

## **Studying the Rural**

**Report of the Third Workshop of the Network of Rural and Agrarian Studies (NRAS)**

**Report compiled by Aniket Aga**

December 2014

Workshop hosted by

**The Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal**

October 29 – November 1, 2014

Workshop supported by

**The Ford Foundation, New Delhi**

**&**

**Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR Northern Regional Centre)**

Mentoring Initiative supported by

**Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (Quality Improvement Program / Curriculum  
Development Cell)**

## Preface

The establishment of the NRAS was motivated by the twin objectives of a) reinvigorating the study of agrarian and rural issues in India's academic institutions and enabling scholars to engage with a range of pressing issues and ideas; and b) influencing the pedagogy and curriculum of academic institutions to encompass rural and agrarian issues. The first workshop of the NRAS was held at NIAS Bangalore in October 2010 with the goal of setting an agenda for research on rural and agrarian issues from a wide variety of disciplinary and inter-disciplinary perspectives. The second workshop of the NRAS was held at Annamalai University in Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu in July 2012 and focused on the changing institutions in rural India.

The theme of the third workshop was "Studying the Rural." Some important questions that the NRAS wanted to consider were: a) What are the categories and classifications now relevant for a study of the rural and agrarian? b) How do we use these categories to construct a dynamic picture of the rural? c) What are the major shifts taking place in the natural resource and ecological context, power relations, caste structure, gender and work relations in rural India? d) How do we re-frame the question of the role of the state in rural areas?

The third workshop was held at the Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal, from October 29<sup>th</sup> to November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014 with the kind support of the Director of the Institute, Prof. G.A. Kinhal. Dr. Suprava Patnaik (Associate Professor, IIFM) was the main organizer and convener of the workshop on behalf of IIFM while Dr. Amitabh Pandey (Assistant Professor, IIFM) provided logistical support to all the conference participants. The workshop was inaugurated by Mrs. Aruna Sharma, Secretary, Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, on the morning of October 30, 2014.

The five member Programme Committee for the third workshop consisted of Shri P. S. Vijayshankar (Director of Research, Samaj Pragati Sahyog, an NGO located in Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh), Dr. Rajeswari Raina (Principal Scientist, NISTADS, New Delhi), Dr. M. Vijaybaskar (Assistant Professor, MIDS, Chennai), Dr. Mekhala Krishnamurthy (Associate Professor, Shiv Nadar University, NOIDA) and Dr. Richa Kumar (Assistant Professor, IIT Delhi).

The NRAS acknowledges with gratitude the funding support received from the Ford Foundation, New Delhi, the Indian Council for Social Science Research (Northern Regional Centre), New Delhi, and Indian Institute of Technology Delhi's Quality Improvement Program / Curriculum Development Cell.

## **Introduction to the Third Workshop: Themes and Scope**

For a very long period, scholars and policy makers have considered the rural and the agricultural as nearly synonymous. However, the fact remains that historically the rural has always encompassed non-agricultural production systems, e.g., artisanal and craft-based production. Therefore, even historically, the agrarian has been only a subset of the rural, though undoubtedly an important subset. The disjunction between rural and agricultural has progressively become more and more visible on account of the far-reaching changes in India's rural economy and its ecological setting over the last five decades.

The share of agriculture in India's aggregate GDP has shrunk dramatically from 57% in 1950-51 to a low of 14% in 2011-12. The contribution of agriculture in rural income has declined from over two-third in 1980-81 to about 40% in 2004-05. The rural economy has become less agricultural though not necessarily less *agrarian* in a broader sense. Over two-third of the rural workforce is still engaged primarily in agriculture even though their productivity levels are low. This has been accompanied by intensified flows of capital, goods and labouring bodies between rural and urban and between agricultural and industrial/service sectors – destabilizing the very coherence of concept of 'rural'. There is, thus, an urgent need to re-think existing paradigms of thinking about the rural and its relationship with the agrarian, the urban and the industrial.

The NRAS decided to organize its third workshop on the theme of "Studying the Rural." Some important questions that it wanted to consider were: a) What are the categories and classifications now relevant for a study of the rural and agrarian? b) How do we use these categories to construct a dynamic picture of the rural? c) What are the major shifts taking place in the natural resource and ecological context, power relations, caste structure, gender and work relations in rural India? d) How do we re-frame the question of the role of the state in rural areas?

The workshop adopted the following format. The NRAS invited distinguished scholars to offer review papers on the current state of knowledge on each of the questions listed above and then individual panellists were invited to respond to the review paper. The ensuing discussion, enriched by questions and comments from the audience, put forth new approaches and topics for research. The opening session, which set the tone for the workshop, was titled "How do we frame the study of the rural?" Thereafter, there were four panels: 1) Land, Water and Natural Resources 2) Power, Caste and Mobility 3) Labour, Employment and Gender Relations 4) Agency of the State. The four panels were spread across two days

and the concluding panel discussion on the second day was on “Studying the Rural: The Way Forward.”

Influencing curriculum and pedagogy in order to reflect rural and agrarian issues has been a core mission of the NRAS. To promote research on the emerging themes of the workshop, the NRAS organized a half-day mentoring initiative on the third and concluding day for students and young researchers in/around Bhopal. This was an opportunity for students and teachers in rural and peri-urban universities and local practitioners to discuss their research ideas and get feedback on their written work from senior and junior scholars associated with the NRAS.

### **How do we frame the study of the rural?**

Surinder Jodhka (JNU, New Delhi) set the tone for the entire workshop by offering a genealogy of the concept of the ‘rural’ and why classical definitions of the rural are becoming increasingly untenable. He averred that the ‘rural’ is over-framed – because it is typically framed in opposition to the urban with demographic classification being the index of difference. This framing has been institutionalized in census categorisation where any settlement above a population threshold and with less than 25% of households working in agriculture becomes urban. Genealogically speaking, the opposition of rural/urban is an artefact of the classical western tradition of modern social sciences with its evolutionary biases. This tradition operates through a series of binary oppositions such as rural vs. urban, backward vs. advanced, traditional vs. modern, in which rural implies backward or traditional whereas urban implies advanced or modern. In this tradition, the rural is conceived as lower down the evolutionary ladder, progressively evolving into the urban. This tradition posits that the rural has no choice but to urbanize, to transition from traditional to modern, as people migrate to urban areas. This broad *telos* is shared by modernization theory of the 1950s, neoclassical economic theory and is captured in the imagination of progress. It has even become a part of the everyday ‘common sense’ which considers the peasant as rustic, as illiterate, as ignorant and as someone who needs to learn how to be modern and advanced.

This evolutionary idea is not just a matter of academic theory or practical common sense of a large number of people in rural and urban areas, but has also got enshrined in state practices, for instance in the understanding of peasant agriculture as pre-capitalist, as feudal i.e., non-capitalist. Jodhka further observed that even Marxist frameworks, despite their resolute commitment to historicism, work within these ahistorical binaries. The farmers’ movements of the 1970s and 1980s have further popularized these essentialisms by deploying

the Bharat vs. India binary where Bharat is rural, India urban, and Bharat is dominated while India dominates. The rural gets homogenized in these narratives and it appears as if the rural does not participate in its own domination. From these movements to the crisis narrative of recent years, these binaries and the consequent homogenization of the rural continues.

An additional assumption permeating this discourse, especially lately, couples the rural with agricultural and the farmer. This is a surprising coupling considering that the number of cultivators in rural areas, who hold some viable land over two acres in area, ranges from 25-40 percent of the rural population. Even the number of those that own half an acre is not very high plus they are not really farmers – they get more than half of their livelihood from non-agrarian occupations, explained Jodhka. The remaining are labourers, workers, artisans, etc. As a consequence of this assumption, everything else about the rural becomes invisible and insignificant. The entire policy focus suffers from the risk of losing this vast rural, but non-agricultural, dimension. Most of all, this assumption is empirically false. It is deeply problematic to conceive of the rural and agrarian as co-terminus. In the past few decades, a new class of farmers has arisen which has ventured into commission agency, state level politics and governments – they may articulate their interests in the name of farmers, but are not really farmers and they no longer speak for the vast majority of farmers.

Rather than thinking in terms of binaries, Jodhka challenged the audience to recognize that the rural is getting re-structured. The rural of the village studies of the 1950s and 1960s no longer exists. The rural is disintegrating and that is not necessarily a bad thing. The relational structure of caste has weakened, even as caste has not disappeared. However, *jajmani* systems and forms of loyalties based on caste have broken down. Castes continue to be hierarchical but inter-dependence has disappeared – the aspirations of the future are getting articulated at the level of the individual. These changes are transforming all arenas and institutions of socio-cultural life at all levels of analysis. It is not just the village which is differentiating, but the household itself and even the individual. A household may report itself as agricultural but that household may be doing many things – one son may be farming while another has become a petty shopkeeper. In fact, the same person may be a farmer for some time in a year and a labourer at other times. The logic of marital alliances is changing as well, where farmers find it hard to find brides. Farmers with some surplus are sending their daughters to towns and cities for getting an education with the clear understanding that a desirable son-in-law will be urban-based, preferably with a government job. There has been a corresponding shift in politics from politics of patronage to entrepreneurial politics – where people, from the upper castes with some land but not the richest patriarchs of the village,

raise some money, contest elections and provide some services to the rural poor. They are the fixers or middlemen who are connected with regional level politics.

As the relational structure of caste disappears, the resilience of caste persists. Caste seems to be reproducing itself as a hierarchy of networks. Its articulation is increasingly regional as networks span the closest town, the state capital and national capital and even international spaces. Who can reach where and mobilize what resources depends on their networks. For example, Dalits from Birmingham helped Chamars in their agitation in a village in Punjab. Jodhka concluded by inviting scholars to move away from the rural/urban binary. The point is to move beyond notions of continuity and change and realise that the rural and urban are diversities of experience. Jodhka put forward the suggestion that scholars ought to focus on the political economy and sociology of settlements without prior classifications of rural/urban, agricultural/non-agricultural.

Next, N. C. Narayanan (IIT Bombay) emphasized the need for studying the relationship between global processes and regional, national and local outcomes in the context of water. He observed that the state has progressively withdrawn from rural drinking water schemes, while urban water-provisioning continues. In a way, there has been a counter-revolution in the water sector in the last decade where through dam building, the rural tribal loses while water is allocated to urban industries. At the same time, lobbying within the World Bank got the Bank to help poor countries with creating infrastructure, saving them from “irresponsible activists.” This is how dam-building is back on the World Bank agenda and has seen the re-emergence of the idea of interlinking rivers. While it is vital to track these global processes, it must not be forgotten that it is the institutional structure at the micro-level – along the lines of caste, class, gender – that influences who benefits and who gains at the local level.

A. R. Vasavi (Independent Scholar, Bangalore) highlighted several contradictions facing rural India such as increasing capitalization and financialisation of agriculture even though agriculture is not the key occupation for a large number of people; abandonment of agriculture at the same time as more and more agricultural land is entering the real-estate market; and rise of a new rural service economy that further integrates the rural into the urban. In terms of government policies too, there is, on the one hand, the rise of new welfare regimes associated with NREGA, FRA, NRHM, RTE, etc. and a concomitant rise of regimes of illegality as structures of management for these welfare schemes prove inadequate. She raised the question of how to frame these contradictions? How might we imagine the rural differently – especially given the increasingly prevalent ecological disruptions, such as the

recent floods in Uttarakhand, Kashmir, and rapidly crumbling social structures. A key manifestation of such disruptions, especially disassembling social structures, was evident in the case of widespread malnutrition among children and research needs to factor these contradictions as central to the understanding of changing rural India.

Sudha Narayanan (IGIDR, Mumbai) called for more research on how the vision of agrarian prosperity is interacting with the hierarchies of rural India. As examples, she cited how corporates deploy widespread prejudices in their explanations such as “working with honest, naïve tribals.” What is often not appreciated is how technology is far from neutral and rarely accessible to all for instance, spraying technology often does not cross caste boundaries and even neighbours do not share. A similar persistence of boundaries is seen even with welfare schemes such as MGNREGA – large farmers rather go to the city for wages than to MGNREGA worksite since MGNREGA is considered suitable for lower castes. She concluded with further reflections on MGNREGA. She emphasized how conflating the rural and the agricultural leaves out a very large number of marginalized groups which are rural but not necessarily agricultural. Moreover, even the richest villages have marginalized groups, so restricting the MGNREGA to 200 neediest districts, as the new BJP government is proposing, misses the point of a safety net entirely. In particular, the role of MGNREGA as setting a floor to rural wage rates should be recognised since availability of MGNREGA jobs increases the reserve price and hence the bargaining power of labour. This is also true of the imagination of roads – typically, policymakers speak of roads from villages to the cities, when very often people need roads from their house to the field.

With this, the discussion was thrown open to the audience. C Rammanohar Reddy (Editor, Economic & Political Weekly) said there was real need for research at the scale of the region to get away from sweeping all-India generalizations and also to allow for a comparative perspective. Satish Deshpande (Delhi School of Economics) reminded the audience that disaggregation, while important, is not enough. We need to be able to come up with new ways of telling stories, of aggregating in a manner that the parts do not disappear in the whole, they remain visible and the stories do not work merely in isolation. What is the rural today, he asked. He said that we used to think of it as a kind of place, of tradition, of continuity, but perhaps today, we can start with new sites of inquiry, for instance the story of a particular crop – what is the rural in that context, or how is power mobilized in electoral politics, what is the rural in that context? P S Vijayshankar (SPS, Bagli) said we need more experiences from north-eastern and western India on the tribal/non-tribal dynamic, while Srijit Mishra (IGIDR, Mumbai) spoke about the fudging and incompleteness in the farmer

suicide data being compiled by state governments and National Crime Records Bureau. He highlighted that 40 per cent of suicides were in the category of “other”. Ram Reddy (EPW) asked, why farmer as a category is privileged and there is no discussion of artisan suicides and labourer suicides? How has the homogenous category of the farmer come to replace the differentiated categories of peasant, landlord and labourer?

In response, Surinder Jodhka reminded the audience that getting past the rural/urban binary is not just an academic challenge – the binary is also institutionalised in state practices and many other practical ways. Rural is definitely there demographically and otherwise too – but it is not what it was and what it was assumed to be and that has to change. This faulty discourse of the rural affects a large number of people, for example, if 60-65 percent rural population is non-agricultural, then it makes no sense to bestow so much importance to water for cultivation that impacts about 10% of the population. Much of the old rural elite, as commission agents and real estate agents for example, is as much urban as rural. He ended by posing the challenge of conceptualizing the pluralities of experiences. For this we need new categories, classifications and new ways of bringing them together.

### **Panel 1: Land, Water and Natural Resources**

The first panel dealt with the disputes related to land, water and natural resources. P. S. Vijayshankar presented the review paper while G. A. Kinhal (Director, IIFM, Bhopal) chaired the panel. Unfortunately, M. Vijaybaskar (MIDS, Chennai) was unable to participate in the workshop and so Vijayshankar presented Vijaybaskar’s remarks as well. In his presentation, Vijayshankar started by pointing that our knowledge of water is extremely limited. He felt that current debates in the water sector were stuck in classic oppositions: of tradition versus modern, irrational versus rational, environment versus development, decentralised versus centralised, etc. He emphasised the need to move beyond these binaries to be able to address important issues such as those of gender, community, access, etc.

The colonial imprint on water storage mechanisms could be found in centralised water systems in India, in opposition to local ecology as well as local water management systems. Since the 1980s, big dams have come under enormous scrutiny due to their ecological and social costs. This growing opposition to dams highlighted the small, dispersed and community-managed water harvesting systems as an alternative to big dams. He highlighted diverse traditional water management systems, such as *ahar pyne* in South Bihar or the tank systems of South India. Some of these traditional systems are re-emerging, yet the nature of



this rejuvenated tradition needs interrogation especially in terms of their underlying power relations.

Since 1970s, groundwater has become the major source of irrigation and drinking water in India. There is evidence of depletion of groundwater reserves and a growing crisis at least in some parts of the country. Yet, no major movements with the exception of the Placimada struggle have been successful. The issue of allocation of water is also a deeply contentious and political issue as very often, provision of water to some groups is only possible at the cost of other groups. The conflicts get even more complex and intractable when they concern upstream-downstream allocation with respect to ground water. Vijayshankar observed that there was a dire need for more studies to understand groundwater use and extraction.

Ultimately, he raised the question of just allocation of water to agriculture, industrial and residential sectors. This question has to be addressed recognizing that the preferred neo-liberal solution of relying on water markets is not without its exclusions. He argued that the distribution of water is a political issue, and therefore it is not possible to manage water through an apolitical institution.

K. J. Joy (SOPPECOM, Pune) was the first among the panellists to respond to Vijayshankar's remarks. He noted that though water conflicts have been on the rise, academic engagements with these have been largely sporadic. While there has been some work on inter-state and legal issues, there is need to frame these issues within a 'water justice' perspective. While there has been some research on the role of caste in water conflicts and considerably more work on the Sardar Sarovar Dam, other types of conflict in rural spaces such as issues of equity in the allocation of water, in particular its diversion from rural to urban areas has lacked systematic research. Civil society has taken up these issues more consistently and actively than academics. He then shared his own engagement in such civil society initiatives and action research of case studies on water conflicts. Sharing findings of this research, he highlighted that water allocation issues are closely related to rural livelihoods, and they also re-order social relations to some extent. He emphasised that there have been significant resource flows from the rural to urban areas, and different types of conflicts are unfolding in peri-urban, urban and rural areas in the country. In this context, he spoke about the reallocation of water from agriculture to the industrial sector and cited the case of Maharashtra, where in the last 7-8 years water has been diverted away from 300,000-400,000 acres of agricultural land, affecting an equal number of families.

Joy argued that knowledge is a serious instrument for politics. He felt that framing the rural differently can be very pertinent for good policymaking. He also observed that caste class and patriarchy continue to structure water access and allocation and the lack thereof. He concluded by reminding the audience that the nature of water as a resource is quite different from land and other resources. Therefore, the interplay between water as a resource and different kinds of social hierarchies is not only a matter of academic scrutiny but also of one of political engagement.

Next, Sunny Jose (TISS, Hyderabad) offered some reflections on the micro-politics of fisher communities' mobilization on issues of environmental policymaking. The definition of fisher communities is highly contested; at one end of the spectrum there are fish 'workers' (whose occupational identity becomes their social identity), then there are the 'fisherfolks' (people who depend on fishing for their livelihoods in a sustainable manner), and there is also the emergence of 'new fish entrepreneurs' (who fish for profits). He said that he prefers the use of 'fisher community' which, though vague accommodates the aforementioned categories.

Thereafter, he traced the political mobilisation of marine fisher communities against the withdrawal of a coastal environmental policy in the post-tsunami context. He said that for the state, 'sustainable' and 'scientific management' were central to its coastal environment policy, which, among other things meant the displacement of fisher communities from the coast. However, living on the coast (habitation) was integral for livelihood sustenance of the fisher community, and thus the policy incited the ire of fisher communities. An Expert Committee appointed under the chairmanship of M. S. Swaminathan proposed exemption of a whole range of activities that can take place on the coasts, allowed Special Economic Zones and removal of habitat for fisher communities. In light of such developments, he argued that fisher communities had to contest industry by self-mobilisation. Their mobilization was aided by the fact that post-tsunami, many civil society organizations had also been trying to mobilize fisher communities. At the same time, Jose lamented the fact that environmental movements had in the main failed to engage with fisher communities. Even more glaring was the failure of scholars of rural India to engage with fisher communities, they being focused principally on the agrarian.

Several rapid developments such as the implementation of a 2008 amendment in the coastal regulation zone rules, the constitution of a parliamentary standing committee, helped crystallize the mobilization of the fisher community. The mobilization even met with some success when, in 2011, the fisher community was invited to participate in the framing of

notifications for coastal zone management. However, Jose also cautioned that the process of coastal management was getting increasingly bureaucratized and the space for traditional fisher communities to participate in management processes was shrinking. This augurs grave challenges in the future, in particular for women who are pushed further to the margins.

Soundarya (NIAS, Bangalore) presented some curious findings from her research in Ramanagara District of Karnataka. She posed the question of whether it was possible to imagine agrarian change without change in land relations, especially given the centrality afforded to land relations in agrarian studies. Her paper revisited a village in Ramanagara district of Karnataka which was first studied by the Census of India in 1961. Based on data collected from 170 households and key informant interviews, she noted both continuity and change in agrarian relations in the village. In 1961, food crops produced were consumed within the village, there was no capital for expansion, loans were obtained from usurious moneylenders; there was inequality in land ownership, and exchange labour and *Jita* labour was prevalent.

Moving forward to recent times when she conducted her research, she finds that the caste composition of the village was unchanged; owner cultivation remains the main form of cultivation, and tenancy remains; the village was practically untouched by land reforms. At the same time, she finds that the Gini coefficient of land has marginally gone up, and while landless households are increasing, the case is not the same for agricultural labourers, owing to occupational diversification. Important events in the village's contemporary history include the introduction of electricity in the 1960s, establishment of a sugar factory in 1974, the Iggular barrage project of 1996 and the advent of bore-well irrigation. The capital for private bore-wells arose from silk cocoon production which allowed some wealth accumulation. Today, half the landowners are cultivating sugarcane – but this shift is not equally prevalent across castes.

She found drastic changes to have occurred in labour relations. Two-third of owner-cultivating households rely on hired labour for cultivation. One-fourth of owner-cultivating households rely on family labour. Exchange labour has declined, and the factory hires seasonal migrant *Lambani* labour from Bellary and Koppal districts on contractual basis. Soundarya also noted that that agriculture remains largely owner-cultivation driven, and there was no drastic change other than the subdivision of land-holding. At the same time, there have been major changes in irrigation, wealth accumulation from sericulture, and a shift towards sugarcane cultivation due to the development of a sugarcane factory nearby. She thus

concluded that the village had, curiously, experienced agrarian change without a corresponding change in land relations.

The last panellists were Ashish David and Ritu, both with the IIFM, Bhopal. They presented a paper on inherent incongruities in ‘fortress conservation’. They argued that the import of the western concept of delineation of inviolate spaces in the form of Protected Areas into India has meant grave consequences for millions who reside within or on the peripheries of conservation reserves designated in such manner. In a context of competing claims on the natural resources in the form of nature based tourism and developmental projects, they questioned the effectiveness and fairness of the conservation ideology in a cross-sectoral sense. They stressed that against the backdrop of forest diversions and non-compliance with compensatory afforestation requirements, the burden of protecting India’s natural heritage falls disproportionately on forest inhabitants who as ‘environmental subjects’ become the victims of such policies and for whom resources provided by the forest are not a luxury but a matter of survival.

The problems begin with the very notion of ‘voluntary consent’ which is required on paper for relocation from Tiger Reserves. In their study, they found that the spirit was ‘voluntary consent’ but it was never observed in practice. In fact, if the term ‘resettlement’ is taken in spirit, then the ideology governing relocations and design of relocation packages needs to be revisited, owing to the distinct social-ecology characterising different forest dwellers, which may not align with a cash or land settlement option.

Ashish David and Ritu also emphasised that significant constraints and challenges faced by relocated families revolve around loss of natural resources that provided subsistence, cash income and supported their unique social-ecological system. They concluded that this also points to the need to acknowledge intra-household differences, as loss of these resources understandably affects women differently, causing heightened time-use burdens and drudgery in finding some resources while completely losing access to certain other resources.

They also introduced the audience to a tool they had deployed quite effectively in estimating the different burdens of relocation. This was a time-use methodology which allowed them to collect rich and detailed data on what relocation meant to different segments of forest-dwellers, in particular women, based on a comparison of how they spent their time pre- and post-relocation. Their data beautifully captured how daily household chores become more burdensome as a consequence of relocation. David and Ritu thus provided a very useful analytic device to capture some crucial aspects of relocation that are likely to benefit not just

academic inquiry but also political articulation.

Suprava Patnaik (IIFM, Bhopal) served as the discussant for the panel. She noted that there were contradictions within contradiction and thus we need new perspectives in research and policymaking. She emphasized that inter-disciplinarity in research was critical. She also stressed that research is only meaningful when it can be understood and deployed by the common people and is accessible and available to them.

A fertile discussion with the audience followed the presentations. N.C. Narayanan discussed the problems of small farmers in the contexts of a declining water table on the one hand, and water as private property on the other. He also expressed some reservations on the role of traditional panchayats which function simultaneously in the presence of modern democratic institutions. Mini K. (IIT Delhi) discussed the politics of the bore-well ban in Punjab, and how lifting of this ban would affect water supply in the long run. K.J.S. Satyasai (NABARD, Mumbai) reflected on the nuances of the functioning of rural water markets across the country. Srijit Mishra emphasised that we simply cannot study the rural without studying water. Anjali Noronha said that there is a need to talk about water, without saying 'rural' or 'urban', and she highlighted the distancing of communities from ideas of water access in the backdrop of globalisation and urbanisation. She asked for a discussion on how some of these issues could be brought into the middle and high school curriculum, and how we could take up collaborative studies in this network.

Satish Deshpande argued that perhaps, from an ideological and political point of view it is the invisibility of groundwater that explains lack of research in this area. He compared this with the recent debates on Ganga, reflecting on the implications of visibility of surface water vis-a-vis non-visibility of groundwater in the framing of issues therein. Amitabh Pandey (IIFM, Bhopal) noted that a major problem is that groundwater is no one's domain, and the recommendations of the groundwater board are not taken seriously. In the context of binaries, Arvind Sardana (Eklavya, Madhya Pradesh) wondered if river basin and groundwater mapping were getting even more fragmented in this debate. The chairperson, G.A. Kinhal closed the session by observing that diverse issues were discussed in the session, and he urged researchers to exploit scores of unused data collected by the government to generate new knowledge.

## **Panel 2: Power, Caste and Mobility**

Srinivasan Iyer (Ford Foundation, New Delhi) opened the session by noting that the theme of power, caste and mobility is an enduring theme and invited Satish Deshpande to present his review paper.

Satish Deshpande's review paper was titled "Caste, power and the rural today." He remarked that if we want to understand how caste and power work in the rural today, we have to start with asking ourselves once again what is the rural today and disciplining ourselves from thinking we know what it is. What makes the rural newly illegible today is the following:

- a. There has been over time a moral ideological de-centring of the rural – rural is no longer the authentic centre of India.
- b. Definitions of the rural are relational, and because they are relational, our anxieties about the 'rural' include the binaries through which the rural has been understood. These binaries have been constraining, and enabling in certain ways but especially today, they are constraining more than enabling.
- c. Loss of transition narratives. Earlier descriptions of the rural had a teleology of transition – a 'before' picture for an 'after' modernized, individuated picture we have in mind. If we were thinking of agriculture, we were thinking of capitalist agriculture. Pressure on the description of rural was muted because we were in the presence of transition narratives. Now we no longer have those transition narratives, so our descriptions are no longer secure. What is the rural when it's no longer transitioning into an 'after' picture we already know?
- d. We can no longer speak of a single rural, we certainly don't have a single urban – these experiences are differentiated and segmented in different ways. So the question is how do we remain faithful to disaggregation and yet be able to go back to providing a big picture. The challenge is that the first action demanded of us is disaggregation and then we are called upon to put back together so that we don't lose sight of the fragments, this is the call of theory.
- e. The rural is not exclusively agrarian but it's too early to forget the agrarian. Our settled sense of the rural is now unsettled.

Next, Deshpande synthesized a set of paradigms that have arisen over time to understand questions of caste and power. These paradigms are only roughly in chronological order.

- a. *Jajmani* system – the origin myth of caste and rural society. The main effect this produced was muting the harshness of hierarchy and giving way to a romanticized notion of inter-dependence.
- b. Framework of dominant caste – the most resilient and powerful framework which held sway for four decades. The famous definition of dominant caste is that it is not necessarily the highest, but is high in status, has control over land, is numerically preponderant and has urban connections. Being the regional dominant caste had some well documented consequences in terms of how power is mobilized. This has got eroded and eaten away in a number of ways, the intrusion of non-rural opportunities and resources factor most generally into the erosion of the regional dominant caste.
- c. Third framework for understanding caste and rural relations is that of atrocity. Our common-sense understanding is that communal violence is urban and caste violence is rural. We believe caste disappears in the urban area, while religious violence is muted in rural areas. In urban areas, religion is the principal axis of violence while in rural areas, caste organizes violence. These expectations have been belied. Caste is making itself felt even in urban areas and communal violence in rural areas. There is caste violence and conflict in urban areas too.
- d. Caste came in for mention reluctantly by economists in terms of differential wage rates and segmented labour markets. After the unit level data became available and OBCs were identified separately, it became possible to do different kinds of studies.
- e. As a kind of catch-all framework, is the broadly ethnographic work that started as village studies – had no topic of its own other than caste or village itself.

While these are the familiar packages, we are now having difficulties in the mode of this understanding, because the rural is under pressure. Much of what can be said of the rural can also be said of caste, we cannot pretend we know what caste is – we need to know what caste is in terms of what it is being mobilized to do. Juxtaposing rural and caste no longer produces legibility. Deshpande confessed that he did not have solutions to the aforementioned conundrums. However, he thought one potential way out would be to work with certain sites where the abovementioned anxieties can be lessened. These are sites where it is easier to remind ourselves that we do not know what caste is. Some of these sites are:

- a. Going back to the command over labour – coming up with studies of commodity systems or crop specific systems in terms of their labour requirements might get some insights into the working of caste.

- b. Is electoral mobilization different in rural areas? Can we make sense of the rural using specificities of electoral mobilizations – the different ways in which votes are mobilized in urban and rural areas?
- c. Aspirations can also be thought of in caste terms. Different castes may have different aspirations. Similarly, forms of social capital may differ across castes – are there specific forms of opportunity hoarding in rural areas that differ from that in urban areas? Does the relative decline of land in shaping opportunities in rural areas offer us historical luck in terms of re-distributing land?

He concluded by saying that perhaps going back empirically to such sites may help us track the new configurations of caste, power and the rural.

Surinder Jodhka took the baton from Deshpande. Jodhka reminded the audience that just as one cannot talk of caste and village in one breath, one cannot also talk of land, caste and power in one breath as one could in the last twenty years. We have been trained to think that dominant castes control lower castes and they eventually capture Indian democracy. However, this story cracks around 1970s due to the success of caste. Moreover, Green Revolution fragments caste and you have labour moving into Punjab and Haryana from Western UP and elsewhere and you have autonomization i.e., lower castes have moved away not just from their traditional occupations but also from the agrarian scene. The alliance of caste and land and power is gone since the 1970s.

Also, there is consolidation of families at the regional level, and not just the national level. Regional parties, which are the parties of the agrarian elites, become the party of the family or of regional satraps– at a time that at the local level, family ceases to matter. Moreover, caste is operating at the local level, regional level and maybe even national level – but also at the personal level – in the case of men and women, there seems to be underway an internal disintegration of caste. Older men are no longer able to enforce caste norms with women, their daughters. There is an increasing number of inter-caste couples, fearing sanctions from their families, approaching the courts for legal protection. Caste seems to be disintegrating at the personal level also. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to believe that caste is disappearing. People move out of their traditional locations, occupations with resources and liabilities and caste is both an asset and a liability. Jodhka gave the example of how landed farmers can sell some land to raise money for a small business or a petty shop while Dalits find it hard to raise any collateral to start a business. He concluded with the observation that even as there are cracks at the personal level, hierarchies and inequality persist along caste lines.



Next, Asmita Kabra (Ambedkar University, Delhi) presented her paper about minor irrigation projects in central India. The debate on dams framed around the rural/urban divide, the industrial/agricultural divide does not quite fit minor irrigation projects and such projects are very large in number in MP and for these reasons, Kabra focused on minor projects. The specificity of minor irrigation projects lay in the fact that it engenders mobility, opportunities and challenges at a very local scale – a small dam may submerge a small area belonging to a small number of families and only a few people may have to be relocated or compensated unlike big dams where entire villages have to move.

In her study, the principal issue was ‘double displacement’ of particularly vulnerable adivasi households – the first being from a wildlife park about fifteen years back and then to make way for a minor irrigation project. Set in the Chambal division of Sheopur district (M.P) on the banks of the river Kuno, the study provides a worm’s eye view of responses to the proposed dam. In principal, Kabra found that local responses were in a range – some organized resistance, some everyday resistance, and organized negotiations, for instance, there should be some cash and/or land for encroachers too. There were also informal negotiations, resigned acceptance and open acceptance. There is no straightforward template for who takes what course and the framework of risks and benefits proved useful for analyzing the differences in response. Doubly displaced Adivasis may be the most easy to mobilize because they are the most at risk. Depending on history, different families have different risk profiles and differing interests in mobilizing. The fundamental insight provided by Kabra’s study was that the bandwidth for resistance has already been fixed as these responses emerge even before the announcement of the land acquisition. Moreover, the bandwidth does not depend on castes but on very specific ecological niches.

Satender Kumar (G. B. Pant Social Science Institute, University of Allahabad) provided an examination of what caste is today in everyday practices through ethnographic research. His study was set in Meerut in western UP, where some have argued that a silent revolution is underway through electoral democracy as hitherto excluded castes are entering legislative assemblies and gram panchayats. Kumar explored what the micro-level implications, in terms of caste, were, after three decades of caste assertion. How do people in everyday life articulate caste, when power structures are changing as excluded castes enter panchayats and assemblies? He brought out complicated relationships between private and public spaces in re-articulation of caste through local processes of categorization. What strategies of distancing do they adopt when people are forced to intermingle and political compulsions force them to make alliances? What are the ways of talking about caste? For

these questions, Kumar focused on the Jatavs and the Valmikis. He argued that caste is being expressed through the new language of hygiene, civility—the way people speak and behave in public—and complexion.

Kumar observed that while there has been no significant transfer of land towards OBCs and SCs, land no longer constituted a significant source of power. Kumar focused on everyday practices of sitting and eating together and how these practices have changed over the last three decades, an area on which academic literature was sparse. After their electoral rise in western UP, Jatavs, ex-untouchables, are given *charpais* and chairs – this is a dramatic change in everyday village life. However, the same gesture is not being extended to Valmikis. When one goes deeper, one finds that Jatavs always claim superiority over Valmikis. When Kumar asked them why they do not share their *charpais* with Valmikis – they used the language of hygiene, this was something new. Jatavs claim that Valmikis rear pigs and are dirty. They articulate distancing or practice of untouchability – “if they are clean, we will allow them to sit”. But this never happened. Even those Valmikis working in urban areas are not allowed to sit.

Interestingly, even as Jatavs distance themselves from Valmikis, they resent the ways Jats and Gujars distance themselves from Jatavs. Jats and Gujars allow Jatavs to sit, but they are allowed to sit outside, in public space, not in private space. Jatavs are given chairs which are not used for their own caste members i.e., for other Jats and Gujars.

Another factor important for caste perception and distancing is complexion. Relationship between caste and colour is articulated but is not very straightforward. There is a common understanding in the village – “you cannot trust a black Brahmin or a fair (*gora*) Jatav.” Black Brahmins are called *Kalabaman* in the village. Kumar inquired how young people determine and perceive caste when they go to areas populated by strangers, such as colleges—caste blind spaces. The youth freely admit that they can recognize caste clearly – Valmikis are “jet black.” This despite the fact that even Brahmans can be black.

So, even as macro-level change is occurring, people are responding at the micro-level to re-articulate caste distancing. Kumar concluded that principles of interaction used on the ‘outside’ or public were strongly influenced by the principles employed on the ‘inside’ or private, as the composition of visual and auditory traits tended to be used as rough caste approximations. The picture is quite complicated as different groups practice distancing even as other groups make attempts to bridge differences e.g., the attempt by RSS to fold Jatavs, Valmikis and Khatiks into a pan-Hindu identity.

Amitabh Pandey and Rekha Singhal, both from IIFM Bhopal, presented their findings on caste-tribe dynamics based on their work with three PVTGs (particularly vulnerable tribal groups) – Sahariyas, Baigas and Bharia – in Sheopur and Guna districts of Madhya Pradesh. Noting that across most metrics, these three groups are especially disadvantaged, they pointed out how many government schemes for their welfare are compromised because these schemes are mediated by non-tribal intermediaries, particularly those from the dominant castes, who subvert the schemes for their own ends. They reflected that looking at the deeply entrenched systems of oppression working against these three PVTGs, they had become sceptical of the dictum that modern institutions are more powerful and resilient than customary ones.

The final panellist was Balmurli Natrajan (Azim Premji University, Bangalore). He pointed to a paradox facing scholars in caste studies: Increasing caste identities and declining (traditional) caste system; decreasing caste legitimacy and increasing caste atrocities and casteism. This paradox is sought to be “explained away” by a dominant discursive framework that Natrajan outlined as having the following key claims – each of which “valorizes” caste in dubious ways: .

- a. That caste groups are no longer hierarchised groups, but are simply voluntarist modern democratic interest groups (the “democratization of caste” claim).
- b. That caste groups are an engine of economic activity because “social trust” runs high within castes and so transaction costs are lower in a situation of underdeveloped capitalist institutions. This of course gets the causality wrong because it does not answer why trust does not cross caste boundaries (the “capitalization of caste” claim).
- c. That caste today exists as substantialized identity (rather than relational), and hence approximates ethnicity. Thus, caste groups are communities of cultural identities seeking recognition of castes and their cultures in a multicultural society. This is anti-politics of caste – it empties culture of power and makes culture appear as apolitical (the “ethnicization of caste” claim).

These 3 claims are backed up by two more (dubious) claims about caste which seek to explain away some empirical facts.

- d. One, that caste operates largely as a “benign normal” entity – for example as a benign private affair operating in matrimonial decision-making (eliding the fact that marital alliances within caste boundaries routinely shape social relations).

- e. The second is that caste operates as a “brutal-abnormal” phenomenon persisting in some out-of-the-way-place (preferably Bihar or some badlands) in the form of caste atrocities.

To combat such a dominant framework of viewing caste today, Natrajan focused on the caste-as-ethnicity or substantialized identity claim in order to challenge it. Based on his ethnographic study with the potters or kumbhars of Chhattisgarh, he observed that while his potter informants saw no contradiction between denying caste hierarchies and distinctions and claiming a salient cultural identity for one’s own caste group, however, the identity claims of potters were derived from caste hierarchies in the first place. Terming this reconstruction of caste behavior as the culturalization of caste, Natrajan argued that caste relations, far from being derivative of cultural differences (as they are made out to be in the caste as ethnicity claim), are à priori ascriptions of ascribed status based upon birth and “blood.” Or, in the idioms of Kumhār everyday life, caste, which is frequently made out to be about khān- pin rahan-sahan (cultural differences), ultimately turns out to be about unchh- neech (à priori ascriptions of “higher-lower” status based upon birth and purported purity of “blood”). Culture drops its mask to reveal caste as fetishized blood.

This led him to ask why (and not just how) people reproduce caste? He proceeded to show that for caste to persist today, there needs to be co-ordinated, co-operative collective action, that is either intentional or not, to keep caste going. While the focus on discrimination and law is absolutely essential, only to focus on that is to miss how caste is deeply embedded in social life – as the process of monopolization of resources, forms of humiliation and prestige. He further noted that wherever culturalization seems to occur, there is a need to articulate who kumbhars are and this has led to coming up with rules – the Kumbhar Niyamavali or caste association rules for example.

Natarajan concluded by reminding us that far from becoming benign or irrelevant, caste actively adapts itself to changed realities; what is needed is a materialist analysis that is capable of viewing how caste reproduction takes the symbolic (or superstructural) elements into consideration for reproduction of productive relations. As an example, he suggested that control in the realm of production and reproduction have a very intricate way of tying into each other. He focussed on a particular rule in the *Niyamavali* which is a gender rule – a rule on patrimony. The rule is stated as follows: Children of a *Kumbhar* man from an alliance outside *Kumbhars* will be acceptable after proper repentance and annulment of marriage. This acceptability is not available for children of a *Kumbhar* women from an alliance with a non-*Kumbhar* man. To understand this gender difference, Natarajan pointed to a key facet of

*Kumbhar* life: “Man to the wheel and women to the market.” That is the men work the wheel to craft the pots while the women market those pots. Since both production and marketing are critical for the sustenance of the *Kumbhar* household, when a *Kumbhar* man has an alliance with a non-*kumbhar* woman, the non-*kumbhar* woman does not disrupt the production of the household – other women of the household, e.g., mother and sister, can take up those tasks, but for a *Kumbhar* woman to reproduce a *Kumbhar* household with a non-*Kumbhar* man, the man must be a non-*Kumbhar* who can work the wheel, a near impossibility.

In the general discussion that followed, people questioned whether the village still retained any coherence as a concept. Many in the audience and among the panellists remarked how schools and colleges had come to occupy such a central place in caste conflicts in today’s India. All castes are now experiencing the desire and the pressure to send their children, including girls, to schools and colleges. Yet there is considerable unease about the consequences of letting children and youth go into spaces where caste boundaries might be lax and which the elders do not supervise and control. In some ways, this uncontrollable unsupervised mixing of people from different castes may be the best case yet for Indian education institutions, all their other problems and issues notwithstanding.

### **Panel 3: Labour, Employment and Gender Relations**

Sripad Motiram (IGIDR, Mumbai) presented his findings on employment and labour relations in rural India in terms of their issues, trends and associated debates. His findings were based on the last NSSO survey. He acknowledged that there were several methodological and epistemological issues with the survey and sampling methodology, nevertheless he believed one can provisionally glean some useful insights by combining data from multiple sources.

He pointed out that, while it was true that India had grown rapidly over the last twenty-five years, the primary sector has grown much less vis-à-vis the secondary and tertiary sectors. This led Motiram to ask – what has become of employment? Three indicators are calculated for this purpose namely the labour force participation rate, work force participation rate, and the unemployment rate. Motiram felt, however, that one indicator which was superior to the above three is the current daily status of employment. This method is what the NSS survey on unemployment and employment uses. This indicator asks people what they have been doing over the past reference week. Each day in the reference week can be divided into two activities. Thus, this allows for the possibility of people doing multiple activities during the week. The labour force participation rate is a simple ratio of total

person-days in the labour force to that in the population. In the last twenty years roughly speaking, the male labour force participation rate has remained stable while the female labour force participation rate has fallen.

The labour force participation rate among women is also much lower to begin with. The workforce participation rate looks at the number of working person-days in the economy shows a similar story, males have been roughly stable while female workforce participation rate has fallen. Why is the labour force participation rate for women so low and why has it been falling? There is some debate on this and has involved several prominent academics. Motiram pointed out that unemployment for women has been increasing. The overall unemployment figures are low because underemployment – people taking up jobs they are over-qualified for – is substantial and masks the real extent of unemployment. He also pointed out that the nature of unemployment is changing in India in that increasingly, unemployment is being driven by educated people, unlike earlier when unemployment was driven by illiterates.

Over a period of 35 years, there has been a substantial decline in employment in agriculture both among men and women. There is a slight increase in manufacturing but rural construction is a sector that has seen an enormous increase in employment. In urban areas too, construction has risen but there has been a slight fall in the manufacturing sector. In the classic Lewisian sense, in the dual sector, there has to be a movement of labour from agriculture to industry. One of the problems that India is facing is that India has not seen growth in labour-intensive manufacturing jobs. Linking his discussion with those in the previous panels, Motiram pointed out that this was another reason why the urban cannot be de-linked from the rural.

Next, Motiram examined the cleavages in the rural sector. His analysis showed that large farmers are doing better than the agricultural and other labourers. If one looked at caste groups – upper castes are doing better than OBCs who are doing better than SCs and STs. The growth rate between 2004-05 and 2011-12 shows that everybody in rural areas has seen some growth, but the poorer percentiles have seen lower-than-average growth.

He also weighed in on the debate over whether rural labour is free or unfree. He pointed out that debt remained very important and agricultural labourers especially have high levels of debt. These groups still rely on debt for consumption and medical needs. On the question of whether debt was heritable, Motiram's data showed that a very low percentage of people said that debt was heritable, but he cautioned that this could be due to a measurement error.

Sudha Narayanan (IGIDR, Mumbai) continued on the theme of women withdrawing from the labour force and this is not restricted to any specific age category. She pointed out that MGNREGA has often been dubbed as a women's programme. Overall in India, about 50 percent of MGNREGA workers are women and in Andhra Pradesh (AP), the focus of S. Narayanan's study, 58 percent of MGNREGA workers are women. S. Narayanan's main research questions were: What is the impact of MGNREGA on wages and what are the implications on the functioning of labour markets? Instead of looking at district or national level NSS based analyses, this study focused on one village so that a fine-grained picture of how guaranteed wages impact labour markets can emerge.

MGNREGA is very often blamed for increasing the wage rates. Some studies using the NSS data show that approximately a 5 percent increase (in real terms) in wages that can be attributed to the programme. And in star states which have better functioning of the programme, this increase could be up to 9 percent. Other studies, which use the exact same data set, show on the other hand that there is no change. However, if one looks at the SCs who constitute a disproportionately large section of MNREGA workers, one finds that they have benefitted significantly. More importantly, analysing season-wise, one finds that they benefit in the lean summer months.

Sudha Narayanan's study looked at ICRISAT villages, which have been surveyed over a long period, which fall in the Mehboobnagar, Akola and Solapur districts. Labourers in general do not have bargaining power, however, there are some critical points in the season when bargaining power shifts in favour of labourers, e.g., in cotton and horticulture, the workers can bargain wages of up to 300 rupees per day only at those points in the season when timeliness of sowing or picking becomes very important.

Gender gap exists in wages and has probably widened over recent years. Wages for tractor driving, land preparation and construction are all much higher than MGNREGA wages so it does not have an impact on increasing these other wages. The MGNREGA wages, for a very long time, have been flat and only in recent years they have been increasing (in nominal terms) with time. Wages in construction for males and females in recent years have been much higher than what is given under the MGNREGA. On the basis of these facts, S. Narayanan argued that the MGNREGA is not really competing with other tasks. However, in two villages, Dokur and Aurepalle in AP, which were generating more employment days than any other village under study, around 2007, rich landlords started complaining about shortage of workers during the agricultural season.

S. Narayanan also pointed that there were considerable differences among states in terms of implementation efficacy. A recent survey that was done on 200 workers in AP shows that the range of wages that people get is lower than the notified wage. The MGNREGA is piece rate – the work typically takes 8 hours. Women tend to work lesser hours and accept a lower wage than the minimum wage so that they can do other work on their own farms or elsewhere. This is typically during summer. She concluded her presentation with the point that MNREGA has perhaps had a limited impact on wages, a point that is highly relevant to the national political debate on the future of the programme.

Shailaja Fennell (University of Cambridge, UK) presented her findings from a study done in Alwar looking at the choices that girls and boys make with respect to schooling and employment choices. She identified three puzzles. First, the issue of wage gap on gender lines, second is the issue of new kinds of stratification in the neo-liberal economy with its attendant responsibilities, and the third is the puzzle of globalization i.e., the impact that globalization has had on employment options and aspirations. Her research captured three important themes. First was that gendered lives were unravelling and people were making new and difficult choices. Second was that education and subsequent employment opportunities were opening up new spaces for men and women which was generating anxieties within the family, especially among the older generation. She wondered if community was emerging as a more important institution of social control than the family. Third was the porosity between school and community, something that Fennell and her colleagues had not considered. Based on seventeen detailed life histories collected from among teachers, parents and students from rural and urban areas, she found that parents had sky-high expectations from education. Women who had themselves not had the opportunity to study wanted their daughters to get an education. Rural families running businesses wanted their children to study even though the opportunity to directly start working was available to the children. Fennell argued that it would be a mistake to make this about individual choices, since these “choices” were shaped in multiple ways by the social structure with differentiated access to capital and networks.

Finally, Fennell suggested that socially constructed reality around gender, caste and class may be a way of overcoming another binary which is emerging in gender theory which is between masculinities and femininities. Instead of constructing types of masculinities or femininities, if one located them among social group constructions, then perhaps one could cross-tabulate between masculinities and femininities in order to understand what subordinate groups in society were trying to do.



Himanshu (JNU, New Delhi) cast a critical light on the category of non-farm employment. His paper tried to explore what non-farm work meant by working large-scale secondary data and a village study. He based his findings on the work in Palanpur village done between 2008-10. The definition of non-farm is itself residual. This would make sense in the 1950s, 60s and 70s when the non-farm sector was indeed residual. Today, one has to define what exactly constitutes non-farm. The dominant category is becoming non-farm – in the Indian case it is construction. Himanshu argued that one needs to define the categories within non-farm, otherwise one was homogenizing a very diverse category. One also needs to look at the quality of employment in the non-farm sector. Reviewing evidence, he postulated that much of the non-farm diversification in employment in India could be a bottom-to-bottom shift, with labour engaged in poor quality casual work in farm sector shifting to equally poor quality jobs offered in the non-farm sector. This is not something that we should celebrate.

In Palanpur, government jobs and school teacher positions have come down. The railways have stopped employing people today. Bulk of the increase in employment opportunities is in casual labour for construction, brick kilns, marble polishing and head loaders. The majority of the people working these jobs were in agriculture. There are two other dimensions. People who are exiting into non-farm work are people from lower ends of the spectrum, that is, Jatavs and OBCs. The work that they are moving into is back breaking work and not remunerative. Even then, they are happy to have broken down the barriers which were there in rural areas. There is a slight upward mobility even – one starts as a head loader and may become a contractor managing ten other workers. This improvement may be slight but in terms of breaking out of traditional hierarchies it is a success. The village cannot be thought of as a closed economy. There is nothing called the ‘village’ today. The links of the village to the outside are very obvious now.

The second dimension is that of rising inequalities. Between-group or inter-caste inequalities are coming down but within-group inequalities are increasing. Access to jobs is still determined by access to capital, particularly human capital such as education, links and social networks. Explosion into non-farm has increased, and it is a positive sign, but only at the lower end of the spectrum.

Amrita Dutta (Institute of Human Development) presented research that she first began as part of her PhD and which she has continued since – this being a longitudinal study on rural Bihar on a broad range of issues. Her presentation was specifically about a village in Madhubani district of north Bihar and the stream of migrants that it supplies to Delhi, about

1200 kms away. The methods used in this study are semi-structured interviews with migrant workers. The study is longitudinal in the sense that it draws from information on households over time. The same household is studied in the rural and urban area and thus this study is also bi-locational.

Migrants are overwhelmingly male. While some migrate for education, predominantly people migrate for work. People migrate about 10-11 months in a year which effectively means migrants spend more time in their work locations than in their native places. Only 4 percent of households derive their income only from agriculture in the village. Pluriactivity is the norm especially for people lower down the economic ladder. Most people start migration at a young age and they leave school to do work. The pull factors from the city have become really strong.

Migration now is very planned, the word for migration in Hindi is *palayan* which means running away or escaping. Work has become complex over time. Networks allow jobs but they also do not allow you to move up the ladder in their jobs. The labour market is very segmented and networks contribute to this segmentation in the economy. In Delhi, migrants do not live in slums but many of them live together in multi-storeyed apartments. They complain about water problems and excessive electricity tariffs charged by landlords. About 30 of them share a tap which is available only for 30 minutes in a day. In these respects, they feel that things are better back in the village.

Migrants work hard and are in control of their economic life, but they were very isolated in the city. Previous literature on rural-urban migration in Bihar shows how migrants affirmed their rural and urban identities, but this study showed how migrants constantly affirmed their rural identity. They do not see themselves as belonging to the city. Migrants see themselves as just there to make an income and go home. People would prefer staying in the village but at the same time do not want to work in agriculture. There is a desire to work outside the hierarchies in the village. There is an increase in incomes leading to an increase in consumption, aspirations and dowry. As regards the future, migrants express profound ambivalence. They did not have plans.

In the ensuing discussion various questions and concerns came up. Richa Kumar asked what impact online commodity markets and speculation has had on incomes and wages in the agrarian sector. Surinder Jodhka mentioned the need to understand intra-household differentiations. When people do more than one activity and when different people within the same household do different things, what does that entail for the coherence of a person and a household? A. R. Vasavi remarked that there is feminization in agriculture even as female

labour force participation was declining. She asked if there were instances where women have become decision-makers rather than participants in the labour force vis-à-vis new crops. Sudha Narayanan responded that women in agriculture were still participating as labour and not as decision-makers. In response to the question by Richa Kumar, Sudha Narayanan noted that she had found that price rise is not passed on to farmers by traders and speculators but price declines most certainly are. Himanshu cautioned that people moving from agriculture to non-agriculture may not necessarily be better off and we need to understand much more what is happening to sites of work such as construction and brick kilns.

#### **Panel 4: Agency of the State**

This panel was chaired by Satish Deshpande, and T. Sundararaman (JNU, New Delhi) presented the review paper. Sundararaman's paper reviewed the agency of the state with reference to state actions in the arena of public health. This included dialogue around the Structural Adjustment Programs, health sector reforms and civil society attempts to make the state accountable and efficient with respect to public health care delivery systems. Sunderaraman argued that the current phase of neoliberalism is better understood not as a withdrawal of the state but its repositioning in the economy, and its role in management, economic production etc.

According to the World Bank, in its *World Development Report 2003*, the rationale for the role of the state in the health sector emerges in the following contexts: production of public goods, poverty alleviation, and market failures. In social scientific literature, the following broad theories have tried to capture the working of the state and the government.

1. Large theories of bureaucracy which emphasise better monitoring and efficiency. Sunderaraman gave the example of the Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation to emphasise the point that systems sometimes work well even without charismatic leaders.
2. Institutional theories emanating from the work of Ostrom and others which focus on institutional choice, exit options, voice and hierarchies within and across institutions. He cited the examples of the introduction of user fees, information management systems in programs like RSBY (*Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana*) and encouraging people's participation in health care systems through institutions like *Rogi Kalyan Samitis*. The circular logic of this group of theories lies in its emphasis on the fact that the state must regulate the market more effectively, and for making this possible the state must be made responsive to market failures.

3. The third group of theories is exemplified by the work of Vikram Chand, Devesh Kapur and Judith Tendler (e.g., *Good Government in the Tropics*, 1998). This kind of analysis relies on theories of bureaucracy, New Institutional Economics and comparative studies of different governments to understand what kind of governance systems work in practice. The contradiction inherent in this kind of analysis is that they ignore the coercive role of the state (the role of surveillance in digital platforms and information management systems) and the fact that state systems are often not geared to enable the poor; they are more geared towards discipline and punish modes.
4. The argument that states make good policies but they are not realised because of implementation failures also leads to emerging disciplines like Operations Research and Implementation Research.

Sundararaman distinguished between the government and state and pointed out that the latter could be a greater defender of inequality than the government. Further, he underlined the fact that the state has become more heterogenous in the recent years, its caste composition has changed, for example, and hence there was a need to relook at the legitimate role of the state. Here, he reflected on the principal agent problem in the health sector, in which the doctor could be considered to be an agent of the patient, of the state, as well as his own agent. The contradictions arising out of the existence of multiple agents allow spaces for negotiations, which need to be explored for a more nuanced understanding of the agency of the state.

Srijit Mishra (IGIDR, Mumbai) presented very interesting findings about the measurement of farmer suicides in India and the lacunae in the estimates that state agencies like the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) provide. Since suicides are considered to be a crime under the Indian Penal Code, data for suicides are collected through police records by the states and NCRB. Suicide data are under-reported and there are often changes in reporting, for example, the decline in farmer suicides in Chhattisgarh from 2010 to 2012 was a result of change in definition rather than a change in numbers. Suicide rates need to be normalised with the appropriate population and adjusted for age, and the incidence of farmer suicides can be measured using various estimates, like difference in suicide rates (farmer over non-farmers) or the suicide mortality rate (number of farmer suicides per 100,000 male farmers).

Mishra pointed out the grey areas in the collection and reporting of suicide data, as farmers can be classified under different categories in different states viz. self-employed business, self-employed farmers and self-employed others. The answer to the question, ‘who

is a farmer' can be varied. For instance in Maharashtra, a suicide can be classified as a farmer suicide only when the person owned land in his name (as per land records), had taken a loan and there is proof that he was under pressure to repay the loan. In countries like Australia and USA, the definition of farm suicides includes farm workers, while farmers' suicides warrants excluding agricultural labourers from the population used for normalising.

Mishra also pointed out that in states like Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, farmer suicides have been linked to the introduction of Bt cotton and the development discourse has turned into a pro- and anti-Bt debate. He remarked that farmer suicides is a long- term phenomenon, and the discourse needs to move away from a techno-centric yield or income focus to a people-centric livelihood and quality of life focus. The quality of data and methods of reporting suicides need to be improved, and farmer suicide rates need to be normalised with suicide rates in the rest of the population.

K. J. S. Satyasai's (NABARD, Mumbai) presentation continued the discussion on the lines of the earlier paper by Mishra. He focused on the importance of rural credit vis-à-vis the problems of farmer distress and indebtedness, as a necessary response to the crisis that is looming large. He pointed out that after the economic liberalisation of 1991, Priority Sector Lending declined and rural credit trends changed dramatically. The branch licensing policy of banks was relaxed after 1991 and banks were allowed to open and close rural branches according to their wishes. He also gave the example of Regional Rural Banks (RRBs), set up exclusively to provide banking and credit facility for agriculture and other rural sectors. However, following the recommendations of the Purushothaman committee, the RRBs are undergoing a process of amalgamation and consolidation. In light of the banking sector reforms, Satyasai raised the question whether financial institutions should only work for profit motive and whether policy goals of this sector should abandon the rural sector and its viability. The compliance of the banking sector with international standards set by the Basel I, II and III norms have meant that the costs of banking transactions have increased significantly. Does this mean that these costs should be passed on to the farmers?

After 1991, the share of small farmers in rural credit has come down significantly. Although the defining feature of agricultural credit in the recent past has been the government's doubling of agricultural credit policy over a three year period beginning from 2003-04, there is a need to investigate the impact of this credit at the field level. Satyasai spoke about banking innovations and the vital, critical role played by microfinance institutions. In this context, he emphasised the role of local communities and community-

level initiatives in the credit sector. He concluded his paper by stressing on the continued need for role of the state in the rural credit sector.

N.C. Narayanan's paper focused on academic efforts at engaging with the state, a decidedly minority agenda within the academia. He focused on the Technology and Development Supervised Learning courses (TDSL) offered to B.Tech undergraduate students of IIT Bombay. Narayanan recounted his personal journey that has influenced his thinking, pedagogy and academic practice; his initial training as a hydro-geologist, his involvement with the Peoples' Science Movement in Kerala, his PhD in development studies, his interest in political ecology and experience of working with mainstream institutions.

To demonstrate his argument, Narayanan outlined the shifts in water sector governance in the context of neo-liberal reforms, and how the responsibilities of governance have changed between the spheres of state, market and civil society in the pre- and post-reforms period. In recent years, rural water allocation has increased, funds from global financial institutions for state governments that are spent through Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) has also increased, and yet issues of quality, access and equity remain valid concerns. He also spoke about ways to address the capacity gaps that exist at the village level to undertake activities relating to water governance and sanitation. According to him, in order to deepen accountability and functioning of state institutions, it is required to engage with local actors to connect the last mile of implementation.

In this context, he discussed the TDSL initiative of IIT Bombay as a strategy for bridging the capacity gap with the help of student fieldwork and student projects. The possibilities of engagement with NGOs, local organisations, resident associations needs to be explored, something that is being done by the Technology Development programme of the IITs. The concept and strategy employed here is attempting anthropology of the state at the local level. To conclude his presentation, Narayanan highlighted some issues that require further attention with this approach:

- The assumption that inadequate capacities result in inadequate implementation.
- Capacity building is sufficient for bringing change
- Sensitive students bring analytical rigour to their work and practice

Finally, Mini K.'s (IIT Delhi) presentation provided what can be considered an anthropology of the state, exactly as N. C. Narayanan had emphasized, in the context of state-led agricultural development interventions in Kerala. Her paper was a part of her doctoral work, which was an ethnographic analysis of the Kerala Horticultural Development

Programme, an internationally aided participatory agricultural development intervention supported by the European Union, with 78 percent funding by EU and 22 percent by the Government of Kerala. After the EU funding was stopped, this was institutionalised and scaled up in the form of a governmentally organised company, the Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council Kerala (VFPCCK).

Mini developed theoretical insights from David Mosse's *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid* to reflect on the question as to how India and specifically, the state of Kerala qualified for this EU aid while there were many other equally deserving candidates. The answer to this could be found in several unrelated factors: EU wanted cheaper processed food, hence they wanted to give aid for vegetables, fruits and horticulture; the wife of the EU councillor was from Kerala; and the food processing plant that was decommissioned in Europe was brought to India as part of this project. Mini also problematized the notions of participation, training and governance to reflect on actual procedures of functioning within this organisation. The role of bureaucrats, CEO of the programme, membership of the steering committee and the involvement of different stakeholders like farmers and politicians was also analysed in her work. The rhetoric of participation went along hand in hand with the orchestrating of the farmers' elections to the council by the state apparatus and the fact that there was never any real participation in the programme by the farmers.

Mini concluded her paper with a discussion on Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT). Her description of the choice of the pineapple juice processing plant (instead of the much-demanded banana chips plant), the products manufactured in this plant and its ultimate closure due to the use of endosulfan pesticide by pineapple growing farmers spoke of the relevance of theorising the agency of non-human objects while considering development interventions in the social arena.

Aniket Aga (Yale University, USA) served as the discussant for the panel. He tried to bring together the five papers presented in this panel under the rubric of different perspectives of viewing state-society relations. He highlighted the instability, collapse of conceptual/empirical integrity that was the thematic of all the papers. The state today is characterised by state-society hybrids, with state and non-state actors being present in institutions like the National Advisory Council, the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) and the State Biodiversity boards. The blurring of the rural-urban divide that has occurred with intra-person diversity of roles and livelihoods is also reflected in the blurring of the state-society relations – for example, the same person might be a corporate manager for 28 days in a

month and a member of a government constituted expert policymaking group for the remaining two days.

He also pointed out that discussions of state/society relations and agency of the state must not run parallel to discussions of caste. Caste needs to be brought into state/society frameworks. He pointed out that mercantile capital in India and the Indian face of multinational capital is largely in the hands of a few castes just as the bureaucracy and the private sector managerial class is monopolized by a few upper castes. So when one says that corporates are co-opting or lobbying the state, is one not basically saying that a small number of castes are together controlling both capital and the structures meant to regulate it?

He added that there was a need to study the heterogeneous ways in which power and resources are mobilised in society towards particular ends of governance, without judging in advance whether a network qualifies as part of the state or as part of society. The state is not a monolith and there are all kinds of power struggles within the state and between the state and various groups, and there is further complication due to the rise of hybrid structures that are neither fully within the state nor fully outside it. He concluded by building on the suggestions offered by Satish Deshpande and Surinder Jodhka. He said that if one traces specific networks of action – whether of crops or of health services or of suicide statistics, etc. – one may be able to see the play of agencies in a fine-grained manner. This will help reveal the pressure points or weak spots where interventions can be made and to the extent, one gets some idea about where and how to intervene, this may not be simply an academic exercise.

In the ensuing discussions, several kinds of questions arose. K. J. Joy asked if it was not necessary to retain the state/society binary and to think of resistance and subversion as a mode of engagement with the state. He felt the papers paid more attention to the positive face of the state while its role in land acquisition, mining contracts and destructive development in general largely went undiscussed. Vijayshankar also felt that the papers presented were uni-dimensional, focusing on minimalist interventions and not expecting larger changes in society. Richa Kumar responded that a paper on the post-tsunami rehabilitation activities of the state on the Nicobar Islands was part of the panel but one of the authors, Venkat Ramanujam, was unable to participate in the workshop. This paper discussed the militarization of the islands against the backdrop of humanitarian aid and showed a different face of the state. Sripad Motiram asked if agencies other than the NRCB captures suicide data. In response, Mishra said that the revenue department of the state government also collects data on suicides, the problem is that the state often has an interest in under-reporting data. Sundararaman mentioned that older roles of the state coexist with current discourses of



‘new public management’. There is an intention of a section of the state to change, but that is mediated through multiple actors. We need to look at the state and government as contested terrains, where there are pressures (for digitisation and transparency, for example), agenda for control, and spaces within the state for resistance. Finally, N. C. Narayanan remarked that even within the present framework, it was possible to combine narratives of state coercion and resistance, for example while considering issues of natural resource conflicts and governance.

## **Conclusion**

The concluding session was chaired by K. J. Joy. The panellists were C. Rammanohar Reddy, Satish Deshpande, A. R. Vasavi, Arvind Sardana, P. S. Vijayashanker, T. Sundararaman and Richa Kumar. The primary objective of the panel discussion was to set the agenda for future research in rural and agrarian studies and to articulate the role of the network in taking the agenda forward.

Rammanohar Reddy began the discussion by commenting on Sudha Narayanan’s paper on the MNREGA. He observed that generally two arguments are being made to dismantle the MNREGA – first, that it does not create assets and second, that it pushes the farm wage too high making agriculture unviable. He said that there were few studies such as Sudha’s which had investigated these two specific issues. He strongly felt that the NRAS should intervene in the public discourse when it has interesting studies which shed light on urgent, contemporary debates.

Sundararaman observed that areas like impact of the health care and education were not discussed in the papers presented. He informed the group that in such public services the role of the state needs to be studied, including the delivery mechanisms as well as public investment. Issues of urban/rural divide, sources of health care, higher education also need to be addressed. Vijayshanker noted the existence of multiple ruralities and multiple regionalities in India and emphasized the need to capture the issues of regions. He observed that some regions like the North-East and the East have been left out. As a group, the network needs to cover more of regional elements. He observed that Himanshu has opened a Pandora’s Box by asking the question of what is ‘non-farm’, which requires further attention. He reiterated the need to include more research on topics like natural resources and labour and gender. Finally, he highlighted the question of institutional buy-in for promoting the activities of the network. The members of the network are also part of different institutions. He thought it might be a good idea to create an institutional space for the NRAS.

Building on Vijayshankar's suggestion to study regions, Vasavi reiterated the need to study the North-East region and engage with researchers from that area. She expressed her concern that our idea of the village and rural continues to be about average multi-caste, agricultural sites and suggested that we should pay more attention to forest based communities and adivasis. Mentioning Sunny Jose's work, she said affected communities in certain regions like coastal areas also deserve more attention as the nature of settlement and the dynamics happening there are really interesting. Other topics are the coming up of new institutions and the role they play and the loss of agrarian citizenship. In cases like the debate on GMOs, issues are not discussed with the agriculturalist and policies are often conducted through the backdoor, on the sly. Policies are becoming anti-agrarian and anti-democratic. She also mentioned the need to engage much more with new partners and the need to make efforts towards making research more democratic rather than top-down. We also need to look at education and we need to ask ourselves how our research and our materials can be used for curriculum development.

Satish Deshpande felt that the NRAS is ideally situated to take up the question of what the rural is. He thought that the existing definitions of rural and agrarian will not go away. Even if one minimizes them to some extent, statistics are organized in this way. At the same time it is to be realized that sticking to those is not useful. While we try to discover afresh what the rural is and what the urban is, one thing to do is that we should state it clearly. We need to work towards the typology of spaces, such as settlement. He opined that we are still within one of the inaugural debates in modern Indian sociology between Foucault and Srinivas, that is whether the village is an architectural entity or a socio-cultural space. Whether it is education or school or state programmes, we can approach it empirically by asking the question of what is rural. The issue of gender, by itself is particularly important and a very fruitful aspect in this context, particularly when we think gender does not mean only feminine. Masculinities are as important as femininities.

Arvind Sadana commented that such research needs dedicated time and effort and that should be kept alive. He agreed with Sripad Motiram in terms of the methodological issues. He also agreed with Rammanohar Reddy that the network has to expand public discourse. Mentioning Eklavya's work, he opined that we can intervene actively in some phases. Workshop for college teachers is one such thing to start with but he also cautioned the group that it cannot be done as a one-off. That requires sustained programmes. He suggested that members of the group could come and participate in a workshop, which is meant not only for teachers but for those college people too, who are helping in curriculum development. Such

participation will open up the chances for the latter to listen to discourses, which they have never heard before. He also suggested that we need to move towards bilingual materials. According to him we should not underestimate those people who wish to read such material. He also promised help from Ekalavya in translation, printing, dissemination etc. He reminded the group that we have to have such materials to move forward and to move the agenda, if we think about entering public discourse. More sharing and collaborative work could also be encouraged.

Richa Kumar suggested engaging in collaborative research on the issue of food, diet and nutrition and its linkage. The relationship between the food we grow or production, the food we eat or consumption and its impact on nutrition from childhood to adulthood, is an important area of study. Mentioning the disturbing statistics about the current malnutrition levels among the children in India, she hoped that the group can take up this theme. She informed the group that this requires a multidisciplinary approach, such as ethnography to understand the context of food production and consumption, and epidemiological studies on nutrition across the country.

Himanshu agreed with Rammanohar Reddy's point to enter the public discourse. He opined that there is a new breed of researchers going to rural areas with some irrelevant questions and expressed his concern that the objective of that group is to set the agenda for research for others to follow. He suggested that the network should set the agenda and not follow the agenda set by others. According to him a lot of work on MGNREGA was to follow the agenda.

At this point, the discussion was opened to the audience. Surinder Jodhka observed that though the need for decoupling of rural and agriculture has been taken up in these discussions, agriculture per se has not been discussed. He opined that agriculture needs to be reframed from a rural activity to a social and economic activity or as a process, citing the recent work of Richa Kumar and Mekhala Krishnamurthy. Referring to American sociology he mentioned that in India, too, the rural is disappearing but agriculture is not. He urged the group to reimagine agriculture as an activity in the larger circuit of commodities and production. It calls for a paradigm shift in India, which has already started.

Srijit Mishra raised a methodological question on the ethical aspects of doing research. He also enquired whether we can involve and engage local people like school teachers, college teachers in our research as one way to take the agenda forward. Sunny Jose raised his concern about the marginalization of fishing communities in research. He informed that the agrarian frame is not suitable for such communities. The division between the landed and the

landless – so crucial to agrarian studies – is not suitable for fisher folk. Mentioning the globalization of agriculture, he informed that the first sector that got globalized was fisheries. The invisibility of this community and lack of sensitivity to its issues is not only from the state but equally from social science, too, and its unwillingness to engage with such issues. Mentioning Richa Kumar's point, he also reiterated the need to take up food and nutrition and expressed his concern that issues of health and malnutrition had been reduced to blaming open defecation.

The workshop concluded by announcing the new core group members for NRAS who were volunteering to take the work forward. These included Balmurli Natrajan from Azim Premji University, Bangalore and Satendra Kumar from G.B. Pant Institute, Allahabad, who would be the coordinators for the coming year. The next NRAS meet will be held at Allahabad and the G.B. Pant Institute would be the key host institution. Three faculty members from IGIDR, Mumbai, Sripad Motiram, Srijit Mishra, and Sudha Narayanan would provide inputs and support for the NRAS to have a dynamic website where papers from the conferences and other materials could be uploaded.

The valedictory session of the workshop was chaired by the Director of IIFM. The members of the NRAS thanked the Director and the faculty of IIFM, Bhopal for the excellent organisation of the workshop.

### **Mentoring Initiative, November 1, 2014**

Influencing curriculum and pedagogy in order to reflect rural and agrarian issues has been a core mission of the NRAS. To promote research on the emerging themes of the workshop, the NRAS organized a half-day mentoring initiative on November 1, 2014, the third and concluding day for students and teachers in rural and peri-urban universities and local practitioners in/around Bhopal. Prospective participants were asked to submit a written paper or research proposal of 1500-2000 words, on the basis of which they would be selected. Out of all the written submissions received by the programme committee, ten participants were selected and paired with senior and junior scholars associated with the NRAS. Participants were able to discuss their research ideas and they received one-on-one feedback on their submissions. Discussions between mentors and mentees ranged from guidance on choosing research methods, field research, publishing, research ethics, revising written work, literature review, scoping their topic, and other issues related to research and publication. All

participants expressed deep satisfaction with the outcome of the initiative and the NRAS hopes to conduct more such initiatives in the future.

**REGRETTABLE OMISSION:** The core members of the NRAS regret that the meet which took place in Bhopal did not take time off to remember the Bhopal Gas Disaster, the largest man-made environmental tragedy in the world, which took place nearly thirty years ago (1984). Although the gas disaster is often represented as an ‘industrial disaster’, it was pertinent to see it as linked to the promotion of industrialised inputs for agriculture (since MIC, the leaked gas, was used for the production of fertilisers) and a vast number of those who were affected were workers. The linkage between agriculture and urban production zones, the type or model of agriculture that has gained hegemony, and the growing negative impact of pesticides and synthetic fertilisers on workers (most of whom are also rural migrants) indicate for us the need to see how commodities and inputs are now also key actors, which influence the life of rural and agrarian communities. What is even more alarming is the historical injustice that the Bhopal Gas victims and their families have not still received adequate compensation and their health issues remain unaddressed. That the NRAS meeting did not at all devote time for a careful contemplation of these issues is a serious and regrettable omission.

*Program*

**STUDYING THE RURAL**

Third Workshop of the Network of Rural and Agrarian Studies (NRAS)  
Hosted by the Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal  
*October 29 - November 1, 2014*

**29<sup>th</sup> October 2014**

**REGISTRATION**  
**DINNER**

**[7:00 pm]**  
**[8:00 pm onwards]**

**DAY 1: 30<sup>th</sup> October 2014**

*(Venue: Samagam)*

**REGISTRATION**

**[8:30 am]**

**INAUGURAL SESSION:**

**[9.15 am – 10.00 am]**

Arrival of the Chief Guest	9:10
Welcome and Lighting the Lamp	9:15
Introduction to the workshop	9:20
Director's Address	9:25
Chief Guest's Address	9:35
Vote of Thanks	9:55

***HIGH TEA and GROUP PHOTO: 10:00 am to 10:15 am***

**OPENING SESSION: HOW DO WE FRAME THE STUDY OF THE RURAL?**

**[10.15 am – 11.30 am]**

**Chair:** Dr. C. Rammanohar Reddy, Economic and Political Weekly, Mumbai

**Keynote Speaker:** Prof. Surinder Jodhka, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

**Beyond Binaries: Re-framing the 'Rural' in Contemporary India**

**Panelists:**

Dr. N.C. Narayanan, IIT Mumbai

**Studying the Rural: Why? How? Who?**

Dr. A.R. Vasavi, Independent Scholar, Bangalore

Dr. Sudha Narayanan, IGIDR, Mumbai

**Rapporteur:** Dr. Richa Kumar, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

*TEA: 11:30 am to 11:45 am*

**PANEL 1: LAND, WATER AND NATURAL RESOURCES [11.45 am – 1.00 pm]**

**Chair:** Prof. G.A. Kinhal, Director, IIFM, Bhopal

**Review Paper:** Shri. PS Vijayshankar, SPS, Bagli, Madhya Pradesh

**The Review Paper on Water**

Dr. M. Vijaybaskar, MIDS, Chennai

**Political Economy of Land & Rural Land Markets in India: A Review**

**Panelists:**

Dr. R. Vijay, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad

Shri K.J. Joy, SOPPECOM, Pune

**Engaging with Water Conflicts in Rural India**

Dr. Sunny Jose, TISS, Hyderabad

**The Micropolitics of Fisher Communities' Mobilisation against an Environmental Policy in India**

Ms. Soundarya, Research Scholar, NIAS, Bangalore

**Agrarian Change with relatively static land relations - Findings from a village in Ramanagara District, Karnataka**

Dr. Ashish David, IIFM, Bhopal and Ms. Ritu, Research Scholar, IIFM, Bhopal

**Fortress Conservation and the Inherent Incongruities**

**Discussant:** Dr. Suprava Patnaik, Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal

**Rapporteur:** Ms. Amrita Datta, Associate Fellow, IHD, Delhi

*LUNCH: 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm*

**PANEL 1 Contd.**

**[2:00 pm to 3:00 pm]**

*TEA: 3:00 pm to 3:15 pm*

**PANEL 2: POWER, CASTE AND MOBILITY**

**[3.15 pm to 4:30 pm]**

**Chair:** Shri Srinivasan Iyer, Ford Foundation, New Delhi

**Review Paper:** Prof. Satish Deshpande, University of Delhi, Delhi

**Caste, Power and the Rural Today**

**Panelists:**

Prof. Surinder Jodhka, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

Dr. Asmita Kabra, Ambedkar University, Delhi

**Setting the template(s): Everyday politics and the evolution of responses to involuntary displacement**

Dr. Amitabh Pandey and Dr. Rekha Singhal, IIFM, Bhopal

**Caste-Tribe Dynamics, Power politics cause for slow changes in PVTG community of Chambal zone of Madhya Pradesh**

Dr. Satendra Kumar, G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, University of Allahabad

**Caste and Micro-Politics of Electoral Democracy: Emergence of the Marginalized Caste Groups in Rural western UP**

Dr. Balmurli Natrajan, Azim Premji University, Bangalore

**Caste and Its Reproduction: Towards a Materialist Understanding of How Caste Persists**

**Discussant:** Dr. A.R. Vasavi, Independent Scholar, Bangalore

**Rapporteur:** Mr. Aniket Aga, Research Scholar, Yale University

*TEA: 4:30 pm to 4:45 pm*

**PANEL 2 Contd.**

**[4:45 pm to 5:30 pm]**

*DINNER: 8:00 pm*

**DAY 2: 31<sup>ST</sup> October 2014**

**PANEL 3: LABOUR, EMPLOYMENT AND GENDER RELATIONS**

**[9.15 am – 11.15 am]**

**Chair:** Dr. Reetika Khera, Indian Institute of Technology Delhi

**Review Paper:** Dr. Sripad Motiram, IGIDR, Mumbai

**Employment and Labor Relations in Rural India: Issues, Trends and Debates**

**Panelists:**

Dr. Sudha Narayanan, IGIDR, Mumbai

**Employment Guarantee and women's work in the ICRISAT Villages**

Prof. Shailaja Fennell, University of Cambridge, UK



**Recasting Gender: A New Tool for Reclaiming the Rural and Natural Spheres of Development**

Dr. Himanshu, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

Prof. Duvvuru Narasimha Reddy, ICSSR National Fellow, Delhi

Ms. Amrita Datta, Associate Fellow, Institute of Human Development

**Strangers in the City? Rural Bihari Migrants in Delhi**

**Discussant:** Dr. Asmita Kabra, Ambedkar University, Delhi

**Rapporteur:** Ms. Mini K, Research Scholar, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

*TEA: 11:15 am to 11:30 am*

**PANEL 4: AGENCY OF THE STATE**

**[11.30 am – 1.30 pm]**

**Chair:** Prof. Satish Deshpande, University of Delhi, Delhi

**Review Paper:** Dr. T Sundararaman, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

**The Agencies of the State: A Critical Reflection on Experiences of State Reform**

**Panelists:**

Dr. Srijit Mishra, IGIDR, Mumbai

**Farmers' Suicides in India: Measurement and Interpretation**

Dr. K.J.S. Satyasai, NABARD, Mumbai

**Rural Credit and the State**

Prof. N.C. Narayanan, IIT Mumbai

**Engaging with the State: A Limited Reformist Agenda for the Researcher**

Mr. Venkat Ramanujam, Research Scholar, ATREE, Bangalore and Mr. Pankaj Sekhsaria, Research Scholar, Maastricht University, Netherlands

**The Humanitarian State: Tsunami gifts, Reciprocity, and Militarization in the Nicobar Islands**

Ms. Mini K., Research Scholar, IIT Delhi

**Internationally Aided State-led Agricultural Development Interventions: Whose Agency Counts?**

**Discussant:** Mr. Aniket Aga, Research Scholar, Yale University

**Rapporteur:** Mr. Budhaditya Das, Research Scholar, Ambedkar University, Delhi

*LUNCH: 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm*

**CLOSING SESSION: ROUND TABLE ON STUDYING THE RURAL: AN AGENDA FOR ACTION**

**[2:30 pm – 3.45 pm]**

**Chair:** Prof. Duvvuru Narasimha Reddy, ICSSR National Fellow, Delhi

**Panelists:**

Dr. C. Rammanohar Reddy, Economic and Political Weekly, Mumbai

Prof. Satish Deshpande, University of Delhi, Delhi

Prof. A.R. Vasavi, Independent Scholar, Bangalore

Shri Arvind Sardana, Director, Eklavya, Madhya Pradesh

Shri. P.S. Vijayshankar, SPS, Bagli, Madhya Pradesh

Dr. T. Sundararaman, Visiting Professor, JNU

**Rapporteur:** Ms. Soundarya, Research Scholar, NIAS, Bangalore

*TEA: 3:45 pm to 4:00 pm*

**CLOSING SESSION: CONTD.**

**[4:00 pm – 5.00 pm]**

**Agenda:** Conclusions from the workshop  
Publication of workshop papers  
Furthering pedagogical engagement of NRAS in collaboration with other institutions  
Brainstorming on institutionalizing the NRAS through a charter  
Nomination of the next set of NRAS members to take this forward

**VALEDICTORY SESSION:**

**[5:00 pm – 5.30 pm]**

**Agenda:** Welcome  
Conclusions of the Workshop  
Chief Guest's Address  
Director's Address  
Vote of Thanks

*HIGH TEA: 5:30 pm*

*DINNER: 8:00 pm*

**DAY 3: 1<sup>ST</sup> November 2014**  
**MENTORING INITIATIVE**

**INTRODUCTION**

**[9.00 am – 9.15 am]**

Shri P.S. Vijayshankar, Samaj Pragati Sahyog, Bagli, Madhya Pradesh  
Dr. Richa Kumar, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

**FEEDBACK ON WRITTEN PROPOSALS**

**[9.15 am – 10.45 am]**

Mr. Amit and Ms. Ruchika Bammi, IIFM, Bhopal  
Mr. Anwar Jafri, Samavesh, Bhopal  
Ms. Bhoomika Joshi, ICSSR RSP, Uttarakhand  
Mr. Prasant Mohanty, Sehgal Foundation, Rajasthan  
Ms. Shipra Pal Singh, XIM, Jabalpur  
Ms. Nishtha Tripathi, IIFM, Bhopal  
Mr. Ankur Kumar, IIFM, Bhopal

***TEA: 10:45 am to 11:00am***

**FEEDBACK ON WRITTEN PROPOSALS [contd.]**

**[11.00 pm – 12.00 pm]**

**ACTION RESEARCH**

**[12.00 am – 1:30 pm]**

Shri Arvind Sardanha, Eklavya, Madhya Pradesh  
Shri P.S. Vijayshankar, Samaj Pragati Sahyog, Madhya Pradesh

***CLOSING LUNCH: 1:30 pm – 2:30 pm***

**List of Participating Senior Scholars:**

Prof. D.N Reddy, ICSSR National Fellow, Delhi  
Prof. A.R. Vasavi, Independent Scholar, Bangalore  
Shri Arvind Sardanha, Eklavya, Madhya Pradesh  
Dr. Srijit Mishra, IGIDR, Mumbai  
Dr. Satendra Kumar, G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, University of Allahabad  
Dr. Balmurli Natrajan, Azim Premji University, Bangalore  
Dr. Sripad Motiram, IGIDR, Mumbai  
Dr. Asmita Kabra, Ambedkar University Delhi  
Shri P.S. Vijayshankar, Samaj Pragati Sahyog, Bagli, Madhya Pradesh  
Dr. Richa Kumar, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi