

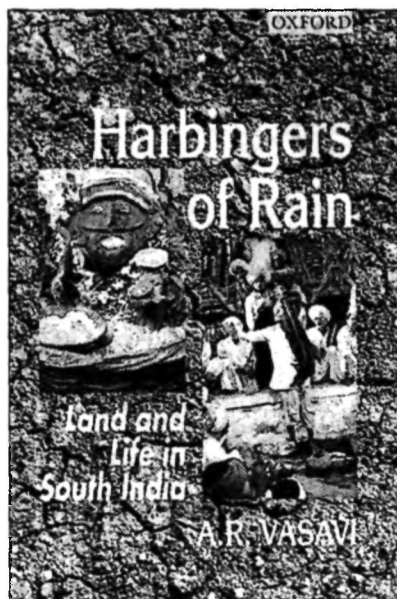
Land and life in South India

HARBINGERS OF RAIN: A. R. Vasavi; Oxford University Press, "Oxford House", 219, Anna Salai, Chennai-600006. Price not mentioned.

THE BOOK under review is about land and life in South India. In most agrarian societies, land is assigned key economic and cultural value. Because of the presence of state agencies that seek to alter the economic conditions of the region, agriculture and hence agricultural land forms both the context and object of re-ordering. This objectification of land also leads to subjectification of people. Based on their links to agriculture, other central domains of local society, such as the local forms of knowledge and practices, identities, the cosmogony and symbols also become subject to the agenda of alteration. The book states that while each of these domains is embedded in the larger cultural complex of the region they are articulated and practised through key precepts or cultural categories. State agenda then scrutinises and often critically and negatively assesses each of these precepts in terms of its own values and orientations. The results of such an interface are an amalgam of altered agricultural practices, identity, symbols and a repertoire of commentaries that reflect people's acceptance, negotiation, rejection, and revision of the new culture.

Fieldwork for this study was initiated as a dissertation project in 1989 when the author spent the year at a village about 13 km from Bijapur town. This was completed in 1993. This book is the result of her observations and participation, based on multiple discourses and sets of social action which form the sources of data.

Chapter one contextualises the theoretical, sociological and anthropological issues pertinent to the study. Chapter two helps provide a historical perspective to the famine experiences of the region, and to the entry of the state in the region. Notes and references to the chapter follow the format for historical references. The next chapter attempts to provide an overview of the cultural configurations of the region and details of life in a particular village of the district. The next three chapters attempt to provide a deep description of the ecological, agricultural, social and cultural specificities of the region. Details of the region's cultural precepts, practices and transactions are contextualised in terms of understanding not only the underlying meaning systems and the structures of relatedness but also the disjunctions between



changed social structures and existing cultural idioms. Chapter seven identifies the bases of the state's entry into the region and focusses on key categories and terms by which state agencies contest and attempt to alter the region and its culture. The resulting changes in the experience of drought and general life conditions of the people in the region are detailed in the next chapter.

The shifts in the domains of agricultural production, knowledge systems and identities, cosmogony and the local society's cultural commentaries through which it seeks to comprehend and assess the new changes in its land and life form the core of chapter nine. Chapter 10 provides a conclusion to the study with a summary of the cultural results, contradictions and implications of an articulation between a local society and a state agenda. A glossary provides the English meanings for the Kannada words used in the text.

The book is said to deal with the land and life in South India, though only one South Indian State, Karnataka, is dealt with. Again, only a localised geographical region, the Bijapur district, has formed the basis of the study. The book provides an in-depth analysis of the people of the region and their lifestyle, their hopes and fears, their past and future, in the ever-changing flux of the so-called economic growth. A good depiction of the current rural scenario, useful to sociologists and social workers.

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