

REIFICATION OF FARMER CONCEPTS IN NSSO SURVEY

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Abstract: This paper shows that auto-critical “review” of definitions by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), as revised by formal abstract changes in concepts, devoid of substance, may not be a driving force of practical change in the farmers’ condition or even their understanding. Review process of the NSSO lost sight of the ground reality of Indian agriculture even as NSSO unwittingly acknowledged in general terms “changed scenario of agriculture in the country”. Abstractly revised unrealistic concepts and definitions, have affected the efficacy of the findings of Situation Assessment Survey to truly “capture the condition of agricultural households”. Nevertheless “findings” of the NSSO have sustained so far as they negated formal “concepts” and their underlying criteria. Farmer and farmer-household appear hard pressed, to make conceptual “exit” and “move-out” from traditional farming. Findings of this paper show that subsistence-farming-based farmer-households negate the idea and concept, projected on them, to change into calculative-capitalist Agricultural Production Units (APUs). It turns out that dialectical conflict and tug of war exists between the family-food-security/consumption-centered “farmer-households” versus market-oriented economic-capitalist “APUs”. The contradiction is likely to continue until human essence of real farmer/farmer-household is restored in place of “reified farmer”.

Index Terms – farmer, agricultural household, APU, Situation Assessment Survey, NSSO, reification, concept

I. Background

“All science would be superfluous if the outward *appearance* and the *essence* of things directly coincided” ~ Karl Marx: *Capital* Vol. III

The lives of farmers and agrarian crises are yet to be diagnosed and comprehended truly beyond mere awareness of external “condition of households” (NSSO, 2014). Dependence on pure economic-calculative modes of conception, definition, fixation with apparent “condition” known by mere facts, etc. transforms farmer into object of overtly incomprehensible mystery.¹

Writer Premchand’s (2004) persuasive portrayal in 1930 of *Halku’s* life of poor-yet-satiated peasant in “*Poos ki Raat*” (A Winter Night), puts up challenge to any alternate medium of expression of the life of farmer yet to appear in more convincing form in current literature. Indian farmer continues to feature in contemporary discourse more as spectral riddle than definite social relation. As human being he has been atomized and curtailed by established concepts from standing in direct relationship with environment, both as *species being* and *natural being*. His social relation, natural relation and self-relation (self-determined essence) appear disintegrated (Foster, 2001). Impressionistic accounts such as “situation assessment” survey, “state of the farmer” etc. though appealing fail to enlighten us on dynamics of inner world of consciousness of farmer where all sorts of contradictions and paradoxes operate.

In this backdrop, it is pertinent to preface this paper with Hegelian-Marxian dialectical thought that all theses–antitheses categories (viz., appearance and essence, surface reality and sub-stratum of reality, outer phenomenon and inner meaning, form and content, factual existence and potentiality-possibility, material base and ideological superstructure, quantitative and qualitative, objectivity and subjectivity, etc.) signify *dialectical and dual aspects* of things, beings, events and phenomena. Concept, as a tool of understanding with efficacy, has to capture subtle nuances and complexities hidden behind outer form and concealed in those dual aspects.

Difference between look-like and reality has to be raised to the level of “consciously defined” concepts for understanding. External characteristics tend to veil the truth of dialectical changing relations concealed in internal contradictions to be understood by appropriate concepts. In understanding reality through critique of concepts our task becomes similar to that assigned to philosophy whose objective is “exhibiting and justifying the grounds for regarding as valid the concepts so constructed” (Lukacs, 1967). Similarly, Goldway (1967: 428) states: “The problem of differentiating between what *appears* to be true and *what really is* has always been central to every scientific study. The distinction between *appearance* and *reality* is as old as mankind. The earliest men had to distinguish, *consciously* and constantly between what *looked-like* dangerous animals, poisonous reptiles, mushrooms, and so on, and *what were really such*. Likewise they had to distinguish between what *appeared* as good hunting ground, good soil to cultivate, and good weather for planting, and *what really was the case*”.

II. Farmer Question, Problem, Rationale and Critique

This paper is about locating the *essence* of “farmer”. Our focal point is farmer’s definition and concept in Situation Assessment Survey (SAS) reports of National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) of 2003 and 2013. A striking feature of farmer’s concept is that it is based on pure economic criterion which negates social/sociological aspect. This negation needs to be negated for comprehensive understanding of essential features of farmer’s concept to be effective in the current scenario of agrarian distress. The sociological approach is subordinated to economic perspective due to the expanding space of uncritical-positive-thinking-based “one-dimensional society”, “one-dimensional concepts” and “one-dimensional human beings” burdened by technological rationality of advancing capitalism (Marcuse, 2007). Such calculative rationality hardly questions concepts from dialectical multi-dimensional pluralistic perspectives. A critique of the concept of farmer is justified in the backdrop of state’s concern for “doubling farmers’ income”. Indian agriculture –along with its peripheral actor i.e. farmer– finds itself in a grip of storm created by this concern. Farmer’s existence gives *appearance* of being at the center of discourse, and yet he is not there in human *essence*.

Locating farmer in our thought process as really free (contemplative) and active subjective being with “higher consciousness” of cooperative-associative (instead of individuated) purpose of being is problematic. We pose a question: Is it possible to have free-thinking farmer? Quoting Greek philosopher Epicurus, Foster (2001) would say: It has chance, possibility and potentiality though Democritus would have said “necessity” alone determines captive-dependent state of existence of farmer. So, following Democritus, farmer in mainstream economics is projected as separated, mysterious, out-of-the-world “production unit” (NSSO, 2014), out-of-sync with human-natural reality, and subservient to economic-calculative rationality. This is signified by farmer’s diversified-dual mode of co-existence: Persistence of subsistence farming since Neolithic age (Waters, 2007) and “agropastoralism” and “specialized pastoralism” since pre-history (Ratnagar, 2004: 89-104) was carried with quasi-commercial farming; and supplementing successful survival with distressed suicides.

The *apparent* contradiction of well-being with distress is to be understood and resolved by going to the root of the farmer’s *essence*. Essence of man is man himself (Foster, 2001). This applies to farmer also for whom external world is antithetical and “negative”. Therefore, Dhanagare (1994:19) holds that “the term ‘peasant’ needs to be defined by establishing its meaning negatively”. Mode of thinking has to be radical, critical, “negative” (Hegel’s “negation of negation”), and questioning of established aspects (Marcuse, 2007). It also applies to our exploring of farmer’s essence and ontology of his social-being in traditional agriculture. Marx is pertinently quoted in Lukacs (1967): “To be radical is to go to the root of the matter. For man, the root is man himself”. Man of the moment in this paper is farmer. We are now in a position to concretize the problem: Human, not technocratic-economic perspective; farmer is not the issue, the issue of primary importance is approach. We offer a critique of the criteria adopted by NSSO in defining the concept of farmer projected in sole pursuance of profit-income.

III. NSSO’s Concepts and Findings Used by Researchers

Using data from existing sources has acquired renewed importance –the most prominent being surveys of NSSO. Surveys of 59th round (2003) and 70th round (2013) are two most important input-sources of NSSO to know economic condition of Indian farmers. Reports of these surveys formulated farmer’s concept and other related concepts. Recently, researchers looking for evidence of farmers’ income-growth have made extensive use of NSSO data and depended on this lone source for “doubling farmers’ incomes” project. NSSO’s inputs on farmers’ incomes, concepts and criteria are extensively used by Satyasai (2015), Chandrasekhar *et al* (2016) and Satyasai *et al* (2016). Although reservations have been expressed severally on reliability of NSSO’s data, its use continues –mainly because alternate database at All-India level based on large-sample survey of farmers does not exist. Though NSSO’s findings may have been questioned from time to time, concept of farmer has never been critiqued.

IV. Surveys, Statistics/Concepts, Depiction in World History

Many countries conduct need-based surveys to collect data through designated agencies. These data serve important purpose of understanding changes in socio-economic state of population. In the pre-1917 Russia, Zemstvo statistical data consolidated in *Statistical Returns* for various regions (called Gubernia) came handy in making precise assessment of the state of development of Russian economy. The rigor and coverage of Zemstvo data based on clear thought process helped Lenin (1977) in conceptualizing differentiation of peasantry and evaluating “the whole process of the development of capitalism in Russia”. Zemstvo data also facilitated Lenin in settling debate with ‘Narodnik’ economists on the issues of capitalist relations, emerging home market and differentiation of peasantry. His analysis, based on reliable Zemstvo inputs went a long way in building practical case for people’s revolution. True depiction of reality and robust policy-making is possible only by reliable data-inputs, thoughts and concepts.

We take a plausible view that surveys in any form need to portray “true” state of reality –form of truth that follows complex dialectical process of understanding conflicts and contradictions at ground level. An adequate grasp of thought process that goes behind conceptions is difficult without shedding formal empty abstractions. It is due to accurate portrayal of ground reality that *Animal Farm* penned by Orwell (2011) in literary form of novel in 1945 is considered classic and one of the most influential

portrayals of true essence of its time as it depicted sufferings of peasants under Czarist and Stalinist regimes as also English imperialist practices. Words were able to achieve what statistical concepts, data, facts and findings could not do. Qualitative change in society/economy may be captured truly when data-inputs and concepts have intrinsic subjective quality (use/ substance/ meaning). Orwell's portrayal rested on transformation of the quantitative into qualitative. His portrayal of characters/ functions was so perfect and so near to the actors/events of autocratic regimes of that era, including Czar and Stalin (Copley, 2016). In our times, portrayal of state/ society in the U.S.A exemplified by Chomsky (2007) fulfils the standard of most accurate conceptualization and depiction of reality. Importance of concepts to be substantive (useful) and meaningful to reflect on reality cannot be overlooked. Efficacy of literary presentation cannot be underestimated vis-à-vis quasi-scientific economic conception and technocratic analysis.

V. Objectives

The main objective of the paper is to analyze concepts and definitions of the NSSO in Situation Assessment Surveys (SAS) of 2003 and 2013, henceforth termed as SAS-2003 and SAS-2013. SAS-2013 is reported as a “repeat survey” of SAS-2003ⁱⁱ. It's not our object to see comparability of results of SAS-2003 with SAS-2013 since this aspect is already clarified by NSSO (2014: 4): Results of the two surveys are not strictly comparable. Our objectives in this paper are:

1. To present a critique of concepts and definitions related to farmer in survey.
2. To discuss implications of concepts and definitions on findings in survey.
3. To make comparison of concepts with findings to see any incompatibility and contradictions.

We conclude our paper with observations on whether SAS-2013 sought to have a conceptual paradigm-shift in the Indian agriculture through the changes in criteria, concepts and definitions.

VI. Approach & Methodology

One way to locate the essence of farmer from sociological perspective of Theodor Shanin, Daniel Thorner and Lenin centered on “middle peasant” is illustrated in Dhanagare (1994). In this approach, criteria used for qualitative differentiation of farmers are three-fold: (1) type of income received from the soil (wage/ profit/ rent); (2) the nature of rights (secure/ insecure); and (3) the extent of field work actually performed. Using this approach Daniel Thorner proposed the following workable conceptual model of agrarian class structure, varying from region to region in vernacular terms: I. ‘Maliks’ⁱⁱⁱ; II. ‘Kisans’^{iv}; and III. ‘Mazdoors’^v (Dhanagare 1994: 14). *He includes ‘substantial tenants’ among ‘Kisans’ and ‘poor tenants’ among ‘Mazdoors’, which appears logical.* Theodor Shanin placed emphasis on “relationship to land” in understanding agrarian relations. Our analysis borrows some elements of sociological approach. We use the approach/ phenomenon of “reification” illustrated by Lukacs (1967) based on the concept of “fetishism” of commodities developed by Marx (1986). So far farmer in India was conceived with the sole aim of production. Now he is projected with the objective of “income” also –to take care of money-value of produce besides producing goods. Researchers have conducted studies (cited in this paper) to find data-based evidence of doubling of income of farmers using the NSSO's concepts and findings. In this context, depicting the reality of incomes necessitates constructing concepts and devising definitions based on sound criteria to generate data-inputs – expected to be rooted in real-life activities of farmers. So, our critique of NSSO's concept of farmer is based on the method of “Historical Materialism” described by Marx *et al* (1976). We check validity of criteria used for concepts from the aspect of historical materialism.

VII. NSSO's Concept of Farmer

SAS-2003 (59th round) states: “A *farmer* is defined as a person who *operates* some land and is engaged in agricultural activities^{vi} during the last 365 days. A person qualifies as a farmer if: (i) he *possesses* some land; and (ii) he is engaged in some agricultural activities on that land during the last 365 days. A household having at least one *farmer* as its member was regarded as a *farmer household* in the context of the present survey. Persons engaged in agricultural and/or allied activities but *not operating* a piece of land are not considered as *farmers*. Similarly, agricultural laborers, coastal fishermen, rural artisans and persons engaged in agricultural services are not considered as *farmers*. It is also quite possible that during the reference period of last 365 days, a person could have left his entire land as ‘current fallow’ by discretion or due to natural situation or otherwise^{vii}; such farmers are also excluded from the coverage” (NSSO, 2005: 4-5)

NSSO made a critical review of its concepts and definitions in 70th round. It dispensed with the term “farmer-household”. New concepts of “agricultural-household” and “agricultural production unit” (APU) were introduced. SAS-2013 states that: “A critical analysis of the concepts and definitions followed in 59th round with respect to the changed scenario of agriculture in the country revealed the necessity of *dropping the criterion of land possession* for considering a *household* to be covered in the survey. Recognizing the fact that *significant* agricultural activity can be conducted *without possessing any land*, the definition of ‘*farmer*’ followed in NSS 59th Round was critically reviewed and the *land possession* as an eligibility criterion was dispensed with, replacing it with the concept of ‘*agricultural production unit*’^{viii} as one which produces field crops, horticultural crops, livestock and the

products of any of the other specified agricultural activities. With a view to keep the large number of households with *insignificant* agricultural activities *out of survey coverage*, it was decided to have a minimum value of agricultural produce for a household to qualify as an ‘agricultural production unit’. . . A *cut off* of Rs.3000/- for value of annual agricultural produce was adopted and the survey was renamed as ‘Situation Assessment Survey’ of Agricultural Households.’ (NSSO, 2014: 2)

SAS-2013 (70th round) thus defines “agricultural household”: “An *agricultural household* was defined as a household receiving some value of produce more than Rs.3000/- from *agricultural activities*^{ix} and having at least one member self employed in *agriculture* either in the principal status or in subsidiary status during last 365 days. However, households which were *entirely agricultural labor households* and households receiving income *entirely from coastal fishing*, activity of rural artisans and agricultural services, were not considered as agricultural household.”(NSSO, 2014: 3)

VIII. Critique of Concept of “Farmer”

8.1 Criterion Discards Necessity of Land Possession

NSSO’s reasoning that “significant agricultural activities” can take place without land possession, does not appear plausible from the perspective of resource-poor cultivator. Significant agricultural activities without necessity of land possession makes it possible for him to be eligible for sample, but our contention is that he may not be termed as farmer. Nevertheless “farmer” concept is missing altogether from SAS-2013. Cut-throat competition for leased land and inflated land rents are expected with this criterion^x. An outcome of import of ‘no-land-possession’ criterion to define farmer is seen in endeavor to liberalize lease market and Model Land Lease Act by ‘NITI Aayog’ (2016) so that a species of *lease farmers* is encouraged, followed by lease-based units/companies.

By adopting the criterion of *no-land-possession*, probability of persons to be selected in sample as “farmer” gets increased as there is large number of persons who do not possess land to do farming but do animal-farming along with leased-in land –so that as per SAS-2013 they become eligible for sample. Conversely, probability of *land-possessing* cultivator-households is reduced if *no-land-possessing* persons are selected in sample. The criterion causes sample biasness. By this liberal criterion, farmer is conceptually divested of “natural condition of production” or “object of labor” or “inorganic part of his nature”, i.e. called land, which directly enables him to work on it with his labor. He is projected to do “agricultural” activity but that does not necessarily include cultivation since *a priori* he does not possess land. This is strange criterion as farmer is projected, to be in “agriculture” *without necessity of possessing land*.

In previous SAS-2003, a person included in sample could do cultivation of “field crops and horticultural crops, growing of trees or plantations, animal husbandry, poultry, fishery, piggery, bee-keeping, vermiculture, sericulture, etc.” (NSSO, 2005) However, in SAS-2013, despite *not possessing* any land, a person selected in sample is projected to do all such same agricultural activities. In comparison to SAS-2003 overall sample of SAS-2013 is expected to be biased in favor of *no-land-possessing*-persons vis-à-vis *land-possessing* cultivators. The essence of farmer as cultivator is diluted as he makes way for something else: Land-disabled.

If necessity of *land possession* is discarded, it implies either (i) land-based crop cultivation be left out from definition of farmer, or (ii) it be clearly indicated in report that intention (not made explicit) is to include other “agricultural activities”(cited) under the rubric of erstwhile “farmer” in greater number. Option (ii) matters the most due to feasibility. NSSO’s reading of “changed scenario of agriculture in the country” projects a thought that *land-based* activity of cultivation has lesser economic significance vis-à-vis agricultural activities (animal husbandry and others cited). *By doing away with criterion of land possession, definition of farmer triggers a paradigm shift in agriculture according to which sample farmer may or may not possess land so as to be pressed to do other “agricultural activities”*

8.2 Conceptual Exit of “Farmer” and Shift to “Agricultural” Unit

NSSO’s definition takes farmer and farming notionally away from the realm of cultivation to the broad notions of “agricultural-household” and “agricultural activities”. In the thought process of NSSO, farming is no longer central activity. There is shift in focus from farmer and farming to abstract “agricultural activities”. Transformative change in notions takes us back to retrospective described by Mazoyer *et al* (2008) as “the earliest systems of *cultivation and animal-breeding* [that] appeared in the Neolithic epoch at least 10,000 years ago”.

For transformation into “agricultural” system, concept of “agricultural production unit” (APU) is devised. The contours and qualitative dimensions of APU are not defined in report. Nonetheless it is indication toward production-oriented enterprise of sheer economic importance, and need not necessarily be a compound of elements, viz., demographic-household element and agriculture/farm element. It is intended to dissociate notion of family-household from farm/agriculture so that “agricultural” activity henceforth is pure economic enterprise divested of familial connection, based on hired labor in a framework of micro economic theory of farm-firm.

The intent of bringing-in concept of “unit” is to transform “agricultural activities” into economic production units –*land-possession no more necessary*. It tends to take us to classical epoch of capitalism wherein trinity of separated land-owner (rentier),

capital-owner (capitalist) and labor-owner (wage-laborer) are distinct concepts. However, intent and expression of SAS-2013 is somewhat guarded so as not to show revealed preference for capitalism in Indian agriculture. It just converts “household” into “production unit” in way as it converted and finished the concept of crop-farming into “agricultural” activity. Several “agricultural” activities together give impression that persons may carry them in customary way of household activity with family labor though it is misconception. Misconception vanishes by reverting to the concept of “production unit” i.e. of pure economic significance oriented to profit instead of household consumption even as “household” gives way to economic “unit” concept. NSSO’s traditional household-based “animal-husbandry” concept (before survey) (NSSO, 2014: 2) transforms into modern “animal-farming” concept (after survey) (NSSO, 2014: 22-23).

8.3 Cut-off Value and Exclusion of Households

Attaching *money* value as also a cut-off to *home-consumption* of agricultural produce to decide economic significance of activity and exclude such households from sample (later) is fraught with conceptual errors. SAS-2013 excludes “households” which do not fit to be eligible as production “units”. It claims that to keep large number of households with insignificant agricultural activities out of survey coverage, it was decided to have a minimum value (Rs.3000) of agricultural produce for a household to qualify as ‘agricultural production unit’. While cut-off *value* is arbitrary (despite 68th round data source) from quantitative aspect, idea of exclusion *per se* is questionable from qualitative aspect. “Home grown consumption” *per se* may not justify valid ground to decide on eligibility for “agricultural production unit” though NSSO excluded only *below* threshold/ cut-off level households.

Even if households may possess and operate land and produce annual produce of value below Rs.3000 they are not fit to be included in sample: Indirectly, NSSO conceives such households not as “farmers” or APUs. By NSSO’s (2014) logic, economic size alone matters –below minimum point on income scale, a cultivator is not fit to be termed as farmer or production unit of “significant” economic proportion. Subsistence farmers or even below-subsistence farmers (if that term could be attributed for survival on verge of deficit of home production) are not fit to be termed as farmers according to NSSO (2014). This makes it problematic.

IX. Implications

Concept of farmer and its related concepts of NSSO (2014) entailed data collection through survey whose findings are expected to have implications for reliability, validity, etc. as under.

9.1 Biased Results due to Exclusion and Adverse Selection

NSSO’s (2014) report SAS-2013 claims that there was large number of households with “insignificant” agricultural activities which were intended to be kept out of the survey. Survey design actually resorted to excluding those households from sample later (at stage of tabulation). *It implies that results and findings of survey are biased to the extent of exclusion of “insignificant nature” of households.* It is normal to expect exclusion of subsistence households (annual consumption of home-grown produce below Rs.3000/-) shall have impact of artificially inflating average income since overall sample has greater proportion of other households doing “significant” sized agricultural activities.

Recent researches (cited earlier) into comparison of incomes based on SAS-2003 and SAS-2013 data are not expected to be a rigorous comparison to reflect true ground reality since incomes of SAS-2013 survey are influenced upwards and inflated by exclusion of “insignificant” type households. *Household-exclusion through weak conceptualization is expected to entail adverse selection of households, affecting consistency of findings, results and conclusions.* Each agricultural household, irrespective of size of activity/ produce/expenditure should matter equally for chance of selection. Arbitrary exclusion entails potentiality of biasness. Even SAS-2003 report of NSSO (2005) had engaged in exclusion of households of this type (“insignificant” farming activities of *kitchen garden*, etc.). Conscious “elimination of households pursuing farming activities” of “insignificant” nature (NSSO, 2014: 3) from sample implies that definition of farmer gets distorted and/or results are also affected to be invalid. Exclusion is invalidated by the vision of National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) which envisages promoting *cultivation of home vegetable gardens* to manage food shocks (NRLM, 2015).

9.2 Wage and Salary Incomes Clubbed Together

Results on income of agricultural households are tabulated by NSSO (2014) denoting four sources, viz., income from “wage/salary”, net receipt from cultivation, net receipt from animal farming, and net receipt from non-farm business. The earlier SAS-2003 report of NSSO (2005) did not club wage and salary together: It kept “wage” without hyphenated with “salary”. It is not clear from report why wage income is clubbed with salary income in the findings though it has no indication of rationale at conceptual level. An agricultural household may possibly have incomes of members sourced from both wage and salary yet these heads may not be clubbed as qualitatively different. The two income sources are species of different kind, incompatible to compare, and unsuited to club together. They are of different genre and need to be categorized separately even for same household.

Wage income is attributed to activity of wage-labor of uncertain, unfixed and casual nature. There is element of chance and unexpected eventuality. Even contract-labor’s wage income is uncertain. Wages are normally on daily basis. Statutory fixing of wage

rate by state or periodic fixing of wage rate under schemes does not make wage income fixed like salary income unless days of employment or employment *as such* of laborer is permanent and fixed. Salary income is of fixed/ predicted nature. Element of daily uncertainty of unemployment is absent from salary income. Salary income is received normally on monthly basis.

NSSO's (2014) mixing of wage and salary sources within same agricultural household is a flawed concept and marks a break from earlier practice of NSSO (2005) in 59th round that conceived "wage" without hyphenated with "salary". Fixed salaried class person being qualitatively differentiated in labor market (class, nature of job and level of earning) may not be clubbed with ad-hoc wage-labor class person even within same household. Clubbing of wage and salary incomes within a household distinguishes that particular household from another household that has e.g. no salary income but only wage income.

9.3 Incompatibility of Concepts with Findings

Findings contradict the approach followed by NSSO (2014) for concepts and definitions. Lukacs (1967) would say findings do not "justify the grounds [criteria] on which the concepts are so constructed". The ultimate test of justification of concepts is in findings. Concepts need to be compatible with findings. (Table 1)



Table 1: NSSO's Findings and Concepts in SAS-2013: Incompatibility

Finding	Criterion for Concept	Remark on Contradiction
About 63.5% of the agricultural households reported <i>cultivation</i> as principal source of income. They were dependent mainly on <i>cultivation</i> (NSSO, 2014: 12).	Land possession as criterion for defining farmer is done away with (NSSO, 2014: 2)	With 2/3 rd majority of the households principally being <i>land-tillers</i> doing cultivation, the criterion of discarding land possession is not justified.
About 93% of agricultural households in the country possessed some type of land other than ' <i>homestead land only</i> ' (NSSO, 2014: 16)	Land possession as criterion for defining farmer is done away with (NSSO, 2014: 2)	With 93% households possessing land since thought critical for "significant" agricultural activities, criterion of discarding land possession is not justified.
More than 50% of the agricultural households in the lowest size class (<0.01 ha) of land possessed <i>did not operate</i> any land ^{xi} (NSSO, 2014: 16).	Land possession as criterion for defining farmer is done away with (NSSO, 2014: 2)	Daniel Thorner's concept of Indian farmer "clinging to land" is proved. Even if they do not operate land, they continue to have its possession. <i>Sample</i> households hitherto are qualitatively similar to the <i>excluded</i> wage laborer households. ^{xii} Discarding land possession criterion is unjustified. ^{xiii}
Average monthly income of the agricultural households included net receipts from cultivation, farming of animals, non-farm business and income from " <i>wages/salaries</i> " (NSSO, 2014: 21)	(i) Wage and salary incomes within same household are clubbed. (ii) Only <i>actual</i> (out-of-pocket) expenditure on inputs for recording agricultural expenditure was followed. Imputed figures in respect of consumption of inputs out of home stock or out of free collection as well as received in exchange or borrowed were not considered. (NSSO, 2014: 3)	(i) Conceptual discrepancy of wage-salary mix is not justified as the two sources are of different genre. (ii) NSSO aptly felt the limitation of its approach: "With such method of accounting, <i>it would not be possible to derive true income of the household from agricultural activities</i> . It would be sufficient to provide income [narrowly] from 'paid expenditure' approach". (NSSO, 2014: 3). Therefore, wage-salary income conceptual mix is not justified.
A major share of agricultural production is for <i>own consumption</i> (NSSO, 2014: 28). The data show a <i>lesser level of awareness</i> about MSP and even <i>lower level of sale</i> of crops to procurement agencies. Even for the households reported sale to the procurement agency, the <i>quantity sold was a very small percentage</i> of total sale by these households (NSSO, 2014: 31).	A large number of households with value of annual consumer expenditure of home-grown agricultural produce below Rs.3000 were eliminated from sample to define farmer (NSSO, 2014: 3).	Agricultural produce oriented to self-consumption/ <i>subsistence</i> needs or sold mainly to <i>local</i> trader implies majority of the sample households have no ambition to be capitalist/commercial farmers in given conditions. But that does not render them "insignificant". Arbitrary exclusion of similar households from sample, treated as "insignificant" types, is not justified.
Average annual actual expenditure for crop production and receipt per sample agricultural household was Rs.2192 and Rs.5542, respectively (NSSO, 2014: 36).	A large number of households with value of annual consumer expenditure of home-grown agricultural produce below Rs.3000 were eliminated from sample to define farmer (NSSO, 2014: 3).	There is not much difference between net income of Rs.3350 of <i>sample</i> households and value of agricultural produce of Rs.3000 for consumption as cut-off for <i>excluded</i> households. Therefore, arbitrary exclusion of "insignificant" type of households from sample is not justified.
About 45% of the total agricultural households belonged to <i>Other Backward Classes</i> (OBC). About 16% of agricultural households were from <i>Scheduled Castes</i> (SC) and 13% were from <i>Scheduled Tribes</i> (ST) (NSSO, 2014: 10).	A large number of households with value of annual consumer expenditure of home-grown agricultural produce below Rs.3000 were eliminated from sample to define farmer (NSSO, 2014: 3).	About 3/4 th of <i>sample</i> households belong to the disadvantaged social groups/class-castes, practically "insignificant" types themselves. Arbitrary exclusion of similar economically "insignificant" type households from sample to define farmer is not justified.

9.4 Sociological/Social Approach to understand Farmer is Absent

Findings of report (NSSO, 2014) indicate that concept of farmer is not robust since incompatible with ground reality of farming characterized by depressed condition of sample households. Sociological approach to the understanding of farmer is missing due to unrealistic criteria. Such criteria did not allow tabulating data in ways other than mechanical-economic "size-class of land possessed"

or analyzing results in terms of, e.g. Daniel Thorner's simple social classification of "malik", "kisan", "mazdoor" production relations, or Lenin's "poor peasant", "middle peasant", "well-to-do peasant" conceptions. *Rent of land is important social relation of production but it is not considered as criterion to define farmer or his income*. Shanin's criterion of "relationship to land", is disregarded by SAS-2013, by posing *no necessity of land-possession* criterion. Necessity of land possession is discarded by NSSO's criterion, yet results are tabulated in terms of "size-class of land possessed". If land possession is not necessary, then centrality of "land possessed" for tabulation becomes contradictory. Farmer as really free, social, organic being, is non-existing in concepts. He is projected as subordinate part of "agricultural" entity conceived as abstract "production unit" (rather than "relation of production" related to social environment). Farmer is transformed into mere producer, *homo-economicus* being and a dependent-determined object defined in arbitrary way.

9.5 "Reification" of Farmer

Projection of farmer in NSSO's (2014) appears "reified" (strange-spectral object) vis-à-vis his fundamental contemplative nature (thinking and relating subject) concealed by "phantom objectivity" of economic autonomy. Farmer appears riddle since SAS-2013 falls short of comprehending him adequately. This critique of farmer's concept is based on Lukacs' (1967) "reification" concept. Mainstream economics is not accustomed to such depiction of farmer's essence and appearance. Reification is thus defined by Wikipedia-Marxism (2016): "Reification or objectification is the *thingification* of social relations or of those involved in them, to the extent that the nature of social relationships is expressed by the relations between traded objects. Objects are transformed into subjects and subjects are transformed into objects, with the result that subjects are *rendered passive* or determined, while objects are rendered as active, determining factor."^{xiv}

Reification erodes people's way of thinking. When relationship between man and product (gratification by use-value) or between man and man (social-human) is not recognized or even perceived *as such*, it implies a reified mind is in operation (Lukacs, 1967). Consciousness of thinking-mind that goes into defining concept through thought process of NSSO is coming into conflict with ground reality as revealed by findings: concept and reality appear separated. By applying the "phenomenon of reification" developed by Lukacs (1967) we arrive at the following understanding of *reified traits* projected on farmer's concept in SAS-2013 (Table 2).

Table 2: Reified Features of NSSO's Concept of Farmer

Reification	Reified Projection of Farmer
Gripped mind and captive consciousness	Farmer is projected as exact-calculative (not contemplative) person, <i>mindless</i> mechanical (not unmindful human with idiosyncrasies), repetitive-rational (not thinking-rational) burdened to produce for market or to earn foreign exchange or food security for country. He is transformed into "agricultural production unit" of "significant" size fit to be projected as engaged in selling farm produce (quasi-surplus) beyond "home-grown consumption" despite revealed as a subsistence farmer in findings (NSSO, 2014: 28). SAS-2013 conceived trader-commercial-farmer type objectified production "unit", yet what emerged in findings is subjective, thinking consumption-subsistence oriented farmer. NSSO (2014: 3-4) did not consider agricultural inputs sourced from "out of home stock" or "out of free collection" (gift ^{xv}) or "received in exchange" (unmediated barter) or "borrowed" (shared/ credit), etc. for accounting expenditure. This is reification of thinking as sole reliance on "out-of-pocket" expenditure for business loses sight of the ground reality of money-borrowing and credit. Another example of captive consciousness is that "wage" and "salary" incomes of same agricultural household are mixed.
Objectification/ 'thingification'	Objectification of farmer is reflected by use of himself as "wage labor" (labor power sold as commodity) to earn income for survival. NSSO(2005: 4 and 2014: 3) arbitrarily excludes agricultural laborers from farmers' sample despite its own finding (NSSO, 2014: 13) showing that wage-income is significant (22% or second largest) source of sample farmers' income. If wage-labor income is desperately desired then "agricultural labor households" possessing no-land should also be part of sample "agricultural households". Without agricultural production they are inferior to agricultural households –hence "objects" unworthy of inclusion in sample. Production is the dividing line. Exclusion reflects domination of "production" (objects) over humans (laborer households) treated as things. The same "production" (objectified) thinking engulfs sample households by thrusting commercial "production unit" ideology devoted to market while they desire subsistence farming.
Isolated, separated, estranged, alienated, Disintegrated (without bond)	Owner-operator status of farmer is most prominent indication of isolated existence as producer. In this capacity, he does not share cooperative/ associative <i>bond</i> to relate with social environment/ ecology but rather shares <i>bondage</i> of dependence borne out of isolation. NSSO (2014) does not conceive any associative feature of farmer. Farmer is projected as dismembered from his species/ community. Another example of estrangement is exclusion of households to "eliminate", what NSSO (2014) termed "large number of farmers" in "insignificant" agricultural activities. From <i>food security</i> perspective, exclusion of "coastal fishermen" from sample by NSSO (2014) would also tantamount to human estrangement of these vital fishery "production units" from agriculture/food system. Why should it matter, from food security perspective that fishery has to be specifically inland fishery or coastal fishery? Inland fishery is made part of agricultural activities by NSSO (2014). No land possession is necessary for agricultural activities (including fishery) yet coastal fishermen-food-producers are not included in "agricultural

	production units” of sample agricultural households. A narrow view of “agricultural activities” leads to arbitrary separation of producer households.
False autonomy/ independence	It’s not real independence (which enables him to control conditions) that farmer enjoys. Rather there is false freedom of separated production that makes farmer <i>alienated</i> from farmers/ produce/ labor/ nature/ everything. By virtue of false autonomy, farmer is projected as dependent being. He is pressed by external compulsions and coercions concealed by technological modernity. While historical circumstances induce farmers to operate within framework of family-subsistence-consumption system farming, he is conceived as commercial-capitalist market-trade oriented “production unit” unless contradicted by findings of him being a subsistence farmer (NSSO, 2014: 28). Lukacs (1967) claims that reification of captive mind happens if person is projected as object of “pure economics based only on production”, to the detriment/disregard of consumption.

X. Conclusions

It is erroneous to claim that SAS-2013 is a “repeat survey” of SAS-2003 when fundamental concepts and underlying criteria of farmer/farmer-household have got changed and distorted. Paper presents evidence that 70th round of survey (SAS-2013) sought to bring a conceptual paradigm shift, from old “insignificant-sized farmer-household” oriented subsistence farming system towards quasi-commercial-capitalist production unit (APU) system centered round “agricultural-households” of “significant” economic size and strength. The conceptual model of SAS-2013 is not workable, and it is less likely to work in future also under the current “condition of agricultural households”. Conceptual model was disapproved by empirical findings of survey. Findings negated “reified” definitions, concepts and criteria so constructed for SAS-2013 as these constructs could not constitute valid and justified ground to understand the ground reality of sample agricultural households. Contradiction and incompatibility of the findings with the concepts and criteria was a characteristic feature of the 70th round.

Paper proves that NSSO’s rhetorical auto-critical “review” of definitions revised by formal abstract changes in concepts devoid of substance (meaning, use-value) may not be a driving force of practical change in the farmers’ condition or even understanding. Review process lost sight of the ground reality of Indian agriculture even as NSSO unwittingly acknowledged in general terms “the changed scenario of agriculture in the country”. Abstractly revised and unrealistic concepts and definitions affected the efficacy of findings of survey to truly “capture the condition of agricultural households” (NSSO, 2014). Nevertheless findings sustained so far as they negated formal concepts and their underlying criteria. Farmer and farmer-household appeared intellectually pressed to make conceptual exit and move-out from traditional farming. Findings show that subsistence farming based farmer-households negated the idea and concept projected on them to change into calculative-capitalist APUs. It turned out dialectical contradiction between family-food-security-consumption centered farmer-households versus market-oriented economic APUs. The contradiction is likely to continue until human essence of farmer is restored. The conflict was witnessed at various levels as discussed in paper. An alarming aspect was wretched “reification” of farmer projected in spectral riddle-like image with false consciousness of *homo economicus* producer in pursuit of “significant” economic size to be eligible for calculative APU. From being “farmer” he became “unit”. His fundamental nature of free contemplative unmindful being with human/social essence was replaced by mindless-mechanical-repetitive subordinate producer for market. He was divested of historical necessity of land-possession in favor of APU-ownership. His casual “wage” was confused with fixed “salary”. A multitude of “insignificant” looking households was either excluded from survey as ineligibles or became *passive* land-possessor non-operators. SAS-2013 conceived and projected a farmer ever ready to make conceptual exit and be evicted from the land of free-thinking active beings, to be a lease-holder of acquired exotic wisdom. The *material* ground reality based on findings of farmer-households, however, negated this *conceptualized-ideal* negation. In dialectical process of development, paper concludes in posing a question of human essence to the free-thinking mind: What comes first –farmer or calculative-economics?

NOTES

ⁱSociological aspect has been somehow subordinate to economic approach. This trend is cause for concern in Indian agricultural society dominated by motion of “economy”. A series of articles published during 2016 under “Review of Rural Affairs” in *Economic & Political Weekly* is notable addition to the literature for revival of social-ethnic-anthropological approach. A sociological/social perspective on life of farmers, based on field studies in J&K State, was attempted by this author in “Village Weekly” column of *Daily Excelsior* that started from 31 May 2015 covering more than 30 villages of Ladakh, Kashmir, and Jammu Divisions, focusing on story of a different village each week. (<http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/life-in-chuchoot-village-of-ladakh/>) Such studies need to be encouraged (<https://www.researchgate.net/project/Evolutionary-pluralistic-approach-to-understanding-farmers-rural-economy>)

ⁱⁱThe survey aimed at capturing the condition of agricultural households in the context of policies and programmes of Government of India. (NSSO, 2014)

ⁱⁱⁱTheir *income is derived primarily from property rights in the soil* and whose common interest is to keep the level of rents up. They collect rents from tenants, sub-tenants and share croppers. ‘Maliks’ are of two categories: a) Big landlords, holding rights over large tracts extending over several villages; they are absentee owners/ rentiers with absolutely no interest in land management or improvement; and b) rich landowners, proprietors with considerable holdings but usually in the same village and although performing

no field-work, supervising cultivation and taking personal interest in the management and also in the improvement of land if necessary (Dhanagare, 2007).

^{iv} They are *working peasants* having property interest in the land but actual rights, whether legal or customary, inferior to those of 'Maliks'. 'Kisans' are of two categories: a) Small landowners, having holdings sufficient to support a family, who cultivate land with family labor and who do not either employ outside labor (except in harvest) or receive rent. Ulyanovsky (1985) termed them "Junker capitalists" i.e. "owner-operators"; and b) Substantial tenants hold leases; their *tenurial rights are fairly secure*; size of holding is usually above the sufficiency level. (Dhanagare, 2007)

^v They earn their livelihood primarily from working on others lands. 'Mazdoors' are of two categories: a) *Poor tenants, having tenancy rights but less secure*, holdings are too small to suffice for a family's maintenance and income derived from land is often less than that earned by wage labor; and b) Sharecroppers who are either tenants-at-will or leases without security, cultivating land for others on share-cropper basis, and having at least agricultural implements; and c) Landless laborers (Dhanagare, 2007).

^{vi} Cultivation of field crops and horticultural crops, growing of trees or plantations (such as rubber, cashew, coconut, pepper, coffee, tea, etc.), animal husbandry, poultry, fishery, piggery, bee-keeping, vermiculture, sericulture, etc. (NSSO, 2005)

^{vii} Compulsion of scarce resources/ finance as reason is not mentioned –a serious omission. A large number of households would have current fellows due to lack of finance.

^{viii} Text is not clear as it lends itself to interpretation that *land possession* criterion is replaced by *Agricultural Production Unit* owner-operatorship criterion. It is remarkable change to bring-in conceptual paradigm shift toward capitalist enterprises/ units in place of *land* and *households*.

^{ix} Cultivation of field crops, horticultural crops, fodder crops, plantation, animal husbandry, poultry, fishery, piggery, bee-keeping, vermiculture, sericulture etc.

^x In Punjab where oral lease market is brisk, open and liberally developed, competition already caused high land rents (up to Rs.50,000 per acre) leading to inflated costs and distressed farmers—prone to suicides (Sangwan, 2016). *Dalit* tenant farmers are the worst sufferers of land war (Bajpai, 2016). Crisis has its beginning in land lease market.

^{xi} Such land-possessing households included in sample are *de facto* pure agricultural laborer households, the category which was excluded from sample. Finding suggests such exclusion from sample as unjustified.

^{xii} Daniel Thorner's conceptual model (Dhanagare, 1994) included 'poor tenants' of insecure tenurial status among 'Mazdoors'. In contemporary mainstream literature oral 'poor tenants' are cultivator-farmers. With these flexibilities, hitherto excluded agricultural labor households could be eligible for sample selection, more so if some sample land-possessing households are *de facto* agricultural laborer households.

^{xiii} SAS-2003 report of NSSO (2005: 4) defined farmer/farmer-household by criterion of "operating" land; SAS-2013 report of NSSO (2014: 2) defines agricultural-household in terms of land "possession".

^{xiv} The concept is related to, but is distinct from Marx's concepts of alienation and commodity fetishism. Alienation is the general condition of human estrangement. Reification is a specific form of alienation. Commodity fetishism is specific form of reification.

^{xv} Traditional communities all over the world including India survive also on free exchange/gift economy in farm and non-farm sectors (Bakshi, 2009: 171-204). NSSO (2014) ignored this aspect to project a reified-calculative idea of economics thrust upon sample farmer-households erroneously.

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