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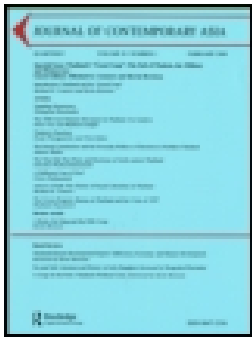
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## The Politics of Land Acquisition in Haryana: Managing Dominant Caste Interests in the Name of Development

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### ABSTRACT

Anti-Special Economic Zone (SEZ) mobilisation in Haryana failed to generate a mass movement. This is despite the political strength of farmers and their deep resentment of the government's policy to build up land reserves for industrial purposes. This article argues that there are two main reasons for this outcome. First, the state government put in place a series of significant policies to compensate landowners and give them a stake in the industrial project, primarily through payment of an "annuity." Second, the main anti-SEZ movements were led by dominant landowning castes who did not incorporate the concerns of landless labourers and tenant farmers who faced equally or even more dire consequences from the government's land acquisition policy. Moreover, mobilisation relied on traditional caste institutions such as *khap panchayats* and farmer unions strongly associated with Jats, rather than adopting a more broad-based approach. Entrenched caste animosity and pre-existing conflicts of interest between landed Jats and Dalits, who have traditionally worked as agricultural labourers, further explain the limited scope of the mobilisation among rural groups. The analysis underscores how hierarchical relations shape social movements, define the claims they make and ultimately impact their effectiveness.

### KEYWORDS

Social movements; land acquisition; caste conflict; Jats; Haryana; India

The North Indian state of Haryana is known for its productive agriculture and the farmers - or more precisely, the owners of agricultural land - constitute a major force in state politics. In the 1990s, the state government's economic development policies began to focus more strongly on industries and services. The powerful development corporation, the Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC), was charged with acquiring large plots, including agricultural land, to erect infrastructure and, equally important, to build up a "land bank." These reserves were then made available to investors for setting up industrial estates or Special Economic Zones (SEZs), especially around Delhi.<sup>1</sup> As elsewhere in the country, forcibly acquiring land for SEZs was a direct threat to landowners and gave rise to contestation and organised resistance.<sup>2</sup> However, unlike in many other states experiencing anti-SEZ mobilisation centred on land, protests in Haryana did not succeed in generating a mass movement. In exploring why this was

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the case, this article focuses on the political environment of the state on the one hand, and on the characteristics of the anti-SEZ movement itself on the other. In particular, it examines the importance of caste in both these domains and argues that caste has been a critical factor, both for shaping the Haryana government's compensation policies and for the strategic choices made by the anti-SEZ leadership. The specific contribution in relation to the relatively large body of existing literature on land acquisition, already mentioned, is the article's focus on the caste dimension of social relations that inform the specific features of land disputes.

The compensation policies put in place by the state government, which became known as the "Haryana model," benefited landowners but gave little concrete compensation to other stakeholders, notably agricultural labourers. Indeed, they appear specially designed to placate Jats, who are considered a particularly important constituency, constituting roughly 25% of Haryana's population, and carrying significant electoral weight in about 40% of the legislative constituencies (Kumar 2010, 21). At the other end of the social hierarchy, Dalits, who account for about 20% of the population, are much less organised politically and do not represent a unified force. The anti-SEZ movement was led by dominant landowning castes from Gurgaon and Jhajjar Districts who did not incorporate issues of concern to landless agricultural labourers, tenant farmers, and service communities, all of whom faced equally if not more dire consequences from the government's land acquisition policy. Instead, the main protest organisations focused their network-building efforts primarily on landowners and on organisations or personalities representing their interests. Comparable to what Nielsen (2019) details for West Bengal, attitudes of social superiority on the part of Jats and pre-existing caste conflicts between Jat landowners and largely Dalit or migrant agricultural labourers help explain the unwillingness of the movement's leadership to include them, thereby depriving the movement of a wider social base. The article argues that the narrow social focus of the movement was an impediment to its effectiveness, as has been claimed also in the case of West Bengal (Nielsen 2016a; 2016b). Although the Reliance-Haryana SEZ project at the heart of this analysis was ultimately cancelled, this was not due to popular contestation, which had not coalesced into a mass movement.

Research for this article was conducted in the late 2000s and early 2010s, as part of a larger study of state-level SEZ policies and political management. It included analysis of documents (policy statements, SEZ project details, press reports, academic and grey literature) and fieldwork consisting of approximately 35 semi-structured interviews with government officials in Delhi, Chandigarh and Gurgaon, local politicians, leaders of the anti-SEZ movement, landowners in Gurgaon and Jhajjar Districts, SEZ developers and journalists.

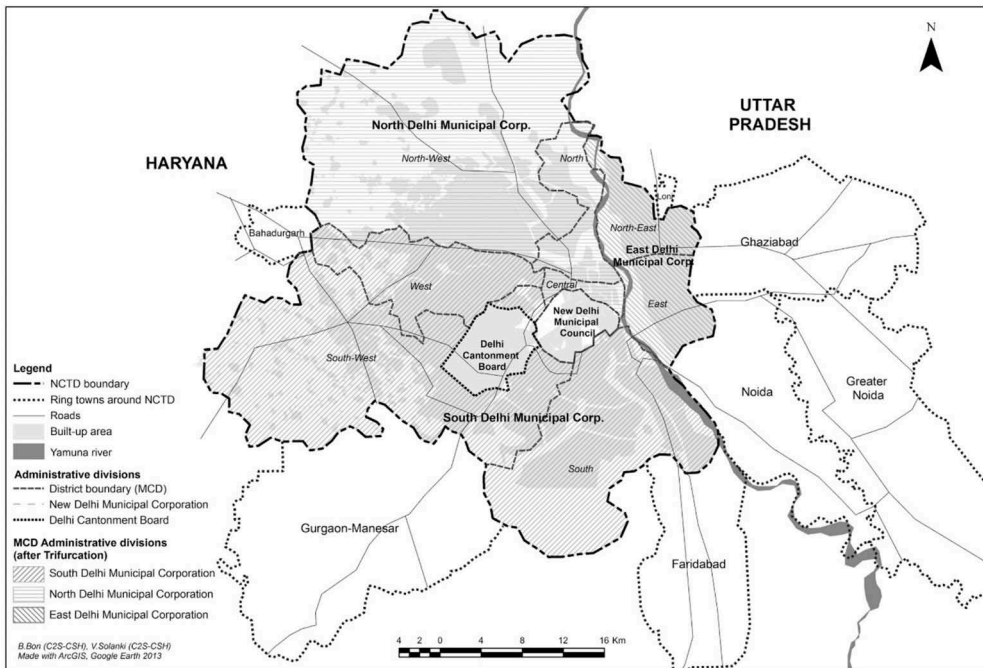
The article is organised as follows: the next section provides a brief overview of Haryana's economy and is followed by an analysis of the main SEZ-related policy decisions at the state level. SEZ policy implementation is the prism through which the land question is examined, in relation to the specific caste configurations and state-society relations in this region of North India. Next, a focus on the Reliance-Haryana SEZ, promoted as India's largest SEZ project, provides a concrete illustration of the state's approach, including its response to opponents of the project. The article then moves on to the protests that opposed the Reliance-Haryana SEZ, including the two civic organisations that emerged to co-ordinate the resistance. The analysis focuses on

how these opponents framed their positions, managed their actions, and obtained responses from the state, with special attention to caste. The concluding section brings together the various threads of the analysis.

### Evolving Urban–Rural Divisions in Haryana

Located adjacent to Delhi, Haryana’s economy is closely linked with the National Capital Region (NCR) (see Figure 1). The structural changes that have occurred in the last few decades have made the metropolitan region even more critical to the state’s economy. Using broad strokes, this section briefly sketches key aspects of this evolution before turning to Haryana’s SEZ policy.

In the decades since India embarked on a program of liberalisation, the structure of Haryana’s economy has undergone profound change. Between 1999 and 2007, the share of agriculture in state GDP declined from 32% to 22%.<sup>3</sup> In the same period, industry rose from 28% to 30% and services from 40% to 48%. However, like elsewhere in India, the distribution of economic output does not match employment patterns: in the mid-2000s, 54% of people were still employed in agriculture, 20% in industrial occupations, and 25% in the service sector. In terms of per capita investment, Haryana’s performance in the 2000s was remarkable, moving from 14th position among India’s states to 1st place (see Zamuner 2009). The highly urbanised areas located closest to Delhi are among the most dynamic in the state and act as an engine for the regional economy. These areas experienced rapid growth starting in the 1990s, most notably via upscale



**Figure 1.** National Capital Territory of Delhi

Source: Government of India (2013).

**Table 1.** Notified SEZs in Haryana by sector and location, September 2017

Sector	Number	Location (district)
IT/IT enabled services (incl. electronic hardware)	22	Gurgaon (18); Faridabad (2); Sonapat (1); Panipat (1)
Biotech	1	Gurgaon
Handicrafts	1	Panipat
Agro & food-processing	1	Sonapat

Source: Government of India (2017).

residential and commercial property development and through the spread of service sector activities. Gurgaon is among the country's leading hubs for business process outsourcing and other IT-enabled services. This specialisation is reflected in the type of SEZs that have been established there, as Table 1 illustrates. In 2010, at the end of a first wave of SEZ development, all of Haryana's 32 "notified" SEZs were located in the NCR, 26 of these in Gurgaon district, adjacent to Delhi's southern border.<sup>4</sup> Seven years later, in 2017, following a series of de-notifications, the broad geographic pattern remains the same: out of 25 notified SEZs, all but two are located in districts contiguous to the national capital, of which 19 are in Gurgaon.<sup>5</sup>

The geographic concentration of SEZs is not surprising considering that a large share of the state's industrial activities is located in the NCR, especially in Gurgaon and Faridabad districts. This trend became more pronounced during the 2000s, in terms of both the number of industrial units and the number of employees (see Table 2). In 2006, over 77% of the manufacturing units in Haryana were covered under the Factory Act, indicating that they were medium- and large-scale industries. In the NCR, many of these larger units are in the automotive sector (cars, motorcycles, tractors) and are major suppliers in the national market.

In this context of rapid growth in the NCR, land values have increased dramatically, as has the volume of land transactions. For landowners, including those engaged in agriculture, there has been increasing pressure to sell land to property developers, both because it is difficult to resist the high prices on offer and because of elite pressure, for instance when developers negotiate a deal with traditional village leaders instead of approaching landowners individually. Not only have private developers been fuelling land transactions, state government agencies have also been aggressively building up land reserves, both for housing, through the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA), and for industrial estates, through the HSIIDC (Narain 2009). Particularly in the latter case, the evolution has been spectacular. Whereas the HSIIDC acquired a total

**Table 2.** Industrial growth in Haryana and within the National Capital Region (NCR)

		2002	2007	Notes
Number of registered industrial units (under Factory Act)	In Haryana as a whole	8,974	9,954	Increased by 980 units in 5 years, of which 661 are in the NCR (67% of total).
	In Haryana's portion of the NCR	3,713 (41% of state total)	4,374 (44% of state total)	
Number of employees in industrial units	In Haryana as a whole	540,338	681,416	Increased share of industrial employment reflects large size of units in NCR.
	In Haryana's portion of the NCR	293,939 (54% of state total)	411,343 (60% of state total)	

Source: Data collected by the author from the Labour Commissioner, Government of Haryana, December 2008.

of 1,500 acres between 1973 and 1994, during 1995–96 alone it acquired 1,000 acres at Bawal (85 kilometres from Delhi), and started acquisition of 1,800 acres at Manesar, some 35 kilometres from Delhi (Kennedy 2009, 249). The government's rationale for this policy, which figured in the state's industrial policy, was to provide a solution to the high land prices resulting from Haryana's population density and high returns to land in certain areas – due in turn to its developed agricultural sector – as well as to the considerable transaction costs related to the acquisition of large amounts of land (Zamuner 2009, 29).

Haryana's political elites appear keenly aware that metropolitan Delhi is driving the state's growth and seek to contribute pro-actively to this dynamic. In the 1990s, the state government accelerated development of industrial estates in the NCR and launched the "Industrial Model Township" concept at Manesar to attract foreign investors. Yet even as political leaders seized on the state's locational advantages, they were cautious, for the sake of electoral politics, not to appear overly preoccupied with Delhi. Farmers still constitute an important electoral force and the Jat community in particular is an important constituency. Like the Jats in Western Uttar Pradesh described by Sahay (2015), Jats in Haryana appear to be a quintessential "dominant caste" based on their social, economic and political strength. Since Haryana was formed in 1966 from the predominantly Hindi-speaking areas of Indian Punjab, Jats have formed a substantial proportion of the state's political leadership and have occupied the post of chief minister in the vast majority of governments. Moreover, Jats and other landowning castes such as Ahirs and Gujjars are organised: the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), for instance, has a long tradition of mobilising the economic and numerical strength of farmers to advocate policies favourable to farmers, such as higher procurement prices, loan waivers, and subsidies on fertiliser (Joshi and Rai 2009). According to one scholar, "[a]lthough BKU was formally open for farmers belonging to any caste or community, since the Jats were its leaders and main followers, their style of life formed the BKU rhetoric" (Sahay 2015, 237). In sum, Jats have inherited caste pride and a sense of social superiority from their traditional dominance.

As argued elsewhere, recent economic re-structuring and rapid urbanisation have created a disconnect between economics and politics, between an economic engine that is increasingly urban (based on real estate, commerce, business and financial services, and peri-urban manufacturing) and a political base of farmers, primarily (though not exclusively) based in rural areas (Kennedy 2014). Political elites are required to manage the contradictory pressures to which this urban–rural disconnect gives rise, to balance industrial growth with attention to the interests of influential agricultural groups. In 2005, one of the first decisions taken by Congress Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, a Jat leader, was to waive farmers' debts to the state electricity utility. Such populist gestures notwithstanding, the rural–urban divide is no longer as salient as it once was; landowning groups increasingly develop direct stakes in the urban economy, including non-agricultural activities. Many landowning castes have moved to urban areas to pursue educational and professional opportunities. Especially around Delhi and Chandigarh, the joint capital of Haryana and Punjab, well-off farmers – the archetypal land-based elite – form a central component of the coalition of interests advocating an aggressive urban growth agenda (Kennedy 2014; personal communication, Prof. Surinder S. Jodhka, New Delhi, January 20, 2010).



Despite Haryana's material prosperity – its per capita income is among the highest in the country – the state is socially conservative and even reactionary. Recent years have witnessed incidents of atrocities against Dalits, gender violence in the form of dowry deaths and “honour killings,” the latter usually linked to inter-caste or proscribed inter-community marriage.<sup>6</sup> One particularly incriminating indicator is the sex ratio, which was 879 for 1,000 males in 2011, a slight improvement over 2001 (861 females for 1,000 males), but still the worst performance of any state except Delhi. Among children, in the age group 0–6 years, Haryana held its rank in 2011 as the state with the lowest sex ratio in the country, just 834 girls for every 1,000 boys. In terms of inequalities, the Gini coefficient for per capita consumption expenditure in Haryana is sizably higher than the national average for rural areas (0.31 to 0.25) and slightly higher for urban areas (0.36 to 0.35) (Nayak et al. 2010, 113).

### SEZ Policy and the Political Environment in Haryana

Haryana stands out among India's states for its policy response to the national SEZ policy (for comparisons, see Jenkins, Kennedy, and Mukhopadhyay 2014). Not only was it the first to pass state-level legislation after the national SEZ Act was ratified by parliament in June 2005, it also passed a series of supporting policies, drawing praise from the national Congress leadership. In particular, the compensation package offered to landowners was singled out as an example of good practice (*Economic Times*, October 1, 2008). Its efforts to create an enabling environment for SEZs made it a poster child for a policy that proved to be increasingly controversial at the national scale. In return, Haryana's governing elites could expect support on matters decided in Delhi. For instance, before announcing early elections for Haryana's Assembly in 2009, the Prime Minister's Office gave first priority to pushing through approvals and removing obstacles for high-profile projects and programmes in the state, including the 2,100 MW captive power plant designed to serve an SEZ project straddling Jhajjar and Gurgaon districts (*Indian Express*, August 5, 2009).

Before examining Haryana's supporting policies, it is useful to recall that the state's electoral fortunes have often shadowed those of the national level: when Congress swept to power in general elections in 2004, winning nine of Haryana's ten parliamentary seats, it also claimed victory in the state assembly elections held the next year, winning 67 of 90 seats. Similarly, in 2014 the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won both the national parliamentary election and the Haryana assembly election (47 of 90 seats). The BJP's decision to nominate Manohar Lal Khattar, a non-Jat, for chief minister came as a surprise and source of vexation to many in the dominant Jat community. As mentioned, Jats are the state's single-largest caste group and Jat leaders are usually chosen to lead the government, to the frustration of other communities. Indeed, a common perception is that Jat-led state governments “work only for Jats” (Joshi and Rai 2004, 5447).<sup>7</sup> Present throughout the state, Jats are a particularly important voting bloc in 35 out of 90 state assembly constituencies, particularly in the districts of Bhiwani, Jind, Sonapat, Rohtak, Jhajjar, and Hisar (Kumar 2010, 21). Three of these districts – Sonapat, Rohtak, and Jhajjar – are directly adjacent to Delhi and form part of the NCR. The economic clout of Jats outweighs even their demographic strength, as they own more than half of the state's cultivable land (Jodhka 1999, 2218).<sup>8</sup> Dalits, the



state's second largest group with nearly one-fifth of the population, possess some ability to influence outcomes. However, due to their relative lack of unity, they are less politically effective than their numbers might suggest. Dalits have traditionally voted for Congress, although this is changing as more parties enter the fray.<sup>9</sup>

Shortly after taking office in 2005, the Hooda government announced several policy decisions concerning land acquisition and rehabilitation and resettlement for people displaced by industrial development. The Department of Industries issued a notification regarding the "acquisition of land for private deployment and in public-private partnership for setting up of SEZs, Technology Cities, Industrial Parks and Industrial Model Townships, etc." (Government of Haryana 2006). It specified the conditions under which the government would assist private developers in acquiring land, the key criteria being the size of the project, its location – in the NCR, in "backward areas," or elsewhere – and whether or not the state government had an equity stake in the project. The notification also expressed the government's willingness to form public-private partnerships, including for SEZs, indicating that for projects in which the HSIIDC's equity stake was at least 26%, the state government would acquire the entire land for the project. Significantly, the policy outlined terms and conditions under which the state government would extend help to firms in acquiring land. These include paying the state administrative expenses (15% of the acquisition cost); rehabilitating displaced people; providing essential services for relocated villages; setting up and running industrial training institutes; establishing an independent power plant or purchasing power from a plant outside the state; employing at least one member of each family whose land is acquired for the SEZ; and providing 25% of jobs to people from the state, that is, "Haryana domicile" (Government of Haryana 2006).

The other relevant policy, issued by the state's Revenue Department in late 2007, concerns the rehabilitation and resettlement of landowners and "land acquisition oustees," also known as the R&R policy (Government of Haryana 2007). In addition to the usual compensation rate for land, the notification called for the annual payment of an "annuity" for 33 years to those whose land is acquired. This was fixed at 15,000 rupees per acre, to be increased by 500 rupees yearly. Annuity rates were revised upwards in 2010, presumably to keep up with inflation. The extraordinary policy included a special clause for land acquired for SEZs by private developers that was more generous to landowners. 30,000 rupees per acre to be paid annually for 33 years, with an annual increase of 1,000 rupees per acre, rates which were also revised upwards in 2010 (to 42,000 rupees per acre, with annual increases of 1,500 rupees per acre.) The policy also provided provisions for compensation in the form of plots of land already in the possession of the HUDA and the HSIIDC that would be provided to landowners whose property was acquired. For instance, if 75% of an owner's total holdings were acquired, a residential (or commercial) plot would be allotted, and the size of the plot would be proportionate to the amount of land acquired.

The objective of the R&R policy was to improve the low compensation levels specified in India's Land Acquisition Act 1894 (in effect until 2013), which were based on the value of sale deeds in the vicinity (Interview, Commissioner and Secretary, Industries Department, Government of Haryana, Chandigarh, November 19, 2008).<sup>10</sup> However, it is widely known that buyers and sellers usually understate the actual price of the transaction in order to reduce their tax burden. The R&R policy was intended to act as a complement to the

decision to impose minimum rates so that compensation would more closely resemble the genuine market value. Demonstrating the government's good faith, the floor rates set in 2007 were increased considerably in 2010. Within Gurgaon Municipal Corporation, for instance, compensation rates were multiplied by two, from 2 million rupees per acre in 2007 to 4 million rupees per acre in 2010.<sup>11</sup>

Some novel features were introduced in the 2010 revision to the R&R policy, one being the "No Litigation Incentive," which offered landowners additional compensation (20% of the basic floor rate) if they agreed not to legally challenge the acquisition or the compensation amount. A second feature was the inclusion of a scheme for the landless and for artisans dependent upon agricultural operations. Although the eligibility and material benefits of this provision were not clearly spelled out in the document, it recognised the adverse effects of land acquisition on occupational categories other than landowners; its stated aim was to create and upgrade the "skill-sets of these people/their dependents so as to improve their employability in the organised sector" (Government of Haryana 2010, 7581).<sup>12</sup> Although the author was unable to confirm whether this scheme was implemented on the ground, it is nonetheless significant in terms of political discourse, as it indicates awareness that the state has an obligation to a range of stakeholders in society, besides those who own land.

### **Genesis of the Ill-Fated Reliance-Haryana SEZ**

The Haryana government played a crucial role in initiating the Reliance-Haryana SEZ (RHSEZ), hailed as India's largest SEZ project. Even before the national SEZ policy became law, Chief Minister Hooda was eager to initiate a high-profile SEZ project.<sup>13</sup> In June 2005, the state government sought approval from New Delhi to establish a zone in New Gurgaon (*Times of India*, June 17, 2005). According to media reports, 1,715 acres for the first phase of this project were in the process of being acquired, and the second phase was to start soon thereafter (*Financial Express*, June 26, 2005). However, the government decided to drop the New Gurgaon project in favour of a much more ambitious SEZ in partnership with Reliance Industries, which had been pursuing plans of its own to develop an SEZ in Gurgaon. In 2006, Reliance and the HSIIDC entered into a joint venture. As part of the agreement, the state government transferred land that it had acquired for the "New Gurgaon" project to the joint venture. This change of purpose, and more importantly, the state's partnership with India's largest corporate house, sparked protests and led to anti-SEZ mobilisation. However, as we shall see, this SEZ did not generate a political crisis for the Haryana government. One of the objectives of this analysis is to explain how the Haryana government managed this opposition and what role caste considerations played. Although the RHSEZ project was eventually scrapped, most observers agree that this outcome was not linked to grassroots opposition but rather to economic conditions, including the decision of the central government to withdraw some of the fiscal incentives (*Business Standard*, September 1, 2014).

As mentioned above, Reliance and the Haryana government each had plans to develop an SEZ in Gurgaon before they formed a partnership. Haryana had sought approval for the New Gurgaon project, a multi-product SEZ to be located on 3,000 acres that had been acquired by the previous government. As for Reliance, its proposed 25,000-acre multi-product SEZ at Gurgaon had received in-principle approval in

March 2006 from the central government's Board of Approval.<sup>14</sup> The new project went beyond the simple merging of the two separate projects. Spread across Gurgaon and Jhajjar districts, the RHSEZ was projected to generate investments of 1.4 trillion rupees and create 500,000 new jobs. In Reliance CEO Mukesh Ambani's words, the SEZ would "create an infrastructure showpiece that can catapult India into the mainstream of global investment" (*Business Line*, June 20, 2006). Because of the negotiations that took place between the signing of the memorandum of understanding and the commencement of the joint venture, it was decided that the HSIIDC would transfer almost 1,400 acres of land already in its possession in Gurgaon district to the new venture. This crucial decision effectively handed over to Reliance a large plot of prime real estate in an attractive location of Gurgaon, with excellent existing infrastructure, including proximity to the national highway (NH8) and Delhi's international airport.

This ambitious SEZ project and the joint venture between the Haryana government and Reliance naturally drew media attention and criticism from political opponents. The main opposition party, the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), demanded cancellation of the joint venture. Former Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala even promised that, if re-elected, he would return the land acquired under his previous administration to its erstwhile owners. The press reported allegations by a former state finance minister that the government was offering Reliance land worth 85 billion rupees that it had acquired from farmers for just 3.5 billion rupees (*PTI*, May 25, 2007). A Congress splinter group called it an illegal deal and demanded the dismissal of the Hooda government (*The Tribune*, May 31, 2007).

Unfazed, the joint venture forged ahead. In addition to the land earmarked for productive activities, residential and commercial areas were planned, and early drafts also included large-scale on-site infrastructure such as a power plant, a logistics hub, and an airport for handling cargo. In the localities affected by the SEZ project, Reliance conducted social impact assessments and formulated plans for village improvements. Reliance had publicly committed to a policy of zero displacement of villages or population; the aim was to undertake in-situ rehabilitation (Sharma 2007).

By late 2008, however, the effects of the global financial crisis began to be felt throughout India and prospects for SEZ development looked decidedly less promising. Progress on the RHSEZ project slowed and ground to a standstill by 2009. Phase I land in Gurgaon remained vacant and in Jhajjar district, Reliance stopped purchasing land and closed all but one of its offices. Cracks started to appear in the previously amiable relationship between Reliance and the Haryana government, each side blaming the other. Reliance accused the government of not making promised investments in roads, water supply and power, and for failing to facilitate and expedite administrative approvals. The government countered by defending a gradual approach, insisting that it needed evidence of reciprocity by the company, especially proof of its continued financial commitment (Interview, senior Reliance employee, New Delhi, May 30, 2009). It seems likely that as the overall financial situation worsened, each side was reluctant to engage in spending, thereby fuelling a feeling of mutual mistrust. The Haryana government may also have decided to keep a low profile in order to avoid provoking opponents of the RHSEZ. Some anti-SEZ activists were close to farmers' movements, and with the 2010 state assembly elections around the corner, the ruling party was careful to cultivate good relations with farmers.

## Landowners Mobilise Against Land Acquisition in Gurgaon and Jhajjar

The RHSEZ project sparked the most organised anti-SEZ mobilisation in Haryana. This mobilisation was organised differently in Gurgaon and Jhajjar districts, reflecting the two distinct phases of the RHSEZ project itself.

In Gurgaon, where the HSIIDC had begun land acquisition under the previous INLD-led government, resistance was primarily from landowners. Gurgaon was experiencing a real estate boom and land prices had risen dramatically over a very short period. This made the below-market compensation paid to landowners even harder to accept, even as instances of forced acquisition by the HSIIDC and the HUDA were on the rise. Since the 1990s, Gurgaon had witnessed “large-scale acquisition of agricultural lands by the government,” including village grazing lands, to develop infrastructure and residential areas (Narain 2009, 501). It was especially aggravating for landowners when government agencies selectively “released” land that they had acquired or were in the process of acquiring. In some cases, land was returned to the original owners, but in others, it was released to third parties. Some of the more widely publicised cases involved high-ranking officials. The courts found that in some cases “the power of acquisition was being used at a massive scale for extraneous reason, causing wrongful loss to the state as well as persons whose land is acquired” (*Indian Express*, January 22, 2009). This suggests that Gurgaon, like elsewhere in urban India, has experienced numerous cases of land grabbing, often with official collusion (*Indian Express*, June 16, 2005). In this sense, the RHSEZ no doubt inherited outstanding grievances and court cases surrounding the prior “New Gurgaon” acquisition process.

Interviews with landowners in several villages of Gurgaon revealed that in early 2007, they began organising protests against the planned RHSEZ and against the unsatisfactory compensation they had received for land compulsorily acquired by the Haryana government for the New Gurgaon project.<sup>15</sup> A local committee was formed, including *sarpanches* and village elders from each of the five villages directly affected by the SEZ: Garouli Khurd, Harsaru, Khandsa, Narsinghpur and Mohammedpur Jharsa. They formed a society called Bhoomi Bachao Sangarsh Samiti (BBSS), or “Save the Land Struggle Committee.” They started informing local people about the SEZ project, trying to persuade them to join in protest actions to prevent it from being realised. They also filed a case in court. In May 2007, the still loosely formed association organised a rally and blocked the national highway for a few hours. The press reported the presence of “about 3,000 farmers from 130 villages from Gurgaon and adjoining areas” (*Times of India*, May 14, 2007).

Following another protest in July 2007, the chief minister agreed to meet the protesters and receive their petition. The BBSS made a series of demands: landowners whose land was acquired should receive an equity stake in the RHSEZ; local unemployed people should be given priority in SEZ hiring; basic infrastructural facilities should be extended throughout the five villages; compensation rates should be increased (the government’s rate was estimated to be ten times lower than the market rate); and the approximately 500 site inhabitants should be allowed to choose whether to stay or to accept a residential plot elsewhere. One of the leaders of the BBSS expressed satisfaction with the chief minister’s attention and promises, and even claimed that the government’s December 2007 decision to provide annuities to land acquisition “oustees” resulted from this meeting, a claim that could not be confirmed from government sources.

At about the same time, another kind of mobilisation was emerging in Jhajjar district. Agents working on behalf of Reliance had begun purchasing land directly from farmers for 2.2 million rupees per acre, which was substantially higher than market rates. By late 2008, the company had assembled approximately half of the land it sought to purchase (15,000 of 31,000 acres). A survey conducted in 2009 indicated that many landowners in Jhajjar were willing to sell part of their holdings, but generally not all of their land (Interview, Reliance employee, New Delhi, January 21, 2010). The reasons varied. For some, it was because they wanted to continue farming; others viewed their land as a form of security for the future and they believed that proximity to Delhi was a guarantee that land values would continue to rise. Because of this fragmented pattern of sales and acquisition, Reliance was left with a patchwork composed of non-contiguous, unevenly sized parcels.

Other landowners in Jhajjar, who had refused to sell any of their holdings to Reliance, started mobilising local opinion against the joint venture in 2007. An organisation called the Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Samiti (KMSS), or “Farmer and Worker Struggle Council,” was formed with members from the approximately 24 villages affected by the project. Arranging meetings in each village, the organisers sought to persuade landowners that the price offered was too low and that Reliance’s promises of employment were not to be taken seriously (Interview, S. Guliya, New Delhi, March 25, 2009).<sup>16</sup> They also used moral arguments, pointing out the social ills arising from selling land, for instance the tendency for people to squander their newly acquired wealth on extravagant weddings or costly automobiles, examples that resonated strongly in this area. Whereas the Gurgaon movement was contesting an already-completed land acquisition process, the Jhajjar movement sought to prevent the establishment of an SEZ by persuading people not to sell their land. An important difference was that in Gurgaon the state government had forcibly acquired land, whereas in Jhajjar a private company sought to buy land from willing sellers.

To try to convince farmers in Jhajjar not to part with their land, the KMSS deployed various organisational strategies. It tied up with farmers’ organisations, opposition parties and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs). One of the main aims was to contest the administration’s classification of their land as “barren.” Acting through Jhajjar’s district collector, the KMSS sent a letter to the president of India, with copies to senior political figures including Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi and the then-Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The issue of land classification had national resonance. Indeed, following the violent anti-SEZ protests in Nandigram in West Bengal, Sonia Gandhi had appealed to developers not to acquire fertile farmland. The KMSS also contacted Murli Manohar Joshi, a BJP politician who was then the leader of the opposition in parliament, and more importantly, chaired the Parliamentary Standing Committee on SEZs. Activists associated with KMSS met him and sought to prove the fertility of their land by showing him local revenue records. This tactic was apparently successful, as Joshi demanded an inquiry and later visited Jhajjar.

These two movements, the Jhajjar-based KMSS and the Gurgaon-based BBSS, decided to join hands in late 2007 and link up with other organisations under a single banner. By expanding the number and diversity of groups involved in protests, they could claim to represent a state-wide movement. One result was greater visibility for the Jhajjar-based KMSS, which managed to cultivate better linkages with national-level activist formations. Indeed, some local actors suggested that it was through national networks that the two

organisations, representing districts in the same state, came to know of one another's existence. In April 2008, the KMSS was involved in the organisation of a *kisan padyatra*, or farmers' march, throughout Haryana, in collaboration with the state unit of the Bharat Krishak Samaj (BKS), a national farmers' union. According to the BKS's executive chairman, the eight-day march was organised to protest against the anti-farmer policies of the central and state governments. The latter was accused of "grabbing" farmers' lands for SEZ projects and "acting as a *dalal* [broker] in the interests of corporate houses" (see AFA 2008). The objective of the *padyatra* was to build solidarity among farmers and sensitise the general population to the negative effects of the RHSEZ. One outcome of this collective action was the formation of a co-ordinating body, the Bhoomi Bachao Talmel Committee or "Save the Land Steering Committee." Its members came from various organisations across the state, including the BBSS and the KMSS. The committee's aim was to put up a united fight against land acquisition for any purpose, not only SEZs. It is noteworthy that a few key activists held positions simultaneously in more than one organisation. One of the founders of the KMSS, for instance, occupied the post of "organising secretary" in the BKS.<sup>17</sup> Though the KMSS insisted it was apolitical, it was nonetheless well known that its president had strong links with the INLD.

Shortly after the *kisan padyatra*, the KMSS organised a large gathering (*mahapanchayat*), which brought together the traditional caste governing bodies (*khap panchayats*) of the area. It should be noted here that among Jats, clan-based *khap panchayats* continue to function and wield considerable power.<sup>18</sup> According to media sources, hundreds of people attended the *mahapanchayat* (*Times of India*, May 12, 2008). The president of the BKU and renowned farmers' leader Mahendra Singh Tikait chaired the meeting. He urged farmers to continue their opposition to SEZs. The resolutions passed by the *mahapanchayat* called on the Haryana government to scrap the SEZ policy on grounds of food security and livelihood preservation, and exhorted Reliance to return the land to its original owners. By associating itself with the BKU, a national farmers' organisation whose membership overlapped largely with Jat-dominated territory in Western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, the anti-RHSEZ movement demonstrated its intent to gain support from a wider cross-section of farmers.

The anti-SEZ agitation became more forceful and took a violent turn during the summer of 2008, as Reliance began taking possession of land in Gurgaon by demolishing existing structures and raising boundary walls. Over several weeks, villagers demonstrated in the streets, blocking traffic, clashing with police and courting arrest. A police force was deployed at the SEZ site and in surrounding localities. Opposition leaders from INLD, BJP, and a breakaway faction of Congress expressed their support to the protestors and occasionally took part in demonstrations. Things came to a head on July 4, 2008, when the police shut down the Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway to prevent people from joining a protest march, thereby causing a massive traffic jam (*The Hindu*, July 5, 2008). This agitation helped bring national attention to the anti-RHSEZ movements and gave hope to the activists that they might succeed in forcing the Haryana government to reverse its stand, like other state governments had been compelled to do.

### Political and Caste Dimensions of Local Social Movements

For both movements, the Gurgaon-based BKSS and the Jhajjar-based KMSS, land-owners directly affected by acquisition initiated the mobilisation effort. This centred



on building local support around the idea of resistance, followed by tie-ups with other activist groups, NGOs and farmers unions, which made it possible to stage more high-profile protest actions. By linking up with national-level organisations, local activist networks were able to draw media attention to their immediate predicament and also to build a connection to larger issues such as food insecurity, and thereby attempt to expand their support base.

In contrast, the movements did not seek to ally themselves explicitly with political parties, a deliberate tactic according to the organisers, who claimed it was to preserve their credibility and appeal to a broader base. Although opposition party leaders regularly made bold statements criticising the state's SEZ policy and participated in certain demonstrations, they did not take a leadership role in constructing the anti-SEZ movement.

The analysis showed that the BBSS and the KMSS remained relatively separate, despite their alliance. Differences in their immediate goals probably acted as an obstacle for building synergy between them. For the BBSS base of landowners in Gurgaon, the acquisition process had already occurred; the most that those who had lost land could hope for was a better compensation package. In Jhajjar, where the KMSS was active, Reliance was still in the process of purchasing land, and the lack of construction activity gave some landowners hope that the project could still be cancelled. Given these fundamental differences, it probably made more sense for the Jhajjar-based KMSS to join up with farmers' organisations, such as the BKS and the BKU, with which its leadership had existing ties. However, most of these organisations represent relatively well-off agricultural interests. The KMSS appears to have limited its efforts to defending the interests of landowners and did not attempt to incorporate the concerns of landless agricultural labourers, tenants and service communities, all of whom stood to lose their livelihoods. This narrow focus can be seen as a major weakness of this movement.

Haryana's social structure offers a compelling explanation for why the anti-SEZ movement was not willing to diversify its support base. Dominant landowning groups – Jats, in particular – tend to monopolise social and political power in Haryana at all levels. Caste consciousness is considered very strong. According to one long-time observer, “nowhere in north-western India is the discourse of caste as prevalent as it is in Haryana ... one's caste identity takes priority over all other identities” (Jodhka 1999, 2218). Moreover, tensions between dominant landed groups and Dalits are a regular feature in many places in Haryana. Jhajjar district was the theatre of a particularly violent incident in 2002, in which a mob killed five Dalit men for allegedly slaughtering a cow (Jodhka and Dhar 2003). Other incidents include the destruction of Dalit houses and shops in Gohana in 2005 and in Saalwan in 2007 (Rajalakshmi 2007). Inevitably, violence committed by one community against another gives rise to retaliation, in a seemingly interminable spiral. Given the strength of *khap panchayats* among Jats, it has been alleged that they make it increasingly difficult for elected *panchayats* (village local government) to function. Observers have hinted at a division of labour: “even in places where *panchayati raj* institutions are present, they are reduced to carrying out civic work while ‘social issues’ are the province of the *khap panchayats*” (Anon. 2010, 7). *Khap*-based solidarity is considered a major source of Jat dominance, alongside control over land and other socio-economic resources (Sahay 2015). Organisers of the Jhajjar-based KMSS reported using the traditional *khap* social



structure as a basis for building the movement. Pre-existing ties between village elders were used to mobilise and garner support for various events (such as the *yatra* and the *mahapanchayat*). This approach tended to reduce substantive participation by other local groups. In other words, the highly segmented social context acted as an obstacle to broad-based mobilisation. This resonates with research on collective action in India that highlights the multiple ways in which social institutions like caste mediate participation, whether in social movements, the economy or political mobilisation (Jodhka 2015; Gorringer, Jodhka, and Takhar 2017; Agarwal and Levien 2019).

A second explanation for why protest movements have not gained greater momentum is that farmers' interests are no longer confined to agriculture (Kennedy 2014). Many have diversified their professional activities and do not depend solely on agriculture for their livelihood. With rapid urbanisation, the fortunes of Jats and other landowning groups are increasingly linked to the urban economy and to activities such as real estate development.<sup>19</sup> Yet, many of these groups still identify themselves as farmers and remain an influential farming lobby. Even for those who continue to earn their living from farming, the agricultural sector has been transformed; rural areas in Haryana no longer resemble an agrarian economy (Personal communication, Prof. Surinder S. Jodhka, New Delhi, January 20, 2010). In this context, mobilisation around single issues becomes more difficult, and political elites have adapted their discourse and actions to take account of the fact that farmers' interests have diversified and are no longer limited to agricultural issues.

## Conclusion

Notwithstanding localised protests in Gurgaon and Jhajjar districts and relatively sustained movements, opposition to SEZs in Haryana has not been as strong or effective as in some other Indian states. A combined sociological and political economy lens was used to analyse the reasons for the comparative lack of impetus behind Haryana's anti-SEZ movement, and to interpret the state government's policies regarding the SEZ policy and to land acquisition more generally. It was argued that these policies were responsive to the interests of the land-owning castes, of which Jats comprise the largest group. It was seen that in addition to their economic and political strength, Jats exerted influence through organisations like the BKU.

Policy decisions taken by the Haryana government following the promulgation of the national SEZ Act in 2005 demonstrate two distinct tendencies, which appear contradictory at first glance. On the one hand, it pursued aggressive territorial marketing, attempting to attract industrial investments by making available plots of developed land, including land forcibly acquired using its powers of eminent domain. Its joint venture with Reliance was a particularly egregious example of this. On the other hand, it revised the compensation policy for compulsory land acquisition in ways that expressed attention to landowners' welfare. Particularly notable was the imposition, and regular enhancement, of floor prices for land acquisition and the payment of annuity for a 33-year period. In some cases, plots of land were offered as part of the compensation package. These measures, the first of their kind in India, appear to be a pragmatic response to current tensions around land issues. The electoral importance of land-owning castes, particularly Jats, is also part of the rationale for endorsing better compensation for land. Despite internal disparities in income and opportunity, Jats still tend to vote *en bloc*.

Based on field-based research, this study has shown that although landed castes remain a major constituency in Haryana politics, their material interests are no longer restricted to agriculture, even if their collective self-image remains overwhelmingly agrarian. Agriculture has become a capital-intensive business and land a tradable commodity in most parts of Haryana. Under such circumstances, farmers are more willing to sell their holdings to developers than they might otherwise be, or even to take up real estate business. Given the recent restructuring of the regional economy, there is tremendous scope for property development in the form of industrial estates, including SEZs, housing or commercial space.

Nonetheless, the state government's decision to create a large-scale SEZ with India's largest private corporation sparked opposition. In the district of Gurgaon, the decision to transfer prime land that had been forcibly acquired a few years earlier to Reliance provided an opportunity for landowners to register their deep disappointment with the process. In Jhajjar, the aim of those opposing Reliance's direct purchase of land, mainly Jats, was to build a base for collective bargaining, either to completely resist the sale of land or to negotiate a better deal. Although sustained for several years, these movements did not succeed in becoming a mass protest. This article has argued that their relative weakness was due to social factors, namely an approach that gave primacy to the interests of dominant groups.

Jat dominance in Haryana is rooted in deep inequalities between caste groups, notably in terms of landholding and agricultural assets. This socio-economic dominance has generally translated into political dominance, notwithstanding the decision by the BJP in 2014 to select a non-Jat for chief minister. Political elites in Haryana are largely from landowning castes and are thus relatively well placed to mediate in negotiations between farmers and corporate interests. This article has argued that entrenched caste animosity and pre-existing conflicts of interest between landed Jats and the Dalits who have traditionally laboured for them explain the limited scope of the mobilisation among rural groups. Both movements examined here mainly concerned landowners directly affected by land acquisition. Moreover, in the case of the KMSS, the mobilisation strategy relied on traditional caste institutions such as *khap panchayats* and farmers' unions strongly associated with Jats, rather than aiming for more broad-based appeal to other adversely affected non-Jat groups. The narrow focus on landowners inevitably led to fragmentation and exclusion, thus limiting the movement's scope.

## Notes

1. The state of Haryana surrounds the National Capital Territory of Delhi on three sides: north, west and south.
2. See, for instance, Bedi and Tillin (2015) and especially the results of an 11-state study in Jenkins, Kennedy, and Mukhopadhyay (2014), in particular Andhra Pradesh (Srinivasulu 2014), Maharashtra (Mujumdar and Menezes 2014), Odisha and West Bengal (Banerjee 2014), and Punjab (Asher 2014). For Rajasthan, see Levien (2012). Apart from SEZs, a growing body of literature examines social mobilisation in response to state-led land acquisition.
3. Data in this section are from Bhandari and Kale (2007) unless otherwise indicated.

4. Notification is the last of a three-stage approval procedure. It is granted after the government is satisfied that the developer has legal possession and irrevocable rights over the proposed land to develop a SEZ and has received all necessary approvals.
5. Data are regularly updated on the official website: <http://sezindia.nic.in/asez-special-zones-notified-2005.asp> (last accessed September 20, 2017).
6. Among Jats, marriage between people of the same *gotra* (clan) is strictly prohibited, and the punishment meted out by *khap panchayats* for such transgressions can result in death. See for instance Anon. (2010).
7. According to a sample survey conducted by the National Election Study in 2004, a majority of voters shared this perception including 58% of upper castes and 64% of Dalits (cited by Joshi and Rai 2004, 5447).
8. There are internal differences among Jats that are not dealt with here. A study referred to in *The Indian Express* (March 10, 2017) estimated that the 23% of Jats possess almost two-thirds of the caste's income, indicating significant intra-caste disparities.
9. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) vote share among Dalits increased from 21% in 2004 to 56% in 2009. However, for the state as a whole, BSP's vote share in the Haryana Assembly elections dropped to 4.4% in 2014 from 6.73% in 2009, winning only one seat (*Indian Express*, October 20, 2014).
10. In 2013, the 1894 law was replaced by a new law, which aimed to provide fair compensation, as well as rehabilitation and resettlement, more in spirit with a rights-based approach (Jenkins 2013). However, upon taking office in 2014, the government of Narendra Modi vowed to amend the law. For a discussion of the proposed amendments, see Nielsen and Nilsen (2017).
11. As a point of comparison, the remaining parts of Haryana not specifically mentioned, that is, those outside the NCR, were revised from 800,000 rupees per acre to 1.2 million rupees per acre.
12. To finance this scheme, 1% of the compensation amount granted by the HSIIDC and other government agencies when they acquire land would be deposited in a special fund. Moreover, private developers would be required to arrange skill training to affected persons and their dependents.
13. This was mentioned in several interviews, including one with the Vice-President of Project Coordination, Reliance Haryana SEZ Limited, Gurgaon, May 2, 2009.
14. See the minutes of the Board of Approval's first meeting on March 17, 2006, available at: <http://sezindia.nic.in/cms/boa-minutes.php> (accessed October 18, 2017). This site maintains Minutes for Board meetings since 2006.
15. Unless otherwise indicated, the following information on mobilisation in Gurgaon was obtained in an interview with Mr Surinder Singh, *sarpanch*, Garauli Khurd, March 7, 2009. When possible, information was cross-checked with press reports, which are cited.
16. Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this section is based on this interview and the author's interview with Mr C. Guliya, President of Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Samiti, Jhajjar, March 7, 2009.
17. According to this leader, he was invited to occupy this position because of his popular base in Jhajjar especially and his ability to mobilise support quickly (Interview, Delhi, March 25, 2009).
18. *Khap panchayats* seek to enforce conservative social practices, notably with regard to marriage. They are also considered responsible for instigating anti-Dalit violence.
19. For a similar trajectory among landowning groups in Andhra Pradesh, see Roohi (2019).

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