

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

### Political Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/polgeo



# Geographies of mediation: Market development and the rural broker in Maharashtra, India

Gregory L. Simon\*

University of Colorado Denver, Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences, P.O. Box 173364, Campus Box 172, Denver, CO 80217-3364, USA

Keywords:
Development
Commercialization
Neoliberal state
India
Brokers
Cookstoves
Indoor air pollution

#### ABSTRACT

This paper explicates the role of community-level intermediaries in post-liberalized economic sectors. Focusing on nascent commercial markets for improved, smokeless cookstoves in southwestern Maharashtra, I describe how development is encountered by three analytic groups – artisans, female stove users and NGO field officers. This study highlights patterns of strategic intermediary action, or forms of brokering, used to negotiate the commercialization process for individuals involved in the fabrication, distribution and use of improved cookstoves. A close analysis of the mediating agent can strengthen theories on how individuals and communities encounter sector privatization and state retrenchment. This study reveals a diverse set of brokering activities and actors, and shows how intermediaries combine tasks associated with traditional conceptions of the political fixer and market broker by working within and between groups of market, village and state operatives to transform market supply chains. Mediating agents coordinate counter regulating activities within civil society in the absence of heavy state intervention and play a crucial role in activating and connecting community interests to latent neoliberal state resources.

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Mr. Bhaskar Datta Kumbhar's artisan workspace sits directly across from his home in a small courtyard where a number of chulah (cookstove) molds are stacked over ten feet high. Only a few paces away, a small canal flows in a straight line bisecting the village. Mr. Kumbhar regularly uses water from the canal to mix cement and soften and shape clay during the potting process. Pointing to the large pile of chulah molds, Mr. Bhaskar tells me they are part of a large order he arranged in a nearby village. "My family will install these chulah in the next few days." He adds that he has been trying to install stoves there for some time, "You see, when I first began my enterprise, I followed the instructions of the market experts. I advertized to the villagers with radio spots, public presentations and showed CDs. But still no one bought chulah from me." After pointing out specific characteristics of his stove molds and what makes his variety produce less smoke than traditional chulah, Mr. Kumbhar turns and tells me more about marketing to nearby households, "You see my smokeless chulah here? Now I sell them more successfully. I marketed to many women in this village and described their benefits, but this was not enough. They were too expensive for some. Then I got wise." Reaching up and retrieving one of his molds, Mr. Kumbhar explains how he recently

gathered a group of women and members of the *panchayat* (village governing body) together to coordinate a bulk purchase order. "I brought them together to explore options and make an agreement. Now these women will receive loans of Rs 150 for each stove from government funds." He continued, "This is how I make deals now, from the middle."

During my fieldwork in southwestern Maharashtra examining the transition from a State subsidized to commercially-oriented improved cookstove delivery program, I was struck by the number of individuals who, like Mr. Kumbhar, described coordinating development activities by positioning themselves between multiple interest groups. This includes groups and individuals brokering financial and merchandise transactions, facilitating village-wide decisions and arranging meetings and information sharing sessions. Mr. Kumbhar, like so many others I interviewed, has seen his personal enterprise and daily routine significantly altered by market reforms. Yet he has also demonstrated an ability to transform supply chain relationships and informal governance structures embedded within the commercial marketplace. This study is motivated by this field observation and argues that further scrutinizing rural brokers can strengthen theories on individual and community responses to rural development programs relying on the advancement of market mechanisms to deliver benefits.

Previous studies attempting to explain discrepancies between rural development project plans and results frequently question

Tel.: +1 650 721 2649; fax: +1 650 721 3223.

E-mail address: gsimon@stanford.edu

the compatibility of top down, modernist development policies and the sincerity of alleged locally 'sensitive' participatory development models (e.g., Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Gupta, 1998; Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Mitchell, 2002; O'Reilly, 2007; Scott, 1998). These and other similar studies frequently perform grounded assessments of development in order to expose the variegated relationships and community mechanisms responsible for reworking intervention at the grassroots level (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001; Power, 2003). For example, Crewe and Harrison (1999) refer to the 'misbehavior' of project participants who simply do not do what program managers expect of them while others cite networks of cooperation to explicate modes and outcomes of local participation (e.g., Chambers, 1983; Mutersbaugh, 2002). Tanya Li suggests development is accomplished "at the interface between development projects and those they target" (Li, 1999: 298) through a series of everyday 'compromises' that "fill the gap between project plans and on-theground realities" (Li, 2005: 391). Others, countering outmoded stories of passive acceptance, refer to resistance struggles, and oppositional movements to developmentalism (E.g., Escobar, 1995; Neumann, 2002; Routledge, 1993, 2003). Such studies highlight how development projects routed through some combination of decentralized planning, participatory governance and state withdrawal are achieved on the ground in ways that at least partially reflect the needs and interests of local groups. This paper offers the lens 'geographies of mediation' as another, complimentary approach to studying everyday development. Geographies of mediation underscore the crucial role of brokering agent activities in influencing market relationships, levels of state withdrawal and the eventual distribution of development benefits.

This essay proffers three principle assertions; First, conditions of economic liberalization have created new market actors, business transactions and political alignments at the village and regional level. As a result, mediating development increasingly involves operating within and between groups of community, market and state actors to rework market supply chains. This requires taking on and combining roles historically assigned in rural India to either the political fixer (Manor, 2000; Reddy & Haragopal, 1985) or market broker (Bailey, 1957; Corbridge, Williams, Srivastava, & Veron, 2005; Dubash, 2002). Second, this study finds that mediating agents transform strict market distribution mechanisms by engaging neoliberal state resources. Roll out neoliberalism does not necessarily make state resources readily available to community groups. Brokers shape conditions of decentralized, heterogeneous and variegated governance (Peck & Tickell, 2002) and help to connect various parties to latent state resources. Third, distinct expressions of both empowerment and corruption arise within this flexible brokerage community. When operating within these intermediary spaces, brokers frequently act as agents of benevolence, goodwill and increased equity as Corbridge et al. (2005) and Krishna (2003) have suggested, and as agents of improbity, avariciousness and wealth accumulation as Jeffrey and Lerche (2000) and Harriss-White (2004) assert. In this case, intermediaries rework market mechanisms and access neoliberal state resources in order to bring health benefits from smokeless cookstoves to poor households while also consolidating development benefits for personal, familial and political gain. In many cases, these strategies of benevolence and corruption occur in concert with one another, simultaneously overturning and reinforcing structures of social organization.

## Political fixers, market brokers and post-liberalized economies

Essays examining rural development in India have primarily characterized intermediaries as either political fixers or market

brokers. Political fixers work between villages and political offices securing development provisions for local areas in exchange for political patronage. James Manor identifies the crucial function of small-time, freelance political fixers as "political intermediaries between the localities and powerful figures (bureaucrats and, especially, politicians) at high levels" (Manor, 2000: 817). For members of civil society, development is facilitated by a series of 'local uppers' or intermediaries with ready access to political resources who help to "bridge the gulf that exists between government and 'the public'" (Véron, Corbridge, Williams, & Srivastava, 2003). Contemporary descriptions of the political fixer have been heavily influenced by Reddy and Haragopal (1985) who describe the pyraveekar as influential middlemen who broker or 'fix' deals between government bureaucracies and members of civil society. The political fixer provides a link between rural villagers and urban-based state administrators (Neale, 1983) as well as between various governmental agencies in the implementation of development programs. On the surface, the main strength of political fixers appears to be their ability to understand and convey the cultural idiom of distant communities in order to establish development programs that benefit rural localities. However fixers also channel benefits upwards and help politicians maintain power. Just as the political fixer can serve as a conduit for rural communities seeking development benefits from a centralized or incapacitated ruling party, so too can (s)he deliver benefits to the politician by contributing to the politics of representation and coalition building.

Others have stressed the important role local operatives play in facilitating the advancement of rural markets by mediating financial. service and commodity transactions. During the middle 20th century. villages transitioning from agriculture-based economies to modes of production premised on mercantilism and ties to the broader Indian economy generated various contingent intermediary labor opportunities connecting local and regional sellers and buyers (Bailey, 1957). Similarly, contemporary commercial markets infuse rural economies with assistance from pure market brokers or adati<sup>2</sup> who provide crucial links between socially diverse village producers and geographically distant markets (EDA Rural Systems, 2001), including wholesalers, local distributors, and village-level consumers (Corbridge et al., 2005; Dubash, 2002). Commissioned agents are operatives in every sense of the word and oftentimes travel great distances to markets and wholesale outlets on behalf of growers and manufacturers. They also serve as money-lenders providing financial resources essential to commercial transactions (Debroy & Khan, 2004).

Variegated governance and strategies for accessing neoliberal state resources

State retrenchment and increased privatization have generated new spaces of mediation where brokers combine activities associated with the political fixer and market broker into a single mediating repertoire. In southwest Maharashtra, the rural broker coordinates activities between state, market and civil society actors and actively shapes community governance over nascent commercial markets. Within this variegated assemblage of villagers, bureaucratic operatives and market traders, intermediaries are particularly effective at

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Such behavior has been necessary in light of the urban bias embedded within the political economy of development in India that has historically funneled economic resources toward more consumptive and politically powerful urban areas and away from production oriented and comparatively less developed rural sectors (Lipton, 1977, 1993; Varshney, 1993, 1995).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Also referred to as *dalaries* in informal and unregulated markets. See G. Ram Reddy and G. Haragopal Asian Survey, Vol. 25, No. 11. pp. 1148–1162. Corbridge et al. (2005) refer to political workers acceptable to the Forward and Scheduled Castes as *dalards* 

#### Download English Version:

# https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1062369

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/1062369

<u>Daneshyari.com</u>