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Peasants to Programmers: Continuity and Change in a Tamil Village Over 50 Years

By: John Harriss

Nesal was where land, labour, caste and hierarchy were intertwined. Half a century later, caste differences remain but the social hierarchy has loosened. Some peasants have turned into programmers, many work outside the village even while living there and so are less invested in the village.

His grandfather was Subramanian Mudaliar, a well-built, grey-haired man who always wore a well-laundered *veshti* (the Tamil word for a "dhoti"). His was a common name in the village in 1973, and I knew him by his nickname, *kadaikaar*, which meant "shopman" or "shopkeeper". He kept the best stocked shop in the village-though the stocks were always small-selling rice and lentils, some vegetables, chillies and small quantities of spices, cheap cigarettes and beedis, little sachets of shampoo, made by Hindustan Lever, and bars of soap, mostly the old English brand called Lifebuoy.

Gopal's was not the only story like this that I came across. The granddaughter of the schoolteacher-farmer who was my neighbour in 1973 is also a software engineer, though she and her husband live and work in Texas.

But he was also one of the best farmers in the village. The yields of paddy that he achieved from his two or three acres, according to my calculations, were the highest in the village. He was doing well enough, while I was living there, to have bought a much bigger house on the "middle street".

It was there, in November 2025, that I met Gopal, *kadaikaar's* grandson. The house-an old-style village house, whitewashed, on one storey, tiled, made up of two open courtyards with rooms leading off them-was just as I remembered it, though the television was an addition, no longer recent. Gopal lives in the village and still manages the cultivation of the fields that belonged to his grandfather, doing some of the work himself.

But he used to live and work in the city of Chennai for one of the biggest information technology (IT)-services companies, Hindustan Computers Limited (HCL). Now he continues to work for HCL, but from home, doing programming. It seemed remarkably appropriate -given that it was an interest in development that had first taken me to the village -that the client he was working for at the time of my visit was the World Bank.

Gopal's was not the only story like this that I came across. The granddaughter of the schoolteacher-farmer who was my neighbour in 1973 is also a software engineer, though she and her husband live and work in Texas.

Perhaps most striking is a story from the market town of Arni, five kilometres or so from the village. I knew Murugan as a small boy, then aged about eight, who worked as a teaboy at the only "lodge"-a small hotel-that there was at that time in the town. He spent his days running in and out at the beck and call of the men who stayed in the little lodge. Later, I knew, he became a tea-master, working in a tea shop in the town.

But at last, with his very bright, intelligent wife, he returned to the hereditary occupation of his caste-handloom weaving. Arni has long been an important centre for the weaving of high-quality silk sarees, made on handlooms. Murugan and his wife were both skillful weavers. They worked hard for many years. They bought a very good little house, and saw their two sons through the local engineering college.

Now one boy is a programmer working in Chennai, while his elder brother lives and works in the Netherlands. Murugan's granddaughter is following in her uncles' footsteps, studying for a degree in computer applications. What a journey has been accomplished by the teaboy I knew in 1973, and his children!

Perhaps the story that I am telling now seems a familiar one. On the face of it, it is about a big shift away from a primarily agricultural economy, in which handicraft industry was still significant, to one in which IT services are so important. What is so surprising in the story of *kadaikaar's* grandson? After all, the reputation of Indian IT companies is well known across the world.

Village to Town

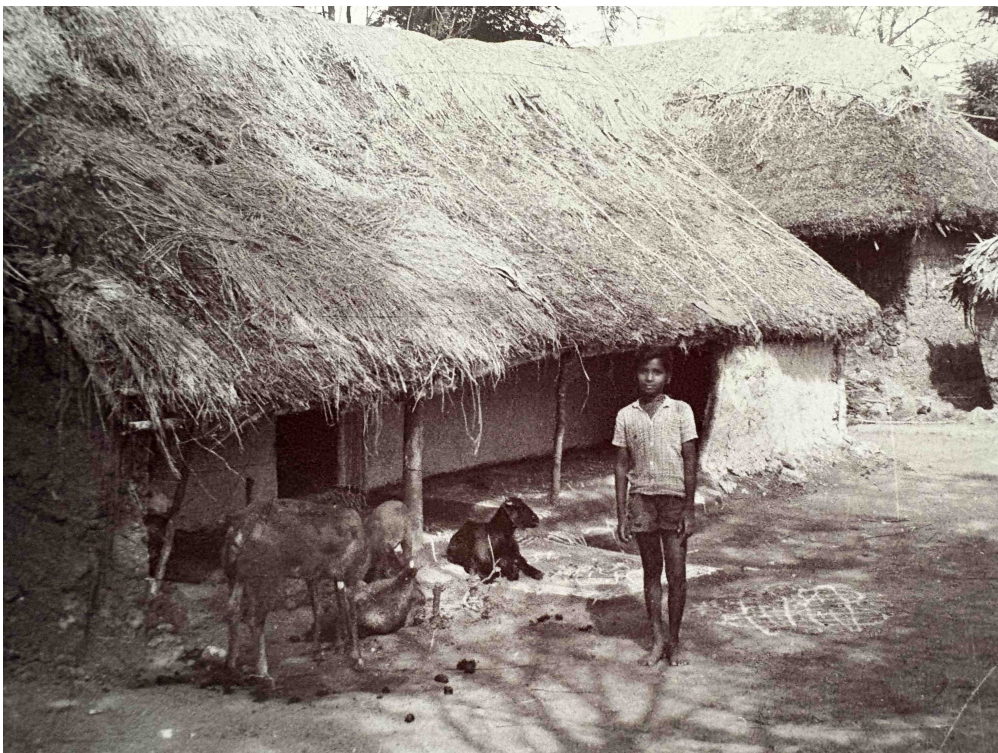
And is not the story of the Indian village (its name is Nesal) much like that of my paternal village (named Islip) in Oxfordshire, in England? My own grandfather, born in 1867, came from a long line of agricultural labourers, but at the time of his birth the numbers of agricultural workers in England was declining sharply. In common with many others in Oxfordshire villages, he left the village, became first a postman in London and then a policeman. His two elder sons became wealthy professional men; my father, the youngest boy, an engineer.

My notebooks show that the first few weeks were utterly chaotic, as I dealt with the curiosity of my neighbours at, it seemed, all times of day and night.

An anthropologist who lived in the village of Islip around 1900 might well have written 50 years later, a story of "Peasants to Affluent Workers" (the description of "affluent workers" being one that was used by sociologists who studied car workers in England in the 1950s, like those who worked in the once famous Morris motor car factory in Oxford). But India has not seen quite the same transformation that took place in England where, by around 1900, a majority of those in employment worked in industry, and the share of those working in agriculture had declined to not more than about 10%.

India's experience has been very different, though in the whole country the experience of Tamil Nadu comes closest to that of England. In India, though agriculture now contributes only a small share of the value of the economy, it still employs almost a half of the working people for at least part of the time. In Nesal, too, though there is certainly one programmer and others of his generation are working in the same or similar jobs in one or other of the cities of India, or abroad, there are more who still depend to some extent on agriculture.

I doubt very much, too, that there are many villages in other parts of India, or small towns like Arni, that would come up with quite the same kind of a story as that of Gopal and of others from Nesal, or that of Murugan's family. An important part of the background to their story is the decision of the chief minister of the state in the mid-1980s, M.G. Ramachandran, to open up "self-funding" higher education for private investment.



The result has been that the state has a huge number of private engineering colleges (and also medical schools), and though many, even if they are profitable, are no doubt of poor quality, some are very good. It seems that the two engineering colleges that were set up in Arni are at least effective institutions. There has been greater educational opportunity in Tamil Nadu than in most of the rest of

the country.

But how and why did it come about that I lived in a village in south India in 1973? I was a PhD student from England and my project was to study the social and economic impact of what was called "the green revolution". This was a big change that was taking place in some parts of India and of other "developing" countries at that time, as a result of the introduction of new varieties of rice (and in some parts of India and in other countries, wheat and maize too) that produced higher yields in response to applications of chemical fertilisers.

We now know that although this, at the time, new technology helped to make India at last self-sufficient in wheat and rice, it has been at the expense of heavy dependence on chemical fertilisers and on the "mining" of groundwater to supply the water that the crops have needed. These requirements have caused serious environmental damage.

Given the timing of the demand, often in a lean period of the year, between harvests, many small peasants had to sell their crop in order to raise the cash to pay the tax bill.

But in the early 1970s the big questions were to do with whether or not the very large numbers of small farmers in India were benefiting from the new varieties -whether or not they were getting better off and fewer people in the country were living in poverty-or whether, perhaps, the "green revolution was turning red" because poor farmers and agricultural labourers had a fresh incentive to mobilise politically against the wealthy landowners. There was some evidence of this having happened in some parts of the country. These were questions that I wanted to answer by studying what was happening in a part of rural south India where there was evidence that the green revolution was taking off.

Thus, it was that in April 1973 I arrived in Nesal with a small bag containing a few changes of clothes, notebooks, a typewriter, and some books, to take up residence in a village house that I rented, thanks to the help of a village schoolmaster. I had been able to study Tamil only for three months and I was very far from fluent, but I was determined not to rely on an interpreter (though in November 2025 I enjoyed the companionship of a young Tamilian friend, Ashwin, an anthropologist).

My notebooks show that the first few weeks were utterly chaotic, as I dealt with the curiosity of my neighbours at, it seemed, all times of day and night. At the same time, I started to build up a knowledge of kinship relations in the village. Later, some village people used to take delight in showing off to visitors my knowledge of how x was related to y and z. For me, it was an important way of getting to know people and of building trust.

The population of Nesal at the time, according to the census that I carried out myself, was around 1,500. Forty years later, according to the national census of 2011, it had increased three times, to 4,569. This was a greater increase than in the region and in the state as a whole, suggesting a lot of in-migration. Quite where all these people (now more than 5,000, I assumed) were packed away in the village in 2025 was a bit of a mystery to me because the physical space of the village, and the numbers of houses did not seem to have expanded by all that much.

Nesal is now a commuter village, many of its residents working outside, and it is very quiet during the daytime. In 1973, however, most villagers' lives were spent, most of the time, in the village. They lived and worked in Nesal, though a visit to Arni on market days was an important outing for men, a visit to the cinema a thrill for all, and the routine of daily life was occasionally interrupted by the adventure of pilgrimage to an important temple. Tirupati and Tirutanni were especially important sites for them.

Cycle of Debt

Nesal was then a "peasant" village. Of course, it was, you might say, given that the word "peasant", in English, is generally understood as referring to a person who lives in the countryside and works on the land. Only in the 19th century did it come to acquire the further, derogatory meaning of someone who is uncouth.

For social historians, however, the idea of the "peasant" has come to have a more specific meaning, of someone working on the land, for sure, but with the further idea that this is a person who produces their own subsistence, using their own and family labour, though at least in part through participation in markets. This is a description that fits a majority of Indians for several hundred years, though dependence on markets was increased under British rule because the colonial rulers required that the most important tax, on land, be paid in cash.

The pots they made were still important for festivals and ceremonies, but their craft was encountering increasing competition from cheap plastic and aluminium vessels.

Given the timing of the demand, often in a lean period of the year, between harvests, many small peasants had to sell their crop in order to raise the cash to pay the tax bill, or to repay a moneylender for the loan of that cash. Many peasants were, in this way, locked into markets. They had to sell and buy whether they wanted to or not.

The cash demands of the new technology of the green revolution, in the 1970s, for seeds and fertilisers and pesticides, and perhaps for the costs of pumping up water from the ground, meant that very many, perhaps most of the peasants of Nesal, were necessarily selling their crops even when they did not have a real surplus beyond their own subsistence needs. It was usual to sell a lot of the crop at harvest time, even though prices were low then, so as to repay the trader, or rice miller, or moneylender who had supplied cash to pay for necessary inputs.

Only a somewhat wealthier man, such as Subramanian Mudaliar, *kadaikaar*, might avoid getting locked into this cycle of debt. He was able to benefit from the green revolution but most of his neighbours were not, or not by very much. They were rather in the position of having to pedal harder so as to stay in more or less the same place.

But I am getting ahead of myself, with this account of the significance of peasants' participation in markets, because the economy of Nesal in the 1970s still involved significant economic relationships that were outside the market economy. In particular, there still was the set of relationships between cultivators and others in the village who supplied them with services of different sorts and for which these "village servants", carrying on their hereditary caste occupations, were remunerated in kind.



This set of relationships, often described as the "jajmani system", is associated by scholars with the traditional Indian village. It worked in different ways in different parts of India, but in Nesal in 1973, when it was referred to using a Tamil word that has a broad meaning of "order", it was a system that involved cultivators in paying in kind, often on their threshing floors immediately after the harvest, to all those who had supplied them with services.

This included the Brahmin family priest (who came from outside the village); the (non-Brahmin) village temple priest (who lived in the village, near the temple); the carpenter and the blacksmith (both villagers, between them responsible for supplying and maintaining ploughs and carts, though they did other work as well, including having some functions on various religious occasions); the washerman (or dhobi, the one in Nesal was a scrounging old rogue, and such a blatant crook as to be quite endearing) who did much of the washing for the village, but who was especially responsible for cleaning cloth soiled with menstrual blood, and responsible too for

some functions in religious ceremonies; and the barber (who came from another village) similarly had some functions at ceremonies, as well as supplying day-to-day services.

The barbers, too, were musicians who played for weddings and other ceremonies. A man who had a kind of press for extracting oil from groundnuts (he was an "oil presser") had been included in the system but I am not sure that he was in 1973. He was old and the press was hardly used at all. But potters were included. Those who supplied clay pots to Nesal had their own quarter in Arni, and collecting the year's pots was a task that had to be carried on immediately before Pongal, the main harvest festival in mid-January each year. The pots they made were still important for festivals and ceremonies, but their craft was encountering increasing competition from cheap plastic and aluminium vessels.

Dalit Assertion

By 2025 this system of non-market relations existed only in an attenuated form. In Nesal, as in other villages, the carpenters and blacksmiths have left because they no longer have a useful function in the agricultural economy, given that tractors and trailers have almost entirely replaced the plough and the elegant wooden carts with their big wheels that were numerous in 1973. Laundry services are still supplied by the daughter of the old rogue I knew in 1973, and her family; and the son of the village temple priest, whom I knew as a boy aged five when I was back in the village in 1984, who still serves in the much-renovated village temple was the first person to remember me in November 2025.

But the term "Dalit", meaning "oppressed", is now widely used by the people themselves, and the name that Gandhi once made popular is now regarded as condescending.

The old payments that were made to the village servants, whose occupations were associated with their castes-payments of certain quantities of paddy and groundnuts in the main-are no longer made. I do not know whether the religious functions that several of the service castes supplied at different times in the year are still performed.

But I have missed out another group of village servants who had an important role in the village I knew more than half a century ago. Theirs were important functions, serving the village community as a whole, supplied by those who were once described as "untouchables"-people at the bottom of the traditional social hierarchy. They were called Harijans by M.K. Gandhi, meaning "children" or "people of God", in an effort to bring them respect. In 1973 these members of the village still referred to themselves as Harijan, but now in Nesal they themselves and others are more likely to use the expression "SC", meaning "Scheduled Caste", the official term for groups like theirs, entitled to some positive discrimination in access to government jobs and to some educational institutions.

But the term "Dalit", meaning "oppressed", is now widely used by the people themselves, and the name that Gandhi once made popular is now regarded as condescending. The Dalits of Nesal are mostly from a numerous caste from whose name there came the English term "pariah", referring to someone who is shunned or cast out of society. The Dalits still live in a separate part of the village that is now usually known as the "colony"-a term introduced by the state government in the mid-20th century to replace the old Tamil word for the place where the erstwhile "untouchables" live.

I made the mistake of using the old word-*cheri*-commonly used in 1973, when I was there in 2025. This incurred a courteously expressed reprimand from the high-caste man, an old friend from the village who accompanied Ashwin and me.

The services that in the 1970s were supplied to the village by the Dalits included being the drummers for village festivals and religious ceremonies. Beating the drum is considered by others to be defiling because, of course, it involves close contact with leather, the skin of an animal, which is considered polluting.

But from among the Dalits as well, came several important village functionaries-the messenger of the village headman, the watchman whose job was to look after the village burial ground and cremation place, and the one who was entrusted with the distribution of water for irrigating crops coming from the village "tank", or water reservoir. There was no water to distribute in 1973, which was a drought year when cultivation depended on water pumped up from open wells. I saw the tank full for the first time only in November 2025. For me, the vast lake that I saw was an extraordinary sight. By then, however, the old system of water distribution had broken down, and the Dalits no longer supplied their traditional services to the village.

These relationships were sometimes wrapped up in a language of father-child relations, and some from among the Dalits would sometimes talk to me about how their "boss" looked after them.

In 1973, the Dalits of Nesal were generally dependent upon the leading, higher caste cultivators of the village. Few of them owned land of their own, and those that did, had only small plots-in total making up less than 10% of all the land owned by people in the village, though they made up more than a quarter of the population. None of them owned a well that could be used for irrigation.

A few had done well enough to live in good houses, having served in the army, and there was an extended family of schoolteachers - who had benefited from the school set up in the colony by the Catholic Church. Surprisingly, thanks to the Church, the colony had had a school before the main village.

Most of the Dalits, however, lived in what were usually one or perhaps two-roomed thatched huts, most without lock-able doors, and they depended upon employment by the farmers of the village. I do not think that long-term bondage, when individuals were tied by debts to a particular landowner that might accumulate even over generations was common any longer (though it was in another village that I knew through relationships there with Nesal families).

There were, however, enduring relationships between individual Dalits and particular higher caste farmers, who employed them as farm servants-and perhaps their wives, too, both as farm labour and as domestic servants. These relationships were sometimes wrapped up in a language of father-child relations, and some from among the Dalits would sometimes talk to me about how their "boss" looked after them.

Such patron-client relations had largely gone by 2025. Already in the 1990s, a big statue of Dr B.R. Ambedkar was set up beside the track leading to the colony from the village. More recent additions to the plinth commemorate visits to the village by Thol Thirumavalavan, the leader of a significant political party-the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK)-formed in Tamil Nadu in 1982 to represent Dalit interests. These are important markers of the increasing assertion of the Dalits over the past half-century. They are no longer subservient as they usually were 50 years ago.

Caste Equation

For Ashwin, recently returned from 15 months spent researching in Hoshangabad in Madhya Pradesh, most remarkable was the complete absence of even minimal acts of deference. Nobody, for instance, stopped to greet the upper-caste man who accompanied us. This was in contrast to the several villages in Hoshangabad that Ashwin had become familiar with, where a greeting of "Jai Ram ji ki" with a bowed head to the Gurjars (Other Backward Class, dominant caste) remained the bare minimum even today.

There is not the same glaring difference in living standards between the colony and the main village that there was in the 1970s-when there was, no doubt, considerable poverty, especially in the colony.

The sense that Ashwin and I both had in 2025 was that the people of the colony and those of the village live side by side, but in largely separate worlds. The Dalits now mostly work outside the village, often in construction, which as it does everywhere in the world, offers precarious employment though it may be relatively well-paid. I thought it significant that in the town of Arni, the real "grunt" work, such as lugging heavy sacks of paddy in the rice mills, is now carried on very often by labourers from North India, not by local Dalits.

There is no doubt that the Dalits of Nesal are much better off than they were. The huts of 1973 have mostly been replaced by quite good modern houses, many of them constructed with the help of the PM Awas Yojana (sometime Indira Awas Yojana), with the largest share of finance supplied by the state government. The quality of housing compares quite well with that of the main village. We saw more cars (let's not exaggerate-three of them) parked outside homes in the colony than we did in the village (only two), and as many motor-bikes. The school in the colony, still run by the Church, is well-equipped and, it appeared, well-run.

There is not the same glaring difference in living standards between the colony and the main village that there was in the 1970s-when there was, no doubt, considerable poverty, especially in the colony. It was nothing like what I saw in the same period in other parts of India, however, when I met people who had nothing but the clothes they stood up in and one or two cooking pots.

There has been a lot of change over this half century in the main village as well. A visitor from 1973 is immediately struck by the fact that virtually all the men-as in the colony too-wear trousers, and short-sleeved shirts, usually in bright colours, that look as if they have been bought off the peg rather than made by a tailor. Fifty years ago, men generally wore a white cotton veshti/dhoti, properly worn so that it reached down to the feet, but that could always be tucked up while working.

Respectable men wore tailor-made loose fitting, long white cotton shirts with long sleeves, that had spacious pockets. Others wore just a vest. Poorer working men wore brightly coloured lungis rather than the plain white veshti.

There were no metalled roads in the village of 1973 and the beaten earth was dusty at some times of the year and a little muddy in the rains. Now there are good metalled roads, though what was the impressively broad main street-the Dharma Raja Temple Street-has been encroached upon and is much less of a public space than it was. Most of the old village houses, like the one in which *kadaikaar* Subramanian's grandson does his programming, have been replaced by modern concrete structures, many of them brightly painted.



The village now has a dedicated post office, whereas post office transactions in 1973 were carried out when the postman arrived from Arni, on the front verandah of one of the bigger houses. There is now a village office, too, where the village administrative officer (VAO) might be found, at least at some times. His is an official government position created in 1980, replacing the institutions of the village headman and the village accountant that were established in the 19th century by the British colonial government.

The "landlords" or "rich peasants" of Nesal in the 1970s were far from being "magnates" and they were not at all wealthy by urban standards, even though they exercised significant power in the village.

The village headman in 1973 was a distinguished-looking older man who commanded wide respect. His was an hereditary position, whereas the post of the VAO is subject to competitive entry. Two of the grandsons of the old man are now VAOs, though neither of them in Nesal. The house in which they grew up has been knocked down and not replaced. The family no longer has any presence in the village-though in 1973 it was the leading family of the most important lineage of Nesal, including some of the biggest landowners.

The vacant space where the hereditary headman's house stood is a symbol of a great change that has taken place in the social structure of Nesal. In 1973, the members of the caste community called Agamudaiyan Mudaliar were the dominant landowners of the village. They made up just a third of the population but owned almost two-thirds of the land. Very few of them owned no land at all, and most employed labourers from among the Dalits to help with cultivation.

Up to that time, except on one occasion, it had always been one of them who had been elected to be the chairman of the village panchayat, and in the case of a dispute in the village, if it was not settled by the headman, it would be resolved by a group of the more substantial Agamudaiyan landowners coming together. When I say "substantial" here I am referring to the ownership of no more than about 10 acres of land, including five acres or so of land that could be irrigated so that paddy could be grown (or perhaps, occasionally, sugarcane). The "landlords" or "rich peasants" of Nesal in the 1970s were far from being "magnates" and they were not at all wealthy by urban standards, even though they exercised significant power in the village.

Fragmentation of Land

Among the Agamudaiyans, two families stood out, including the four households that then owned more than 25 acres. One was the immediate family-the "household"-of the village headman, and whose lineage must, at one point, have owned most of the irrigated land of Nesal. The lands were managed by his son, a tall and handsome man who was well educated, and the only person in the village who spoke more than a few words of English.

He had been at one time a prominent member of the Congress party that had ruled in the state and in the country as a whole, of course, until the late 1960s. He carried a visiting card that stated in both Tamil and English that he was a "landlord"-and he looked the part when he walked through the fields carrying a big umbrella to protect himself from the sun. But, sadly, by 1973, he was only a poor manager of the family lands, perhaps because of financial difficulties, which meant that agricultural operations were often not carried out in time. Yields from the lands were poor.

He had stayed out of respect for his father, who lived in the house till his death, and no doubt while the old man was still alive Karthi worked hard enough to maintain his share of the lands.

It was not at all surprising that his three sons had no interest in farming, or that following the death of the old headman they should have moved out of the village to live at first in Arni. Later, the main base of the family became the nearby city of Vellore where the old man's second grandson, the brightest of the three, became a fairly successful lawyer.

The second major family of the village in 1973 was that of a man named Arcot Duraisamy Mudaliar (his name indicating that the town of Arcot was his ancestral place, his own being Duraisamy, and his caste that of the Agamudaiyan Mudaliars). He had been a successful trader in groundnuts in the 1930s, when there was an important trade in groundnuts between Madras (as Chennai was then named) and Marseilles, and he had built up what was quite a large estate in and around Nesal. Following his death, the lands were divided between his three sons, each of them middle-aged by 1973, who then lived in adjacent but separate houses on the main Dharma Raja Temple Street.

Each of them owned more than 25 acres of land, including a lot of irrigated land on which, given the wells they owned, operated with electric pump sets, they could grow three paddy crops in the year. All three were efficient farm managers with forceful, commanding manners. The eldest, and the youngest of the three each had several sons, though the second, who was a contractor for the local Public Works Department, as well as a farmer, had only an adopted daughter.

The time-traveller from 1973 found only one member of this powerful family still living in the village-Karthikeyan, the youngest of the four sons of Arcot Duraisamy's first son. I found it ironic that it should have been him, in the end, who had stayed. I remembered how eager he had been to get out of the village and either to use his artistic skills to earn a living in town, or to become a bus conductor. Anything but to become a farmer.

His father had partitioned his landholdings between his four sons not long after I had left the village in March 1974, and it was Karthi who inherited the old village house, where-now in his early seventies-he was still living in November 2025. He had stayed out of respect for his father, who lived in the house till his death, and no doubt while the old man was still alive Karthi worked hard enough to maintain his share of the lands. Now though, he has had planted "Burma wood" (teak trees) on about half of the land as an investment for his grandchildren, and he leases out other land for a peppercorn rent to one of the Dalits.

His two sons both live in Chennai, one of them working on the assembly line in the Hyundai plant, while the other is a mechanic in an automobile workshop. This has been the story of Karthi's wider family, too. Two of his own brothers are now businessmen in Arni, and like him, have little interest in the lands they still hold. Their children, like his own too, have no interest in the village. His childless uncle sold all his land before his death to someone from outside the village, who remains an absentee landlord. Quite what happened to the family of Karthi's other uncle I was not able to find out, but his family also had no continuing presence in the village.

The village is a place in which to live, but for most it is not their place of work, as it was for the great majority of village people in the 1970s.

The stories of the headman's family and of that of Arcot Duraisamy show the kind of social churning that has gone on in the village over this last half century. The social hierarchy, given by the differences in landholding among the members of the village community that intersected with caste differences, has to some extent been hollowed out. Caste differences still matter, not least in the way in

which the Agamudaiyans have been able to parley their landholding wealth and their political and caste connections into opportunities in the urban economy in India, and to some extent abroad as well.

Other people in the village, perhaps especially those from among what was historically the second ranked caste and landholding group, might have liked to have followed the leading Agamudaiyans and to have left the village too. But they mostly have lacked the resources and connections that would have made this possible. Their caste name is Yadhava, and in 1973 they made up one-fifth of the population and owned about the same share of all the landholdings. Now, I believe they own rather more of the land and have much more of an interest in cultivation than the erstwhile dominant families.

Caste differences remain, but the sense of a well-defined social hierarchy hardly survives. The village is a place in which to live, but for most it is not their place of work, as it was for the great majority of village people in the 1970s. People are, I suspect, much less invested in the village than they were. I do not want to romanticise the village as it was in 1973 as a solidaristic "community" because it was characterised by great inequalities, the possibility of violence on the parts of the more powerful, and the subservience of the poorest people to them. Yet it did have a sense of unity given by the very clear, established social hierarchy, and the ways in which it was performed, as it was in the main temple festival. This has gone, and in this sense, and because of the diversification of occupations, Nesal can hardly be described any longer as a peasant village.

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