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CONFERENCE

“On Agrarian Issues”: A Report on the Tenth Anniversary Conference of the Foundation for Agrarian Studies

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The tenth anniversary conference of the Foundation for Agrarian Studies (FAS) was held in Kochi, Kerala, from January 9 to 12, 2014. Over 150 delegates from India and 17 other countries participated in the conference. The conference brought together senior academics, activists from mass organisations in India and abroad, and young scholars working on agrarian issues. There were 23 plenary and parallel sessions in all.

The papers presented at the conference were grouped into three broad themes. The themes and the convenors for each theme were:

- Agrarian Relations and Agrarian Institutions, convened by V. K. Ramachandran and R. Ramakumar
- Farming Systems, Environment and Climate Change, convened by T. Jayaraman and Niladri Sekhar Dhar
- Living Conditions, Social Discrimination and Inequality, convened by Madhura Swaminathan and Aparajita Bakshi

V. K. Ramachandran was the convenor of the conference.

Session 1 (January 9): Inaugural Session

The inaugural session of the conference was chaired by **P. Ramayya**, President of the All India Agricultural Workers Union.

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V. K. Ramachandran welcomed the conference participants and briefly introduced the work of the Foundation for Agrarian Studies. The Foundation for Agrarian Studies was established in 2003 in order to facilitate and sponsor multi-disciplinary theoretical and empirical enquiry in the field of agrarian studies in India and elsewhere in less-developed countries. The Foundation seeks to do so in association with a wide section of people interested in the agrarian question, including persons associated with academic institutions, social and political activists, members of mass organisations working in the countryside, and other professionals and scholars. In order to succeed, this effort has had to be driven by content – and the need to understand society in order to change it – rather than donor-driven.

The inaugural address was delivered by **M. S. Swaminathan**, who began by reviewing the history of food policy in independent India. He reminded the audience that the conference was being held a few weeks after the passing of the Food Security Bill into law. He gave a brief account of the history of food policy in India from the “ship-to-mouth” existence of the 1960s through the years of the green revolution to the present, that is, from the years of import dependence and through the expansion and achievement of self-sufficiency in cereal production to the passing of legislation that declared food security to be not the subject matter of political patronage, but an individual right.

Professor Swaminathan contended that, despite the improvements brought about by the green revolution, there were still social, ecological, and economic factors that challenged human development and food security in India. The only pathway open to policy makers and farmers was to go from a green to an “evergreen” revolution, that is, to improve productivity enhancement without causing further ecological harm. Agricultural policy would remain incomplete unless it improved farmers’ lives by enhancing their incomes and work security.

Session 2 (January 9): Agrarian Conditions and Policies

The session was chaired by **Ashok Dhawale**, Vice President, All-India Kisan Sabha. Five papers discussing agrarian policies and conditions in different countries of the global South were presented in the session. **Venkatesh Athreya** was the discussant for the session.

Cheng Enfu, Gong Yun, and Xiaoqin Ding presented a paper titled **Strive to Develop Diverse Modes of Collective Economy and Cooperative Economy**. The authors classified the diverse kinds of collective and cooperative economies prevalent in rural China into four categories on the basis of their capital structures, distribution systems, and governance structures. These categories were: “perfect collective economy,” “typical cooperative economy,” transitional forms (various combinations of collective and cooperative economies), and “typical private joint stock.” The main focus of this paper, which was based on empirical findings from rural China, was

on the first three categories. The paper analysed different forms of social ownership and different paths to agrarian transition in a post-revolutionary context. It also discussed problems of further transition in the context of diverse property relations within a broadly socialist transition.

R. Ramakumar's paper, titled **Economic Reforms and Agricultural Policy in Contemporary India**, dealt with India's agricultural policy and the performance of its agricultural economy, with specific emphasis on the period after 1991. Agricultural development in post-independence India has been marked by a failure of the state to resolve the agrarian question. While institutional transformation of Indian agriculture remained incomplete, economic "reform" after 1991 was based on an explicit rejection of the need for progressive institutional transformation, which would require thoroughgoing land reform. Instead, it was argued that with greater liberalisation of the economy, the barriers to raising agricultural surplus could be overcome through the market and free trade.

Overall agricultural growth slowed down between 1992–93 and 2010–11. During the same period, there was a weakening of public institutional support to agriculture. The protection offered to agriculture from predatory imports was removed, resulting in a fall in the prices of many commodities. As part of fiscal reforms the input subsidy system was restructured, as a result of which input prices and costs of production increased sharply. Growth of public capital formation in agriculture stagnated, as did growth of public expenditure on research and extension. The expansion of rural credit slowed down in the 1990s, reopening the door to credit markets for the informal sector; in the 2000s, public banks increasingly catered to the needs of large farmers and corporate agribusiness groups. Regulated markets came to be treated as obstacles to efficient marketing. Ramakumar argued that the fundamental contradictions of the post-independence agrarian economy have not disappeared with economic globalisation; instead, the task of resolution of these contradictions has been rendered more complicated.

Solomon Lechesa Tsenoli, Minister for Cooperative Governance and Tribal Affairs in the Government of South Africa, in a paper titled **Agrarian Relations in South Africa**, discussed the agrarian situation in South Africa in the post-apartheid period. The paper analysed the attempt to redistribute land equitably, given the historical constraints imposed on South Africa by colonialism. Colonialism left the nation with land ownership patterns and landlessness characterised by exclusion based on race and by spatial distortions. The paper presented a sympathetic account of the successes and failures of South Africa's land reform policy, which is a case of "market-led" land reform, or what is known as a "willing seller, willing buyer" approach to land redistribution.

The presentation was largely on the role of the government in land distribution. As pointed out by Venkatesh Athreya, the paper raised important questions, such as whether the balance of class forces in South Africa was in favour of further

radicalisation of land reform or of a state-mediated – and compromised – settling of the land question.

Gregory Wilpert's paper, titled **Chávez's Legacy of Land Reform for Venezuela**, critically examined the extent to which Venezuela's land reform programme, now 12 years into its implementation, had been successful and effective, and discussed its prospects for the future. According to Wilpert, while Venezuelan land reforms have been able to bring about greater social justice in the agrarian sector, their ultimate success is challenged by (a) intimidation and violence by large landowners, (b) an inability thus far to ensure increased agricultural production and yields, and (c) insidious corruption in state institutions.

Sam Moyo, in his paper titled **Zimbabwe's Land and Agrarian Reform (1997-2013): A Political, Social, and Economic Balance Sheet**, discussed the implications of Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), which officially began in the year 2000. According to Moyo, while Zimbabwe's land reform programme did not result in a socialist revolution and was characterised by different kinds of socio-political problems, it nonetheless represented a rare example of political and economic radicalism. This radicalisation led to positive redistributive outcomes as a result of innovative socio-political mobilisation processes, interventionist state reforms, and on-going movements. Zimbabwe's experience suggests that redistributive land reform remains necessary to redress existing racial, social, and spatial inequalities, and in order to ensure socially inclusive agrarian societies.

The paper on Zimbabwe raised many insightful and contentious theoretical issues. The discussant argued that the paper appeared to project a binary between the political and the economic understanding of land reforms, and that the resolution of the agrarian question was important both to unleash the power of productive forces and for political empowerment of the dispossessed.

Book Release: Dalit Households in Village Economies

After the session, a function was held at which the book titled *Dalit Households in Village Economies*, the latest publication in the Agrarian Studies series published by Tulika Books, was released. **P. Ramayya** of the All India Agricultural Workers Union presented copies of the book to **Prakash Karat**, General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and to **M. S. Swaminathan**.

Recent years have seen new attempts to understand the socio-economic conditions of Dalit life in rural India. However, Sukhadeo Thorat's observation that "very few empirical studies have tried to study the phenomenon of economic discrimination" still holds true. The book is a contribution towards filling that gap. The book, based mainly on village-level and other empirical studies, is a contribution to the study of economic deprivation and exclusion among Dalits in rural India.

Session 3 (January 10): Agricultural Incomes, Agricultural Crises

Four papers were presented in this session. **Mahendra Dev** chaired the session and **Vineet Kohli** was the discussant.

In a presentation titled **Agriculture and National Income around the World: What is the Story?**, **Sanjay Reddy** examined worldwide national income statistics covering the past 50 years to show the near-universal tendency towards a diminishing share of agriculture in income and employment. This trend raises serious questions about the relative influence of agrarian interests in the economy and polity. There are implications across the economy, for example, in terms of the role of different sectors in the tax base, or the role of agriculture in creating demand and supply constraints. Changes in perceptions of the importance of agriculture are, in turn, a factor in the relative neglect of agriculture in productive investment that is visible in many countries, and in a growing urban bias in policy.

An important debate emerged during the discussion on the next presentation, by **K. Nagaraj, P. Sainath, R. Rukmani, and R. Gopinath**, titled **Farmer Suicides in India: Magnitudes, Trends, and Spatial Patterns**. The paper presented the most detailed and comprehensive analysis that exists at present of data from “Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India,” an annual publication of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). The analysis focused, first, on the magnitude of and trends in farmer suicides in India from 1997 to 2012, and, secondly, on regional patterns in the incidence and trends in these suicides. The paper argued that farm suicides were higher than general suicides in several States, particularly in the Deccan region and the heartland of India, and that farm suicides were directly linked to the crisis in agricultural production.

The paper by **Hannan Mollah and Vijoo Krishnan**, titled **The Unending Agrarian Crisis: Its Dimensions and the Struggle for Alternatives**, focused on alternatives to the neoliberal agricultural policy in India. Mollah and Krishnan — the General Secretary and Joint Secretary, respectively, of the All India Kisan Sabha — argued that only the implementation of alternative policies could ensure that the battle against predatory agribusinesses is won and neoliberal economic policies are reversed, and that redistribution of land and breaking up the concentration of land in a few hands was a fundamental requirement for such a turnaround. A substantial increase of public expenditure in the rural sector is required, both to enhance the purchasing power of the rural poor and to increase productivity in agriculture. The viability of agriculture must be ensured by a rapid and sustainable increase in productivity, higher returns, and absorption through a network of agro-processing industries in the cooperative sector. Public-funded agricultural research and extension work needs to be expanded and strengthened. Unequal Free Trade Agreements must not be signed. To protect the peasantry from the vagaries of world commodity markets, which are witnessing sharp price fluctuations, the government should follow a procurement policy which ensures that agriculture remains economically remunerative, and create a Price Stabilisation Fund, as suggested by the National Commission on Farmers.

João Manuel Fontes Dinis, Director of the Confederação Nacional da Agricultura, Portugal, presented a paper titled **Common Agricultural Policy and the Consequences for Farmers in Portugal (and elsewhere in Europe)**. He acquainted the conference participants with the working of the union of small and family farmers in Portugal. He argued that the European Union serves the interests of big capital from the “hard-core capitalist countries,” such as Germany, France, England, and Italy. Its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is an example of this bias: the CAP has led to the destruction of natural resources and biodiversity, the ruin and abandonment of small and family farms, and a large deficit in the “food balance-of-payment” of Portugal.

Session 4 (January 10): Land Use and Agricultural Production in India

Four papers on the problems of land use and agricultural production in India were presented in this session, which was chaired by **Ishita Mukhopadhyay** and for which the discussant was **Ravi Srivastava**.

In a presentation titled **Feeding India in 2030**, **Abhijit Sen** described the challenges facing food production and food sufficiency in India. He stated that available data and studies suggested a growth in agricultural productivity and factor productivity in agriculture in the current and projected periods. Taking issue with what he termed a “pessimistic” viewpoint among academics, he contended that in order to feed (at current levels) the projected population for the year 2030, the required rate of growth of crop yields, which is 1.6 per cent per annum over the 16-year period, is not only achievable but is much lower than the growth rate in agricultural yields and factor productivity witnessed in the period 2005–13 (approximately 3.5 per cent per annum).

In her paper, titled **Scarce Land: Issues, Evidence, and Impact**, **Sheila Bhalla** showed that there has been a secular decline in net sown area in India in the post-liberalisation period. This phenomenon has implications for food security, worker productivity, the distribution of land holdings, and the household incomes of farmers.

Takashi Kurosaki and Kazuya Wada presented a paper titled **Spatial Characteristics of Long-term Changes in Indian Agricultural Production: District-Level Analysis, 1965–2007**. The variables of concern included land-use intensity, the share of land under rice and wheat as a proportion of total area under food grain production, the ratio of crops other than food grains in gross cultivated area, the intensity of fertilizer use, and individual crop shares in gross cultivated area. The paper also proposed a new regional classification of Indian districts based on similarities in initial cropping and land-use patterns, rainfall, and initial conditions of and changes in irrigation, arguing that the proposed classification explained the spatial patterns of long-term changes at the district level better than existing classifications.

B. Venkateswarlu and **C. A. Rama Rao**, in a presentation titled **Dryland Agriculture in India: An Overview**, contended that rainfed agriculture could be made viable and sustainable if the processes of technology development and transfer, policy-making related to agriculture in general and rainfed agriculture in particular, and input and service delivery systems were more proactive, cohesive, integrated, and flexible. The solutions to the problems of rainfed agriculture had to be location-specific to account for the complexity and diversity of rainfed environments. Many of these concerns were reflected in the activities related to rainfed agriculture in the National Mission of Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA) being finalised under the 12th Five Year Plan. The emphasis is on evolving mechanisms and arrangements for support systems that enable technology adoption. The provisions of current development initiatives such as the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) and the IWMP (Integrated Watershed Management Programme) can be utilised to extend support to rainfed agriculture. Finally, if agriculture, including rainfed agriculture, is to be a sustainable and preferred choice of individuals in the long run, it needs to be a profitable enterprise and provide adequate income to support a decent standard of living.

Session 5 (January 10): Transgenic Crops in Agriculture

The two papers presented in this session dealt with the extent, feasibility, and adoption of transgenic crops in the Indian context. The session was chaired by **Ajay Parida**. **Jonathan Pattenden** was the discussant for the session.

In an important and synoptic review of the technical state of cotton cultivation in India, titled **High Density Planting: The Next-Gen Technology in India for Doubling Cotton Yields**, **K. R. Kranthi** discussed cotton yields in India in the context of the extensive cultivation of Bt cotton. The data show that the widespread shift towards Bt cotton from 2002 to the present has had a positive impact on cotton yield, cutting down crop losses and damage caused by the bollworm. This has also resulted in the increased acceptability of cotton exports from India. According to Kranthi, the poor export performance and stagnation of cotton yield in India from 2005 to 2013 was primarily because Bt cotton was available only as a hybrid and not as varieties to the farmers. The paper, which drew on research undertaken by the Central Cotton Research Institute, and included a summary of the technical reasons for low cotton yields, proposed new cropping techniques – particularly high-density planting of compact, non-branching varieties – to enhance yields from Bt cotton.

Ronald Herring, in his paper titled **Farmer Interests in Technology in India: From Bt Cotton to Bt Brinjal**, contended that there is a political puzzle in agricultural biotechnology in India: policy relating to two crops carrying the same transgene – *cry1Ac* in Bt cotton and Bt brinjal (eggplant/aubergine: *Solanum melongena*) – for the same purpose (resistance to some insect pests), and facing

the same authorisation procedures, produced opposite outcomes. Equally important was the fact that years of testing of the technology in both cases indicated similar agro-economic advantages to farmers and the sustainability of growing these two crops. Though the Government of India supports biotechnology as a project of the developmental state, only one crop has to date become legal. Farmers' interests were of demonstrable importance in the widespread adoption of Bt cotton, despite opposition from campaigners. Though the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) was more precautionary than the farmers (and State governments) were in regard to Bt cotton approval, it proved incapable of detecting or preventing the introduction of transgenic cotton before official authorisation. In Herring's succinct formulation, "there is a kind of an anarchic agrarian capitalism that produces its own energy... Bt cotton demonstrated the incapacity of the regulatory system to prevent farmer interests from outrunning the regulatory state." Although a coalition of forces in "civil society" attacked state science on cotton as being dangerously inadequate, Bt cotton spread to virtually universal adoption by farmers. Bt brinjal was approved by the GEAC after nine years of testing, but the Minister of Environment overruled and officially downgraded the GEAC, imposed a moratorium on Bt brinjal, and promised a new regulatory authority for biotechnology. In the politics of Bt brinjal, farmers' interests were largely missing; instead, Herring said, a politics of precaution assumed more attention than either the existing hazards in production and consumption of the vegetable or the interests of the developmental state, enunciated with early commitment to the technology. This division illustrated the fault line between the developmental state and the precautionary state, and the reasons for rejection of technologies in some crops rather than others.

Session 6 (January 10): Women's Issues

The session was chaired by **Jens Lerche**.

Saraswathi Menon presented a paper titled **Some Issues on Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Agrarian Studies** (co-authored with **Shahrashoub Razavi**). The paper identified certain areas in the field of agrarian research that are particularly related to women as a social group and are relatively understudied: (i) the significance of unpaid work (both subsistence and care), within the continuum of work, to people's livelihoods and well-being, as well as to the persistence of gender inequality; (ii) gender inequalities in land tenure institutions, and women's generally weaker claims and entitlements to land; (iii) women's generally weak political voice, and the constraints that stand in their way in claiming equality and justice, whether in response to violence or land dispossession.

Judaline Mulqueeny, Central Committee Member of the South African Communist Party (SACP), presented a paper on **Women in Rural Africa**. It provided a case study of women in rural South Africa in the context of a classical formulation of the agrarian question, and some comparisons with the rest of Africa.

Subhashini Ali, former President of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) and Vice-President, All India Agricultural Workers Union, was the discussant for this session. She gave critical comments based on insights and experiences of mass movements led by AIDWA on issues of gender and the agrarian question.

Session 7 (January 10): Incomes from Agriculture and Manual Work

The session was chaired by **B. Venkat**, Vice-President, All India Agricultural Workers Union. **Sripad Motiram** was the discussant.

Three papers were presented in this session, all based on data from the village surveys conducted by the Foundation for Agrarian Studies since 2005–6 under the Project on Agrarian Relations in India (PARI). **Vikas Rawal**'s paper, **Costs of Cultivation and Farm Business Incomes in India**, which presented findings from ten villages in five States drawing on the data archive, highlighted two points. First, the PARI data on costs of cultivation show that incomes from crop production were meagre for a large majority of cultivators in irrigated and rainfed villages. A substantial proportion of households in almost all the villages – ranging from about 5 per cent in Warwat Khanderao in Vidarbha, Maharashtra, to about 42 per cent in Rewasi in Sikar district of Rajasthan – incurred losses in crop production (a finding subject to the qualification that the data were for a single reference year). Secondly, the evidence from PARI data show that disparities across classes in ownership of land and other means of production resulted in differential outcomes in terms of incomes from crop production, and in terms of the capacity to cope with agronomic and economic resource constraints.

The paper titled **Household Incomes in Rural India: Results from PARI Village Studies**, by **Aparajita Bakshi, Arindam Das, and Madhura Swaminathan**, discussed the levels, distribution, and composition of incomes of households in 13 study villages in six States. The paper provided estimates of household and per capita incomes in these villages, and examined variations in incomes by caste and class. The contributions of the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors to total incomes were examined, as was the functional distribution of incomes. The study showed that, first, household incomes in the survey villages were low. Only one village had mean incomes above two dollars a day (an internationally accepted figure for income poverty). Secondly, villages with low irrigation intensity tended to have lower average incomes than did irrigated villages. The pattern was broken when a substantial section of the population had access to incomes from sources other than crop production. Thirdly, the distribution of household incomes was highly unequal in all the villages. Fourthly, there was a consistent pattern of income disadvantage among Dalit, Adivasi, and Muslim households. In all the villages, the mean incomes of Dalit, Adivasi, and Muslim households were lower than those of Other Caste households. Fifthly, the gap between socio-economic classes in terms of incomes

was huge. In every village, there was a small class of landlords, capitalist farmers, and rich peasants whose mean incomes were more than ten times those of manual worker households.

The paper titled **Manual Employment in Rural India: Evidence from PARI Data**, by **Niladri Sekhar Dhar, Aditi Dixit, and T. Sivamurugan**, studied features of employment among manual workers. There has been very little quantitative analysis of the extent of underemployment of rural workers in India, mainly on account of the lack of reliable large-scale data. The study, which used data from 10 villages, analysed the severity of underemployment among rural workers. The findings were as follows. First, hired manual workers constituted the largest single socio-economic class in almost all the villages. Secondly, men were able to take greater advantage of opportunities for non-agricultural labour than women were. Thirdly, feminisation of the labour force was seen in most of the study villages. Fourthly, there was widespread and severe underemployment among rural wage workers with a large proportion of them receiving employment for less than three months in an entire production year. Underemployment was even worse among female wage workers. Lastly, the low number of days of employment, accompanied by very low wages in agricultural tasks, pushed the majority of hired manual worker households below the official poverty line.

Yoshifumi Usami presented a paper titled **An Examination of the Recent Reported Rise in Agricultural Wages in India**, which examined recent trends in agricultural and rural wages in India as reported in the major sources of secondary data. This question is of particular interest in the context of recent debates about the role of employment generation programmes such as the MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme). There are five major sources of official data on rural wages: (1) Agricultural Wages in India (AWI), published by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture; (2) Cost of Cultivation of Principal Crops (CCPC), released by the Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices, Ministry of Agriculture; (3) Employment and Unemployment Surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSS EUS); (4) Rural Labour Enquiry Reports on Wages (RLE), produced by the Labour Bureau; and (5) Wage Rates in Rural India (WRRI), also published by the Labour Bureau. Usami's study showed that, according to these sources, the real wage rates for agricultural and rural labour had risen substantially over the last five to six years. However, this rise needs to be located in the context of long-term trends. Any growth in the recent period has to be seen against the backdrop of a long period of very low – even negative – growth of wages after the early 1990s. Other findings of his study were, first, that female wage rates had grown faster than male wage rates, thus reducing the male–female disparity; secondly, that agricultural wages had risen slightly faster than non-agricultural wages; thirdly, that there were substantial regional variations in growth rates; and fourthly, that the growth of agricultural wages decelerated in 2012–13, particularly in respect of wage rates for females.

Session 8 (January 10): Special Lecture on “The Media and Coverage of Agrarian Issues”

N. Ram delivered a talk on **News Media and Agrarian Issues**, in which he described the reach and composition of the news media in India, and outlined two main functions that ought to be served by the media: providing credible information and performing a critical-investigative-adversarial function. The power of the Indian media, he said, had declined, despite its growing reach and ability to attract the best talent. The core functions of the media had been compromised through manipulation of news analysis to suit political and financial interests, devaluation and degrading of editorial function and content, and systematic dumbing down of content. In explaining this phenomenon, Ram cited Prabhat Patnaik on media issues with respect to economic power and the hegemonisation of the media by international finance capital, the ascendancy of which has been promoted by the media at large. However, there were some exceptions and examples of uncompromised reporting – particularly P. Sainath, whose pioneering work on reporting issues of deprivation had generated widespread attention.

Ram said that the demands of journalism today have made superficiality and dilettantism endemic in the profession. The need is to raise the ethical bar and “unleash uninhibited criticism” of these incompetencies of the media. The media needs to be trained in depth, rigour, and methodology – an effort that cannot be achieved by the media itself. It is here that organisations like the Foundation for Agrarian Studies needed to intervene with their research expertise. He suggested that the Foundation should (a) conduct research on the news media’s coverage of issues that fall under the ambit of its research interests; (b) conduct workshops for journalists on methodology and the methodological rigour needed to cover agrarian issues; (c) play a role of advocacy both with the press and the reading public; and (d) contribute accessible, understandable, and interesting articles to the press.

Session 9 (January 11): Agricultural Extension and Rural Cooperatives

Balwinder Singh Tiwana chaired this session and **Sankar Bhaumik** was the discussant.

Two papers in this session dealt with the status of agricultural extension services in India. **K. Narayana Gowda (Agricultural Extension in India)** described and evaluated in detail the different types of agricultural extension systems implemented and planned in India.

Bheemeshwar Reddy (Access to Extension Services in India) examined the access of farmer households to different types of extension services, using data from the Project on Agrarian Relations in India (PARI) of the Foundation for Agrarian Studies, and from the Situation Assessment Survey of Farmers (SAS) conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). The paper also examined the

actual levels of spending on agricultural extension by the Government of India over the last three decades. It showed that the majority of farmers did not have access to any public or private sources of agricultural extension.

P. Krishnaprasad, Finance Secretary, All India Kisan Sabha, presented a paper titled **A Food Processing Cooperative in Wayanad**. Wayanad is a region in Kerala that was known for a high incidence of farmers' suicides. The paper chronicled the peasant movement that led to the establishment of a successful large food-processing plant – Malabar Meat – in Wayanad. The plant is collectively owned by peasants and workers.

Session 10 (January 11): The FAS-UNICEF Project on Child Well-Being, Schooling, and Living Standards

In this session, Venkatesh Athreya presented the main findings from the FAS-UNICEF project report titled **Child Well-Being, Schooling, and Living Standards**, written by **Venkatesh Athreya** and **Madhura Swaminathan** with assistance from **T. Sivamurugan** and **Chiranjit Poddar**. The authors of the report argue that, in the current context of social policy in India, the findings from 14 villages brought out very clearly the need for a massive expansion and strengthening of investments in child-related activities. Policies pertaining to basic education, health, and shelter need to be universal in scope, with special attention and effort placed on relatively deprived households. The authors stress the need to move away from policies designed specifically for “below poverty line” (BPL) households, that is, policies of narrow targeting based on an arbitrary expenditure poverty line. The findings of the report clearly show that the incidence of child labour is often higher among small land-owning households than among landless labour households. To ensure that all children are not working and are attending school also requires focusing on children who may belong to households that are officially above the poverty line (APL). Similarly, problems like lack of space in the house or the absence of an educated woman in the family do not necessarily disappear when a household comes into a higher asset ownership category. While backward districts and villages need special attention, so do the poor, particularly those who belong to socially deprived communities, in the more advanced villages.

Shamsher Singh presented findings from his study of **Basic Amenities and Housing in Rural India**, using data from the PARI villages. He showed that Dalit settlements were separate from the “main” village settlement in all the villages, and that the Dalit areas lacked basic infrastructure including all-weather pucca roads, street lights, open spaces for common use, and educational institutions, in almost all the study villages. Secondly, the pattern of access to amenities for households at different income levels indicated that incomes alone did not ensure an improved standard of living, unless these were very high. He argued that public intervention was essential to reverse historical discrimination and to provide access to adequate housing.

Tassew Woldehanna presented a paper titled **Shocks, Child Labour, and Children's Dropout from Primary School: Implications for Education Policy in Ethiopia**. This study was a part of the Young Lives Project in Ethiopia. The main objectives of his paper were, first, to analyse the impact of economic shocks on primary school drop-out rates, and, secondly, to analyse the effect of child work (paid and unpaid) on drop-out rates and on the completion of primary education. The main findings of his study were the following. First, given the shortage of school infrastructure and service provision in Ethiopia, the gap in access and enrolment between children belonging to wealthy classes and those belonging to poorer sections is very wide. Secondly, Ethiopia needs to close the enrolment gap between male and female children.

Renu Singh, in **Inequalities and Deprivations Faced by Children Growing up in Rural India**, presented findings from the Young Lives Project in India. The presentation stressed that poverty reduction strategies need to address childhood poverty: children deserve a special place in the anti-poverty agenda in order to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Many children are subject to multiple disadvantages in their household circumstances and with respect to aspects of social identity; these disadvantages cannot but have a serious long-term impact on their welfare. It is therefore critical that policies take the multi-dimensional nature of childhood poverty into account.

The session was chaired by **Madhura Swaminathan** and **Smita Gupta** was the discussant.

Session 11 (January 11): Classes in Rural India

This session brought together four papers, theoretical and empirical, dealing with the question of agrarian classes and class contradictions in contemporary rural India. The session was chaired by **Brinda Karat** and **John Harriss** was the discussant.

J. Mohan Rao presented a paper titled **Unfree Labour under Capitalism: A Contradiction in (Useful) Terms**. While negative individual freedom and class unfreedom are not incompatible, free labour under capitalism has to be a contradiction in terms. But capitalism, classically defined, is production by doubly free labour, which sharply distinguishes it from forms of unfree labour that characterise its pre-history. In the contemporary world, Rao argued, unfree labour is concentrated in the capitalist periphery, particularly in backward agrarian settings. He contended that keeping capitalism and unfree labour properly apart is a practical imperative of the continued use of these historically fruitful categories even if, as a corollary, unfree labour under capitalism must seem a contradiction in terms.

Jens Lerche's paper, titled **Regional Patterns of Agrarian Accumulation in India**, focused on regionally specific agrarian transitions in India today. He

argued that there are significant differences in agrarian growth and accumulation trajectories across the Indian States, and that this phenomenon is best understood as an outcome of major differences not only in agro-ecological conditions, but also in class constellations and the accumulation strategies of the dominant rural classes. According to Lerche, avenues open to dominant capitalist farmers coalesce around state-related accumulation, education and urban/overseas jobs, trading, agro-processing, and moneylending, as well as possible land sale. In some States, especially but not only in the South, agricultural capitalists have also moved into industrial production.

Praveen Jha presented a paper titled **Labour Conditions and Wage Employment in Rural India: A Note Based on Reflections from the Field**. It discussed the nature and composition of rural labour (particularly with regard to the diversification of activities in rural areas), wages and earnings, and employment–unemployment conditions, including the growing casualisation of labour and changes in labour contracts. The paper also explored some qualitative dimensions of the labour force, including, *inter alia*, changes in the nature of unfree labour and issues relating to the socio-political consciousness of working people in the countryside.

Biplab Sarkar's paper on **Farm Harvest Price and Cost of Production: A Quantitative Assessment of Agricultural Price Policy in India** analysed the costs of cultivation of different crops from 15 detailed village surveys by the Foundation for Agrarian Studies, and compared these estimates to the relevant minimum support prices (MSP). His analysis showed that, in seven out of 12 villages, the average farm harvest prices of paddy were lower than the corresponding MSP in the relevant crop year. Further, if the imputed cost of family labour was included in the cost estimates, the MSP of both paddy and wheat fell short of the average cost of production in all but one village. Further still, poor and middle peasants received prices that were not only below the MSP, but also below average market prices.

Session 12 (January 11): Poverty, Social Security, and Rural Credit

Sabrina de Cássia Mariano de Souza, Niemeyer Almeida Filho, and Henrique Dantas Neder presented a paper on **Access to and Inflation of Food in Brazil**. They argued that the main cause of hunger in Brazil is difficulty in access to basic foodstuff. Brazil is a pioneer in respect of laws, institutions, policies, and public awareness with regard to the right to food. Nevertheless, this paper argued, there are structural reasons that contribute to high inflation in food prices that affect the purchasing power of the people.

Pallavi Chavan summarised two papers in her presentation. The paper titled **Rural Credit after 2000: Evidence from RBI Data**, co-authored with R. Ramakumar, argued that there has been an increase in the number of rural bank branches and an increase in the volume of agricultural credit after 2000. However, the increase in

rural bank branches has not kept pace with the increase in population. There was a rise in the share of indirect credit and large loans in total agricultural credit. The overall trends indicated that the major beneficiaries of the revival in agricultural credit in the 2000s were corporate groups and other organisations indirectly involved in agricultural production, and not farmers who were direct producers in agriculture. The authors argued that even though rural credit witnessed a revival after 2004 and the number of rural bank branches rose, the increase did not bridge the gap between under-banked and well-banked regions in the country. There had been a revival in the growth of credit to agriculture, but the changing distribution of agricultural credit raised questions about how far it benefited rural areas, small cultivators, and under-banked regions in the country.

The second paper, co-authored with **Amalendu Das** and the FAS team, and titled **Contemporary Rural Credit System in India: Some Insights from Village Surveys**, analysed the contemporary rural credit system in India using data on household indebtedness from the surveys of 20 villages across nine States. The data used were from the FAS data archive. The village data indicated that over 40 per cent of rural households were indebted, and that the well-off tended to seek more credit than others. Although formal sources of credit dominated in the aggregate volume of loans, socially and economically vulnerable sections had low access to formal credit.

In a paper titled **Agricultural Production and Household Incomes in a Disaster Year: A Study of Melanjippattu Village after Cyclone Thane**, **Harshan Teepee** discussed the differential impact of the cyclone on land owners and landless manual worker households in a village in Tamil Nadu.

Ramya Ranjan Patel's paper on **Agrarian Relations, Landlessness, and Inequality: A Case Study of Undivided Kalahandi District** discussed the differential access to land across irrigated and unirrigated regions, and across different social groups, in Kalahandi district in Odisha.

The session was chaired by **Balwinder Singh Tiwana** and **Ishita Mukhopadhyay** was the discussant.

Session 13 (January 11): Climate Change and Farming Systems

The papers presented in this session focused on issues of climate change with specific reference to its impact on agriculture and on farming systems in India. **A. A. Nambi** chaired the session, and **Tejal Kanitkar** was the discussant.

The paper titled **Climate Change and Agriculture: Current and Future Trends, and Implications for India**, by **T. Jayaraman** and **Kamal Murari**, covered three major issues. First, it drew attention to some significant recent advances in climate science with regard to crop production and its relation to climatic variables. Secondly,

it surveyed the significance of climate variability and the occurrence of extreme climatic events for agricultural production in the context of present and future global warming. Thirdly, it discussed these results in relation to the economic consequences of climate change. This part of the paper focused on the need to understand the differential impact of climate change on agriculture across time, across regions, and across different socio-economic strata of producers.

The questions of who suffers the consequences of climate change, and what the nature is of public action required to protect their well-being, are among the key normative issues in the making of domestic and global climate policy. While not directly addressing the latter question, the paper provided some indications for policy by focusing in some detail on the former.

Usha Tuteja presented a paper titled **Impact of National Food Security Mission on Returns from Pulse Crops: An Empirical Assessment**. The paper focused on the slow rate of growth in the production of pulses and the decline in per capita availability of pulses in the context of a rising demand for and rising prices of pulses in India. The author argued that increased production of pulses is possible by means of area expansion and/or realising yield potential. While the scope of the former is limited, the second could be achieved if serious thought is given to the adoption of the full package of available improved technology. This would be possible if farmers received state support. Tuteja's study indicated that the National Food Security Mission has had a positive impact on the yields of pulse crops in Haryana, and that this positive impact has helped in augmenting production despite declining acreage.

In a paper titled **Homestead Cultivation: A Potential Land Use System**, **Jacob John** discussed the multi-faceted potential of homestead cultivation, a highly profitable and environmentally sustainable farming system. The findings of his paper are significant for regions such as Kerala, where the availability of land is severely constrained but there exists a rich wealth of trees and plants, and traditional knowledge.

Kaye Lushington presented a paper titled **The Registration of Plant Varieties by Farmers in India: A Status Report**. As a signatory to the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) Agreement of 1994, India was obliged to enact legislation that brought plant varieties within the general purview of intellectual property. The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001, was enacted in fulfilment of that obligation. Lushington's paper examined the issue of registration of crop varieties by farmers in India under this Act. Trends in registration did not indicate that the Act had spurred innovation. The right to registration of farmers' varieties has served primarily as a means to recognise the past contributions of farmers to the preservation of traditional biodiversity. The extent to which tangible pecuniary benefits have accrued to farmers who have registered their varieties has yet to be determined, and, in the circumstances, the value of farmers' varieties could

lie mainly in their use for further research. The lack of data on the use of farmers' varieties in India creates difficulties in determining their true role in the agricultural sector. The registration process may therefore be useful in ensuring that the use of traditional varieties is adequately documented. There is an urgent need to extend the five-year time limit imposed on the registration of farmers' varieties in order to ensure that all such varieties are documented and preserved.

Session 14 (January 11): Adivasis in Rural India

The chair and discussant for the session was **M. Kunhaman**, Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences. The four papers presented in this session brought out the specific vulnerabilities of Adivasi households in relation to the land question, and due to changing agrarian relations on account of urbanisation, the appropriation of land for non-agricultural use, and the settlement of non-Adivasis in traditional Adivasi villages.

V. K. Ramachandran presented a field report from two villages located in tribal regions from the PARI surveys. He noted that Adivasi villages were characterised by a special kind of underdevelopment, manifested in extreme backwardness with respect to technological and economic growth, human development indicators and social infrastructure, and levels of incomes and people's livelihoods.

Brinda Karat, Vice President, Adivasi Adhikar Rashtriya Manch (National Platform for Tribal Rights), presented a paper co-authored with **Vikas Rawal**, titled **Scheduled Tribe Households: A Note on Issues of Livelihood**. The paper provided an analysis of broad trends in socio-economic conditions among the people of the Scheduled Tribes, while recognising the substantial diversity that existed as a result of regional variations. The paper described changes taking place in the livelihoods of Adivasi communities in the context of the growth of capitalism in Adivasi areas. Capitalist development has had a distinct impact on Adivasi identity and culture. Adivasi populations are subjected to deprivation and dispossession; that very dispossession and change in habitat cause changes that, in turn, deprive them of benefits to which the Scheduled Tribes are entitled. Increasing dispossession has led to greater proletarianisation of rural Adivasi populations and has intensified socio-economic deprivation among them.

Saqib Khan presented a paper titled **Adivasi Struggles in Thane District since 1947 and the Role of the Kisan Sabha**, tracing the history of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) in Thane district, Maharashtra after 1947, i.e., after the Warli revolt. The main source material for the paper came from interviews with AIKS activists and leaders, and from certain secondary sources of information. After the Warli revolt, the AIKS mobilised the Adivasi people on issues of land, forest rights, wages, and other welfare issues in Thane. The paper documented and analysed the nature of this mobilisation and the demands raised by the AIKS, and the extent to which these demands have been achieved.

Govinda Choudhury's paper, titled **Land Tenure, Community Rights, and Forest Conservation in the Dooars of Eastern Himalaya: Linking Livelihood Security and the Forest Rights Act**, discussed the implications of the Forest Rights Act 2006 (FRA) for the Adivasi people of Eastern Himalaya. It focused on issues of land tenure and property rights in the forests, and their implications for forest conservation in this region. The paper also assessed the implementation of the FRA in Jalpaiguri district, drawing on field studies conducted from 2009 to the present by the author in forest villages of the district. The author argued in favour of going beyond recognition of land tenure in ensuring property rights to forest communities, and for making appropriate institutional changes for an effective conservation programme.

Session 15 (January 11): Studies on Rural Transformation 1

This was the first of two sessions that discussed rural transformation in South Asia as reflected in village studies conducted in recent years. **John Harriss** was the chairperson and discussant for the session.

Janine and Gerry Rodgers, drawing on several decades of work on Bihar, looked at changes in the agrarian class structure of the State from the 1980s to the present day in their paper, **Class, Occupational Change, and Inequality in Rural Bihar: 1981-2011**. They explored changes with respect to migration, incomes, inequality, and the composition of rural agrarian classes. They called for a reconceptualisation of agrarian classes in the light of the growing integration of rural households with the urban class structure.

Mahabub Hossain and **Abdul Bayes** presented a paper titled **Transformation of Rural Economy of Bangladesh 1988–2008: Insights from Repeat Sample Household Surveys**. Based on primary data collected from a national-level sample, the authors argued that per capita incomes in rural Bangladesh have grown significantly, owing largely to the growth of the rural non-farm sector. Farm incomes have also increased as a result of an expansion of irrigation, the adoption of modern seeds and inputs, and a vibrant land-lease market.

Awanish Kumar (in **Some Aspects of Employment and Labour in Marathwada, Maharashtra: Findings from a Village Survey**) explored changes in employment patterns and forms of labour in Karkatta village in Latur district, Maharashtra. He noted that there has been a shift in the dependence of the rural worker from agricultural work to non-agricultural work. In both sectors, however, Dalits and women obtained fewer days of employment than non-Dalits and male workers. In addition, he characterised some forms of non-agricultural employment (primarily in brick kilns) as being similar to forms of labour service.

Karan Raut's paper, **Some Aspects of Employment and Labour in Eastern Vidarbha: Results from the Resurvey of a Village**, based on a resurvey of Zanjiya

village in Gondia district, Maharashtra, recorded changes in the sectoral distribution of the work force, labour absorption and family labour in paddy cultivation, the number of days of employment in agriculture and non-agricultural sectors, and the intra-sectoral composition of non-agricultural work. Raut concluded that there had been a substantial diversification of rural work in the direction of non-agricultural work, mostly in brick kilns and construction.

Session 16 (January 11): Issues of Globalisation and Agriculture

The session was chaired by G. Ramakrishnan. Vijoo Krishnan discussed the papers.

In their paper titled **WTO and Agriculture: An Assessment of the Bali Outcome**, Biswajit Dhar and Roshan Kishore argued that the less-developed countries have been unable to shift the momentum of agriculture negotiations under the WTO in their favour. Developed countries are unwilling to yield any ground to developing countries, even on critical issues such as domestic food security. The Bali outcome provided a temporary reprieve for less-developed countries in which to “negotiate an agreement for a permanent solution to the issue of public stockholding for food security purposes” within four years. However, such a permanent solution seems improbable since the developed countries are unlikely to accept any amendment to the Agreement on Agriculture, which has benefited them at the expense of less-developed countries.

K. N. Harilal and V. Dhanya (in **On Disagreement between the Agreement on Agriculture and Tropical Agricultural Products**) discussed the problems of trade in specific tropical agricultural products under the WTO regime. Tropical agricultural products are generally grown in the less-developed countries, and are processed and consumed in developed countries. Unlike other agricultural products or manufactures, tropical products have not suffered from excessive protectionist policies imposed by the developed countries; rather, they have been traded freely and with little state intervention. The WTO regime has led to an increase in the volume of trade in tropical commodities, an increase accompanied by price volatility. The very nature of the value chain of tropical products, characterised as it is by a small number of players with monopsonistic buyer power in downstream nodes and intense competition among a large number of small players in upstream nodes, has led to instability in the market even when trade volumes have increased.

In his paper on **US Intervention in Indian Agriculture: The Case of the Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture**, V. Sridhar criticised the lack of transparency in the US-India Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture Education, Research, Services and Commercial Linkages (KIA). The KIA was positioned as a programme that would benefit Indian farmers. However, Sridhar argued, the KIA’s design is inherently undemocratic in so far as it circumvents existing Indian institutional structures. Secondly, the manner in which the agreement seeks to alter the nature and structure of the regulatory regimes governing agriculture can have a far-reaching impact on the livelihoods of the people.

Arindam Banerjee (in *From Agrarian Crisis to Food Crisis: Interrogating Some Global Interlinkages*) explored the implications of global processes of agrarian change for the global food crisis. He examined the global food crisis as an outcome of a broader strategy of export-oriented agriculture and income deflation.

Session 17 (January 11): Dalit Households in Village Economies

A broad overview of Ambedkar's views on agrarian reforms, poverty, and social and economic inequality in the Indian context was provided by M. Thangaraj, who presented a paper titled **Dr Ambedkar on Agrarian Reforms**. He discussed Ambedkar's ideas and policies with respect to agrarian reforms, and the rural and urban labour force. Anil Bhuimali presented a paper titled **Ambedkar's Contribution to Economics and Society and the Underprivileged**.

V. K. Ramachandran began by documenting discriminatory practices against Dalits in contemporary rural India, drawing on extensive village surveys conducted by mass organisations of Dalits, peasants, and workers (the Movement for the Destruction of Untouchability in Tamil Nadu, and the Struggle Committee Against Caste Discrimination in Andhra Pradesh). These are cases of direct discrimination, that is, the denial of universal rights to members of a group because of their membership in that group. He then turned to forms of socio-economic exclusion and discrimination. Drawing on data from 22 villages surveyed under PARI, Ramachandran presented evidence on discrimination in the sphere of education, ownership of land and other assets, household incomes and basic amenities. Caste is embedded in production relations, he argued, and there can be no end to caste-based exclusion and deprivation in India without a resolution of the agrarian question.

B. V. Raghavulu gave a detailed account of discrimination against Dalits, drawing on empirical evidence from Andhra Pradesh. He also examined the effect of empowerment measures initiated by various institutions, and concluded that without the eradication of caste, such empowerment measures or affirmative action cannot provide equal opportunity for all.

R. Ramakumar was the chairperson and discussant for this session.

Session 18 (January 11): Studies on Rural Transformation 2

The second session on rural transformation was chaired by **Vijoo Krishnan**, and **Judith Heyer** was the discussant.

Himanshu's paper on **Poverty, Inequality and Mobility in Palanpur** examined the process of income diversification and the increasing importance of the non-farm sector in the rural economy. Assembling data from surveys conducted in Palanpur

village in Uttar Pradesh between 1957 and 2009, Himanshu said that real incomes had more than doubled in the 25-year period. This was accompanied by a reduction in poverty. There was a gradual process of non-farm diversification under way in the village; such diversification had raised the incomes of the poor and weakened the barriers to mobility that confronted the poor. The increase in incomes and reduction of poverty did not, however, necessarily lead to a reduction in inequality at the village level.

Deepak Mishra's paper, **Agrarian Relations and Institutional Diversity in Arunachal Pradesh**, took note of the "regionally embedded" nature of agrarian transition and examined the nature of this transition in the North-Eastern State of Arunachal Pradesh. He argued that capitalist development in Arunachal has not led to a process of institutional convergence, but to one of "institutional adaptation, continuity, and hybridity." This institutional diversity, according to Mishra, is a deliberate policy choice of the Indian state.

Sejuti Dasgupta's paper, titled **Economic-Political-Economic: One Power Translating into the Other**, was based on her ethnographic work documenting the influence of the rural ruling classes on the formulation of agricultural policy. The study was conducted in the States of Chhattisgarh and Karnataka. She concluded that rich farmers and landlords have been able to influence the state in manipulating policy to serve their class interests at both the national and local levels.

Yuri Emelianov (in **Agriculture in Today's Russia**) documented the ruin of agriculture in Russia that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. He used a comparative method to analyse a range of economic indicators, including average consumption, investment in agriculture, improvement of land, and the production of mechanical implements, between the end of the Soviet period and the present day, in order to illustrate the stark changes that have occurred in Russia in the past two decades.

The main conclusion of the paper by Ravi Bhandari (**The Political Economy of Land Reform in Post-Conflict Nepal**) was that, despite a strong movement for the redistribution of land, led by the intended beneficiaries of that redistribution, a successful land reform programme has not yet been implemented in Nepal because other necessary institutional factors are not yet in place.

Session 19 (January 11): Migration and Economic Mobility

In recent decades, the extent of rural migration has risen, but scholarly studies have not been able to adequately capture the process and its implications. This session was devoted to examining patterns of migration among rural households. The session was chaired by S. Thirunavukkarasu, Secretary, All India Agricultural Workers Union, Tamil Nadu. Praveen Jha was the discussant.

In her paper, titled **Women and Migration**, **Indrani Mazumdar** examined issues relating to women and rural labour migration in contemporary India. She asserted that despite an increase in the size of the labour force engaged in the construction sector – a sector almost synonymous with migrants – the proportion of migrants is not likely to have changed. The increase in overall migration rates, she argued, could be explained by female migration for marriage.

Jayan Jose Thomas and **Yasodhara Das** (in **Migration in India: Evidence from PARI Data**) explored the extent and nature of rural migration based on data from the PARI study villages, by studying the nature of employment and migration destinations, wage levels and standards of living, and the economic and social profiles of migrants. They pointed out that remittances from migrants were a significant component of rural household incomes in several villages.

Bheemeshwar Reddy and **Madhura Swaminathan** presented a paper titled **Intergenerational Occupational Mobility in Rural India: Evidence from 10 PARI Villages**. The most striking overall observation was that intergenerational occupational mobility in the study villages was very low, with a mobility rate ranging from 15 to 43 per cent. In other words, roughly two-thirds or more of men remained in the same occupation as their fathers. Occupational immobility among rural manual workers was higher than among all other occupations in all the villages. Downward mobility from any other category to rural manual workers was higher than other rates of mobility, irrespective of social group. Further, Scheduled Caste men experienced much greater downward mobility than did men from other castes. The authors concluded that the boundaries of a village did not provide opportunities for upward mobility, particularly for Dalit manual workers.

Session 20 (January 11): Agrarian Crisis

Madhura Swaminathan chaired the session and **Venkatesh Athreya** was the discussant.

Prabhat Patnaik (in **Imperialism and the Agrarian Question**) argued that the classical formulation of the agrarian question, as formulated by Lenin and Kautsky, needs to be further developed, taking into account the changes that have taken place since that discussion, and the specificity of contexts influenced by colonial rule.

He outlined the unequal relationship between the “core” and the “periphery” in which the demand for tropical agricultural products in the former are serviced by the outlying regions at non-increasing prices. In the colonial era, this was achieved through income deflation by direct taxation and deindustrialisation. In the *dirigisme* era, the stagnation of prices occurred not due to direct income deflation, as was the case during the colonial era, but as a result of increased production on account of technological advancement and because of competition between countries of

the “periphery” for export markets. In the neoliberal era, income deflation was re-imposed on the outlying regions through policy prescriptions such as curtailing of government spending under the pretext of “sound finance.”

Professor Patnaik reasserted the importance of the “core of the understanding of resolving the agrarian question” – mobilising workers and peasants to break the land monopoly by radical land redistribution, to build collective forms of ownership based on this egalitarian distribution, and to advance from this bourgeois revolution to a socialist revolution. However, the phenomenon of globalisation has given rise to a few more “transitional demands”: (i) defence of landless, marginal farmers, and large sections of the peasantry from neoliberal policies; (ii) struggle against dispossession of the peasantry; (iii) resistance to corporate capital in agriculture; (iv) placing restrictions on shifts in land use from food grain production to crops other than food grain (unless it is justifiable on the criterion of “social rationality”); and (v) organising struggles to put forward the demands of the working people, and to make “schemes of succour”, such as the MGNREGS and the Right to Education, meaningful.

Venkatesh Athreya agreed with the view that the rise to dominance of international finance capital from the mid- to late-1970s, and the collapse of the erstwhile socialist regimes of Eastern Europe and the USSR, has enormously strengthened imperialism as a system and weakened the global struggle against it. It is also true that the imposition of neoliberal policies in most countries of the developing world under the aegis of rampaging imperialism constitutes an attempt at re-colonisation in a political economy sense (though not in a territorial sense). While recognising the setback to even the limited anti-imperialist pretensions of the big bourgeoisies and ruling classes of the “peripheral” countries that this turn of events implies, it is important to note the space for manoeuvre that still remains as well as the signs of multi-polarity that we observe in the international arena.

Athreya also discussed in some detail questions of the growth of productive forces under capitalism, including the development of productive forces in agriculture and activities related to agricultural production. He argued that, even in the current phase of neoliberal capitalism, it is not the case that tropical agriculture has remained stagnant throughout the period in all countries: in India, from 1990 onwards, we did not witness uniform stagnation but phases of stagnation.

The discussant agreed with the list of issues for struggle put forward by Professor Patnaik. He added that the struggle against landlordism and land monopoly, and against oppression based on caste, gender, and tribe, must be accompanied by vigorous struggles on the issues identified by Professor Patnaik.

Amiya Kumar Bagchi said that the agrarian crisis is connected to a crisis in human security and human survival. The majority of the people in the world, specifically in the

less-developed countries, are engaged in agriculture or in other types of employment characterised by informal and vulnerable conditions of work and labour. In the less-developed countries, this has meant that the incomes of urban and rural populations, of workers in informal and formal sectors, of people engaged in agricultural and non-agricultural work, and of men and women workers, have not converged. This holds important implications for human well-being and survival. Professor Bagchi contended that with the fall of the socialist regimes and rise to dominance of the neoliberal state, the advances of the last century are now clearly being reversed. First, there has been a stagnation and reversal of trends in human longevity in the last 15 years. Secondly, there has been a distinct reversal with respect to gains and advances in workers' rights and privileges, even in the European countries. Thirdly, as climate change shows, resource- and capital-intensive accumulation cannot be sustained if the well-being of the majority of the population is to be a policy commitment.

Session 21 (January 12): Planning for Agriculture and Rural Development through Local Governments

This session on decentralisation and its role in agriculture and rural development was chaired by **P. K. Michael Tharakan**. **A. Prasada Rao**, State Vice-President, All India Kisan Sabha, Andhra Pradesh, was the discussant.

Surjya Kanta Mishra, former Minister of Panchayats and Rural Development, Government of West Bengal, made a presentation on **Panchayati Raj and Its Role in Rural Development**, focusing on the role of the panchayat in bringing about changes in the structure of production and class relations by enhancing democratic decentralisation. According to him, there are three political yardsticks by which the success of panchayati raj systems in rural India are to be measured. These are: first, the extent to which they mobilised the rural masses; secondly, the extent to which rural development programmes implemented by them brought about changes in class relations in the countryside, and mobilised social groups that were victims of social and economic deprivation; and thirdly, the extent to which these institutions helped people understand the limitations of the system and ways to overcome those limitations.

Thomas Isaac, who was an organiser of the landmark People's Plan Campaign (PPC) in Kerala, made a presentation on **Land Reform and Panchayats in Kerala**, focusing on the interlinkages between democratic decentralisation and land reforms in the Indian context. Land reforms and democratic decentralisation are complementary processes; democratic decentralisation and block-level planning can contribute significantly towards agricultural development. He also argued that the potential of land reforms and of democratic decentralisation have not yet fully been realised anywhere in the Indian context.

Jun-ichi Okabe and **Aparajita Bakshi** presented a brief summary of their work-in-progress, titled **A New Statistical Domain in India: An Enquiry into**

Gram Panchayat-Level Databases. They argued that a new statistical domain has emerged in rural India as a consequence of the decentralisation programme initiated by the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution. The paper examined data sources at the gram panchayat level in relation to the data needs that would be generated if the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 were implemented comprehensively. The paper also used data from case studies of two gram panchayats in West Bengal and Maharashtra to describe existing data sources at the panchayat level in some detail, and to assess the quality and suitability of available data on local government.

Session 22 (January 12): Agrarian Relations in China, Vietnam, and Cuba

The papers from China, Vietnam, and Cuba presented in this session discussed the diverse experiences of the three countries in experimenting with different transitional forms. V. K Ramachandran chaired the session and Ashok Dhawale was the discussant.

The paper on China by Hu Leming and Ding Xiaoqin was titled **The Protection of Peasants' Rights and Interests in China**, and was based on data from a survey of 800 peasants in Hebei, Henan, Shanxi, and Inner Mongolia. The paper documented infringements of peasants' rights and interests, and linked them to the rapid advance of urbanisation and industrialisation, and the weakening of protection of peasants. It argued that the state and society have to respond to peasants' core needs, and take the policy of "building new rural areas" as an opportunity to protect peasants' rights and interests.

Pham Van Duc (in **The Policy on Agricultural Land and Its Impact on Agricultural Production and Peasants' Life in Viet Nam Today**) presented a review of land reform and land use policy in Viet Nam. He discussed the impact of land reforms under two heads: positive effects and unexpected effects. The positive effects of the implementation of the new land-use policies in Viet Nam have been the following: (a) peasants have become more enterprising and agricultural productivity has improved; (b) there has been a rise in the efficiency of land use; and (c) land policies have activated the agricultural land market in rural areas, resulting in more efficient allocation of farm land and the emergence of new industries in rural areas. The unexpected effects of new land-use policies in Viet Nam have been: (a) that the peasants enjoy limited benefits from land as land earmarked for agricultural use cannot be converted to other uses; (b) the distress sale of agricultural land is increasing, a phenomenon that has resulted in differentiation of the peasantry; and (c) the time period for which land-use rights are assigned may be too short and may not provide incentives for long-term investment in agriculture and land.

In her paper titled **The Evolution of Agrarian Relations in the Global Crisis: The Updating of Cuban Agrarian Relations**, Gladys Hernández Pedraza examined the situation of Cuba in the global context. She pointed to the implications of

fluctuations of food prices in a world in which 70 per cent of the world's poor live in rural areas, and depend directly or indirectly on agriculture. The huge price volatility of recent years has exacerbated the pernicious effects of neoliberal policies. Two general transformations in agrarian relations have occurred in the globalisation era: a boom in transnational agribusiness and the privatisation of thousands of millions of hectares of agricultural land. Consequently, there has been global impoverishment of peasants, especially in the less-developed countries.

The paper further analysed the state of agrarian relations in Cuba in a period of global crisis. It traced the major transformations in agrarian relations in Cuba over several decades, including recent attempts towards biodiversification and new policy reforms.

Ashok Dhawale commended the papers on the experiences of China, Vietnam, and Cuba for the insights they provided. Socialism, as described by Marx, classically entails social ownership of the means of production. The paper on Vietnam stated that "The state is the subject of ownership right (i.e. land belongs to the entire people with the state as the representative owner), [while] the masses, mainly peasants, are subjects of land-use rights." In China, too, agricultural land is socially owned. The paper on Cuba showed that when the revolutionary government came to power in 1959, 75 per cent of Cuba's agricultural land was owned by foreign companies and individuals. After 1969, over 70 per cent of agricultural land was turned over to the state, and vast colonial and neo-colonial estates were replaced by state-owned farms.

In each of these countries, however, there have been major subsequent changes that were aimed at promoting individual initiative and reducing bureaucratic inefficiency. In China, after 1978, the commune system was replaced by the household responsibility system, in which individual peasants were leased land on contract. In Vietnam, in 1988, similar rights were conferred on peasant households. In Cuba, in 1993, only 33 per cent of the land remained state-owned, while 42 per cent of land, 90 per cent of sugarcane cultivation, and 60 per cent of land under other crops were transferred to basic units of cooperative production, called UBPCs; this process was further extended after 2007. As a result of all these changes, agricultural production in each of the three countries expanded remarkably.

Today, new constraints, such as those caused by increasing fragmentation of land, have emerged in the socialist countries. Hence, long-term strategies have to be examined.

Session 23 (January 12): Concluding Session

The final talk of the conference was delivered by **Amra Ram**, President, All India Kisan Sabha. He commended the efforts of the Foundation for Agrarian Studies in advancing the study of the agrarian question from a Left perspective. In particular,

he was appreciative of the effort to combine careful fieldwork in villages in different agro-ecological zones of the country, with a theoretical understanding of political economy and Marxism.

Having been associated with organising the village surveys in Rajasthan, he noted that certain aspects that were hitherto unnoticed were brought out by the PARI studies (he referred to the findings of the Rajasthan round of the PARI surveys on the impact of migration on women's wages in Rewasi in Sikar district as an example of the detail that the surveys had been able to capture). He also said that the surveys had helped in understanding different forms of inequality that, as he knew from his own experience, existed in different regions of Rajasthan.

Amra Ram thanked the organisers and volunteers for their efforts in organising the conference. He congratulated the FAS on completing 10 years, and looked forward to many more years of people-oriented research from it.

Conference Core Committee and FAS staff:

Aparajita Bakshi, Amalendu Das, Arindam Das, Yasodhara Das, Niladri Sekhar Dhar, Aditi Dixit, Pinki Ghosh, T. Jayaraman, Secki P. Jose, Deepak Kumar, Chiranjit Poddar, V. K. Ramachandran, R. Ramakumar, T. Sivamurugan, Madhura Swaminathan.

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Conference Coordinator:

Deepak Kumar

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