

Foundation for Agrarian Studies



November 6 to 9, 2025 | Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

Day-wise Conference Proceedings

Report of Day 2 – November 7, 2025

The second day of the conference started with two plenary sessions (Plenary 1, Plenary 2) in the first half of the day, followed by two sets of parallel sessions (seven in total: Session 1A, Session 1B, Session 1C, Session 2A, Session 2B, Session 2C, and Session 2D) which took place over the course of the day. The latter set comprised presentations by young scholars. The summaries of the papers follow.

Plenary 1

Vizhinjam Hall, Time: 0900–1045

Chair:

V. K. Ramachandran (*Vice Chairperson, Kerala State Planning Board*)

Speakers:

Luciano Rezende Moreira (*Professor, Federal Institute of Rio de Janeiro*)

Ashok Dhawale (*President, All India Kisan Sabha*)

Jens Lerche (*Professor, Agrarian and Labour Studies, SOAS University of London*)

Venkatesh Athreya (*Consultant, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF); Retired Head of Department of Economics, Bharathidasan University*)

V. K. Ramachandran (*Vice Chairperson, Kerala State Planning Board*)



The session explored how neoliberalism and unequal class and caste structures have deepened agrarian inequality, and reshaped rural livelihoods. The speakers also made a point about the transformation dependent on rebuilding state capacity, expanding non-farm employment, and strengthening the unity and struggles of the rural poor.

Luciano Rezende Moreira (Translator: Marcus Taylor): Productive Forces and Agrarian Relations in Brazil: The Struggle for a National-Developmental Project



Lucaiano Rezenda Moreira delivered his presentation in Spanish and Marcus Taylor translated the session into English. He traced the trajectory of Brazil's economic and agrarian transformation from the mid-twentieth century to the present, by emphasising the shift from a period of state-led developmentalism to one of neoliberal dependency.

In the 1940s, Brazil was largely rural, with low literacy and life expectancy, but by 2022 it had become 87 per cent urban, with major improvements in education, health, and living standards. These gains, he explained, were the result of the “Miracle of Growth” (1930–1980), a period of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation driven by strong state intervention. During this time, public enterprises and agricultural institutions such as Embrapa, Empresa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural (EMATER), Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social (BNDES), and Companhia Brasileira de Tratores (CBT) formed the backbone of Brazil’s industrial and agricultural modernisation.

This trajectory changed sharply after the 1980s, with structural adjustment, privatisation, and trade liberalisation marking the “neoliberal turn.” Moreira described this as the “death blow” to Brazil’s economy, contrasting it with China’s rise under state-led growth. While Brazil’s GDP per capita had been higher than China’s in 1980, by the 2020s, China had far surpassed it. In agriculture, multinational corporations such as Monsanto and John Deere came to dominate production, while Brazil became increasingly dependent on imported inputs and on exports of primary commodities like soy, meat, and petroleum.

Moreira warned of the environmental costs of neoliberalism, including large-scale deforestation in the Amazon, and called for the revival of a national-developmental project that restores public control, rebuilds state capacity, and reclaims Brazil’s economic sovereignty for its people.

Ashok Dhawale: The Peasant Movement in India in Neoliberal Times

Ashok Dhawale traced the history of the peasant movement through three key phases. Under British imperialism, colonial extraction devastated Indian agriculture, the result of which was the frequent and deadly famines, like the Bengal famine of 1943, affecting wide swathes of the subcontinent. After Independence, the class character of successive Union governments prevented genuine land reform, with Kerala, West Bengal, and Jammu and Kashmir being rare exceptions. Indian capitalism, Dhawale



argued, developed as a hybrid system in which capitalist accumulation superimposed on feudal relations deepened inequality rather than eradicating it.

The Green Revolution brought food self-sufficiency but intensified class and regional divides between irrigated and dryland areas. The neoliberal turn of 1991 marked a deeper rupture, wherein imperialist globalisation and corporate dominance turned Indian

agriculture into a site of dispossession.

Over the last 35 years, agrarian distress has worsened with more than 4,00,000 farmer suicides, soaring input costs, and a historic reversal where landless agricultural labourers now outnumber cultivators. Corporate control has expanded across the input, insurance, and marketing sectors, while state support systems such as the Public Distribution System (PDS) and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) face systematic erosion.

Dhawale identified the basic contradiction in Indian agriculture as one between the rural rich and the rural poor, but argued that post-liberalisation, a new conflict has emerged between the entire peasantry and small entrepreneurs, against imperial and corporate capital.

Jens Lerche: Productive Forces and Agrarian Relations in the Countryside, with a Specific Focus on Socio-Economic Classes in the Countryside in India

Jens Lerche explained that changes in India's countryside must be understood through both agrarian and non-agrarian dynamics, as most rural people now combine farm and non-farm work, with agriculture becoming a secondary income for many, except larger farmers. Class and caste remain tightly linked, shaping who can access new technologies and invest in productive forces: while Indian agriculture has seen continuous investment in machinery, seeds, and irrigation, these advances are highly class-specific and largely benefit those with capital, as government support rarely reaches small farmers. Using a case study from Uttar Pradesh, he showed stark inequalities between dominant landowning castes like Jats and Thakurs, who increasingly accumulate capital outside agriculture, and marginalised groups like Jatavas, who have little land and rely on informal and non-farm jobs, with

Jatav women often doing the agricultural labour. In some ways, the withdrawal of dominant castes from farming has opened limited opportunities for Jatav labour, but the overall structure remains deeply unequal.



Drawing on case studies from Uttar Pradesh, Jens observed that Thakur landowners accumulate capital largely outside agriculture, while Jatav women remain farm labourers. In Muzaffarnagar, sugarcane cultivation sustains some accumulation, but many rely on informal or migrant work. He concluded that agriculture can no longer be the main income source for most rural families; real progress depends on expanding non-agricultural employment and ensuring subsistence land access for

rural labourers.

Venkatesh Athreya: On the Question of Productive Forces in the Capitalist Mode of Production



Venkatesh Athreya revisited Marx's analysis of capitalism to emphasise that the growth of productive forces is an inherent and continuous feature of the capitalist mode of production, even though it is interrupted by periodic crises. These periodic crises are a result of contradictions between productive capacity and capitalist relations. Turning to contemporary debates on the nature of the role of the agricultural revolution in

Europe's transition to capitalism, he sought to counter a dominant theme in current scholarship that underestimates the ongoing growth of productive forces in the development of capitalism. While colonial plunder and dispossession were critical, internal productivity growth and proletarianisation also played key roles.

He concluded that under capitalism, the growth of productive forces is contradictory. It weakens workers in the short run but sets the stage for crises and transformation. Technological progress under capitalism carries the unrealised potential for human well-being that can only be fulfilled under a socialist order. Venkatesh Athreya examined how the development of productive forces in India is shaped by changing agrarian and non-agrarian relations. India's move out of agriculture has been slow and uneven, with most rural households depending on both farm and non-farm income. Agriculture now serves mainly as a secondary livelihood, particularly for poorer groups.

Technological change in farming through machinery, irrigation, and new seeds has increased productivity but remains highly class- and caste-specific, benefitting large, capital-owning farmers while excluding smallholders. Even state-supported technologies reinforce these inequalities.

V. K. Ramachandran: Socio-Economic Classes in the Indian Countryside

V. K. Ramchandran made the following arguments in his paper. The agrarian structure is largely characterised by highly unequal land and wealth ownership and the concentration of assets among landlords. We also face declining family labour and rising wage labour (especially non-agricultural). India witnesses a resilient but highly differentiated peasantry and a growing interdependence between peasants and wage workers. Never before have boundaries between the poor peasants and wage workers been so porous: one can be a cultivator this season, and a wage worker the next. Their material conditions are increasingly similar, which forms the objective basis for unity among the rural poor.



Ultimately, only movements that articulate the concrete demands of these classes around income, livelihood, and social justice can transform rural India and society at large. The task at hand therefore, he emphasized, is to form an alliance in the countryside led by the poor peasantry and wage workers to fight for every aspect of the economic and social liberation of the rural masses, in the district, block, mandal, and panchayat, in order to identify the most burning issues of income, livelihoods, and social existence of the rural poor and

make these issues the basis for united struggle.

Plenary 2

Vizhinjam Hall, Time: 1115–1300

Chair:

S. Mahendra Dev (*Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM)*)

Speakers:

Madhura Swaminathan (*Professor and Head, Economic Analysis Unit, Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Bangalore*)

Arindam Das (*Joint Director, Foundation For Agrarian Studies*)

Yoshifumi Usami (*Retired Professor, Osaka Prefecture University, Japan*)

Brinda Karat (*Former Member of Parliament; former General Secretary of the All India Democratic Women's Association*)

Avinash M. Tripathi (*Faculty, Azim Premji University*)

Gopal Guru (*Political Scientist, Former Professor, Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU)*)



During this session, the following topics were discussed: persistence of rural poverty, wage stagnation, deepening inequality, and the marginalisation of Adivasi communities, stressing the need for conceptual frameworks.

Madhura Swaminathan, Arindam Das, C. A. Sethu, and Daya Susan Thomas: Poverty and Living Standards in Rural India: An Overview based on National and Village-Level Data

The paper was presented by Madhura Swaminathan. While global trends in poverty declined over two decades, this trend was reversed in the post-COVID period, with increasing poverty and declining standard of living becoming a global phenomenon.



In India, despite the many income-poor and food-insecure people, there is no official poverty line. A recent study by Sethu *et al.* found the poverty headcount ratio for 2024–25 to be 26.4 per cent in India. However, according to the State of Food Insecurity report of 2025, the proportion of those who cannot afford a healthy diet in India has declined. This is because the World Bank used data from the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey of 2022–23 that underestimated inequality.

However, evidence from PARI village studies establish that poverty and deprivation remain at high levels in rural India. Studies on time poverty, especially among rural women, show stagnating real rural wages and declining standards of living among poor peasant and manual workers.

Arindam Das and Yoshifumi Usami: Trends in Rural Wages and Earnings

Yoshifumi Usami and Arindam Das presented a paper on Trends in Rural Wages and Earnings, based



on Wage Rates in Rural India (WRRRI) and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data. However, these sources diverge on multiple points. For instance, while the WRRRI data finds real wages stagnant in the last decade, the PLFS data

shows a rise in rural wages post-COVID. The differences between the databases are due to differences in definitions. Rising wage rates indicate structural changes in the labour market. This should lead to

a decline in rural poverty. Data such as consumption expenditure must be examined further to establish this.

Brinda Karat: Socio-Economic Conditions of Scheduled Tribes in India



Scheduled Tribes in India face many challenges with the growth of capitalist relations in tribal areas and as a result of government policies. This is despite the constitutional rights granted to these communities. Scheduled Tribes were labelled “encroachers” by the British, and continue to face dispossession post-Independence, with capitalist expansion and neoliberalism in the private sector displacing them from forest lands. Coercive displacement goes hand-in-hand with lack of statistics on who and how many are displaced. With growing government deregulation and expanding Company rule, even previously offered compensations such as jobs for affected families and representation through the gram sabha are disappearing. Organisations such as the FAS must conduct research on the status and conditions of the Adivasi groups.

Arjun Jayadev, Avinash M. Tripathi, and M. K. Shravan: Rural Growth and Distribution: Two Narratives from the PLFS 2017–2023



Avinash M. Tripathi presented the paper which was co-authored with Arjun Jayadev and M. K. Shravan. He brought out the contrast between individual real wages and rising household per capita incomes, as seen in Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) between 2017 and 2023. They argued that changed household composition and expanded participation contributed to rising household incomes, while individual wage stagnation implies that such improvements are fragile.

Gopal Guru: Maharashtra's Changing Agrarian Scenario and Widening Inequality



Gopal Guru argued that a conceptual language is necessary to understand agrarian change, citing the context of changing agrarian scenario and widening inequality in Maharashtra. Inequality must be central to theory on its own and as a starting point, rather than being seen from the perspective of equality. While equality, from an economic point of view, needs the language of data sets and timelines for policy formulation, there must be terminology and concepts to constitute the metaphysics of inequality. The elements in defining inequality are agency (you must have agency to articulate the claim on poverty), language (to interpret what inequality is), adversary (the entity to express this language to), and compensation (for conditions of distress and disparity, legal and moral).

The Chair concluded the session, agreeing that both consumption-based and multidimensional poverty are important. Wage rates, inequality, village-level issues, and tribal issues, are fields for additional discussion by young scholars.

Session 1A

Vizhinjam Hall, Time: 1415–1600

Interim Chair:

R. Ramakumar (Professor, School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai)

Chair:

T. M. Thomas Isaac (Economist; former Minister for Finance and Coir, Kerala)

Speakers:

Barbara Harriss-White (Professor Emeritus of Development Studies; Emeritus Fellow of Wolfson College)

Deepak Johnson (Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, CHRIST (Deemed to be University))

Surajit Mazumdar (Professor, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning (CESP), Jawaharlal Nehru University)

Mihika Chatterjee (Lecturer, International Development, Department of Social and Policy Sciences and Co-director, Centre for Development Studies and Centre for the Study of Violence, University of Bath)



The session saw a discussion on how Indian agriculture is increasingly shaped by neoliberal and corporate pressures, rising costs and falling farm incomes, deepening inequality, land dispossession, and stagnant non-farm growth.

Barbara Harriss-White: Post-Colonial Capital in Indian Agriculture



Barbara Harriss-White interrogated the concept of “post-colonial agrarian capital” by asking what kind of capitalism emerged in India after colonialism and what was truly “post” about it. She examined how Subaltern and Post-Colonial Studies have engaged with agrarian transformation, acknowledging their role in decentring Eurocentrism but critiquing their neglect of class, state, and material structures. Situating post-independence agrarian scholarship within a “Tower of Babel” of competing frameworks, she highlighted the state as the least theorised actor.

Engaging with Kalyan Sanyal’s idea of “dual economies,” the “accumulation” and “need” sectors, she appreciated its moral critique of capitalism, yet argued that the binary cannot explain India’s intertwined realities of caste, class, and labour. Arguing “the class framework is not wrong, it is indispensable to understanding rural transformation,” she maintained that caste functions as an economic regulator, not merely a cultural one. In conclusion, Harriss-White argued that India’s agriculture today belongs not to a post-colonial order but to a form of neo-colonial capitalism shaped by global capital, American power, and persistent class and caste hierarchies. She called for a grounded, field-based political economy rather than a separate post-colonial theory of capitalism.

During the discussion, Barbara Harriss-White emphasised the persistence and functional role of petty commodity production and small-scale self-employment in rural India, highlighting their integration into capitalist markets and differentiation from purely pre-capitalist forms, while noting that caste dynamics under capitalism differ from North American racial capitalism.

Deepak Johnson: The Profitability Crisis in Indian Agriculture

Deepak Johnson and V. Surjit’s paper, analysed trends in farm costs and incomes from 2000–01 to 2019–20 using data from the Comprehensive Scheme for the Cost of Cultivation of Principal Crops (CCPC), motivated by the government’s goal of doubling farmers’ income. Covering eight major

crops, the study showed that while agriculture remains vital to rural livelihoods, real crop incomes



have fallen sharply over two decades due to rising input costs, especially for fertilisers, human labour, and machinery, and stagnant output prices. Fertiliser decontrol under the 2010–11 Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme has worsened cost pressures, while yield-growth, particularly in oilseeds and pulses, has remained weak. Profitability improved until around 2010–11 but declined steeply thereafter, with a widening gap between Minimum Support Prices and actual market prices revealing deep procurement and price-realisation inefficiencies. With average landholdings at just

0.86 hectares, most farmers earn inadequate incomes even from multiple crop cycles. The authors highlighted growing inequality among cultivators and called for a comprehensive response, raising productivity, regulating input costs, ensuring fair output prices, and extending targeted support to small and marginal farmers.

During the discussion, Deepak explained that the study focused on crop diversification, with cotton included in the dataset but not analysed, and that household labour was valued at prevailing wages without adjusting for subsistence.

Surajit Mazumdar: Corporate Intervention in Indian Agriculture

Surajit Mazumdar examined the dynamics of corporate intervention in Indian agriculture since the 1991 liberalisation, highlighting both the limits and the emerging trends of corporate influence. Despite over three decades of neoliberal reforms, corporate penetration in primary agricultural production remains limited, with the household sector continuing to contribute the bulk of value added and public and household investment dominating the sector, he said. Since the early 2010s, however, corporate presence has gradually expanded in the ecosystem surrounding agriculture, particularly in mechanisation, input supply (seeds, fertilizers, and machinery), and agro-processing activities. The consumption of pesticides, fertilizers, and seeds has increased, with a significant rise in the corporate share of fertilizer production, while pesticide exports have grown even as domestic



absorption remains limited. Mazumdar pointed out that mechanisation, led by tractors, has also accelerated, positioning India as one of the largest tractor markets globally.

He framed the agrarian crisis not as an accident but as the outcome of policy choices, and links it to a broader “crisis of accumulation” for Indian capitalism, which he termed a “parasitic phase of expansion,” where corporate actors increasingly seek new profit sources in agriculture as other sectors plateau. Recent farm laws and policy shifts toward privatisation, contract farming, and deregulation further facilitate corporate expansion, while inequality within agriculture and smallholder vulnerability persist. Overall, corporate influence is growing more through processing and input supply than direct production, and the tensions between corporate capital and agrarian households are likely to intensify.

During the discussion, Surajit Mazumdar replied to a question on global agribusiness, noting that imports largely cater to high-income consumption patterns rather than domestic staples.

Mihika Chatterjee: Land in India’s Post-Pandemic Accumulation Regime

Mihika Chatterjee’s paper examined land distribution, agrarian dynamics, and rural accumulation by linking farm and non-farm crises. She emphasised the increasing commodification and dispossession of land, which disrupts traditional agrarian structures and intensifies inequality, with NFHS surveys indicating rising landlessness and polarisation. Small and marginal holdings remain a structural feature, with village studies providing more accurate depictions than official data, while tenancy arrangements have grown from 9.9 per cent in 2002–03 to 17.3 per cent in 2018–19, often reflecting distress-driven or intra-class arrangements. Stagnation in the non-farm sector, particularly manufacturing, which grew at an average of only 3.5 per cent annually between 2012–13 and 2019–20, alongside India’s textile production increasingly being replaced by Vietnam and China, and the slump in construction, a key source of rural employment, has pushed surplus labour back into agriculture, raising the sector’s share of employment. She noted that “there’s an idea that farmers want to exit farming,” a perception common in policy discourse, but argued that semi-proletarianisation and partial dispossession are functional to rural social reproduction and capital accumulation, rather than purely voluntary exits.



Overall, she framed the persistence of smallholdings, growing tenancy, and increasing miniaturisation as outcomes of class-specific agrarian crises and broader stagnation in industrialisation, demonstrating the interlinked crises of farm and non-farm growth under contemporary neoliberalism.

During the discussion, Mihika clarified that her focus on manufacturing and construction reflected the empirical absorption of dispossessed labour, that service sector inclusion would alter relative surplus calculations, and that the concept of semi-proletarianisation better captures the nuanced, functional role of land in rural social reproduction, rather than simple pauperisation.

Session 1B

Bay Hall, Time: 1415–1600

Chair:

T. N. Prakash Kammardi (*Professor and Head, Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore*)

Speakers:

K. K. Narayanan (*Managing Director, Metabelix Life Sciences*)

Niveta Jain (*Principal Scientist, Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI)*)

Sreeja Jaiswal (*Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change (MCC)*)

Sandipan Baksi (*Director, Foundation For Agrarian Studies*)

The speakers emphasised that sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture demands equitable and well-regulated use of technology, scientifically grounded mitigation of agricultural emissions, fair and realistic global climate pathways that protect food security in the Global South, and a rigorous, evidence-based evaluation of alternative farming approaches.

K. K. Narayanan: Harnessing Technology for Sustainable Agriculture: Kerala’s Path to Food Security and Climate Resilience



K. K. Narayanan argued that science and technology can be used responsibly to ensure sustainability, equity, and resilience in agriculture, particularly in Kerala. He argued that science itself is neutral, but inequalities arise from how it is deployed, emphasising that the fruits of science must be fairly shared among all stakeholders. Tracing agriculture’s long evolution, he noted that while global food production today is sufficient, problems of access and financial sustainability persist, especially as farmers’ incomes remain far lower than

those in other sectors.

Narayanan highlighted the dual role of technology in modifying both “nature” and “nurture.” The Haber-Bosch process and synthetic fertilizers have been essential in feeding the world, but their use must be balanced with bio-fertilizers to maintain soil health. He pointed to advancements such as BT

cotton, gene editing, and potential C3 to C4 plant conversion as examples of technological innovation addressing productivity and climate challenges. In Kerala's context, he emphasised scale-neutral mechanisation and value addition to boost farmer incomes, calling for strong regulation to ensure equitable benefits.

Niveta Jain: Green House Gases Emission from Agriculture: A Critical Perspective (online)

Dr Niveta Jain discussed agriculture's contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions and the need for mitigation. She explained how global temperatures have increased since 1850 and attributed this to rising emissions of carbon dioxide (75 per cent), methane (16 per cent), nitrous oxide (4–5 per cent), and fluorinated gases (2 per cent). Agriculture, particularly livestock and rice cultivation, contributes significantly to emissions, with India ranking first in agricultural emissions globally. However, Dr Jain emphasised that India's emissions are survival-based. She outlined mitigation strategies, including improving water and fertilizer efficiency, crop rotation, nutrient management, residue retention, and the adoption of aerobic rice or direct-seeded rice systems. Reducing food waste, promoting vegetarian diets, and adopting precise fertilizer application methods could also lower emissions. She concluded that while agriculture is vital for the survival of civilisation, it must become sustainable through coordinated technical, economic, and social efforts at national and international levels.

Sreeja Jaiswal: Critique of Global Mitigation Pathways: Overlooking Food Security

Implications (online)

Sreeja Jaiswal's presentation examined how the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) AR6's modelled land-based mitigation pathways unevenly distribute burdens between the Global North and South, with severe consequences for food security. Drawing on the IPCC's scenario database across four temperature pathways (C1–C4), Jaiswal found that none of the 1.5 °C or 2 °C pathways achieve zero hunger by 2030, and only one scenario meets this goal by 2050 and 2100. The models, driven by uniform global carbon pricing and cost optimisation, push large-scale land-use change in developing regions, diverting agricultural land toward bioenergy and afforestation. This raises food prices and increases hunger risk, especially in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Even the single "Eat-Lancet diet" scenario that achieves zero hunger imposes disproportionate dietary shifts on the Global South and relies on unrealistic international aid transfers. Jaiswal concluded that current IPCC models fail to integrate principles of equity, justice, or socio-cultural feasibility, and called for

new equity-based pathways and greater transparency in communicating regional assumptions and trade-offs to policymakers.

Sandipan Baksi, Dona Safui, and T. P. Harshan: “Alternative” Approaches towards Sustainable Agriculture: An Epistemological Critique



Sandipan Baksi critically examined the growing discourse around “alternative” agriculture, including organic, regenerative, and agroecological models, arguing that while these approaches raise valid concerns about hunger and climate change, the methodology of their claim must be critically examined. Adopting a scientific realist position, the authors reviewed highly cited papers propagating alternative agriculture, to analyse the logic, evidence, and methods supporting such claims.

He presented four key hypotheses often made in alternative agriculture arguments about yield not being a central parameter: that crop yields have not grown dramatically, that organic and conventional yields are comparable, that alternative practices can raise yields, and that hunger is about distribution rather than production. Their review showed that most evidence comes from small-scale participatory studies that demonstrate yield management rather than genuine improvement, with little discussion on scalability or mechanisms of generalisation. On local knowledge, they argued that while ethnographic insights are valuable, Participatory Action Research (PAR) and case studies cannot be used to prove the superiority of local knowledge against modern science. For example, traditional practices such as “spiritual rainmaking” cannot be equated with scientific knowledge without empirical validation.

The authors concluded that alternative agriculture often overlooks rigorous experimentation, causal testing, and theory-based evaluation, and cautioned against placing all knowledge systems on the same epistemic footing as modern science.

Session 1C

Waves Hall, Time: 1115–1300

Chair:

A. V. Jose (*Honorary Visiting Professor, Centre for Development Studies*)

Speakers:

A. Vijayaraghavan (*President, All India Agriculture Workers Union*)

K. N. Ganesh (*Chairman, Kerala Council of Historical Research*)

Balasingham Skanthakumar (*Social Scientists' Association, Sri Lanka*)

R. Vijay (*Dean School of economics, University of Hyderabad*)

The topics covered through this session were the dynamics of rural productive classes, land reforms in Kerala, rural poverty in Sri Lanka, and poverty among peasants and workers.

A. Vijayaraghavan and Vikram Singh: Agrarian Crisis and the Changing Nature of Rural Productive Classes in India

A. Vijayaraghavan pointed out that after Independence, developmental policies failed to address the needs of the lower strata, the producing classes of India. Highlighting the various changes taking place in agrarian relations, he underscored the rapid growth in the number of agricultural workers and peasants. Many workers of agricultural origin have been forced to shift to manual and casual labour for their survival. He also drew attention to the multifaceted issues faced by the poor and the government's failure in the neoliberal era to provide adequate social security or relief to the working poor. Furthermore, he stressed the lack of sufficient attention from researchers to the fundamental issues confronting the poor.



K. N. Ganesh: Land Reform and the Socio-Economic Transformation of Kerala

K. N. Ganesh explained the rise of a middle-level peasantry in Kerala and the emergence of a middle class that aligned with the forward castes in the historical context of land reforms. The historical development of various classes and the use of caste to preserve land relations laid the foundation for the recent reassertion of caste identities. He also highlighted the contradictions in the labour market



during the neoliberal era, particularly the dilemma between selling labour to global capitalism or inviting capital in accordance with the conditions of the labour market. He ended with some suggestions in favour of the real producing classes.

Balasingham Skanthakumar: Measuring Rural Poverty in Sri Lanka

Balasingham Skanthakumar laid down a picture of the economic conditions of Sri Lanka through



some development indicators. Sri Lanka has seen a sharp rise in poverty, 24.5 per cent in 2019, driven by food inflation, currency devaluation, and a 10 per cent economic contraction. The World Bank notes that 10 per cent of people are just above the poverty line. Poverty is concentrated in the plantation (estate) sector, largely among Malaya Tamil workers, an ethnolinguistic group. Despite some rural improvements, de-agriculturalisation, falling real wages, and indebtedness persist in Sri Lanka.

R. Vijay and Nisha Patel: Poverty and Living Conditions Among Peasants and Workers



R. Vijay and Nisha Patel studied the relation between investment patterns and tenancy, and diversification in agriculture. Post-2000, agriculture in India shows a rising presence of small and tenant farmers, with tenancy increasing. R. Vijay highlighted the diverse nature of the agrarian structure, which comprises owner cultivators, poor tenants, and mixed tenants, with marginal farmers often being mixed tenants. Household diversification has

grown as more families combine farm and non-farm activities, though after 2008, there was a slight revival in farm participation. The trends show that more diversified households invest little in

increasing productivity. Even the farm investment as a whole is increasing, but in a declining trend. When households diversify, they tend not to invest in productivity-enhancing assets; instead, they focus on activities that reduce risk.

Session 2A: The Land Question

Vizhinjam Hall, Time: 1630–1815

Chair:

Niladri Sekhar Dhar (*Associate Professor, Bihar Institute of Public Finance and Policy, Patna*)

Discussant:

Mihika Chatterjee (*Lecturer, International Development, Department of Social and Policy Sciences and Co-director, Centre for Development Studies and Centre for the Study of Violence, University of Bath*)

Speakers:

Ameet Kumar (*Doctoral Student, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-Roorkee*)

Mrityunjay Pandey (*Research Consultant, National Centre for Good Governance*)

Gobinda Padhan (*PhD Scholar, Maa Manikeshwari University, Bhawanipatna*)

Peddi Dayakar (*Assistant Professor, Agro Economic Research Centre (AERC), Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune*)



The session discussed unequal land rights, rising tenancy, caste-based land inequality, and worsening land degradation, and how together they shape a deeply uneven rural landscape in India.

Ameet Kumar: Problematising Land Reform in Jammu and Kashmir, India

Ameet Kumar used Ambedkar's framework of economic emancipation to underscore the dignity and freedom of Dalits in Kashmir. He particularly focused on migrant Dalits from West Pakistan, who



were denied land rights even during the land reforms led by Sheikh Abdullah. Beginning with a historical account of land reforms in Kashmir, the paper pointed to the loopholes through which Dalits were left out. Although land was allotted to migrant Dalits, they have no ownership rights over it. They face denial of government benefits, delays or corruption in obtaining NOCs for construction, lack of access to loans, and, in the worst cases, land grabbing. The speaker argued that full ownership of land must be granted

to these communities.

Mrityunjay Pandey, Nisha Patel, and R. Vijay: Analysis of Changes in Extent and Composition of Land Tenancy in India: An Exploratory Analysis



The thrust of Mrityunjay Pandey's argument was on how public policy influences the patterns of tenancy in the Indian countryside. The increasing trend in tenancy after the 2000s is linked to the new economic policies introduced in the 1990s. Since liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation, there has been the formation of an agrarian and employment crisis. The cost of cultivation has increased, but there are no assured prices or returns

for output, which has also affected employment. Additionally, there is a profitability crisis. To survive, households switch between agricultural and non-agricultural, farm and non-farm activities, creating mixed households with multiple occupations. This has led to an increase in tenancy, particularly driven by marginal tenants. West Bengal, Odisha, and Bihar are the main drivers behind this trend.

Gobinda Padhan and Chitrasen Bhue: Caste Stratification, Land Inequality, and Landlessness in Post-Reform Rural India

From before independence to today, caste has remained a distinctive and exploitative institution, existing not in singularity but in relation to other institutions. Gobinda Padhan examined patterns of land inequality across castes in rural India and the overlap of land ownership across caste groups in



post-reform rural India. There has persistently been high land inequality in India. Scheduled Tribe communities own land in a proportion slightly larger than their share in the population, Other Backward Class groups have ownership proportionate to their population, Scheduled Caste groups are severely under-represented and Other groups are consistently over-represented. However, land equality is mostly caused by within-group inequality, and there is caste

stratification in land holding.

Peddi Dayakar: Sustaining Soil, Securing Yields: A Longitudinal Study of Land Degradation and Productivity in India

The speaker examined land degradation in India and its declining soil productivity, erosion, waterlogging, and salinity. He emphasises the cyclical relationship between land degradation, groundwater depletion, and climate change, each reinforcing the other.



The speaker examined trends in land degradation and regional variations, showing that Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Gujarat bear high economic costs due to these issues, with Gujarat being the worst affected. From 2003 to 2017–19, some of these states have improved or utilised degraded land. The speaker highlighted the

importance of adaptation mechanisms.

Session 2B: Commercialisation of Farming

Bay Hall, Time: 1630–1815

Chair:

Shinu Varkey (*Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, St. Berchmans College, Changanassery*)

Discussant:

V. Surjit (*Associate Professor, Centre for Agrarian Studies, National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), Hyderabad*)

Speakers:

Akshay Subhashrao Deshmukh (*PhD Scholar, Institute for Social and Economic Change*)

Kunal Munjal (*PhD Scholar, Economic Analysis Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Bengaluru*)

Rachit Tiwari (*London School of Economics and Political Science*)

Sejuti Das Gupta (*Associate Professor, Michigan State University*)

Ambika Subhash (*PhD Candidate and Junior Research Fellow, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nebru University*)

The session explored how FPOs, corporatised value chains, state-led agroecology, new horticultural capitalists, and illicit biotech seeds are reshaping agrarian relations, market power, and farmer autonomy in contemporary India.

Akshay Subhashrao Deshmukh and Parmod Kumar: Determinates of Farmers Participation in the Grape Value Chain through Farmer-Producer Organisations (FPOs) in India: A New Institutional Economics Approach

Akshay Subhashrao, through his study examined how Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) help



grape farmers in Maharashtra and Karnataka participate in high-value markets. Using a New Institutional Economics framework, it showed that FPOs reduce transaction costs, improve market access, and provide technology and collective support. Socio-economic factors like landholding, education, and credit access influence membership, with medium and marginal farmers benefiting most. The study

highlighted the need for inclusive strategies, training, and timely information to support smallholders and strengthen FPO-led value chains.

During the discussion, Akshay clarified that his analysis comparing grape and raisin prices accounted for the conversion ratio between fresh and processed produce.

Kunal Munjal: Political Economy of Sugarcane Commercialisation in Uttar Pradesh (2000–2024) Production Boom, Corporatisation of Industry, State Regulation, and Differential Outcomes

Kunal Munjal's study examined the political economy of sugarcane commercialisation in Uttar



Pradesh (2000–2024), addressing a research gap in the quantitative understanding of India's agricultural markets. Focusing on the mid-level structure, the study analysed how market and processing structures evolved, the role of private versus public players, and the factors driving these changes. Uttar Pradesh witnessed a growth in sugar production due to a new high-yield variety, improved recovery rates, and yield expansion.

Sugar mills expanded their processing capacity, while traditional crushers and *kolbus* sharply declined, reflecting consolidation, industrialisation, and corporatisation. Ownership shifted predominantly to private mills (79 per cent), many transforming into multi-purpose agro-industrial energy complexes leveraging ethanol and other by-products. State policies, including Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP-2004), disinvestment, subsidies, and Minimum Support Price (MSPs), actively favoured corporatisation, enabling large private mills to dominate, while regional and cooperative mills contracted. Technological divergence, market reorientation, and economies of scale further reinforced consolidation. Despite these changes, sugarcane farming remains household-based, highlighting the risk that any reduction in state regulatory support could amplify corporate dominance to the detriment of farmers.

During the discussion, Kunal Munjal explained that while traditional crushers and jaggery units once offered farmers flexibility, they have declined sharply over two decades due to licensing restrictions

and the dominance of refined sugar, though small-scale jaggery production persists for local sweets and liquor industries.

Rachit Tiwari: Paradoxical Rendering and the Appropriation of Community – Managed, Zero-budgeted, and Sustainable Agroecological Transition in Andhra Pradesh

Rachit Tiwari's study reveals how a grassroots agroecology initiative has been transformed into a



centralised, state-led, and financially-driven project. Based on fieldwork in Guntur (2022–23) with more than 35 interviews and participant observation, he identified three key paradoxes: the community-managed paradox, where local autonomy is undermined by bureaucratic control; the zero-budget paradox, where the programme relies on 90 million Euros in loans, contradicting

its self-reliance ethos; and the sustainability paradox, where carbon credit monetisation turns ecological goals into financial instruments that rarely benefit farmers. Farmers face economic insecurity during the transition, policy contradictions, and social hierarchies, particularly affecting tenant farmers. Tiwari argued that truly equitable agroecological transformation requires devolving power to local democratic institutions, securing land rights, and providing direct support during the transition period.

Responding to questions on Andhra Pradesh's natural farming model, Rachit noted that Zero Budget Natural Farming's (ZBNF) success is context-specific, dependent on crop, livestock, and market conditions, and criticised the state's top-down push among marginal farmers for a labour-intensive practice better suited to community-led efforts.

Sejuti Das Gupta, Ishita Mehrota, Chadrani Dutta, and Aparajay Kumar: Agrarian Transformation in India: New Realities and Subjectivities in High Value Crops

Sejuti's study investigated agrarian transformations in India's high-value crop sector, focusing on horticulture, niche crops, and peri-urban farming. It examines who the new horticulturalists are, their sources of capital, land relations, labour dynamics, and marketing strategies in an evolving agricultural landscape. Based on fieldwork across 54 farms in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala,

Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, and the National Capital Region between 2019–2024, the study integrates quantitative and qualitative methods within an interdisciplinary framework of agrarian political economy and urban geography. Findings reveal the rise of a distinct class of “nouveau-riche capitalist farmers,” often non-agrarian professionals from services and manufacturing sectors, investing in small, mechanised, and technology-intensive farms, with women increasingly taking on



ownership and managerial roles. Despite urban migration, labour remains tied to agriculture, with seasonal migrant workers engaged in farm operations. The study also showed reverse capital flows, with urban surplus invested back into agriculture, reshaping peri-urban landscapes through nurseries, high-value farms, and farmhouses. Overall, these transformations illustrate new relations of production, capital, and labour,

growing social differentiation, and the blurring of urban–rural boundaries, highlighting the socio-economic and spatial impacts of high-value agriculture in contemporary India.

To a question raised during the session, Sejuti clarified that traditional orchardists, such as apple growers in Himachal Pradesh, are included in the high-value crop framework, though this inclusion requires further conceptual refinement.

Ambika Subash: From Enclosure to Illegality: Biotechnology in India’s Cotton Capitalism

Ambika Subhash’s study traced the technological trajectory of cotton in India, from the Green Revolution to the Biotechnology Revolution, focusing on Madhya Pradesh. Cotton serves as an ideal lens to understand technological change because India is the second-largest producer and largest exporter globally. The study investigated how failures in the legal Bt cotton regime (2002–2010) led farmers to adopt illegal herbicide-tolerant Bt (HTBt) seeds. Fieldwork (2025 season) involved a household survey of 280 farmers in Dhar and Barwani, combined with snowball sampling of dealers, revealing the prevalence of informal seed circulation across Gujarat, Maharashtra, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh. These seeds, often unbranded or locally labelled (“4G,” “5G,” Yugam, Bahubali, Missile), are adopted to manage rising labour costs and persistent pest problems, notably the pink bollworm, while reducing manual weeding. The labour-intensive cultivation relies on pickup truck



labourers, mostly women, and is deeply affected by political backing and local networks that facilitate illegal HTBt trade amid regulatory inaction. Ambika emphasised that the convergence of legal and illegal biotech systems now forms a single structure within Indian cotton capitalism, creating ecological, economic, and labour implications. She argued that Bt cotton's initial productivity gains came mainly from hybrid vigour rather than the Bt trait, with pest

resistance and lack of refuge practices undermining sustainability; she called for decentralised public research to replace the current private monopoly in cotton biotechnology.

Discussion

V. Surjit's discussion offered an integrated reading of the session, arguing that the four papers collectively show how global finance, state-led programmes, and commercialisation are reshaping agrarian relations and peasant livelihoods. He highlighted the growing financialisation of "sustainability" initiatives like Andhra Pradesh Community Managed Natural Farming (APCNF), the corporatisation of sectors such as sugarcane where public resources facilitate private accumulation, and the weakening of democratic local institutions originally meant to empower rural communities. He also underscored contradictions in state strategies, where scientific approaches operate alongside ideologically driven programmes like ZBNF, and pointed to farmers' reliance on informal technologies such as HTBt cotton amid rising input costs.

Session 2C: Trajectories of Agrarian Change

Waves Hall, Time: 1630–1815

Chair and Discussant:

Jens Lerche (*Professor, Agrarian and Labour Studies, SOAS University of London*)

Speakers:

Avinash (*GITAM School of Humanities and Social Sciences*)

Saqib Khan (*Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, GITAM School of Humanities and Social Sciences*)

Gaurav Bansal (*PhD Scholar, University of East Anglia*)

Aman Bardia (*Assistant Director, Platform Cooperativism Consortium, The New School, New York University*)



The speakers highlighted how agrarian change across states reflects region-specific histories, land regimes, and power structures.

Avinash and Saqib Khan: Agrarian Change in Tribal States: A Study on Jharkhand and Tripura

Avinash and Saqib Khan discussed the theme of agrarian change in tribal states, focusing on Jharkhand and Tripura. Saqib said that most existing studies on these states have focused on the subsistence nature of agriculture and on relations between tribal and non-tribal communities, but have paid limited attention to differentiation within tribes. He explained that their study tries to understand the distinctiveness of these regions by looking at the historical and social specificities of agrarian relations.

In Tripura, he noted that the partition of India and the large-scale immigration of non-tribal populations significantly altered the state's agrarian structure and led to tribal land loss. Over the past few decades, however, a new landed class has emerged among the tribal population, marking a shift in class relations. Saqib emphasised that agrarian relations in Jharkhand and Tripura must be seen in their historical and regional contexts, rather than through a universal framework of subsistence agriculture.



Avinash discussed the idea of the tribe as a peasant and focused on understanding agrarian change in Jharkhand. He pointed out that unlike many Green Revolution states, Jharkhand represents a non-capitalist agrarian formation, with subsistence agriculture and unique land tenure systems such as the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act and Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act that protect tribal land rights. Drawing on fieldwork in two districts, Khunti and Palamu, he

compared regions with strong tenancy protection and those with histories of landlordism and insurgency. In Khunti, agrarian change has occurred through the introduction of high-yielding varieties, vegetable cultivation, and the active involvement of NGOs and agricultural input companies which often substitute for weak state agricultural services. In Palamu, however, market-based intermediaries play a greater role than NGOs, showing different trajectories of change. Avinash also examined Tripura's history to challenge the notion of a homogeneous tribal society, showing that even under princely rule, there were internal hierarchies and varied forms of exploitation. After independence, migration from Bengal altered land relations and led to both tribal dispossession and the emergence of tribal landlords through mortgage and distress sales. Recent studies, he noted, also show increasing income diversification and socioeconomic differentiation within tribal villages.

They argued that tribal societies are not static or uniform, and that new forms of class differentiation and agrarian relations have emerged within them as a result of market penetration, state policies, and the postcolonial development process.

During the discussion, Avinash and Saqib Khan explained that seasonal migration is fundamental to agrarian relations in Jharkhand, organised around remittance economies linked to the paddy cycle; although Adivasis retain formal land titles, land mortgage, sharecropping, expanding credit, and NGO-led promotion of High Yielding Varieties (HYV) through model villages have reshaped production and created new agrarian hierarchies, with NGOs acting as intermediaries between local producers, state programmes, and corporate input suppliers.

Gaurav Bansal: Studying the Rural Beyond the Village: Political Economy of the Small Towns and Its Implications for Capital Accumulation and Agrarian Distress in Rural Punjab, India

Gaurav Bansal's presentation examined the uneven nature of agrarian change and crisis in Punjab. He



argued that much of the existing literature on Punjab's agrarian structure carries a hint of cultural determinism, portraying Jats as inherently agrarian and unable to transition out of agriculture. This view, he suggested, overlooks important regional variations within Punjab. Most research focuses on the Malwa region, which is heavily dependent on agriculture and allied activities for accumulation, and where labour-displacing technological

changes have deepened the agrarian crisis. In contrast, regions like Majha have seen greater diversification beyond agriculture, leading to a different kind of distress for labourers; one that is less visible but still significant. Bansal emphasised the need to link processes of accumulation, regional inequality, and agrarian distress to better understand the differentiated forms of crisis across Punjab's rural economy.

Responding to a question on Punjab's regional differences, Gaurav argued that uneven capitalist development, shaped by the history of Sikh militancy, colonial legacies, agricultural dependence, and varying degrees of urban integration, explains the distinct trajectories of Malwa and Majha and the persistence of caste–class hierarchies.

Aman Bardia: Caste, Capital, and Contestation: Uneven Agrarian Development in Gujarat

Aman Bardia's presentation examined how Gujarat's model of capitalist growth has deepened rather than dismantled caste hierarchies in rural areas. Drawing on secondary data and policy documents, he argued that since the 1980s, state-led reforms such as land conversion, SEZ expansion, and contract



farming have primarily benefited dominant caste groups while systematically excluding Dalit and Adivasi farmers.

Bardia explained that productive forces like mechanisation and agri-business expansion have intensified both class and caste inequalities, concentrating land and credit in the hands of upper caste elites. He noted that even cooperative and state institutions remain dominated by these groups, limiting redistributive reform. Contract farming, especially in crops like potatoes and cotton, further entrenches exclusion through high entry barriers and exploitative arrangements.

He concluded that Gujarat's so-called "success story" rests on a caste-based structure of accumulation, where narratives of efficiency and growth obscure deep social inequality. True agrarian transformation, Bardia argued, requires confronting caste power within both market and state institutions rather than relying on technical or market-led solutions alone.

To questions on caste and class differentiation in cooperatives, Aman Bardia emphasised the need to analyse capitalism with caste at its core, noting tensions between anti-caste and Left movements, and clarified that his dataset on cooperative societies' caste composition was constructed from multiple administrative sources, including the Registrar of Cooperative Societies' public records, Gujarat's Socio-Economic Review, SCSP-linked enrolment data, and prior research, making the dataset indicative rather than definitive.

Session 2D: The World of Rural Workers

Aqua Hall, Time: 1600–1815

Chair:

V. Sridhar (*Former Associate Editor, Frontline, Bangalore*)

Discussant:

Vinoj Abraham (*Professor, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram*)

Speakers:

Priya Kumari (*PhD Scholar, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University*)

Prachi Bansal (*Assistant Professor, Economics, Jindal School of Government and Public Policy (JSGP), Jindal Global University*)

Mrityunjay Rao (*PhD Scholar (Economics), JNU*)

Sreenivasulu Yamanapalli (*Associate Professor, Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad*)

Nageshwar Bansode (*Assistant Professor, B. R. Ambedkar School of Economics University, Bengaluru*)

The session explored how rural India's labour, credit, and agrarian systems remain deeply shaped by caste, class, and land inequalities, with smallholders, Dalits, and Adivasis systematically excluded from formal credit, secure employment, and public amenities, while persistent tied labour, mechanisation, migration, and social hierarchies reinforce structural marginalisation.

Priya Kumari: Credit for Whom? Enhancing Kisan Credit Card's Lending Limits in India's Unequal Rural Credit Landscape

Priya Kumari's paper highlighted how landholding, class position, and regional disparities shape access to the Kisan Credit Card (KCC), often excluding the very farmers the scheme was designed to support.



Despite its stated aim of providing timely and affordable credit to small and marginal farmers, the enhanced lending limits and revised conditions increasingly privilege those with larger landholdings and stronger repayment capacities. As formal credit allocation becomes tied to collateral and perceived creditworthiness, poorer households with limited land are effectively

screened out and pushed back toward informal lenders. The analysis showed that instead of reducing inequality in the rural credit landscape, the current KCC framework risks deepening existing hierarchies of access and indebtedness.

Prachi Bansal: Stitching Together the Story: Labour Use in Indian Cotton Farming

Prachi Bansal's paper examined labour absorption in Indian cotton farming and finds that, unlike



other crops where labour arrangements have shifted significantly, forms of attached labour persist in Haryana's cotton cultivation. This continuity is striking given the broader diversification of rural employment and the expansion of non-farm opportunities, which have altered labour relations elsewhere. Her analysis raised an important and underexplored question: why does cotton continue to rely on

tyed or semi-feudal labour arrangements despite these structural changes? The paper pointed to a critical line of inquiry into how crop-specific labour demands, local power structures, and the political economy of cotton shape the resilience of attached labour.

Mrityunjay Rao and Jyoti Yadav: Labouring Lives in Rural Brick Kilns in India: Caste, Class, and Gender in Perspective

Mrityunjay Rao's study on rural brick kilns showed that workers remain effectively attached to the kiln



through contractors, rather than owners, creating a system of labour bondage mediated by advance payments. Despite the appearance of contractual arrangements, work conditions are harsh and prolonged, with workers living in highly informal, precarious setups lacking basic amenities such as toilets. The study highlighted how invisibility, informality, and dependence are reproduced through kinship-based recruitment networks, overwhelmingly affecting Dalit and Adivasi

workers. In the discussion, it was noted that similar labour relations, mediated by middlemen like *mistris*, are widespread across multiple sectors, pointing to a broader pattern of intermediated, caste-structured labour control in rural India.

Sreenivasulu Yamanapalli: Understanding Agrarian Transformation: Longitudinal Evidence from Dalit Landless Agricultural Labourers and Landed Households in a South Indian Village



Sreenivasulu Yamanapalli's longitudinal village study from Andhra Pradesh documented a clear structural transformation over three decades among Reddy landowning households and Dalit landless labourers. The revisit captured major shifts in agrarian employment relations: a move from agricultural to non-agricultural work, large-scale migration of Scheduled Caste

households to nearby towns, rapid mechanisation reducing labour demand from landless labourers, withdrawal of women from farm work, and evolving tenancy arrangements as landowners themselves exit agriculture. As a result, Dalit dependence on agricultural labour has sharply declined, but this shift is not simply economic, persistent caste discrimination has increasingly pushed Dalit workers out of local farm employment. The study raised the question on whether the caste-based discriminatory dynamics have become more exclusionary now, even though caste hierarchies have always existed, pointing to deeper changes in power, labour demand, and rural social relations.

Nageshwar Bansode: Mapping Marginality: Caste and Access to Public Amenities Among Dalits in Maharashtra

Nageshwar Bansode's paper mapped caste-based marginality by examining district handbook data from Maharashtra to assess Dalit households' access to public amenities, revealing persistent socio-economic deprivation rooted in limited access to essential infrastructure. The study showed that Dalit families often rely on higher private spending for education and health – leaving less for basic consumption – reflecting what Thorat described as both market and non-market forms of discrimination. Historical exclusions in education, water, mobility, and credit continue to reproduce



present inequalities, demonstrating how deeply caste structures shape everyday life. Bansode argued that breaking this cycle required collective mobilisation for equitable access and rights, alongside robust state intervention to expand public amenities and confront structural caste discrimination.

Discussion

As discussant Vinoj Abraham pointed out that the five studies on rural India revealed both continuity and change in semi-feudal relations. Continuity was shown in some studies through the persistence of unfree labour. Change, indicating capitalist transformation, was found in others by a shift from food to non-food occupations, a rise in wage labour, increased mechanisation, and women's withdrawal from the workforce. Methodologically, continuity was often identified in cross-sectional studies, while change was captured through repeated village studies.