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Development, Policy and Agriculture in India in the 1990s

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Policy tends to be depoliticised in development discourse. In this paper Bernard Schaffer's framework for the political analysis of policy is recalled and developed. Repoliticising policy involves the analysis of four overlapping political fields: those of agenda, procedure, resources and access. The framework is applied to the politics of the agricultural policy agenda over the recent past in India, and with special reference to Tamil Nadu state.

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‘The *status quo* is an option for partial participation in reforms. One wonders if it stands any chance at this juncture?’ (Randhawa, 1994, p361)

‘Rosencrantz: Take you me for a sponge my lord? Hamlet: Ay, sir; that soaks up the king’s countenance, his rewards, his authorities. But such officers do the king best service in the end; he keeps them like an ape doth nuts, in the corner of his jaw; first mouthed, to be last swallowed ; when he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you shall be dry again. Ros: I understand you not my lord.’ (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act IV; Sc II)

What is Policy?

In India, despite the appearance in the early 1990s of comprehensive proposals for the liberalisation of India’s agricultural sector, ¹ the *status quo* has shown remarkable resistance. This paper seeks reasons in the process of development policy for the considerable ‘chance’ agricultural policy has had - for good or ill - throughout the last decade of the 20th century.

The study of development policy suffers acutely from the fact that so much is excluded from theories of development whose *raison d’être* would seem to be their presumed policy relevance. ‘Policy’ is missing from the indexes of most major textbooks on development, development theories and the politics of development. ² While the OED defines policy as ‘the *course of action* adopted by government’ to achieve certain objectives (my italics), in economics policy is commonly presented and understood as meaning the course of action that ought to follow, based on the results of hypothesis-testing or a set of deductions from economic theory. In rational choice discourse, policy is seen as the product of social interests; and in Foucauldian analysis development agencies generate discourse creating in turn a structure of knowledge which, while failing in its own terms, has effects including the entrenchment of bureaucratic power and the denial of politics. ³ In the case of economics, policy is seen in terms of ‘implications’ - and neither the character of the state nor the operating costs of the policy implications are usually considered. In rational choice theory, the metaphors of policy as a ‘commodity’, of lobbies as ‘interests’ or ‘purchasers’, and of votes as ‘currency’ are abstracted from any history - and the history of the evolution of the deep social forces shaping the volatile ‘epiphenomena’ of policy is outside the frame. ⁴ In post-modern deconstruction, Ferguson’s conclusion that ‘development’ is an ‘anti-politics machine’ is more realistic, yet while he points out that development policy threatens domestic political mobilisation by depoliticising what it contacts, he nevertheless avoids the question of the very real resources and politics generated by development policy itself, forces which strongly influence distributive outcomes.

Mainstream understanding of the policy process is instrumentalist and positivist. Policy is a rational activity carried out by technical experts in and out of the state, not necessarily neutral but using objective methods in a transparent way.⁵ Problems are identified, generally as deficits; their scope is sectoralised; data are organised for a process of dispassionate consideration; a selection known as policy-making takes place; decisions are made known; thereafter 'other and different (non policy) things, known as implementation occur'.⁶ At best, but rather rarely, monitoring and evaluation complete a feedback loop and as is all too well known, when evaluated against statements of intention, policy is almost always unsuccessful. Obstacles - either 'in society' or of 'political will' - then serve as scapegoats which enable failed policies to be replicated or the responsibilities of officials to be avoided.

Policy and politics are distinguished in English, enabling the depoliticisation of policy. As a result, crucial factors shaping the mobilisation and allocation of public sector resources are excluded from consideration. If policy 'is what it does', it has to be recognised that the entire process bristles with politics. The question is what sort. Unless this is asked, the history of policy will be banal and misleading. Commonly the scope of policy reform is exaggerated by experts, in their 'exemplary positions' of authority.⁷ Opposition, if considered at all in development economics, is conceived of as the cause of the economic costs of suboptimal decision making, (the 'lack of political will'). Paradoxes in which intended beneficiaries of a policy become its victims (and vice versa) when the policy is implemented - or in which the costs of the ineligible but included (E errors) are deplored while those of the eligible but excluded (F errors) get neglected - then become routine. The suppression of the fact that policy is messy is itself part of the ways in which those with a stake in 'policy technique' defend their vested interests.

The most useful general framework for teasing out the constellation of power relations generated by development policy remains Schaffer's (1984), though his credo does not make light reading. Simplifying and developing Schaffer, we see that the policy process involves four kinds of overlapping politics. They may be separated for the purpose of analysis but in practice they operate simultaneously. The first is that of *agenda*: the power relations involved in the creation, negotiation and ordering of sets of themes about which statements of intention are made. The second is that of the translation of policy discourse into *procedure*: the enacting and internalising of laws and informal rules of procedure and of access. The third is the power relations by means of which *public resources are raised and allocated*, tax is resisted and expenditure challenged. The fourth is the politics of *access* to bureaucratically distributed goods.⁸ In the whole set of processes, party politics and bureaucratic politics are meshed with the politics of social institutions and material interests, and the neat boundary between state and society is blurred.⁹

It is through the politics of *agenda-setting* that issues are labelled, are contested and ranked. In the analysis of policy not only is this kind of politics uniquely privileged (as though the rest did not exist), it is commonly reduced to a 'distanced' technical sphere - one occupied increasingly by experts in international banks and their client aid agencies and by client academics, consultancy firms and local technical advisory cells. It is carried out in a *lingua franca* of markets, profit, efficiency and conditionality, and with the use of advanced statistics. Hamlet's 'sponges' may be found here. Evidence expressed in any other paradigmatic, disciplinary - or even real - language is rejected and excluded (or, as the World

Bank sometimes does, it is published as a device to distract attention from the real business of banking). In practice however, many other interests with different and unequal powers are pitted together in agenda-setting. There are of course individual bureaucrats interested in the perpetuation of their jobs, whatever the character of the state employing them, be it independent/developmental or rentier/predatory. The interests of collective, departmental or part-privatised quango and public corporative bodies come into contention, as do structures of patronage and social networks (ethnic, religious, regional, gendered) operating inside the state. Then there are the media, in which certain kinds of evidence dismissed by technical experts may be considered valid and important (for instance particular individual cases) and where other kinds of evidence are neglected or censored.¹⁰ In electoral democracies such as India's, political parties are arenas in which ideas about policy can seethe creatively, although the individual politician in a given party may be ignorant of development policies or understand his or her party's position on specific issues in ways that flatly contradict the understanding of other party members.¹¹ There may be party-coalitions in government and opposition in which matters which are low on the agendas of individual parties shoot upwards as a result of their significance in consensus-making. Agendas are also shaped by organised national and international lobbies representing material interests (trades unions, family businesses, corporations, banks, 'farmers': supplicants, threateners, smooth suppliers of the members of advisory committees and councils, openly or secretly active inside government departments) for which the politics of agenda are important only in so far as they can be used to mask the competition over the creation and protection of rents that is taking place elsewhere. There are civil society institutions, NGOs and social movements which work on agendas, sometimes without any material interest but deploying information and persuasion ('advocacy'). And so on.

Inside and outside the state, in struggles around the agenda, development is *sectoralised* (for example nutrition policy excludes *food* policy let alone alcohol policy). People are *labelled* (as 'pregnant and lactating mothers', 'small farmers', 'BPLs' (people below the poverty line), the micro-creditworthy, 'SC/ST' (those eligible for positive discrimination) etc) although in reality people may belong to several such categories.¹² Some of these labels set people up as targets, making them doubly objectified. By these means some people are excluded, rejected, silenced and made invisible, while forces entirely outside a given agenda, or excluded from it in the process of sectoralising, may determine policy priorities. But equally these labels create categories around which those so labelled may develop their own political mobilisation. Technique may not always triumph; decisions may never be formalised; most crucially of all, stated intention may never be taken at face value.

In the process of *proceduralisation* (the means whereby a policy objective is operationalised), components of the agenda - scholarly papers, policy notes, manifestoes, project appraisals, plans, etc - are translated into patterned behaviour through legislation, departmental orders and informal procedural norms, which are supposed to be enforced. But sometimes breaking the rules is rewarded (as in public sector food storage and processing where outdated technologies are specified but performance is improved by ignoring the rules; or as in the rules of spacing between wells to be supplied with electricity for water-pumping, thereby penalising late comers who privately reward those who fix the connection). Procedure is the least visible arena policy. Two kinds of politics matter here. One is when discrepancies are introduced between the intentions expressed in agendas and what procedures really imply, a

slippage which may be accidental, but often is not. As a result, procedure may embody internal contradictions and inconsistencies and become more and more inconsistent as amendments are made over time, or as officials change posts and newcomers interpret the rules differently. Formal procedures may even prevent implementation altogether (for example, the international convention on freedom from hunger where it has not yet been possible to codify 'hunger').¹³ More than one form of procedure often co-exist¹⁴ and the very *idea* of what procedure involves may mutate inside bureaucracies or in civil society.

In the second kind of politics, procedure is a resource to be captured: the administration of procedure is a 'field of power'. Its social composition is protected.¹⁵ In legally plural societies like India's for example, combinations of parts of different legal systems may be opportunistically deployed. Judgements of breaches of procedure come into conflict, as a result of which there are further discrepancies between procedural norms and actual practice. Informal systems of regulation and sanction develop in response. The Essential Commodities Act is a case in point, with 59 amendments, highly varied local understandings of its scope, informalised implementation and socially codified norms of corruption.¹⁶

Most policy analysis also pays scant attention to the third set of political forces shaping the policy process, except in the technical fields of public finance and corruption theory. These are the power relations shaping *the mobilisation of resources* for the implementation of policy. Of course, resource mobilisation through taxation, loans and grants of aid is riddled with options and subject to the other kinds of politics too. The seasonality and timing of revenue flows, and the social composition of the forces resisting and those complying results in patterns in the supply of tax revenue are the truest reflection of the structure of social accountability. Fiscal resources pour into a convection system to be allocated between current and capital expenditure, between departments and projects, between sectors and subsidies, centre and states. The seeming deadweight of past patterns of allocation should not blind us to the fact that political forces keep these allocations in place. They also determine the extent to which individual departments are co-ordinated; for *every* department of government has a role in the regulation of markets and most have a role in the development of agriculture. And what has been said here about financial resources applies equally to the recruitment and allocation of officials.

The fourth aspect of policy concerns the power relations through which rules of access are enforced and challenged : those of the '*counter*' (how many points of distribution or registration are there? When are they active? Where are they located and with what implications? What are the volumes of administered goods and services flowing over them?); *eligibility* (who qualifies? Who is excluded? Who decides?); *queues and their discipline* (among those who qualify who gets the goods and services? In what order?); *voice* (who (eligible or non-eligible) can intermediate or manipulate the rules of access to their own advantage?); and *exit*¹⁷ (who drops out? Who does not benefit? Who finds ways other than those ruled in order to obtain the benefit to which they are entitled?). In accounts of access to bureaucratically-distributed goods and services, people are frequently referred to as 'beneficiaries' or 'targets'. They are passive recipients. Of late 'participation' has been popularised with a view to incorporating beneficiaries actively into the process of access, and to a very limited extent into allocation.¹⁸ (It has also become an end in itself.) How far 'participation' has really changed the power relations of access is so far almost unknown.

These 'complex systems of powercodify social norms and values, and articulate fundamental organising principles of society, they also contain implicit (and sometimes explicit) models of society' (Shore and Wright, 1997, p6-7). These help to pattern and constitute the spheres of collective and individual action - and 'freedom'. In this sense, as S. Guhan put it, the state is a road roller rather than a sports car. Allocations are not the only aspect of the policy process that are characterised by deadweight. 'Terms of art' (and their acronyms) are created and become imbued with very specific and exclusive meanings (take for example 'safety net', 'TRYSEM', 'social exclusion', 'gender and development (GAD)', 'the environment' even 'the reform period'). These special meanings are understood in development agencies; they structure what is researched, taught and debated in universities and research institutions. Routines also persist, even when leached of their original purpose (e.g., often, 'participation'). Resources (money and postings) come to be 'dedicated' and terms of inclusion seemingly settled for ever (be it for 'nominee directors', 'pregnant and lactating women', 'informal livelihoods', 'small scale industry', 'desert development', let alone for Hamlet's 'spunges' and 'nuts' who hang around in management consultancies and bureaucracies and wait upon politicians to this day).

In the light of these reflections, not only is policy revealed in its intrinsic complexity (and orthodox notions in their politically selective simplicity), but the process of implementation is also seen to transform policy utterance 'out of all recognition'.¹⁹ These transformed relations of authority then *actively conceal* developmental possibilities - among them the possibility of the social regulation of markets in the mass interest, of the collective provision of 'equity' and of the operationalisation of rights, all of which were given a mandate in India's Constitution.²⁰

The problem with the realisation that policy must be understood in terms of complex layers of politics is that to analyse them is then such an ambitious undertaking that it has never been attempted in its entirety. For a start it is necessary to stand outside the knowledge structure and the constituent disciplines created for development in order to perceive the power relations masked by its discourse. But the language in which one carries out the operation is inevitably part of this structure of knowledge. This analysis also calls for evidence to be found in many different places, evidence requiring expert interpretation (for example, the cost-benefit and welfare economics paradigms or legal texts) as well as evidence from verbal accounts, not excluding anecdotes and rumour, which is extremely hard to collect and is considered of doubtful legitimacy in social science;²¹ Schaffer himself observed that '(s)uch data is decentralised, humble and dirty'. The collection of such evidence calls for the participant observation of an anthropologist, the critical methods of the historian and the professional expertise of economists, political scientists and lawyers, and its analysis requires efforts of deconstruction. No single scholar has these skills. No discipline encourages their development. However if the analysis of policy is not to connive with one small part of the process (that of technique) to the exclusion of all the rest of it (which continues to shape the policy process, despite our ignoring it and whatever our judgment of its desirability), then we somehow have to make the attempt.²²

In India, policy for both agricultural production and social welfare is the responsibility of constituent states. However, both the Planning Commission and the central government Ministries in New Delhi influence state agendas, resource mobilisation and allocation and

access; and their politics - operating at different scales - may involve different agendas, procedure, resources and rules of access.²³ While different, they are not separate. The composite nature of the agenda, the regulative framework and the sources of funding may itself become a resource in the competition over surplus that lies at the heart of development. For brevity's sake we confine the argument to agriculture; within agriculture, to its agenda, to the origins of its agenda and to their politics.

The Composite Agricultural Agenda and its Significance for Development

Already by the mid nineties, there were two worked-out policy packages for agriculture with material resources to back them. One, the liberalisation paradigm, had and still has a highly influential reach. This was the paradigm being debated by administrators and scholars alike in Washington, London, New Delhi and Madras/Chennai, as though there were no other kind of agricultural policy. It is the one taught to students all over the world. The other paradigm, discovered much later through interviews with local agricultural officials in Tamil Nadu state, is grounded in the science-based paradigms of the local state bureaucracy and the politics of patronage. By 2001 however, there were at the very least three paradigms.²⁴ At the risk of some arbitrary simplification, the assumption of just three policy packages still helps us understand the role of agenda in the politics of agricultural policy and the role of composite, interlocking agendas in the politics of reform.

Fast Track Liberalisation : We start out from the justified and critical statement on policy options for economic liberalisation made from N.S. Randhawa's review of papers to the New Delhi Conference on 'Agricultural Policy in the New Economic Environment' sponsored by FAO and held in September 1993, just as our own fieldwork was starting.²⁵ 'To be phased over 3 to 4 years', the controls over the agricultural sector needed to be eliminated so as to enable markets to function efficiently and to eliminate the economic distortions caused for reasons of private interest by bureaucrats and politicians. At least 20 major agricultural commodities would be involved, notably foodgrains (whose domestic prices would rise to the level of world markets), together with oilseeds and sugar should the OECD countries fulfill their treaty obligations under the GATT and reduce their agricultural protection. For India, this was an agenda for the deregulation of commodity and factor markets. It involved the elimination of movement restrictions, the unbiased operation of freight transport, the privatisation of storage, the deregulation of agro-processing from its special (protected or restricted) status as a 'small scale industry', the dismantling of subsidies on fertiliser and electricity, with increased exports compensating for the production disincentives resulting from the price squeeze from raised costs of production. It involved either dismantling or privatising most of the activities of the public distribution system, the liberalisation of the land market - starting with land lease deregulation - and permission for corporate investment in 'wasteland' and degraded forest.

The fast track agenda was far from being a policy for wholesale privatisation. The conception of public goods and services embodied in fast track policy required investment in port infrastructure for agricultural exports and imports, irrigation infrastructure in the deprived regions of the north-east and east, research and development for the crops of these regions, universal safety nets for the poor, who would get food stamps, a much reduced buffer stock of

foodgrains and, more controversially, the protection of targeted and subsidised credit for small-scale agricultural production.

The people who made this input into the agricultural policy agenda, being migrant global technocrats and national economic policy elites, were and are able to impose conditions on international loans.²⁶ Their criteria were based on benefit-cost paradigms and a disembedded conception of efficiency. The discourse was (macro)economic, with the consequence that institutional change was conceived as 'engineerable' - and indeed friction-free. Since then, ongoing debate has concerned means or instruments, rather than principles. What is excluded is significant. There is practically no concern for the agro-ecological environment and the only concern expressed concerning the mass of small producers and labourers in agriculture is that they are a threat to the smooth running of the new policies, and to be assuaged with a safety net. Markets are assumed to operate neutrally with respect to society. This agenda is thus crudely 'anti-politics' both in the sense of not arising from party politics or being associated with any single party, and in the sense that it depoliticises development by its discourse. Indeed, it is openly said by economists to 'remove politics from the economy'.

Creative Globalisation : Here the key text is the report of , and comments on, a detailed interview with the agricultural scientist, M.S.Swaminathan, under whose charge HYV seeds were introduced to India. He is an ex Secretary of Agriculture to the Government of India and ex Director of the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, who now directs in Chennai a state-of-the-art, private agricultural research institute named after him.²⁷

The globalised agricultural trade and investment regime has provoked a new agricultural agenda. Three policies have particular urgency. The first results from the establishment of the World Trade Organisation in 1994 which regulates, inter alia, global agricultural trade. Compliance with its rules has been unbalanced : it has been forced on developing countries but resisted by the OECD block. For OECD countries, formal exceptions have been created, by the mechanism of policy 'boxes', to protect incomes and even raise the level of farm support. There needs to be a counterpart 'Livelihood Box' - a set of quantitative restrictions on imports for countries like India in cases threatening the mass of agricultural livelihoods. The second policy proposal results from the proprietary control of the biosphere where international procedure is both inappropriate and inconsistent. Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) are already at variance with the legally binding provisions of the International Convention on Biological Diversity (their global signatories coming from different domestic Ministries). There needs to be protection for the rights of Indian farmers to retain seed between seasons and to protect new varieties developed by themselves. Third, the genetic modification (GM) of agricultural products poses two further kinds of currently unresolvable policy problems. The first is the relation between GM crops and the environment. On the one hand GM crops may constitute a technical solution to production in agronomic environments (notably saline and dry land) for which policies of conventional biotechnological change have had little success. On the other hand GM crops are certain to be biochemically unstable, to create gene pollution and to risk unpredictable and irreversible environmental impacts. The second problem is the relation between the control and goals of GM science and the material practices and outcomes actually associated with it. Although publicly-funded research will always be 'distorted' (meaning it will be moulded by the agendas of funders, the career interests of scientists, peer pressure, etc, rather than induced by

factor scarcities), it may nonetheless have some social goals and long time horizons, whereas privately funded research is first and last for profit and dividends. There is an urgent need for a National Commission on Genetic Modification.

Policy makers engaging critically with agricultural globalisation are drawn from the agricultural science elite in state-funded research institutions and the scientific civil service, from NGOs and social movements and certain political parties.²⁸ Their positions and priorities range from a resistance to global capital on both the right and left (based variously on nationalism, socialism or participative forms of democracy) to a concern for mass livelihoods and/or the environment. All aspects of this agenda presuppose a strong domestic regulative role for a state that is strong enough in turn to alter the global rules for agro-capital. By contrast, the redistributive aspects of this agenda, concerned with decentralisation and participation, express contradictory forms of anti-state populism. The language of efficiency is not paramount but the concept of appropriate production *is*. This agenda is still being intensely debated and risks at best shutting the stable door long after the horse has bolted. In that case, regulation will lag far behind events.

Tamil Nadu's Agricultural Policy Agenda - the Garden : Here we start out from the four Annual Policy Notes and data on Agricultural Department expenditure published under the names of the State Agricultural Ministers K.P.Krishnan and V.S. Arumugham from 1994 to 1997 during a change of ruling party, backed up by the Budget Speeches for this period.²⁹ It exemplifies non-metropolitan agricultural development policy.

Tamil Nadu's agenda in the early reform period shows a substantial degree of autonomy, as does its defence of the scope and price parameters of the public distribution system and noon meal scheme. Since it is so different, both from the liberalisation agenda and from textbook agricultural policy,³⁰ we will consider this agenda at greater length. Tamil Nadu's stated policies for agriculture are as follows:

- i) environmental protection, focussing on wastelands, soil conservation and watershed development;
- ii) sustainability (organic farming, biofertiliser development, integrated pests management, bioconversion of agricultural and urban waste);
- iii) improved water management at the micro-scale, using a variety of participative, collective and (semi) state institutions and scientific techniques;
- iv) 'scientific implements' for agricultural production;
- v) seed patenting for biodiversity, focussing on horticulture, oil palm etc;
- vi) diversification in production : an active role for the state via demonstration plots and extension in horticulture, sericulture, dairying, poultry and fisheries;
- vii) logistical, technical and financial support to increase exports, particularly of horticultural and floricultural products with upstream production linkages to agro-processing plants;
- viii) increased vegetable production;
- ix) 'reasonable' prices regulated through the streamlining of marketing infrastructure (extension staff are to shed their inputs-trading activities but agricultural wholesale Regulated Market Committees are to expand the pledge-loan facility based on produce stored on regulated market sites; continued effort to be made to systematise quality grades across a wide range of products (a necessary precondition for long-distance trade)) and

x) the creation of new forms of active economic management (direct trading by the agriculture department to be hived off to state corporations; new parastatal trading agencies and seed inspectorates for plantation crops to be created; new laws regulating horticulture to be passed).

This agenda is advanced by politicians and administrators and expressed in a combination of science-derived and triumphalist language greatly at variance with that of fast track liberalisation. The territorial state is envisioned as a very large garden. A highly active political state is unavoidably engaged in creating the collective preconditions for the 'gardeners' to go to market and in reducing the unequal terms of bargaining they can expect once they get there. Table 1 shows that throughout the period of heavy pressure to cut public expenditure, capital and current expenditure by the Agriculture Department exceeded estimates.³¹ Expenditure was on an expansion path and attempts to contain it failed.

Much is made of ecological diversity which implicitly justifies modes of procedure and allocation which work through a mass of projects and micro-schemes. Their description uses a language of decentralisation, scientific technique and specificity. Huge emphasis is also placed on the category of 'small farmers', with contradictory mixes of individual incentives and rewards (packages of high-tech and green-tech inputs (see Table 2)) and of collective action to enhance economies of scale.³² Entire districts are selected for special attention, for crop-specific projects, wasteland cultivation, soil conservation or watershed development; immense possibilities for patronage are generated by configuring agricultural policy in this way. At the same time, the proliferation of small schemes for small producers depends in part on the political interests of project funders from outside India. The agendas and resources of aid agencies have a direct influence upon the state government : the FAO trains farmers in 'biocontrol'; the World Bank trains district level planners in planning and agricultural professionals in IT; DANIDA develops the skills of agricultural women and encourages watershed development; SIDA dynamises agro-forestry and dryland agriculture while the Government of Israel helps to transfer technology for high value crops. The state's capacity to absorb these project funds is saturated. Year by year the policy notes record incomplete uptake and delays. Ecological diversity, external project funding and a politics of patronage are mutually reinforcing here. The result is a striking inertia in both discourse and resource allocation.

Over precisely the kind of time span in which the fast track liberalisers expected deregulation to penetrate the entire economy, the Tamil Nadu Agriculture Department showed how little it needed to change. At the margins in fact, a populist form of agricultural patronage was exchanged for corporate patronage in 1996 when Jayalalitha's AIADMK regime was replaced by Karunanidhi's DMK. Grants for temple gardens and for the beautification of the Ooty lake for film sets; and prizes to exemplary extension officers and farmers, were suddenly stopped.³³ Instead new resources were made available to subsidise corporate capital to develop wastelands for floriculture and undertake joint ventures in agro-processing. Infrastructure for agro-processing and specialised physical market sites (for jaggery, for flowers) was promised, along with subsidised transport for farmers.³⁴ Above all, the state agenda expresses continuity, complexity and expansion. It reflects solid bureaucratic interests, a nexus structured around patronage and the application of scientific techniques, together with the needs of a diverse but powerful political constituency.³⁵

Major parts of the agricultural economy are strikingly marginalised on this agenda. The foodgrains economy of rice and groundnuts, in which a state with fabled grain bowls has lost rank and where growth has faltered, ³⁶ are not the central concerns of local agricultural policy.

Indeed it is now obvious not simply that the local policy agenda is different from the one we researched but also that the main policies affecting agriculture are not administered through the agriculture department. They are administered through a range of other departments (Public Works for road and irrigation infrastructure; Food and Civil Supplies for food; Industry for fertiliser; Social Welfare for labour; Co-operatives and Finance for credit) and parastatal corporations (Electricity Boards; the All-India Food Corporation and the State Civil Supplies Corporation for food; Cotton Corporation, Storage and Warehouse Corporation etc). The regulation of agrarian markets is administered through combinations of state and central government departments and corporations. Most of these departments and corporations are also doing non-agricultural things. As a result, the priorities of the agricultural agenda and the ranking of agricultural policy as a whole in the priorities of each institution implementing agricultural policy will be quite specific. In implementation as well as in theory, agricultural policy will be affected by non-agricultural policy. Agricultural policy (as is the case with other kinds of policy ³⁷) is also supported by with non-agricultural justifications. A new parastatal for agro-engineering services is justified not only for agriculture but also as a component in the state's policy to give livelihoods to unemployed engineers. The state does not simply - and conventionally - sectoralise agriculture. It splits agriculture up into micro sectors and distributes it across almost all formal institutions of government. Only in the year 2000 did bureaucratic co-ordination appear in the state's agricultural policy notes. ³⁸ No acknowledgement of the idiosyncrasy of what is labelled agricultural has ever appeared there.

Although three quite separate policy agendas can be discerned, each with their histories - fast track liberalisation, creative globalisation and Tamil Nadu's garden programme - all of them intertwine not just because they co-exist in time but also because of overlapping institutions and interests. Although far from exhaustive, our description of them is detailed enough to show the influence of agricultural research on the idioms of both the global and the state agenda, and of economics on liberalisation and globalisation policy. Both the global and state agendas are also characterised by a paternalistic populism. The interests of international aid agencies pervade all three agendas, financial aid in the first case, social movements in the second, and bi- and multi-lateral development agencies in the third. While the global and state agendas each embody contradictory positions on capital (and by implication on labour and petty production), the first agenda encourages capital while depoliticising it discursively. The agendas are also at different stages of formation, that at the state being most deeply settled while the other two are in contention. Agricultural policy vividly illustrates the dynamic nature of this political process.

Interpretations : Agriculture is slow to be reformed. The state's involvement in agriculture was expanding, not contracting, in the early phase of liberalisation. By 1993-4 fertiliser had been partially decontrolled and subsidies had been rapidly restored. Agricultural credit had not been touched. Product prices were moving towards world market levels: the price of rice rose while that of groundnuts sank. Movement restrictions on agricultural trade were lifted in

1993 (but lorry drivers still had to bribe checkpost guards to let them through and Indian railways still favoured public corporations over private trade). The structure of subsidies (on credit, agricultural co-operatives, fertiliser, food, electricity and irrigation) was intact and remained so throughout the period (Table 3). The redistributive operations of the Food Corporation of India supplying the Public Distribution System was being lethargically revamped so as to targeted areas as well as income categories. The movement of groundnuts had not been deregulated. Local states still regulated markets in order to enable state procurement of a range of commodities. Agro-processing was still reserved for 'small scale industry' until 2001.³⁹

The low relative priority given to agricultural reform can be explained in a number of persuasive ways. Using Bardhan's political economy, where policy is the outcome of clashes between three proprietary classes, the relative speed of reform is dictated by the nature of the costs and benefits to interests in opposition to it.⁴⁰ In agriculture however states have *not* acquiesced to fast track liberalisation in agriculture because of the lure of benefits in other economic sectors. They have not acquiesced at all. If we search for an explanation in terms of class forces, we can find it in agricultural lobbies that back resistance. But it is not only the nexus of interests benefiting from the combination of parasitic and productive rents derived from the partial socialisation of agriculture, it is also and crucially the indispensability of the price structure of basic wage goods for the entire informal workforce - including people selling foodgrains after harvest and buying some back before the next - that is at stake. While the capitalist class fractions expected to benefit directly from fast track reform were the agrocaptalist elites and intermediate and corporate agri-business, these are relatively small and dispersed interest groups compared to the might of the engineering sector which, through the Confederation of Indian Industry, exerts heavy pressure on policy elites and shares all but the last digit of their postal codes.⁴¹ Jenkins' controversial hypothesis that successful reform has occurred by stealth - whatever its relevance to industry - carries the powerful implication for agriculture that since reforms touching mass livelihoods cannot under any circumstances be stealthy, they will be delayed.⁴² Bardhan's depiction of the Central Government 'chipping away'⁴³, piecemeal, but not necessarily by stealth, had little purchase on agricultural policy in the nineties. Even though one sure way in which the central state has chipped away is through reducing its subsidies to states, agricultural policy has the consistency of diamond. This has resulted in a 'mere' transfer of the financial burden, rather than a set of policy responses. Even the argument about the need to reduce the contribution of total subsidies to the fiscal deficit may work curiously in favour of agricultural subsidies, since they are not the largest element. Total food and agricultural subsidies in 1993 were about 13 % of total government subsidies while agriculture was 32% of GDP (Table 3). Until bankruptcy requires a response, agricultural policy looks set to resist reform.

In addition to these explanations, our analysis of the agricultural agenda reveals another simple and obvious reason for delayed reform. This is the intrinsic complexity of agricultural policy, the range of interests in it being multiply justified, inconsistently layered, path-dependent and contested, operating simultaneously in many policy paradigms, involving most departments of government, linking the jurisdictions of centre and state. Laws and office procedure mirror this complexity and the relevant allocations of skilled manpower are also extensive. Organising the wholesale dismantling of existing agricultural policy has simply not been imagined. The idea must beggar belief. The policy process may be more influential in

blocking reforms than the sheer size of subsidies. It is also an expression of the unusual common interest of competing class forces.

Although the Indian state sector is about half the size of its western counterparts in term of its share of GDP, it does not fail to reach villages.⁴⁴ The state permeates production and is the only institution of any significance engaged in redistribution. Agricultural development turns out to be ordered by project and by patronage as much as by price and subsidy. Policy is a thickly tangled skein of power through which indirect, externalised and unintended activity influences each labelled sector.

Lastly, it is very hard to detect what is *not* included in agricultural development policy. The lowest priority on the liberalisation agenda is assigned - in the sector of production - to sanitation and drinking water infrastructure, organic fertiliser, credit for land purchase by landless producers and wage protection . [The social welfare sector is even lower in the ranking of policy priorities than is agricultural production, and ranked lowest in the scheme of priorities of the social sector are incapacity and disability, alcohol policy and its ravages, the life chances of girls, child labour and the condition of single person households].⁴⁵ These exclusions are not to be regarded as definitive since the means whereby they were noticed was not systematic - they were confronted during village fieldwork. Unimportant development policies involve physical dirt, manual labour, ritual pollution and age and gender subordination. Quite how liberalisation could do anything but intensify this egregious neglect is not at all apparent .

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Table 1: Agriculture Department Spending, Tamil Nadu (Rs crore (10 m))

		1994-5	1995-6	1996-7	1997-8
Current	Estimated	665	253	744	689
	Revised	717	786	789	719
Capital	Estimated	679	765	754	
	Revised	730	795	802	

Source: GOTN 1995 to 1998, *Policy Notes on Agriculture*.

Table 2: Patronage of Small Farmers: 1995.

Heavily Subsidised on Free Provision of Rationed Goods and Services

Agricultural kits to farm women

Coconut seedlings to children

Storage Bins

Tarpauline

Tyred Bullock Carts

Power Tillers, Threshers, Trailers

Micro minerals

Green manure seeds

Bio-fertiliser packs

Power pesticide sprayers

Raticide

Petromax light traps

Source: Government of Tamil Nadu, 1995. *Policy Notes on Agriculture*, Madras, pp. 18-22.

Table 3: Agricultural and Welfare Subsidies

All-India 1993-4	Fertiliser	Electricity	Irrigation ⁽¹⁾	Credit	Food	Total Ag. + Non-Ag.
Rs bu crores	2.7	3.5	2.6	1.8	3.0	127
Tamil Nadu	Rs crores	Electricity	Social Security	Noon Meal	Food	
1990-91		175.7		235.3	257.8	
1991-92		4.3		255.6	332.2	
1992-93		826.3		272.3	473.1	
1993-94		890.2	62.4	282.5	359.0	
1994-95		653.8	66.5	365.2	440.0	
1995-96		354.8	85.9	356.9	800.0	

Sources: Randhawa, 1994, p. 368; Bardhan, 1999, p. 147; Government of Tamil Nadu raw data.

⁽¹⁾ Including the annualised cost of the book value of capital costs.

Note: Agricultural subsidies as a % of total government subsidies: 13%
Agriculture as % of total GDP (1990): 32%.

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(Note: endnotes are behind references)

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Endnotes

1. Gulati and Pursell, 1993; Parikh, 1993
2. Cowen and Shenton, 1996; Kitching, 1982; Leftwich, 2000 ; Leys, 1996, Rapley, 1996
3. Ferguson, 1990, ppxiv-v
4. Pedersen, 2000
5. Policy analysis leads to ‘decisions which are impartial, taken in a technical sound fashion’ (Timmer, Pearson and Falcon, 1983)
6. Schaffer, 1985
7. Apthorpe, 1997, in Shore and Wright
8. Mutatis mutandis, this framework could be applied to policy making in other institutions which govern development, for instance (QUA)NGOs and MNCs, though to my knowledge it has not to date.
9. Ferguson would appear to owe Schaffer an intellectual debt in his compelling analysis of aid and development policy in Botswana as being an *Anti-Politics Machine*
10. see Ram, 1995, on the media and ‘hunger’ in which he shows that extreme events are publicised but routine chronic malnutrition is screened out.
11. see Harriss, 1981, for cases of intra-party contradiction in Tamil Nadu on the subject of the regulation of markets.
12. (ed) Wood, 1985
13. Codification is frequently not specified sufficiently to enable a breach of policy to be identified, which is the case with many conventions on economic and social rights (see Alston, 1994)
14. von Benda Beckmann et al, 1992; von Benda Beckmann, 1994; Ghai et al, 1987
15. Trubeck and Galanter, 1974
16. Mooij, 1999a
17. After Hirschmann, 1970
18. Chambers, 1997; and see Mosse 1995 for a critique
19. The phrase is Sudipta Kaviraj’s , 1988. Subir Sinha illustrates this point by showing how scientific research and institutions, the mini-narratives and unsustainable resources of aid donors contrive with local power relations to construe ‘watershed development’ *not* as collective

activity around soil and moisture conservation, but as a form of village level development including seasonal employment, diversification, productive activities 'labelled' for children and women (Seminar; 'Watershed Development and Rural transformation in India', Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford, 2001).

20. Wood, 1984

21. See Mooij, 1999b, for a reflection on field methods

22. Mooij, 1999a; Harriss 1991; Harriss-White and Janakarajan, forthcoming

23. There are for instance four separate regulative frameworks governing domestic financial institutions (industrial development banks) and two regulating corporate governance.

24. For a fourth, well resourced and written in the language of management studies in which 'participation' has been further transformed into a mode of access of corporate capital to 'small farmers' see www.natp.org.

25. Randhawa, 1994, pp353-78

26. Pedersen, 2000

27. Interviews in 'Frontline', vol 18, no 3 Feb 3-16 2001, pp112-120

28. See also the CPM Rajya Sabha Member, Biplab Dasgupta's accounts of structural adjustment and the environment, 1999, chs 3 and 5

29. Government of Tamil Nadu (GoTN), 1994 to 1997, *Policy Notes on Agriculture 1994-5 to 1997-8*, Dept of Agriculture, Chennai

30. Taking Ellis, 1992, as a good example of the latter's scope

31. Table 3 also shows that all state subsidies on electricity and the social sector increased from 1991-6.

32. For instance, selective subsidies are given for well boring and digging while participative water management groups are organised and surface water resources are said to be exhausted (GoTN, 1996, p64; 1997, p78)

33. GoTN, 1996, p16, p46; GoTN, p96

34. GoTn 1997, p68-78, p96

35. It was not possible to study how the Department of Agriculture's agenda is implemented in villages because our funded project had not anticipated such a radical policy disjuncture, being led by the national-level policy literature in economics and by the themes acceptable to DFID one of which was structural adjustment.

36. Srivastava, 1998, pp 224-5

37. Tamil Nadu's Noon meal Scheme was justified not only as a nutrition intervention, but also as an education, employment and social welfare intervention (Harriss, 1991)

38. www.tn.gov.in/economy/eco-may.htm 2001

39. Randhawa, 1994; Patnaik, 2001

40. Bardhan, 1998

41. Pedersen, 2000

42. Jenkins, 1999

43. Bardhan, 1998, p128; see also Corbridge and Harriss, 2000, p284

44. See Harriss-White and Janakarajan, forthcoming, for a set of village studies of development policy

45. Ibid