?

Marketing knowledge; FCTC policies:

1. VAT on tobacco sales.
2. Ban on Gutka and Paan Masala.
3. Public awareness raising on health issues.
“…the politics of agronomic knowledge supports and reflects the interests of a much wider set of actors, from national and international public-sector research organisations to multinational agri-food corporations, food sovereignty campaigners, farmers and consumers. The analysis of knowledge politics should help explain why particular agricultural technologies or development pathways are favoured over others”

(Andersson and Sumberg, 2015: 4-5)
Theoretical contestation

- Mainstream literature; sees farmers as individuals, divorced from broader structures of power.
  (World Bank, 2008)
- Local knowledge/ scientific knowledge debate; dichotomisation and essentialisation of local knowledge.
- Marxian political economy highlights power in terms of class, and how actors are embedded in system of capitalism.
  (Harriss-White, 2008, Bernstein, 2010)
Central arguments

- Local hierarchies of power as well as “local”—”scientific” hierarchies of power shape knowledge.

- Knowledge is used to enable exploitation and class antagonisms.
Fig. 3, Adapted from Reddy and Gupta, 2004:19
Sun-cured tobacco: classes

- Immediate post-harvest sales
- Minimal curing (1-3 months)
- Maximal curing (6 months)
- Maximal curing and storage (1-3 years)
- Further storage by petty broker/trader
- Sales to Tamil Nadu companies who undertake processing
- Sales to retailers (Tamil Nadu and other states)
- Sales to traders in other states with processing
- Payments back to moneylender
- Loan
- CTRI
- Seedlings
- Seedling sales
- Agri-inputs
- Water
- Labour power

- Production
- Circulation
- Harvest
- 1 year
Class shapes knowledge production

- Farmers get information from traders
  - System of trading in tobacco
  - Isolation
  - Tobacco in the shadows

- Traders’ knowledge networks
  - Contact during trading season – price-setting
  - Unions

- Traders use knowledge to exploit farmers
Tobacco curing and class relations

- Curing ameliorated class antagonisms.
- Curing is small-scale and low-capital.
- Curing levels depended on area.
- Curing enabled farmers to become traders.
“Fraternal capital”

- Strong intra-caste accumulation, credit and exclusion of other castes.
- Large number of Gounder traders and brokers also.
Conclusions

- Class-based analysis enables a more coherent understanding of:
  - Local hierarchies of power
  - How they shape knowledge production
  - How productive activities enable increased power for farmers

- ‘Capillary’ forms of power such as caste also shape knowledge production.

(Harriss-White, 2008: 306)
References


