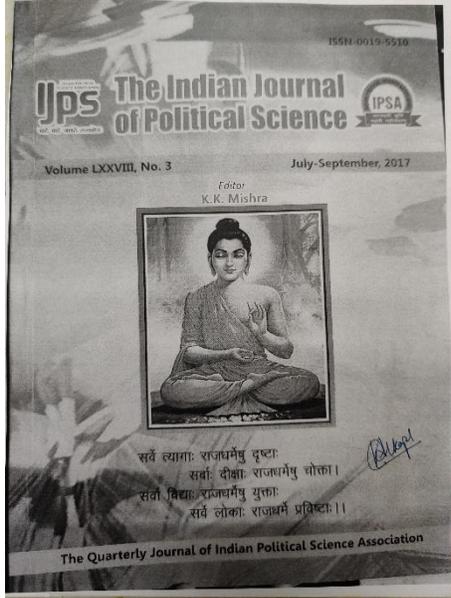


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THE LAND QUESTION AND ITS RADICAL NATURE: BRINGING THE DEBATE ON LAND AND LAND RIGHTS MOVEMENTS BACK TO THE FOREFRONT

Alka Pal

The article provides a brief discussion on the various conceptualisations which have tried to make sense of the land rights movements. For instance Michael Levin argues that how Karl Polanyi's concept of a 'counter-movement' and David Harvey's concept of 'accumulation by dispossession' and even Partha Chatterjee's concept of 'political society' fails to do complete justice to the specificity of land rights movement simply because they provide sweeping generalisations and try to club land rights movement with other poor people's movements. Not realising that land being an issue of livelihood resource can throw up radical protest movements. A distinction has been made between struggles for land reforms and struggles for land acquisition. The article broadly tries to map the movement scenarios: framing, organisation, networking and alliance making done by the movements. And to see that, to what extent these can help in maintaining the autonomy of the movement and thereby allowing it to remain both institutionalised and a radical movement at the same time.

Property and its acquisition break social bonds and drain the life sap of the community. The unemployment involved plays havoc, world over and generates a force that can coax or coerce peoples to deeds of injustice and of wholesale horror.

—Rabindranath Tagore, from *The Robbery of the Soil* (1992)

The struggle for land rights is based on the maxim of 'land to the tiller'. The maxim finds its theoretical basis in John Locke's 'labour theory of property' but the same theory can be used by the state to appropriate land. Under the guise of the Lockean rationale of 'higher and best possible use of land', the state has been expropriating land from what it considers as the low value users (peasants) and passes it to capitalist classes who can make better use of the land and create profit, which it is presumed will finally lead to the betterment of all (the trickle down effect) and which in reality rarely happens. The article provides a brief discussion on the various conceptualisations which have tried to make sense of the land rights movements. For instance Michael Levin argues that how Karl Polanyi's concept of a 'counter-movement' and David Harvey's concept of 'accumulation by dispossession' and even Partha Chatterjee's concept of 'political society' fails to do complete justice to the specificity of land rights movement simply because they provide sweeping generalisations and try to club land rights movement with other poor people's movements. Not realising that land being an issue of livelihood resource can throw up radical protest movements. A distinction has been made between struggles for land reforms and struggles for land acquisition.

There has been a lot of empirical literature on land rights movements in India which basically focuses on regional or state level case studies. But not much of theorisation has been done on the issue of movement scenario that might be specific to the land rights issue. The article is divided into three broad sections. The first section basically talks about the complications around which the question of land is contextualised and how to make sense of the specificity of the land rights movement so that we can avoid the fallacy of clubbing many issues or similar to the radical issue of the 'land question'. The question of land as a livelihood resource is a somewhat radical issue and can create struggles which are radical in nature. This section also delves into the complex nature of land related laws and the divided powers of the centre and the state to legislate on land complicates the issue more. The second section brings in the movement scenario for land reforms. A distinction is made between the issue of land reform and the issue of land acquisition. The phase of struggles for land reforms was a radical one mainly because it was guided by the left oriented parties which, views the possibility of social change by means of a radical violent revolution thrown by the masses. The third section opens the discussion on the

Alka Pal, Research Scholar, Centre for Political Studies, Jyoti Bhabha University, New Delhi