

**"Rural transformation on the
margins of the agrarian: place, caste,
and collective action in a south
Indian fishery"**

**Dr. Aparna
Sundar**

Date: Tuesday, Dec. 04, 2018

Location: 701 South Ross Building

Research: 10:00-11:30am

Teaching: 2:00-3:30pm

This paper contributes to the growing discussion, seen for instance in the most recent issue of the Journal of Peasant Studies (JPS), around the nature of rural transformation in the Global South flowing from the failure of the “agrarian transition.” The livelihoods of the large and growing numbers of those displaced from agriculture but not absorbed into industrial work are increasingly precarious, pieced together from a combination of urban and rural wage work, self-employment, subsistence production, and state support, and often involving circular migration and the maintenance of trans-local households. In much of this discussion, the failure of the agrarian transition is seen as produced primarily by the agency of capital, through such processes as the Green Revolution, the intensification of accumulation by dispossession, and neoliberal strategies of “jobless growth.”

By contrast, I offer an account of the “failed” transition as produced also through the agency of labour, drawing on a reading of three decades of collective action in a south Indian fishing district. I describe a social movement of opposition to the introduction of mechanized trawlers that arose in the 1980s, successfully deploying the language of the commons against the loss of livelihoods, class differentiation, and resource collapse threatened by the trawlers to win trawling regulations. The gains of the movement combined with ecological place, caste, and “community” to result in a fishery that still provides viable livelihoods, but not without its contradictions in the form of technological fixes, debt, and declining resources, contradictions which call for analytical frameworks beyond that of transition, either completed or failed.