

ENTANGLED SOVEREIGNTIES: NEW LAND MARKETS, AN ENTREPRENEURIAL STATE AND THE ASPIRATIONS OF A 'CRIMINAL CASTE' IN GURUGRAM, HARYANA

Over the past three decades, the largely rural district of Gurugram in Haryana has witnessed intense urbanisation and land monetisation. The local Gujjar community is the most recent beneficiary of the new market in land. Gujjars are a 'Denotified Tribe'. That is, their names have been taken off the list of 'Criminal Castes and Tribes' promulgated during the colonial era. Seeking integration into Gurugram's urban modernity, the 'stigma' of being an ex-criminal tribe and how to overcome it is a frequent point of discussion. Deeply felt among a community that has recently transformed into 'land-sale millionaires' from a relatively disadvantaged position, the stigma is frequently expressed as the incapacity for self-definition and stereotyping by the state. Strategies of 'recuperation' of sovereignty over Gujjar identity do not, however, involve eschewing caste identity but, rather, its re-inscription in Gurugram's urban modernity. Gujjar communities in Gurugram utilize a variety of strategies towards this end, utilising new land wealth towards inscribing 'Gujjar-ness' into the urban landscape. These include the refashioning of domestic spaces and weddings; road signs that list Gujjars in 'important' government positions; and a recently inaugurated Gujjar Mahotsav (festival) that showcases Gujjar culture. In this presentation, I provide an ethnography of 'sovereignty' in order explore the ways in which a new and sovereign Gujjar self is imagined through the same processes – of the state and capital – that are blamed for producing Gujjar incapacity and subalternity. Rather than treat 'sovereignty' as a matter of 'state-ness', I present it as the grounds for negotiations between the state, private capital and citizens regarding mutually agreeable self-definition.

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