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Discourse into The Perils of Land Ownership and The Need for Inclusivity in an Era of Emerging Smart Cities in India

As a Sikh, farming is very significant to my heritage. In fact, the festival of Vaisakhi that occurs yearly in April marks the birth of Sikhism with a grand celebration in which farmers harvest wheat and pray for prosperous crops. While, I have never been to India and don't have a strong connection to farming, hearing the stories of the farmers that are to give up their land for the smart city Dholera, was upsetting ("India's Smart City" 00:07:04-00:09:32). It made me think of my grandmother's family that currently reside in a small village in Jalandhar. I cannot imagine what my family would do without their farm as it is their only source of income and sustenance. Their land allows them to cultivate vegetables, produce milk from buffalos, and grow wheat. But more than this, their land is significant for it has been in the family for decades. Thus, I think that the implementation of smart cities in regions of India that rely on ancestral and agricultural land isn't smart because it puts the inhabitants of this land in a vulnerable position both mentally and financially.

Land exchange in return for money or smaller plots of land is not a good compromise for the farmers of India. Often times, these landowners give up their land without giving consent or without understanding of what is happening ("India's Smart City" 00:25:30-00:25:46). If the concept of a smart city is difficult for us to define as an educated and tech-dependent society, how could it be explained to farmers with little schooling or understanding of the technological world. My grandmother's brothers finished school in the third grade and consider climate change to be foreign, let alone smart cities. Here, governance and planning take advantage of the farmers lack of knowledge and effectively exclude them from the planning process leaving them in a vulnerable state. The city of Magar Pata seems to have a better system where landowners receive shares for their land. But, the experience of the landowner depicted in the video about India's smart cities seems to me to be rare ("India's Smart City" 00:11:26-00:12:58). Not all landowners can be as business-savvy or as enthusiastic to assimilate into a modernized city. Without education or without a desire to leave the village, my family in India would be left behind in an increasingly tech-reliant and urbanized India in this scenario. Therefore, I believe there should be more inclusive and participatory planning in these smart cities. If India's target is to advance using smart cities, it has to do so in conjunction with the landowners who are giving up their livelihoods to make this happen.

Prior to knowing about India's 100 smart cities mission, I imagined these smart cities to focus on the wellbeing of India's inhabitants. Yet, the predominant outcome of this mission seems to be tech-based cities focussed on nothing else but money and modernity. The Gujarat International Finance Tec-City is an example where the city was built on farmland from three villages, yet the finance centric atmosphere isn't inclusive of the landowners who gave up their land for it (New Delhi. Housing and Land Rights Network). In Dharamshala, it was proposed that homes be constructed for slum dwellers, but in the wake of being classified as a smart city, a slum settlement was demolished (Asher). Then there is Magar Pata that consists of a secure environment, but one that is in the form of an unaffordable gated community rendering an

exclusionary atmosphere ("India's Smart City" 00:16:50-00:20:40). Thus here, those in poverty are vulnerable alongside farmers. The common shortcoming I see within these cities is the principle of inclusion. In regard to farming in particular, the planning process needs to include farmers in all decisions regarding their land to ensure no one faces eviction due to these smart cities. I understand that farming won't be feasible based on resource availability in the future, but urbanization cannot happen overnight. Ultimately, instead of replacing villages with skyscrapers, India should focus on addressing the basic needs that are lacking in these regions such as access to water. But, if farmland must be taken away, there should be decisive thought put into compensation such as preserving part of the land or creating job opportunities for these individuals through urban farming. Moreover, there should be resources to aid in the transition to these smart cities. To implement these facilities, governance and planning should inform farmers of their plans through workshops and then subsequently hold meetings to allow the farmers to participate and voice their concerns. A board of ethics should also be hired to ensure that the farmers are being treated fairly. In short, smart cities may allow India to become advanced like many developed countries but the current lack of inclusivity of many in its population from landowners to the poor will result in a nation divided by those residing in smart cities and those who get left behind.

Works Cited

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