

Caste, Class, and Clientelism: A Political Economy of Everyday Corruption in Rural North India*

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Abstract

Abstract: Corruption has reemerged as an important issue in research on geography and development, but there has been little research on the relationship between corruption and class reproduction in rural areas of poorer countries. This article presents insights into how low-level economic corruption actually works within institutions that are responsible for purchasing sugarcane in rural western Uttar Pradesh, India, and the role of this corruption in perpetuating material inequalities within rural society. The discussion is based on 12 months of intensive field research on the economic and social strategies of a dominant caste of rich farmers in Meerut District, western Uttar Pradesh. In this article, I note periodic rural protest against the government's mismanagement of sugarcane marketing and corruption and describe everyday, disguised, and discrete forms of corruption that allow rich farmers to obtain privileged access to lucrative marketing opportunities. I also show how discourses surrounding corruption are politicized along the lines of caste and class. I conclude by relating my empirical material to debates on local state-society relations in India. I stress the need to understand corruption with reference to local political economy and the broader distribution of social and economic opportunities in rural society and point to future avenues for geographic research on corruption in the Indian countryside.

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