

Max. Marks: 20

Duration: 1 hr

1. Read the following passage extracted from an article based on an interview of writer P. Sainath by a journalist Jason Overdorf, originally published in *The Atlantic* (taken from <http://p.sainath.org/documenting-indias-villages-before-they-vanish/>) and answer the questions given below.

India is currently undergoing what writer P. Sainath calls "an extremely painful transformation." The country's 2011 census reflected one of the largest mass migrations in history—one that has swelled over the past decade. For the first time, the census recorded more population growth in cities than villages. Indians are not so much leaving the countryside to seek better-paying jobs in the city, as they are fleeing increasing poverty resulting from the stagnation of agricultural growth, the rising cost of inputs like water and fertilizer, and a shortage of land. India's landless agricultural laborers now outnumber landed farmers, and the average plot size of those who do own land is shrinking. They can hope to earn around \$84 a month with that sized plot, but it costs them \$96 a month to raise their crops, forcing small-scale farmers to take on other jobs to make ends meet. A lack of crop insurance, poor access to low-cost loans, and unpredictable rains—plus cultural pressure to shell out fat dowries and lavish weddings for their daughters—leave many farmers crippled by debt. Some give up altogether. As many as 300,000 farmers have committed suicide over the past two decades. Countless indigenous tribal people, too, have lost their lands and cultures to dams, mines, and tiger reserves.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi sees this transformation as inevitable. He has promised to create 300 million jobs in "industrial corridors" through schemes like "Make in India". But critics like farm-policy analyst Devinder Sharma say desperation is pushing people out of the countryside far faster than industry can create jobs for them in cities and towns. "We have not created 300 million jobs over the past 67 years since independence," Sharma told me, noting that only 8 percent of Indians work in the formal sector of the economy. "How can you create that number in five years?" he asked, referring to the Indian government's term limit.

Technology, including the Internet-based sort, has both been blamed for causing India's agrarian crisis and held up as a magical solution to farmers' woes. For example, hybrid wheat and rice sparked the Green Revolution that saved India from starvation in the 1960s—that is, until pesticides and chemical fertilizers depleted the soil and boosted cancer rates, according to activists like Vandana Shiva, a prominent advocate of organic farming. Banks and finance companies often grant farmers easy access to loans to buy tractors, whether or not the farmers own enough land to make a tractor pay for itself—to the point where Punjab villagers routinely take out a loan to buy an \$8,000 tractor, only to flip it and buy a new car for their daughter's dowry, according to Sharma. "One of the biggest reasons for farmer suicides is that we have loaded the farmer with unwanted technologies," he said.

Meanwhile, the Indian Tobacco Company and various nonprofits have promoted Internet kiosks as a way to free farmers from rapacious middlemen by giving them direct access to market information. Companies like Reuters and Nokia have proposed mobile updates with weather reports and expert crop advice to increase farm output. Top banks and mobile-service providers have teamed up to offer financial services through rural Indians' mobile phones in a bid to get hundreds of millions of people out of the moneylender system and into the banking system. And, in the latest silicon dream, Modi has proposed 100 technology-enabled "smart cities" to bring rural Indians out of the countryside altogether.

But none of these innovations has struck at the root of the problem, which is that farmers who increasingly till plots smaller than a football field cannot hope to earn a living wage. Still, Aditya Dev Sood at the Center for Knowledge Societies told me that mobile- and Internet-based technologies have increased rural incomes and had more radical sociological effects. Interconnectivity with the outside world is eroding the "closed social networks" of the village that have fostered the ghettoization (outcasting / isolation) of Muslims and untouchables. "I'm willing to hazard that within my lifetime we're going to see that change utterly," he said. Sainath says: "My generation has lost its connection to rural India. The generation coming after us doesn't even know that a connection existed."

- Write a summary of the above passage, as you understand it, in 3 sentences. (2)
 - What in your view does Sainath call a painful transformation? Why is it painful in the author's view? (2-3 sentences) (2)
 - Technology has been called both a cause and a solution to the farmers' problems. Analyse this statement as stated in the passage. What is your opinion about the role of technology in this problem? (150 words) (4)
 - What is the side-effect of interconnectivity, as stated in the article above? What are your views about this statement? (100 words) (3)
 - Discuss what you would propose as a solution to this problem as a student of VEL700. Give reasons based on the discussions in the class, and the videos used for these discussions. (150 words) (4)
- (15 marks)
2. Discuss in about 250 words why in your view the society prefers to be materialistic despite the demerits of this worldview discussed in the class. (5 marks)