

# Foundation for Agrarian Studies



## International Conference on Agrarian Change

November 6 to 9, 2025 | Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

### Day-wise Conference Proceedings Report on Day 3 – November 8, 2025

The third day of the conference started with a plenary session, Plenary 3. This was followed by three sets of parallel sessions (ten in total: Sessions 3A, 3B, 3C; Sessions 4A, 4B, 4C; and Sessions 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D). The last set of sessions (5A, 5B, 5C, 5D) consisted of presentations by young scholars. The summaries of the papers from these sessions follow.

#### Plenary 3

*Vizhinjam Hall, Time: 0900–1045*

#### **Chair:**

**T. Jayaraman** (*Senior Fellow, Climate Change, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF)*)

#### **Speakers:**

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

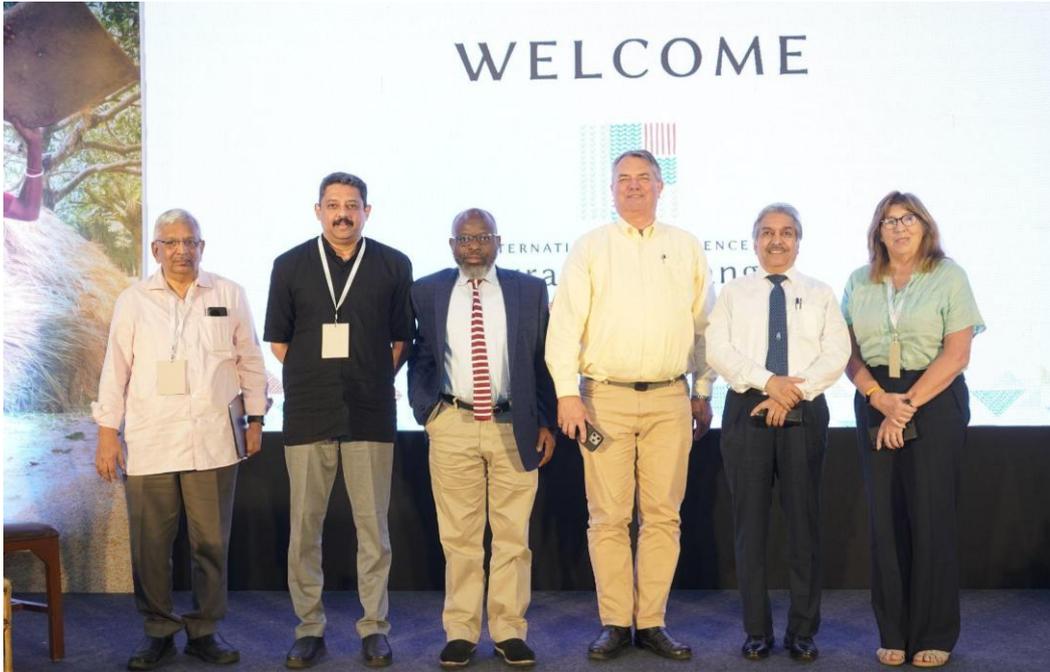
**Ademola A. Adenle** (*Senior Special Adviser on Agricultural Innovation Federal Ministry of Agriculture  
and Food Security, Nigeria*)

**Kathleen Hefferon** (*Former Director, National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (ICAR), India*)

**K. C. Bansal** (*Former Director, National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (ICAR), India*)

**Stanford Blade** (*Deputy Director General, Research and Innovation, ICRISAT, Hyderabad*)

**T. Jayaraman** (*MSSRF*)



### **R. Ramkumar: The Role of Science and Technology in Agriculture: A Review of the Debates**

In his presentation, Dr Ramkumar explored the philosophy of agricultural science, distinguishing



it from general philosophy of science despite substantial overlaps, and traced how GMOs, gene editing, and other major advances have deepened debates on its proper placement within these innovations. He portrayed agriculture-environment tensions as deeply contentious, stemming from agriculture’s historical alignment with European capitalism, where agrarian capitalism evolved alongside scientific progress, involving enclosure movements, dislocations, and productivity surges that sparked heated debates separating scientific advancement from capitalist expansion. Addressing

agricultural politics, particularly the Green Revolution, he noted confusion with the “Red Revolution” and polarised views on its ties to American foreign policy seen by some as imperialism’s instrument, by others as a catalyst for domestic growth in nations like India. Climate change, he argued, has amplified these discussions, probing science’s function in attaining future goals or as a means to them. Professor Jayaraman expanded on this.

Turning to the Green Revolution’s environmental role in India, he observed that recent years’ discourse has fixated on Glenstone’s graph, depicting no rise in growth rate in developed-country

production, a flat line lacking structural breaks suggesting failure in India, with added notes on escalating fertilizer use. Yet, this overlooks the Green Revolution's core success. A statistical rebuttal by Sandipan Baksi, Deepak Johnson, and others appeared in the *Economic and Political Weekly* last year. More fundamentally, the Green Revolution boosted production and productivity without felling extra trees from India's forests. This, he maintained, truly captures the Green Revolution's environmental triumph in India.

### **Ademola A. Adenle: Understanding Africa's Food System Challenges: Why Innovation Must Take Centre Stage**

In his presentation, Dr Adenle demonstrated how Africa's food systems face significant challenges, including low crop productivity among smallholder farmers and a heavy dependency on food imports. According to him, addressing these issues requires placing innovation at the centre of the strategy. A major hurdle is the uneven access to digital advisory services for farmers across the continent. While North Africa shows higher connectivity and Kenya leads with over 60 per cent



of farmers using such services, regions like Central and West Africa lag due to infrastructural and policy barriers. Successful digital platforms like M-Pesa, DigiFarm, and iCow demonstrate the potential for scalable solutions in payments, input access, and advisory services. Furthermore, renewable energy, particularly solar power, was highlighted as a key enabler for improving irrigation, reducing post-harvest losses

through cold storage, and powering agro-processing. The role of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) was also discussed, with South Africa leading in commercialisation and field trials, though many other African nations have been slower to adopt them commercially. The presentation concluded by emphasising the need for high-level policy coordination, harmonising regional standards for seeds and inputs through bodies such as ECOWAS and the AU, and critical investment in strengthening research institutions, innovation hubs, and data systems to monitor productivity and climate impacts effectively.

### **Kathleen Heffron: Plant Molecular Farming: A Revolutionary Model for Agriculture**

Kathleen Heffron framed the United States bioeconomy as a national security imperative in her presentation, with intense competition from China driving rapid innovation in agricultural

biotechnology, a market projected to double by 2030. The convergence of artificial intelligence



(AI) and biotechnology is dramatically accelerating R&D, compressing timelines from years to days and reducing costs from millions to thousands of dollars. This technological shift is critical for addressing profound global challenges, including widespread food insecurity, the massive hidden environmental and health costs of the food system, and the vulnerability of key supply chains for commodities like cocoa and coffee due to climate change and tariffs. A central solution presented was cellular agriculture, particularly molecular farming and precision fermentation, which produce animal proteins without animals. These methods, such as engineering soybeans to produce the meat protein myoglobin or using microbes to

create dairy proteins, offer immense environmental benefits, drastically reducing greenhouse gas emissions, land use, and water consumption compared to conventional livestock. Molecular farming was highlighted as a “fourth pillar” of alternative proteins, leveraging plants as efficient bioreactors. The presentation also showcased non-transgenic techniques, such as using engineered plant viruses to produce high-value proteins like lactoferrin in a cost-effective manner and at high yields within days, often bypassing GMO regulations. The overarching vision presented was to leverage these AI-driven biotechnologies to create radically resilient, ethical, and sustainable supply chains, transforming plant cells into nature’s factories for food and wellness products.

### **K. C. Bansal: Transgenic and CRISPR Technologies in Agriculture**

Dr Bansal said that the evolution of crop improvement has progressed from conventional breeding, which was instrumental in the Green Revolution but is time-consuming and limited to a plant’s own gene pool, to more precise genetic engineering and genome editing. While genetically modified (GM) crops like Bt cotton have demonstrated significant benefits in India including a 22 per cent increase in crop production, 37 per cent reduction in pesticide use, and a 68 per cent rise in farmer profits, their adoption beyond cotton, such as GM mustard, faces regulatory and legal hurdles. In response, genome editing technologies like CRISPR offer a transformative pathway. Unlike GM technology, which introduces foreign genes, SDN1 and SDN2 genome editing techniques make precise, targeted changes to a plant’s native DNA without incorporating external genetic material, leading to faster development cycles (2–3 years) and exemption from stringent GMO biosafety regulations in India from 2022. A national roadmap prioritises the application of



genome editing for key traits including high yield, climate resilience, disease resistance, and biofortification in vital crops like oilseeds, pulses, and cereals. Supported by government initiatives and a robust network of research institutions, genome editing is poised to drive sustainable agricultural innovation, enhance food security, and empower farmers, with an emphasis on continued capacity building and the utilisation of India's vast plant genetic resources.

### **Stanford Blade: Transforming Agriculture Through Innovation: Emerging Trends in Crop Science**



Stanford Blade argued that the agricultural sector, particularly in the dryland tropics, faces intensifying challenges from climate change, land degradation, and high rates of poverty and malnutrition. ICRISAT's mission to address these issues is structured around three integrated, research-based programmes. The Accelerated Crop Improvement programme focuses on genetically enhancing staple crops, utilising a vast gene bank and advanced breeding techniques to develop and disseminate biofortified varieties with higher iron, zinc, and protein content, such as high-iron pearl millet and sorghum. The Resilient Farming Systems programme employs an ecological approach, integrating water and soil management technologies like rainwater harvesting and GIS-based soil mapping to bolster the resilience of agricultural systems in fragile environments. Finally, the Transforming Agrifood Systems programme targets comprehensive food system upgrades by promoting food safety, developing value-added products from dryland crops, and creating market incentives. Underpinning these efforts is a suite of modern crop science innovations, including speed breeding, genomics-assisted breeding, predictive analytics using AI, and gene editing, all aimed at driving a paradigm shift towards resource efficient, productive, and climate-resilient agriculture to ensure future food and nutrition security.

**T. Jayaraman, Sandeep Mahato, Charu Chandra Devashali, and Goutham Radhakrishnan: Climate Change and Agriculture in India: Adaptation Roles, Trade-offs, and Differentiated Vulnerabilities Group Photo?**



Dr Jayaraman argued that the discourse on climate change and agriculture is undergoing a significant and problematic shift, increasingly framing agriculture as a site for mitigation by including supply chain emissions and redefining resilience in ways that place an unfair burden on the Global South. This obscures the core issue: vulnerability is not uniform but is deeply shaped by pre-existing socio-economic inequalities. In India, small and marginal farmers are acutely vulnerable, with severely limited access to critical adaptation resources like irrigation, advisory services, and crop insurance compared to large landowners. Empirical analysis revealed that irrigation, while boosting average yields for crops like wheat and paddy, does not effectively buffer against extreme heat; for paddy, it can even amplify heat sensitivity by increasing humidity. Furthermore, the promoted “win-win” strategy of soil organic carbon (SOC) sequestration for mitigation and yield has been critically scrutinised; data showed no consistent yield benefit from SOC in high-input systems, where management practices like fertilizer application are the primary productivity drivers. Alarming, small holder farms consistently exhibit a higher carbon footprint per unit of output, a structural disadvantage linked to their poverty and lower adaptive capacity. The presentation concluded that equating adaptation with mitigation is inequitable and risks penalising the most vulnerable. Adaptation must remain the non-negotiable priority, requiring targeted, context-specific interventions and more resources to address the profound inequalities that dictate climate vulnerability.

**Session 3A**

*Vizhinjam Hall, Time: 1115–1300*

**Chair:**

**Rammanohar Reddy** (*Founder Editor, The India Forum*)

**Speakers:**

**Judith Heyer** (*Emeritus Fellow, Somerville College, University of Oxford.*)

**Parvathi Menon** (*FAS Trustee, Former journalist with The Hindu*)

**Venkatesh B. Athreya** (*Former Head of the Department of Economics, Bharatidasan University, Tiruchirappalli*)

**P. Shanmugham** (*All India Kisan Sabha*)



**Judith Heyer: Poverty and Standards of Living among Dalits in Coimbatore/Tiruppur Villages, 1981/2 to 2024/5**

The nature and experience of poverty within Dalit communities in the Coimbatore-Tiruppur region has transformed dramatically over a forty-year period, though significant challenges remain. In the early 1980s, poverty was characterised by widespread food insecurity; oppressive agricultural labour conditions for men, women, and children; and a near-total absence of schooling. The primary concerns were basic survival and securing minimal housing. Over the decades, state policies like the PDS, MGNREGA, and housing schemes, combined with improved regional connectivity and non-agricultural job opportunities, led to substantial improvements. Food

security was largely achieved, child labour diminished, school enrolment became universal, and wages rose.

However, the contemporary face of poverty has shifted. While material conditions have improved, evidenced by near-universal ownership of cell phones and televisions, and a significant proportion of households with children attending college, new forms of precarity have emerged. Major stressors now include the high cost of higher education, recurring healthcare expenses for chronic conditions, and the continual financial burden of housing repair and construction. Crucially, access



to formal, quality employment remains elusive for the vast majority, even for those with college education, who often end up in low-paying, informal sector jobs. The penetration of private finance companies has also led to new, severe cycles of debt related to medical, educational, and marriage expenses. Thus, Professor Heyer stated that while absolute deprivation has lessened, poverty persists as a condition defined by high financial stress, unaffordable aspirational costs, and a precarious dependence on informal wage labour, despite dramatic improvements in living standards over the long

term.

### **Parvathi Menon: Kilvenmani and Thanjavur in the 1960s**



The presentation asserted that the Kilvenmani massacre of December 25, 1968, in Tamil Nadu, was not a spontaneous atrocity but the violent culmination of a protracted agrarian struggle in East Thanjavur. The roots of the conflict lay in a highly oppressive agrarian order characterised by high land concentration and the severe economic and extra-economic exploitation of a landless Dalit labour force. From 1966 onwards, this region became the epicentre of an irreconcilable clash between two organised forces: the

Agricultural Workers Union and the Kisan Sabha, leading the fight for fair wages and human dignity for rural labourers, and the Paddy Producers Association (PPA), a platform of upper-caste Mirasdars (landlords) determined to preserve their caste and class entitlements.

The years 1967–68 saw a significant escalation in tensions. While the workers’ movement intensified its wage demands, the landlords responded with targeted violence against union leaders and a strategy of employing outside labour to break the union. A government-brokered wage conference in 1967 failed, as landlords systematically dodged its weak provisions, leading to continued unrest. Despite repeated petitions and warnings from legislators about the volatile situation and imminent attacks, the state administration failed to intervene. Kilvenmani was singled out for the culminating atrocity because it was a stronghold of union activity and its residents had defiantly resisted the local landlord’s demand to disband their union and join the PPA. The massacre, in which 44 Dalits, mostly women and children, were burned alive, was thus the predetermined outcome of this entrenched conflict. The presentation further argued that the subsequent judicial process was a profound failure, establishing a template for impunity in cases of caste-class violence in India.

### **P. Shanmugham: The Victorious Struggle of the People of Vachathi**

**Translator: Venkatesh Athreya**

The Vachathi atrocity of June 1992 in Dharmapuri district, Tamil Nadu, represents a severe case



of state violence against a tribal village. A combined force of 269 police, forest, and revenue officials descended on the village, systematically demolishing all 155 houses, polluting water sources, looting grain, and committing mass rape against 18 young tribal women. The state government initially denied the event had happened and refused

to act, forcing the Tamil Nadu Tribal Association, the Kisan Sabha, and the CPI(M) to launch a sustained mass movement to demand justice.

This struggle involved documenting the crimes, mobilising public opinion, and pursuing legal action. A critical breakthrough came when an investigation by a National Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes Commission officer substantiated all the allegations. Following a Supreme Court directive, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) took over the case. After a protracted legal battle, the district court in 2011 found all 269 officials guilty. This verdict was upheld by the High Court in 2023, which also implicated the district’s senior administrative and police officials and mandated significant compensation and government jobs for the rape survivors. The case, now appealed in the Supreme Court, stands as a testament to a decades-long,

successful struggle by mass organisations to hold state power accountable for a brutal atrocity and secure a measure of justice for the victims. He concluded that we can legitimately and with pride recall the struggle of many activists on the ground from TNGA, from Kisan Sabha, from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and so on, who have been on the right side of the issue.

### **Discussion**

The discussion session focused on several critical questions regarding social and economic progress in Tamil Nadu. Key questions included how middle castes have responded to limited improvements in the living standards of Dalits, with the response indicating that apparent social peace stems from middle castes focusing on opportunities outside villages rather than genuine acceptance, while significant inequalities in education and housing persist.

The debate also scrutinised real wage trends for agricultural labourers, with conflicting views on whether long-term gains are now stagnating or declining. Additional questions explored why Dalits disproportionately incur debt from private healthcare despite public facilities, and why local Dalit populations struggle to transition to industrial jobs that attract migrant labourers from other states, highlighting persistent structural barriers despite incremental improvements.

**Session 3B**

*Bay Hall, Time: 1115–1300*

**Chair:**

**C. Veeramani** (*Director, Centre for Development Studies (CDS)*)

**Speakers:**

**Sudipta Bhattacharyya** (*Professor, Department of Economics and Politics, Visva-Bharati University*)

**Vijesh V. Krishna** (*Principal Scientist, CIMMYT*)

**T. K. Kishore Kumar** (*Chief Operating Officer, UL CyberPark*)

**Simona Caselli** (*President, Assembly of European Horticultural Regions*)

**Sudipta Bhattacharyya: MSP Failure in an Exclusionary and Differentiated Agrarian Structure – A Tale of Two Villages in West Bengal**



In his paper, Sudipta Bhattacharyya examined how the Minimum Support Price (MSP) mechanism has largely failed to protect small cultivators in the state. Drawing on village-level data, he showed that land ownership and operation are highly unequal. Marginal farmers, though 13.79 per cent of the sample, operate barely 10.15 per cent of the land, while capitalist farmers control over one-third.

Smallholder farmers depend on tenancy and distress sales, marketing up to 76 per cent of their produce under debt pressure, whereas large farmers sell over 90 per cent, mainly in high-value crops. Only about 16 per cent of farmers benefit from MSP, with smaller ones entirely excluded due to red tape, high costs, and middlemen's control. Per acre costs rise with farm size, labour participation is inversely related to economic status, and inequality deepens across classes. Despite these constraints, 78 per cent of farmers are aware of the ongoing Kisan movement, and 93 per cent support legal enforcement of MSP, seeing it as vital for fair prices and protection against market exclusion.

**Vijesh V. Krishna: Joint Liability Groups: Kudumbashree and Efforts in the Other of India**

Vijesh V. Krishna's paper explored how women's self-help collectives like Kudumbashree, which now involves about 45 lakh women in Kerala since 1998, can drive agricultural innovation and empowerment. The study, part of the LiT Project comparing Kerala, Bihar, and Morocco, assessed

feminisation of agriculture, with women now forming 42 per cent of India’s agricultural workforce, but still lacking decision-making power and land ownership.



It examined how these collectives function under the “triple exposure” of climate stress, market risks, and institutional fatigue, which restrict their progress. Findings showed that women adapt through shared labour, crop rotation, and peer learning using informal tools, while caste and land issues continue to shape participation, marginal caste women take up collective farming, and non-marginal caste women focus on home-based processing. Krishna argued that Kudumbashree provides social depth but lacks market innovation compared to Morocco’s niche cooperatives. The paper concluded that linking Kerala’s inclusive institutions with stronger market strategies can transform women’s self-help groups from coping mechanisms into engines of agrarian resilience and rural entrepreneurship.

During the discussion, Vijesh V. Krishna noted that around 30 per cent of Kudumbashree SHGs in agriculture carry some debt, mostly for consumption, with microfinance-linked loans requiring further study.

### **T. K. Kishore Kumar: The Experience of ULCCS Cooperatives in the Non-Agriculture Sector: Lessons for Inclusive Development**



T. K. Kishore Kumar’s presentation on “The Experience of ULCCS Cooperatives in the Non-Agriculture Sector: Lessons for Inclusive Development,” underscored the vital role of labour cooperatives in advancing inclusive and sustainable development. The Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society (ULCCS), founded in 1925 to combat caste-based exclusion, stands as a model of equitable and efficient worker cooperativism in Kerala. ULCCS completes projects on time and within budget, earning the trust of governments and private agencies. Through continuous training and upskilling, it provides upward mobility for rural workers and reduces dependency on single-sector employment. Flagship

ventures like UL CyberPark, Sargaalaya Craft Village, and the Indian Institute of Infrastructure and Construction demonstrate replicable models of inclusive and tech-enabled rural

transformation. ULCCS was recognised with an SDG Award, proving that ethical, worker-owned enterprises can be both socially just and economically competitive, offering a blueprint for sustainable cooperative development in India.

T. K. Kishore Kumar explained that ULCCS, with about 18,000 members across four classes, relies primarily on member labour, employing non-members only in specific roles, and has introduced innovative projects like “Sagar Taxi” and “Seed to Market.”

### **Simona Caselli: The Agrifood Sector in Legacoop: Eighty Years of Transformation and Cooperative Resilience in Italy (1945–2025)**

Simona Caselli and Rita Ghedini’s paper traced the evolution of Italy’s agrifood cooperatives as



engines of collective empowerment, sustainability, and democratic development. Emerging after fascist suppression, the movement rebuilt post-war rural economies through worker-owned enterprises that fostered equity and productivity. From 1960 to 1980, cooperatives modernised and consolidated, while between 1980 and 2000 they adapted to global competition through mergers, branding, and quality certification. Today, Legacoop represents over 1,000 cooperatives contributing one-third of Emilia-

Romagna’s GDP. Facing challenges like climate change, digital transformation, and generational renewal, Legacoop promotes precision farming, sustainability-driven innovation, and youth inclusion, reaffirming that cooperative enterprises can remain globally competitive while upholding social justice, environmental responsibility, and democratic governance.

Simona Caselli highlighted that Italian cooperative banks began with minimal community contributions and now benefit from national funds, with most work done by member-farmers and non-member labourers employed only seasonally.

### Session 3C

*Waves Hall, Time: 1115–1300*

#### **Chair:**

**Jiju P. Alex** (*Member, Kerala State Planning Board*)

#### **Speakers:**

**Niyati Singaraju** (*Postdoctoral Fellow, Gender research, International Rice Research Institute (IRRI)*)

**Sai Chandan Kotu** (*Senior Research Assistant, Foundation for Agrarian Studies (FAS)*)

**Gopinath R.** (*Professor, Faculty of Humanities and Languages, Jamia Millia Islamia*)

**C. A. Sethu** (*Senior Research Assistant, Foundation for Agrarian Studies (FAS)*)

### **Niyati Singaraju: Digital Transformation in Agrifood Systems: Opportunities and Challenges**

Niyati Singaraju's study examined the reality behind the optimism surrounding digital transformation in agriculture, particularly the claims of increased productivity and resource efficiency. It highlighted how structural issues such as the digital divide, inadequate information-system infrastructure, and limited digital capabilities like literacy and skills undermine meaningful transformation. The speaker noted that terms like digital tools, digital technology, and digital innovation are often used interchangeably, though they represent enabling conditions for transformation. Each faces its own barriers: for example, introducing a digital tool where smartphones are unavailable, trust and validation issues with digital technologies, and the absence of regular feedback mechanisms in digital innovation. The author argued that digital transformation must begin with farmers' needs, addressing the critical gap between those needs and current transformation efforts. This transformation must also centre justice, digital agency, and ethics, particularly in areas such as AI-driven innovations.



### **Sai Chandan Kotu, Nagesh Maurya, Sandipan Baksi, Tapas S. Modak, and Rithika Pulagiri: Diffusion and Scaling Up of Drones in Agriculture: A Case of Nalgonda District in Telangana**

The study described the underlying power structures in the Indian countryside and examined how the diffusion of new innovations benefits certain groups, using the case of drone use in agriculture

in Nalgonda district, Telangana. Drones are used for various agricultural activities, such as fertilizer



spraying. The drone market in Nalgonda consists of a dual structure: an organised and an unorganised sector, with the latter being the majority. The organised sector is supported by government schemes, licenses, and private companies, whereas the unorganised sector is more dynamic despite lacking formal credit for expansion, relying instead on accumulation from agriculture. The drone sellers in the unorganised sector are dominant caste rich farmers and new innovations are frequently introduced in the sector. The study

highlighted a caste–class nexus that shapes the dynamics of the sector and reflects evolving capitalist interests. It underscored the importance of understanding agrarian relations and argued that policy must account for local agrarian and power structures and aim to mediate or transform them.

Sai Chandan explained the need to use drones. The author explained how manual spraying is a laborious process, and cost alone is not the main reason for the adoption of drones. Farmers prefer drones because they reduce the drudgery involved in manual spraying, including frequent refilling. Drones also reduce farmers’ exposure to chemicals.

### **Gopinath R.: Addressing Water Problem to Increase Paddy Yield in Cauvery Delta Zone**

The study examined the various water-related issues in the Cauvery Delta region, which is marked by low agricultural productivity. The region is highly diverse; at any point in the year, different places display different stages of paddy growth. Variations in rainfall, irrigation sources, seasons, and mechanisation have created multiple production patterns. Reliance on Cauvery river water alone is insufficient. Power hierarchies and political influence shape water distribution, leaving tail-end farmers in delta particularly vulnerable to water scarcity and floods. The author discusses all aspects of water issues, including groundwater salinity in coastal areas, waterlogging, and declining groundwater recharge. Wealthier farmers can afford artificial recharge structures and exert greater influence over irrigation, whereas small and marginal farmers face difficulties at every stage of cultivation. Scientific water harvesting, water reuse, and improved drainage infrastructure are essential to stabilise paddy yields. Farmer Producer Organisations exist largely on paper and remain non-functional. The author concluded with several recommendations: there can be no blanket

solution, but substantial government investment in drainage systems is necessary; mechanisation can be supported by private players; and the increasingly privatised harvesting must be regulated.



The discussion focussed on at what point one stops talking about unseasonal rains, as rains being “unseasonal” is almost the new norm now. The author explained that the occurrence of unseasonal rain has increased but not at a regular frequency. Dams are opened depending on the availability of water, not on needs. Predictions are not reliable. And the rains are not regular enough to be declared as “seasonal.”

### **C. A. Sethu and Tapas S. Modak: The Political Economy of Canal Irrigation: Class, Space, and Water Control in a Delta Village**

The authors’ central argument concerned the hierarchy of irrigation within the village, where



dominant landlords and big capitalists control water and exercise power over the entire irrigation system. The study is based on Palakurichi village, located near the sea at the tail end of the Cauvery Delta, where canal irrigation is the primary source of water for cultivation. The landholding pattern has shifted over time: earlier, Dalits owned no land, but through an NGO called Land for Tillers’ Freedom (LAFTI), they were able to purchase land at subsidised rates. The NGO brought these lands from the dominant Naidu caste. However, the land plots obtained by Dalits are disadvantaged, receiving less field water and facing higher

flood risks, while the Naidus retain control over the canal irrigation network. A key mechanism of power is the control over the shutters of irrigation regulators, with dominant caste members holding the keys. Even though the main canal is maintained under MGNREGA, where Dalits are the workers, the benefits of this maintenance are captured by the dominant caste once again. The cost of irrigation for Dalits is estimated to be 1.5 times higher than that of the Naidus. The speaker argued that the hierarchy of irrigation in the village is not simply the neutral outcome of engineering design or geography, but a product of social relations that both assert and reproduce inequality.

The discussion looked at the limitations of market-based land redistribution. According to Sethu, the land bought and sold under this programme was of inferior quality and comprises small parcels. Ultimately, this transfer failed to alter the socioeconomic structure of the village in a meaningful manner.

**Session 4A**

*Vizhinjam Hall, Time: 1415–1600*

**Chair:**

**Balwinder Singh Tiwana** (*Professor, Department of Economics, Punjabi University*)

**Speakers:**

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

**Arindam Banerjee** (*Professor and Dean, BML Munjal University*)

**Satendra Kumar** (*Social anthropologist and senior researcher, Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies, University of Zurich, Switzerland.*)

**A. R. Prasad Rao** (*All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS)*)



**Venkatesh Athreya: Rural Manual Workers in Tamil Nadu: Results from a Survey**

Based on a 2023 survey of 1,547 rural manual labourers in Tamil Nadu conducted by activists from the All India Kisan Sabha and the All India Agricultural Workers Union, the findings reveal severe exploitation and precarious living conditions. The data, focused on employment and wages, shows that workers average only 129 days of employment per year, with men getting 141 days and women just 110. Days of employment under MGNREGA were a mere 41–43 days. A stark and persistent gender wage gap was documented across nearly all occupations; in agriculture, men earned an average of Rs 438 per day while women earned less than half at Rs 205, and in construction, men earned Rs 555 compared to Rs 371 for women. The surveyed workforce was predominantly from



marginalised groups, with 46 per cent being Dalits and 42 per cent from Backward Classes, most of whom were landless or marginal landowners, and over 30 per cent illiterate. In conclusion, the report advocated for the formation of a unified labourers' union and a concerted campaign for demands including 200 days of employment, increased wages, and improved access to education, healthcare, and

social security to address the profound vulnerabilities exposed by the survey.

**Arindam Banerjee and Anirban Das Gupta: Reimagining the Agrarian Question in India:  
Can Productive Forces Develop Sustainability?**

The presentation asserted that a fundamental rethinking of agricultural policy is urgently needed in the context of climate change. Past interventions, from the production-focused Green Revolution to the market-oriented reforms of the 1990s and the recent farm laws, have largely failed to prioritise the interests of the majority of stakeholders. The current system, reliant on a rice-wheat monoculture from ecologically vulnerable states like Punjab and Haryana, is unsustainable. This model depletes water resources, degrades soil health, and contributes to biodiversity loss and water pollution.



The required shift is twofold. First, there is a critical need to diversify agricultural production away from this monoculture to build resilience for both food security and ecosystem health. Second, strategies must support livelihood diversification for smallholders, acknowledging that many sustain themselves through circular migration, with one leg in rural areas. While new technologies like precision farming are promoted, their adoption faces significant barriers in

the Global South, including high costs, small landholding sizes, and their labour-saving nature in a context that requires labour absorption. Ultimately, moving beyond a narrow focus on climate change to a holistic view that encompasses biodiversity, water preservation, and soil health is essential for a sustainable and equitable agrarian future.

### **Satendra Kumar: Contemporary Farmers' Movements: Changing Agrarian Relations in Western Uttar Pradesh**



The presentation stated that the 2021–22 farmers' movement marked a pivotal reawakening of the agrarian question in Indian politics, challenging neoliberal policies and right-wing hegemony while fostering unprecedented social solidarity. The movement powerfully reintroduced critical debates around ecological sustainability, labour reconfiguration, and land distribution in public discourse, issues that had been marginalised in previous decades. Its most significant achievement was challenging communal polarisation at the grassroots level, particularly in regions like western Uttar Pradesh, which had experienced severe communal riots in 2013. By uniting farmers across religion, caste, and class lines at a time of intense divisive politics, the movement demonstrated the potential for inclusive solidarity and redefined political engagement for rural communities through their sustained engagement with the state, police, and media. Furthermore, longitudinal ethnographic data from western Uttar Pradesh villages reveals that despite some land consolidation, a significant proportion of landless and marginal farmers persist, underscoring the ongoing relevance of land control and social justice. Ultimately, the movement served as a crucial democratic corrective, reminding the nation of its enduring agrarian character and showcasing the potential for collective action to counter corporate capital and majoritarian politics.

### **A. R. Prasad Rao: Untold Aspects of Digital India Land Record Modernisation Programme (DLRMP)**

Based on the presentation, the Digital India Land Record Modernisation Programme (DILRMP), initiated in 2008 following World Bank suggestions, is fundamentally designed to facilitate a land market for corporate interests rather than to secure farmers' rights. The programme's core is the creation of a 14-digit Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN or "Bhu-Aadhaar") linked to geo-coordinates. However, this process is plagued by vagueness and a lack of clear land definitions, which can lead to conflicts and dispossession, especially for the 92 per cent of landowners in states like Telangana who hold small plots.



The ultimate goal appears to be integrating land records with direct benefit and cash transfers, effectively using the “Bhu-Aadhaar” to tie farmers to a centralised system. This represents a shift from the state’s historical role in land reform to acting as a market facilitator for corporate land acquisition. The programme’s implementation is uneven across states, and in many regions, foundational issues like a comprehensive land re-survey remain unaddressed, revealing a disconnect between the high-tech agenda and on-ground agrarian realities. The push for digitisation, therefore, is criticised as a neo-liberal policy that prioritises corporate access to land over the security and rights of independent cultivators.

**Session 4B**

*Bay Hall, Time: 1415–1600*

**Chair:**

**Ritu Dewan** (*President, Indian Society of Labour Economics; Visiting Professor, Institute of Human Development*)

**Speakers:**

**Himanshu** (*Associate Professor, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, School of Social Sciences, JNU*)

**Mariam Dhawale** (*General Secretary, All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA)*)

**Ruchira Bhattacharya** (*Assistant Professor, National Institute of Rural Development*)

**Jiju P. Alex** (*Member, Kerala State Planning Board*)

**Himanshu: Work and Well-being in Rural India: Some Puzzles**

Himanshu's paper examined trends in poverty, inequality, and well-being post 2011–12 in rural



India, highlighting that while World Bank (Press Information Bureau 2025) estimates suggest a sharp decline in poverty, alternative assessments indicate only a moderate reduction. Comparability issues between CES 2022–23 and CES 2011–12 make direct estimates unreliable, so employment and wage data are used as more robust proxies. Findings show stagnation or decline in wages for casual and regular workers since 2017–18, with farmers, the largest worker group, experiencing

decelerating incomes. Structural changes such as rising self-employment and pluri-activity further complicate poverty measurement. Administrative data reveal persistent distress, with 30 per cent of rural households reliant on NREGS, over 50 per cent on PDS, and 94 per cent of E-Shram informal workers earning below Rs 10,000 per month. Using survey-to-survey imputation, poverty was estimated to have fallen from 22 per cent in 2011–12 to roughly 11–18 per cent in 2022–23, with most gains occurring before 2017–18, indicating stagnation thereafter.

During the discussion, Himanshu explained that the gap between PLFS-based and consumer expenditure survey-based poverty trends arises because the PLFS method integrates employment variables such as wages and job quality, offering more reliable projections than limited-variation consumption data. His model allows flexibility in using either the Tendulkar or Rangarajan poverty lines, with 2011–12 as the baseline, thus avoiding comparability issues in newer consumption data.

### **Mariam Dhawale: Microfinance, Women, and Poverty**



Mariam Dhawale's paper, based on the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) survey, highlighted the expansion of microfinance institutions (MFIs) and NBFCs in rural India which has often trapped women in cycles of debt. Based on a national survey covering 100 districts across 21 states with 9,000 women respondents, the study found that public banks frequently denied credit, pushing women toward MFIs

charging 22–26 per cent interest. The surveyed women were predominantly rural (60 per cent), with 40 per cent from Adivasi or Dalit communities, 21 per cent minorities, and 15 per cent single or widowed. Multiple loans were common, with some women indebted to up to 17 MFIs. Testimonies revealed widespread verbal abuse, coercion, property seizure (10 per cent), and occasional physical assault (5 per cent).

Loans were primarily for consumption, not investment, forcing women into debt for survival rather than enterprise; she quoted a woman who had taken a loan from the MFI, "We borrowed only to survive, not to thrive." Dhawale criticised structural issues, including financial deregulation, the retreat of public sector credit, and the RBI's facilitation of MFIs through self-regulatory organisations lacking effective grievance mechanisms. Alternative models like the MALAR Association's SHG-based lending and Kerala's Kudumbashree programme demonstrated successful, women-empowering approaches. The public hearing featured voices of distress and resilience, with Justice Madan Lokur urging stronger regulation and legal aid, and Prabhat Patnaik advocating for low-interest loans. AIDWA called for strict MFI/NBFC regulation, 4 per cent interest loans from public banks, and stronger welfare measures to protect marginalised women from exploitation.

She noted that despite some states, like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, passing laws to regulate microfinance institutions, exploitation persists due to pro-MFI central policies, making women's movements crucial for accountability.

### **Ruchira Bhattacharya: Poverty Alleviation Trajectory of Southeast Asia and Pacific in the Context of Rural Development – A Review**



Ruchira Bhattacharya's presentation of her ongoing research analysed four Southeast Asian countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. She highlighted how rapid poverty reduction can be achieved through a combination of universal and targeted social protection, rural development, and asset creation. Despite starting with very high poverty, these countries lowered poverty rates faster than South Asia through policies such as healthcare coverage, pensions, cash transfers, agricultural price support, rural credit facilitation, and contract farming, often tied to employment generation and infrastructure development. Bhattacharya emphasised the importance of the “new rural” approach, linking economic performance with rural infrastructures (New Rural), employment, which created both public and private assets, enhanced livelihoods, and reduced multidimensional poverty. Lessons include addressing informality, designing inclusive programs, sustaining universal transfers, and tackling gender and regional disparities. These insights offer valuable guidance for designing policies that combine economic growth with social protection and rural resilience.

Ruchira Bhattacharya highlighted that India can learn from countries that prioritised education, health, and rural infrastructure over price support systems; only Malaysia had a robust state-backed MSP mechanism.

### **Jiju P. Alex: Strategies of Poverty Reduction in Kerala**

Jiju P. Alex analysed the strategies of Kerala's Extreme Poverty Eradication Programme, situating it within the State's long history of progressive reforms in land, education, health, and social security that have shaped its poverty outcomes. While earlier poverty alleviation schemes were fragmented and lacked coordination, this initiative adopted a comprehensive approach, defining extreme poverty as the inability to meet basic survival needs such as food, shelter, and income. Using the UNDP-OPHI Multidimensional Poverty Index framework, supplemented with Kerala-specific criteria, the programme identified historically vulnerable groups (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, fisherfolk) and socially marginalised populations. Through an extensive participatory enumeration process involving over 58,000 focus group discussions, 87,158 extremely poor families were identified and verified through ward-level and multi-tiered



committees at the LSG, district, and state levels. Under coordinated interdepartmental supervision, micro-plans ensured delivery of food, health, and income assistance, benefiting over 20,000 families with food support, 29,000 with healthcare, and nearly 4,000 with income aid. He concluded by emphasising the need for sustained institutional vigilance, interdepartmental collaboration, and proactive

measures to prevent households from relapsing into extreme poverty, continuing Kerala's broader trajectory of poverty decline and inclusive development.

Jiju P. Alex clarified that Kerala's micro-plans are locally formulated within its decentralised framework, financed through existing local plan funds rather than new state spending, with monitoring mechanisms to ensure sustainability and prevent relapse into extreme poverty.

#### **Chair's Remarks**

The chair of this session, Ritu Dewan, noted that while much research has focused on the pandemic's impact, two earlier economic shocks, the 2016 demonetisation and GST implementation, have been severely understudied despite their profound effects on India's informal economy, MSMEs, and labour structure. These policy disruptions, she argued, decimated informal livelihoods, triggered a reversal of structural transformation, and pushed many, especially women, back into agricultural work. Dewan highlighted that the apparent rise in women's work participation since 2018 is largely due to an increase in unpaid family labour, with nearly 60 per cent of self-employed women and over 20 per cent of men in this category. She cautioned against romanticising this trend as "entrepreneurship," stressing that it reflects the state's withdrawal from employment creation and the rise of "jobless growth."

**Session 4C**

*Waves Hall, Time: 1415–1600*

**Chair:**

**Jayan Jose Thomas** (*Professor of Economics, Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT-Delhi*)

**Speakers:**

**Brinda Viswanathan** (*Professor, Madras School of Economics*)

**Sudha Narayanan** (*Senior Research Fellow at International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)*)

**Shamsher Singh** (*Assistant Professor, Sociology Department, Flame University*)

**R. Nagaraj** (*Retired Professor of Economics at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Bombay*)

**Brinda Viswanathan and Surabhi M.: Nutrition Security in India: Recent Evidence from Household Consumption**



Brinda Viswanathan study used the latest NSSO consumption data from Round 22–23 and Round 23–24 to examine trends in nutrient intake across Indian households. The analysis focused on macronutrients such as calories, proteins, and fats, and to a lesser extent on micronutrients such as calcium, iron, and zinc. The research, co-authored with PhD students (Surabhi M.), aims to understand evolving consumption patterns and deprivation rates in relation to nutritional norms.

The study employs both per capita and per consumer unit (PCU) measures to assess nutrient consumption, using FGT measures (headcount ratio and poverty gap ratio) to estimate deprivation. Conversion factors from NSSO and ICMR were applied to derive micronutrient values, and inter-household differences were standardised using NSSO's methodology. Data limitations were noted for millet consumption, which was available only for a few predominantly millet-consuming states.

Findings indicate some anomalies between per capita and per consumer unit estimates. There has been a modest improvement in consumption among lower-income households, reflected in a leftward shift in the distribution. The study found that urban households experience higher calorie deprivation than rural ones. Based on the Rangarajan Committee's poverty norms, deprivation headcount ratios have declined overall, though the reduction is more pronounced in rural areas.

The study concluded that understanding India's nutrition security requires a nuanced and disaggregated approach that goes beyond national averages. Persistent inequalities across income groups and between rural and urban areas remain a major challenge for achieving equitable nutrition security in India.

### **Sudha Narayanan: Food Subsidy Debates In India: A Review of Evidence**

Sudha Narayanan's presentation examined India's Public Distribution System (PDS) in the context of food security and welfare. It emerged from the Right to Food movement and was institutionalised through the National Food Security Act (2013), linking farmers through the Minimum Support Price (MSP) to consumers via government procurement and distribution.



She argued that although the PDS is often criticised for being fiscally expensive, with earlier studies suggesting that transferring one rupee costs between three and nine rupees, these estimates ignore the wider benefits to farmers and poor households. When these are

included, the combined PDS-MSP system generates about three rupees in benefits for every rupee spent, showing it to be economically worthwhile. Small farmers form the majority of suppliers, and evidence from Gupta (2022) shows that the MSP does not discourage crop diversification.

On the international front, India faces challenges at the WTO regarding its subsidy programmes. India is protected under the Peace Clause and the WTO's method of calculating support is flawed and unsuitable for developing countries.

Recent research by MicroSave Consulting and J-PAL found limited success with cash transfer experiments, as they fail to consider the political and local economic aspects of food access. Sudha Narayanan concluded that food security is non-negotiable and that, despite its high costs and administrative challenges, the in-kind PDS remains a vital and effective pillar of India's food security system.

### **Shamsher Singh: Longitudinal Insights into Housing Conditions and Basic Amenities in Rural Uttar Pradesh**

Shamsher Singh presented a study on how housing and access to basic amenities such as water, electricity, and toilets has changed in rural Uttar Pradesh between 2006 and 2023. Using data from the Foundation for Agrarian Studies, he compared two villages to show both improvement and persistent inequality.



The share of pucca houses and multi-room dwellings has increased, and toilet access has risen from about one-third of households to nearly universal coverage. In Harevli, Dalit settlements that earlier lacked drinking water and electricity now have better access, though their housing remains crowded and built with poor materials, unlike the spacious pucca houses in

Tyagi areas. Despite infrastructure improvements like better roads, caste-based segregation among Tyagi, Valmiki, Chamar, and Muslim communities continues.

In Mahatwar, housing and access to electricity and water have improved, but congestion and the absence of legal electricity meters remain concerns. The Yadav and Mahatwar settlements are slightly more mixed, yet caste divides persist.

Shamsher Singh concluded that although housing quality and amenities have visibly improved, inequality across social groups, poor infrastructure quality, and enduring caste-based segregation still define rural life in Uttar Pradesh.

### **R. Nagaraj: Import Dependence on Agriculture**

R. Nagaraj's central argument was that India's agriculture suffers from increasing import dependence not only for food items like pulses and edible oils but also for critical inputs such as fertilizers, which poses both macroeconomic and geopolitical vulnerabilities. He said that though much of the empirical evidence he presents is well known, his focus was on the policy suggestions he was proposing.

He traced India's journey from "ship-to-mouth" dependence in the 1960s to becoming a net food exporter, but warned that this progress masks a growing structural weakness: low productivity and

heavy dependence on imported inputs. He emphasised that while imports are not inherently bad,



persistent and rising import dependence for essential goods like fertilizers, pulses, and edible oils indicates national vulnerability in times of geopolitical uncertainty.

Nagaraj argued that policy disconnects exist between the Agriculture Ministry, which sets MSPs, and the Commerce and Finance ministries, which control imports to contain inflation. This misalignment, he said, undermines incentives for domestic producers and discourages investment. He criticised the lack of institutional and infrastructural support for procurement and storage in non-rice/wheat crops, noting that the Green Revolution had succeeded precisely because of such support structures.

As a solution, he proposed the creation of an Independent Tariff Commission similar to those in other countries to make informed, balanced decisions on import tariffs and protect domestic agricultural interests. He concluded that policymaking must go beyond a small group of bureaucrats and include farmer representation to ensure coherence between trade, agriculture, and macroeconomic policy.

**Session 5A: Agriculture and Gender**

*Vizhinjam Hall, Time: 1630–1745*

**Chair:**

**Mini Sukumar** (*Member of Kerala State Planning Board*)

**Discussant:**

**Govinda Choudhury** (*Assistant Professor, University of North Bengal*)

**Speakers:**

**Alankrita Yadav** (*PhD Scholar, Department Of Economics, Banaras Hindu University*)

**Soham Bhattacharya** (*Assistant Professor, Presidency University*)

**Shakuntala Ghadai** (*PhD Scholar, Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Thiruvananthapuram*)

**Archana Tamang** (*Assistant Professor, Nar Bahadur Bhandari Government College, Tadong*)



**Alankrita Yadav: Feminisation of Agriculture and Gendered Time Use: Evidence from Eastern Uttar Pradesh**

Alankrita Yadav's paper analysed how rising female participation in agriculture, particularly in



Jaunpur and Chandauli districts, has altered labour patterns without necessarily advancing women's empowerment. Based on time-use data from 400 rural households across peak and lean seasons, the study revealed that women's total daily work time exceeds men's by nearly two hours, as they shoulder both farm and domestic tasks. During peak agricultural periods, women's productive hours rise while

household chores remain constant, deepening “time poverty” and what Yadav terms “temporal unfreedom,” a condition of restricted control over one’s own time.

She argued that feminisation, in its current form, reflects labour substitution rather than empowerment, as agricultural production increasingly relies on women’s unpaid labour. She concluded by stating that genuine empowerment requires recognising and redistributing women’s time as a key resource, integrating time-use indicators into policy, and addressing the structural inequalities embedded in the feminisation process.

### **Soham Bhattacharya: Exploring Time-Induced Income Poverty Among Women in Indian Agriculture: 2019–2024**



The paper argued that the rising participation of women in rural India’s agricultural workforce, especially through self-employment, is less a sign of empowerment than of economic distress. Drawing on NSSO’s Time-Use Surveys of 2019 and 2024, the study introduced the concept of “Time-Induced Income Poverty (TIIP),” describing women who work long hours yet cannot earn or consume enough to rejuvenate their labour power; nearly 78 per cent of self-employed women in agriculture

fall into this category in 2024.

The study linked these trends to shrinking labour absorption in agriculture due to mechanisation and land marginalisation (as noted by Dhar (2021) and Niyati (2021)), showing that “self-employed women” reflect a process of economic differentiation and precarity, not opportunity. Despite greater workforce participation, women gain little bargaining power or autonomy, as structural conditions, low wages, short labour hours, and weak non-farm employment continue to reproduce gendered inequalities. He argued that romanticisation of women’s self-employment obscures its reality of drudgery and low returns, and that true transformation requires recognising unpaid and socially reproductive labour as central to the productive economy.

### **Shakuntala Ghadai: The Impact of Climate Shock on Household Food Security: Gendered Dimensions of Coping Strategies**

Shakuntala Ghadai’s study investigates how climate and weather shocks affect household food security and whether women’s empowerment can mitigate these impacts. Grounded in the

Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, the analysis used Village Dynamics Studies in South Asia



(VDSA) data (2010–2014) from 12 semi-arid villages in Bihar, Odisha, and Jharkhand. Employing factor analysis to construct a multidimensional Women’s Empowerment Index and household fixed-effects regression, the study found that weather shocks, such as droughts and floods, significantly reduce household calorie consumption, with women being more adversely affected. Empowered

women contribute positively to food security, particularly through savings and social networks, but empowerment alone cannot offset the structural vulnerabilities of rain-fed agriculture or systemic climate risks. The study also highlighted gendered coping strategies, where women prioritise food access while men focus on asset preservation. Echoing broader patterns across South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the paper concluded that gender-responsive climate adaptation and nutrition policies are essential for building multi-scalar resilience and ensuring sustainable food security in vulnerable agrarian regions.

### **Archana Tamang: Agrarian Relations in Sikkim**



Tamang’s study explored the plural and historically layered nature of agrarian relations in Sikkim, where distinct land tenure systems emerged among different communities through varied settlement histories. Although redistributive land reforms were introduced after the merger with India, their impact has been constrained by “Old Laws” safeguarded under Article

371F. Large tracts of land continue to be controlled by monasteries (*Sanghas*) and absentee Kazi landlords, with agricultural production relying on semi-feudal labour arrangements involving Adhiars, Kutiars, and Khetalas. Land sale regulations restrict transfers by both land size and community, reinforcing traditional hierarchies and limiting market flexibility. Persistent absentee landlordism reduces productivity and tenant security. Gender inequalities remain entrenched in land ownership; women may inherit or retain property rights only if they marry within the Sikkimese community. Consequently, land reforms that restrict women’s ownership and preserve

community-based tenure structures have left agrarian transformation in Sikkim incomplete, reproducing both social and gendered inequities.

### **Discussion**

Govinda Choudhury brought together four presentations examining gender, agrarian change, and vulnerability. In his remarks, he noted that feminisation does not necessarily mean empowerment and humorously referred to the phenomenon of the “telephonic husband,” men working away while women manage farms and households, as emblematic of India’s shifting rural gender dynamics. He emphasised the need for conceptual clarity, robust empirical testing, and gender-aware policy design. The discussion covered issues of education-linked stigma, diagnostic testing in models, and constitutional constraints on women’s land rights under Article 371F. Questions from the audience further explored unpaid productive labour, definitions of female-headed households, and women’s limited inheritance rights in Sikkim. Overall, the session underscored that while women’s economic roles are expanding, deep structural, legal, and social inequities continue to constrain genuine empowerment.

**Session 5B: Through the Lens of Political Economy**

*Bay Hall, Time: 1630–1800*

**Chair:**

**John Harriss** (*Professor of International Studies, Simon Fraser University, Canada*)

**Speakers:**

**Deepa Kurup** (*PhD Candidate, Oxford Department of International Development*)

**Paramjit Singh** (*Assistant Professor, Punjab University*)

**Aishwarya Prakash** (*PhD Scholar, Centre For Development Studies*)

**Anjana Kesav** (*PhD scholar, Centre for Development Studies*)

**Ashwin Subramanian** (*PhD Candidate, Harvard University*)

**Deepa Kurup: Social Programmes and Class Struggle: A Comparative Political Economy Approach to Studying Transformative Processes in Rural India**

Deepa examined whether state social programmes, specifically the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), can transform the social relations of production in rural India. Employing a comparative political economy approach, the study analysed the programme’s implementation in four villages in Karnataka with varying socio-economic structures. The villages were categorised as either polarised (high landlessness, high inequality) or peasant-dominated, and as either remote (agriculture-centric) or integrated (connected to urban



economies). The findings revealed a stark divergence in outcomes. In polarised and remote villages, MGNREGS achieved strong direct outcomes (high coverage, low corruption) and strong transformative impacts, defined as expanded bargaining power and collective action for labour. This transformation was driven by robust labour unions that waged mutually reinforcing class struggle in production (using MGNREGS as a “social wage” to bargain for higher farm wages) and around production (fighting the local state to claim work and rights), building solidarities that cut across caste

hierarchies.

Conversely, in peasant-dominated and integrated villages, the programme had weak direct outcomes and negligible transformative impact. Here, socio-economic differentiation among workers was high, and integration with urban economies blurred class contradictions. Labour unions were weakened and unable to link struggles effectively, leading to the programme’s capture

by local elites and the reproduction of existing class relations. The study concluded that social programmes are not neutral interventions but active sites of class struggle. Their potential to transform social relations is not automatic; it is contingent on pre-existing socio-economic structures and, crucially, on being organised from below. Transformation occurs through the dialectical interaction of struggles in the economic sphere of production and the political sphere of institutional arenas.

**Balwinder Singh Tiwana, Paramjit Singh, and Mukesh Kumar: Class Dynamics of Accumulation and Livelihood Strategy of Peasantry in Rural India: Empirical Evidence from Haryana**

The central question addressed in this paper was the changing role of land and the implications



for the peasantry in contemporary rural life. The analysis revealed a sharp divergence in class trajectories. A rich peasantry, dominant in regions like Haryana, functions as “agriculture missionaries,” is expanding production by leasing land from weaker peasants. Their families are progressively exiting manual farm labour. Their diversification is strategic and upward, focusing on village and town-based enterprises like dairy farming, agricultural machinery, and medical shops, or moving to

cities for formal employment, often facilitated by caste networks and political connections. This class has effectively hijacked rural institutions, consolidating its power.

In contrast, the livelihood strategies of the small and poor peasantry reveal a deep crisis. Their engagement in agriculture persists, explaining why cultivation continues despite low returns but is increasingly feminised, reliant on the labour of women, children, and the elderly. This is not a full depeasantisation but a “depeasantisation of income,” forcing male members to migrate to urban centres for work. Policies that appear neutral, like subsidies linked to marketable surplus, disproportionately benefit large farmers, deepening the dependency of the poor on the rich. The critical question, therefore, is whether this widespread diversification reduces rural inequality. The findings suggest it does not. Instead, it reconfigures and potentially reinforces hierarchies, forcing a critical assessment of whether marginal income gains justify the profound social costs of fractured households and a systemic slide into precarious, informal work.

### **Aishwarya Prakash: The Unequal Promises of Collectivisation: Re-Examining Inclusion in Farmer-Producer Companies**

This presentation examined the functioning of Farmer-Producer Companies (FPCs) in eastern Uttar Pradesh, challenging their promotion as inclusive, win-win institutions that combine



corporate efficiency with cooperative principles.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, the study argued that, in practice, FPCs often function as arenas where pre-existing social hierarchies of caste, class, and gender are reproduced rather than challenged. The analysis of three distinct FPC cases revealed that land holding size is a powerful determinant of participation and benefit. Larger, predominantly upper-caste landowners were more informed, involved, and patient, viewing the FPC as a long-term collective asset. In contrast, small and

marginal farmers, often from Other Backward Classes (OBCs), engaged passively, seeing the FPC merely as a procurement outlet and displaying a sense of gratefulness and disposability, as illustrated by the case of Shyam Bahadur Yadav.

The study found that caste hierarchies profoundly shape everyday interactions within FPCs. Despite formal equality, deep-rooted norms of deference and inferiority persist, with Dalit and non-dominant Other Backward Class farmers often refusing to sit alongside dominant-caste members. Furthermore, the research highlighted significant gendered barriers to meaningful participation. Even in an FPC with 60 per cent women shareholders, their involvement was largely symbolic. Restrictive gender norms, time poverty, limited mobility, and a lack of decision-making power at home prevented them from engaging in governance. The presentation concluded that the top-down, target-driven promotion of FPCs creates socially hollow institutions. This stands in sharp contrast to successful, grassroots movements like AMUL. The current policy vision of framing FPCs as the backbone of Atmanirbhar (self-reliant) agriculture is critiqued as abstract, warning that without a confrontation with power inequalities and without redistributive material support, the promise of inclusive collectivisation will remain unfulfilled.

### **Anjana Kesav and Sachin Varghese Titty: Beyond Poverty: Examining the Structural Roots of Agrarian Vulnerability in India**

Anjana and Sachin's research moved beyond static poverty measurements to analyse the structural



vulnerability of India's agricultural households. Using data from the 2018–19 Situation Assessment Survey (SAS), the study reveals that over 68 per cent of agricultural households live below the poverty line. Crucially, it demonstrated that poverty lines alone are inadequate, as both poor (BPL) and non-poor (APL) households exist across all land size classes, indicating widespread income instability. Key findings expose the sector's

deep crisis: a persistent consumption-income gap forces households to borrow for basic needs, with marginal farmers dedicating over 57 per cent of loans to consumption. Debt-to-income ratios exceed one for all classes, revealing systemic reliance on borrowing. The study developed an income-based vulnerability model, showing that vulnerability scores significantly exceed current poverty rates, indicating that achieved economic positions are transitory.

The analysis revealed a clear stratification of risk. Smaller landholders face higher vulnerability, greater income volatility, and dependence on covariate shocks (sector-wide risks), while larger farmers face primarily idiosyncratic risks. This demonstrates how the agrarian crisis differentially impacts classes, with marginal farmers constituting the majority bearing the brunt of structural disadvantages, lacking assets to buffer against systemic shocks. The research concluded that conventional poverty alleviation frameworks are insufficient and called for dynamic measures addressing the root causes of agrarian vulnerability.

### **Ashwin Subramanian: Basmati Tales: Contract Farming, Changing Caste-and-Kin Ties and Agrarian Questions of Capital in a Central Indian Hinterland**

The speaker examined the social and economic dynamics of contract farming for Basmati rice in the Narmadapuram district of Madhya Pradesh, India. This study is situated within the broader context of the post-1991 agrarian crisis in India, where contract farming has been promoted as a solution to issues of market linkages and smallholder productivity. The research questioned the sustainability and equity of such arrangements.



A key finding was the central role played by the Gurjar caste, whose kin-and-caste networks were instrumental in the initial adoption and expansion of Basmati cultivation. Elite members of this group diversified into agrochemical retailing, acting as critical intermediaries who enrol farmers, supply mandated inputs, and manage payments. The initial cooperation, facilitated by caste and kinship ties, has shifted towards

intense competition. This is driven by a proliferation of agrochemical shops, leading to speculative tendencies and the emergence of defaulters.

In conclusion, the speaker argued that while contract farming has created avenues for short-term accumulation for landed caste-classes like the Gurjars, it has also imposed constraints on sustainable diversification. The agrarian growth has reinforced the existing property regime, as traditional merchant castes consolidate their control over rice milling and exporting. The pursuit of rentierism and speculative gains is undermining the very kin-and-caste relations that initially enabled the project's success, revealing a paradox where economic integration leads to social fragmentation.

## Session 5C: Agrarian Identities and Imaginaries

*Waves Hall, Time: 1630–1745*

### **Chair:**

**Gopinath Ravindran** (*Professor (Department of History and Culture, Faculty of Humanities and Languages, Jamia Millia Islamia)*)

### **Discussant:**

**Ranjini Basu** (*Assistant Professor at RV University, Bangalore in the School of Economics and Public Policy*)

### **Speakers:**

**Athmanathan Indrajith** (*PhD candidate in Political Science under Centre Walras Pareto, University of Lausanne*)

**Praveen Verma** (*Assistant Professor, Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi*)

**Sakshi Gupta** (*Graduate student at Kyoto University, Graduate School of Economics*)

The session focused on colonial and post-colonial discourses, and unfolded with the effects of British Policies on agriculture, farmers' movements in post-colonial India. The session also saw a presentation on how Alternative Proteins (APs) are shaping Japan's food systems.

### **Athmanathan Indrajith: Effects of British Policies on Agriculture: The Case of 19th Century Madras Presidency**

Athmanathan Indrajith's presentation examined the effects of British policies on agriculture in the 19th-century Madras Presidency, focusing on how science and technology were shaped by colonial economic interests. He argued that British policies were commercially driven, with projects like railways, telegraphs, and dams serving profit motives and export needs rather than local development. The administrative shift from the East India Company to the British Crown did not bring major change in thinking, as both British and Indian economists of the time remained rooted in Western theoretical models and overlooked rural realities.



Drawing on Polly Hill, he stressed that Indian villages were not self-sufficient or homogeneous and that ignoring caste, class, and religious hierarchies distorted the understanding of agrarian life.

He also highlighted the poor quality of colonial data, the neglect of bonded labour and village economies, and the historical bias of colonial research. Indrajith concluded that understanding Indian agriculture requires moving beyond Western economic principles and recognising the specific social and economic contexts of Indian villages.

### **Praveen Verma: Rethinking Agrarian Identity: Colonial Legacies, Legal Discourses, and the Farmers' Movement in Post-Colonial India**

Praveen Verma examined how colonial legal frameworks continue to shape the meaning of being



a farmer in India, tracing a historical line from the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900 to the 2020–21 farmers' movement. He argued that the British used law to produce agrarian categories that tied caste, property, and morality together, classifying groups like the Jats as agricultural and granting them land rights while excluding Dalits and others. This colonial codification of caste hierarchy created a model of agrarian citizenship that still structures rural life.

Verma noted that the 2020 farm laws repeated this logic under neoliberalism by promoting efficiency and freedom while retreating from state responsibility. The resulting protests evolved from local resistance to a nationwide movement, but beneath the unity of slogans like “Kisan Ekta Zindabad” lay deep caste divisions. Khap Panchayats, which helped sustain the mobilisation, also reproduced patriarchal and caste hierarchies.

He described the movement's shift from economic protest to moral assertion, where ideas of honour, land, and community became central. Despite forcing the repeal of the laws, the protests left existing inequalities intact: the farmer remained a male, landowning, dominant-caste figure, while Dalits and landless labourers stayed invisible. Verma concluded that agrarian populism in India resists economic reform but reproduces social hierarchy. To move from resistance to transformation, he called for reimagining the farmer beyond caste and patriarchy towards an inclusive and intersectional rural politics.

## **Sakshi Gupta: Shaping Food Futures through Narratives: The Sociotechnical Imaginaries of Alternative Proteins in Japan**

Sakshi Gupta's presentation explored how narratives around Alternative Proteins (APs) are shaping Japan's vision of its future food systems through the lens of Sociotechnical Imaginaries (SIs), collective ideas of progress tied to science and technology. Her qualitative research examined Japan's USD 400 million AP market, combining media analysis of 18 organisations and interviews with key stakeholders from companies, research institutes, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF).



She identified five key promissory narratives used to promote APs: as healthy and safe (“guilt-free” and “clean” foods), traditional yet innovative (linking soy-based heritage with cutting-edge cell agriculture), meat-like but not replacements, convenient and future-oriented (including uses in disaster stockpiles or space food), and aligned with sustainability goals through climate and food security rhetoric.

These narratives together materialise into four Sociotechnical Imaginaries: a technocratic food system led by corporations and industry–government networks; an isolated, depoliticised agriculture that normalises rural decline; a technonationalist framing of food as an expression of Japan's innovation and identity; and a model of ethical consumption that individualises responsibility for sustainability.

Gupta concluded that these imaginaries reproduce a corporate and technocratic food future, where innovation and sustainability discourses mask structural inequalities and obscure questions of justice and inclusion in Japan's agricultural transformation.

### **Discussion**

Ranjini Basu critiqued Indrajith for applying a decolonial framework too narrowly to early economic thought, focusing primarily on Dadabhai Naoroji and the “drain of wealth” thesis, which she argued provides only a snapshot rather than tracing continuities into later nationalist politics. She questioned whether the 2020–21 farmers' movement has been overstated as transformative, noting that while it briefly mobilised diverse groups, it may not have radically restructured rural India. Basu also suggested expanding historical analysis beyond the Punjab Land Alienation Act



(1900) to include Chhotu Ram's legislation, which reappropriated colonial legal categories for agrarian identity politics. Additionally, she cautioned that analyses of promissory narratives in agriculture should foreground capitalism's profit-driven logic, noting that imaginaries of innovation and ethical consumption remain embedded within market imperatives.

### **Session 5D: The Reach of Policy**

*Aqua Hall, Time: 1630–1800*

#### **Chair:**

**Pallavi Chavan** (*Director in the Department of Economic and Policy Research, Reserve Bank of India (RBI)*)

#### **Discussant:**

**Kiran Kumar Kakarlapudi** (*Assistant Professor, Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala*)

#### **Speakers:**

**Ashish Chouhan** (*PhD Scholar, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati*)

**Anjaly Unnikrishnan** (*Energy Environment and Climate change Program, National Institute of Advanced Studies*)

**Aparajay Kumar Singh** (*Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, St Xavier's College, Kolkata*)

**Ishwar Choudhry** (*Research Scholar, Climate Change and Agriculture, Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani*)

**Rakesh Gomaji Nannewar** (*Senior Project Associate, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru*)

The session focused mainly on crop insurance, the impact of agrometeorological advisories and crop productivity, carbon markets, and the impact of climate change and adaptation.

#### **Ashish Chouhan: Determinants of Adoption of Crop Insurance in the Soybean Producing Regions of Madhya Pradesh: Empirical Insights Using a Double Hurdle Approach**



Ashish Chouhan examined the determinants of crop insurance adoption in Madhya Pradesh using a double hurdle model approach. Age, education, and access to credit significantly increase both the likelihood of adoption and the area insured. Livestock and off-farm incomes reduce the extent of coverage, indicating substitution with informal risk management. Social hierarchies influence insurance coverage, with lower social groups insuring less area. This highlights inequitable

access.

**Anjaly Unnikrishnan: Agrometeorological Advisories and Crop Productivity: Evidence from Chitradurga District, Karnataka**



The paper assessed the impact of Agro-Meteorological Advisory Services (AAS) on yields of major Kharif crops in the Southern Hills and Plateau zone, and how it influences crop performance. The results showed significant yield advantages for AAS beneficiaries across crops, validating the positive impact of AAS on crop productivity by enabling timely, informed management decisions.

**Rakesh Gomaji Nannewar, Anjaly Unnikrishnan, Kruthika S., Charumati Kasiraju, and Tejal Kanitkar: Agrometeorological Advisories and Crop Productivity: Differentiated Impact of Carbon Pricing on Indian Agriculture: An Ex-Ante Study**

The paper was presented by Rakesh Gomaji Nannewar. The study assessed farmers' access and



utilisation of AAS, the determinants of this access and utilisation, and how the access translates into practice. Access to AAS is unequal, and the inequity is driven by structural barriers. The frequency of advisories is the best predictor of advisory uptake, and farmers extrapolate the data available to them to make decisions. Certain barriers exist (such as delays, language, and access gaps), but these can be fixed through design and delivery reforms. The

authors concluded that AAS is a critical public good and foundational rural infrastructure, which needs to be built on to develop communication loops and systemic integration.

**Peeyush Priya, Aparajay Kumar Singh, and T. Jayaraman: Differentiated Impact of Carbon Pricing on Indian Agriculture: An Ex-Ante Study (hybrid)**

Aparajay Kumar Singh presented the paper that looked at the impact of carbon tax on different groups of farmers as per the operational holdings, and whether the impact of carbon tax is regressive or progressive as far as relative cost burden and producer surplus are concerned. The study found that the imposition of even 5 or 10 per cent as a carbon tax on inputs like fertiliser

and fuel increases the cost of cultivation and leads to an inequitable impact on Indian farmers, the greatest impact being on marginal farmers. The impact of a carbon tax on Indian agriculture will unequivocally be regressive.

### **Ishawar Choudhry: Climate Change Adaptation in Indian Agriculture: A Household-Level Analysis of Adaptive Capacity**

Ishawar's paper uses indices of adaptive capacity based on physical resources, financial resources,



human resources, social resources, livelihood diversity, and information accessibility, in arid and semi-arid regions of India. A Gujarat-Maharashtra-Karnataka corridor currently leads the dryland gradient, due to historical infrastructure and rapid insurance uptake. While there has been measurable progress in resilience between 2013 and 2019, adaptive capacity remains uneven. Insurance, institutional credit, and MGNREGA wages

are the three single biggest factors influencing household scores, showing that access to cash (before or after) underpins most climate-related decisions. Information (from Krishi Vigyan Kendras, progressive farmers, and digital platforms) also plays a key role. Human capital gains (such as literacy) strengthen these drivers.

The discussant, Kiran Kumar Kakarlapudi, offered inputs on some of the study methodologies and spoke about the necessity of anchoring research in a theoretical framework.

*Cultural Programme*

*Quixote: Kathakali Performance by Margi, 1830–2130*



Margi, Thiruvananthapuram, embarked on this experiment in intercultural theatre thanks to the efforts of Casa de la India, Spain, to celebrate the spirit of *Don Quixote de la Mancha* by *Miguel de Cervantes* through Kathakali. This production adapted a European literary work into a rich theatre tradition, one that established itself in the cultural imagination of Kerala in the 17th century.

The Aattakatha (the play-text for production) for the Kathakali Quixote was written and choreographed by Dr. P. Venugopalan, distilling the essence and spirit of Cervantes' classic novel written in Spanish. It was directed by Ignatio Garcia, a renowned Spanish theatre director. The performance was widely appreciated by the audience and marked the end to the day's proceedings.

