Globalization and Future of the Rural-Agrarian in 21st Century India: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities

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India has the world's largest population employed in agriculture and related industries. According to the World Bank, about 43% of Indian population was employed in agriculture in 2019, and most of this population lives in rural areas. India has the world's largest population living in the villages. According to the Indian census of 2011, 68% of its population, i.e., 833 million people, lived in rural areas. Although there has been a steady decline in the agricultural employment and rural population, India is still a country with the population closely linked to agriculture and rural areas.

However, this does not mean that India's population, its employment and way of life are agrarian in the traditional sense. In recent decades, India's rural areas have undergone radical transformations due to the state intervention — agricultural programs and rural development policies. Increasing productivity, higher per-capita income, gradual income diversification, integration of agriculture with the market, and growing migration between cities and villages are indicators of such changes. However, these changes differ from the European urban transformation in the 18th century. The study of industrialization and modernization in India would be incomplete without focusing on villages and farmers. India's rural areas are also centers of caste- and class-based inequalities and discrimination.

Economic globalization and establishment of the World Trade Organization with India as a founding member, opened a new era for the Indian economy after 1991 and affected the Indian agricultural sec-

tor with contradictory consequences. Some economists argue that India's poverty has decreased significantly after India opened its economy. Others argue that this resulted in an agrarian crisis that had serious implications for Indian farmers (the number of farmers' suicides is a convincing indicator).

India celebrated 70 years of its independence, and the government promoted various academic activities on this occasion, while the Indian Council of Social Science Research presented their plan. For instance, the international conference "Globalization and Future of the Rural-Agrarian in 21st Century India: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities" was organized by the Centre for Political Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University in collaboration with the Indian Council of Social Science Research (*Azaadi Ka Amrit Mahotsava*) and Bharat Krishak Samaj (New Delhi). In India, the study of the rural and agrarian issues is generally considered as the domain of sociologists and economists respectively. Political scientists have rarely paid attention to these issues, except for situations when the rural-agrarian question acquires political significance and breaks the political course. This conference considered the agrarian question seriously, which was quite a deviation from the traditional academic approach of in the Indian political science.

The conference aimed at answering three major questions: (1) what are the new concerns of the rural-agrarian society in India are; (2) who are the new actors that would make changes in the Indian countryside; (3) what are the political factors that affect the traditional questions (land, labor, etc.) in the new political environment? The conference focused on five topics: challenges for theoretical generalizations under globalization, the role of markets and private sector in agricultural and rural development, gender issues, the role of the state in rural development and change, issues of labor and technology.

Key questions: Concepts, methods and theoretical exclusions

Sudhir Kumar Suthar, the convener of the conference, made the introductory presentation. He emphasized that the central task of the conference was to find right questions to explain the current and future challenges for rural-agrarian India. He suggested three questions to agriculture: in high politics — what are the major concepts and methodology to understand and theorize these changes; what are the existing or emerging marginalities determined by inequalities or climate change, including gender and labor discrimination; what is the relationship between the state, civil society and the market.

Professor Surinder Jodhka in his key note address proposed to discuss agrarian and rural changes through the method of *gup shup* (a creative space for considering new things, in a slightly casual form but with intention to make sense of things around us). He argued that in the last 100 years, several theories focused on the category

of post-enlightenment in Europe (modernization, Marxism, populism, etc.). These theoretical discussions considered rural and agrarian changes mainly as a transition — linear change and transformation — from primitive to modern, from feudal to capitalist.

However, these theories, despite claims of being historical, were ahistorical as based on the limited experience of Western Europe, which is manifested in discussions of rural-agrarian issues. For instance, although the modernization theory considers the rural is declining, Jodhka believes in the "persistent rural" for the population in rural areas increased. He insisted that Indian scholars need to overcome the euro-centric and teleological interpretations of change, decline and disappearance, and to distinguish the agrarian and the rural as only about 20% of rural households rely only on agriculture. India has experienced diverse trajectories of change due to its rural differentiation based on regional histories, class, caste and gender.

Binod Anand from the Confederation of NGOs of Rural India (CNRI) highlighted a gap in academic research and government policies when it comes to agricultural production, for instance, the field research was conducted mainly in Punjab, Haryana and cotton-growing regions. He argued that the global food chain was not democratic and had no intention to develop mechanisms to ensure that buyers all over the world would get access to farmers' products. He emphasized the need to focus on upward and downward links, post-harvest value chains, food diversification and coordination of relevant departments (which exceed 70) and ministries, especially the primary agricultural cooperative societies.

Amitabh Kundu, Former Professor and Dean of the School of Social Sciences explained the patterns of rural-urban migration and growing economic inequality in India.

Asmita Kabra from Ambedkar University Delhi in her valedictory address focused on regions which are at the margins of agrarian studies. She placed regions in central India in this category as they are not the beneficiaries of green revolution in a generally understood terms. She argued that the relationship between agriculture, forests and hills had to become a part of the discussion on agrarian relations, economy and society. She presented a case study of the recent Cheetah reintroduction that was widely supported. The dangers of ignoring the relationship between environmental concerns and society were clear in the contradictory rhetoric of 'home' for cheetah — the tribal groups displaced from the tiger reserve were made 'homeless'.

Globalization, food systems, and the role of private sector

Raka Saxena from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), in her special addredd talked about the possibilities of the

Indian agricultural exports. She emphasized that India was a net exporter of agricultural produce under globalization, which explains the need to study and develop a remunerative and productive agricultural sector. The search for right questions should focus on various groups of commodities in the Indian export basket, different markets, conditions for volatility and price changes, and right strategies for entering different markets by assessing one's comparative advantages. These questions are important for assessing the sustainability of the Indian agriculture and agricultural exports. Dr. Saxena focused on rice production which contributes to the overexploitation of ground water but is a major component of the Indian export basket. She proposed alternative models of agricultural development such as moving the production of rice from its traditional trans-Gangetic regions (Punjab, Haryana) to the eastern plateau, north-east India and eastern Himalayas, in which the productivity potential of these crops is still untapped.

Vijeta Rattani from the United National Development Program (UNDP) changed the focus from the agrarian sector to the broader category of food systems and insisted on addressing climate change issues not only in food production but also in the related fields — processing, distribution, waste and disposal. Thus, a sustainable food system is (a) economically and commercially feasible, (b) socially equitable, and (c) environment friendly. Currently the environmental impact of food systems is negative — agriculture, forestry and other types of land use are responsible for 24% of green-house emissions. Moreover, the current food system patterns determined the triple crisis — climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. Therefore, we need to broaden the idea of agrarian sustainability so that it implies not only production/supply but also consumption/ demand. Several challenges hinder the creation of a sustainable food system: its complex nature, lack of integrated approaches, fragmented governance, lack of equity, food wastage, energy-intensive food technologies, and lack of strong behavioral nudges. Dr. Rattani suggested to adopt local, contextual lifestyle choices.

Ajay Veer Jakhar, President of the Bharat Krishak Samaj, chaired the special session on the role of private sector and markets in agriculture and emphasized the market influence on farmers welfare and livelihoods. He argued that the challenge is to ensure the continuous development of markets as transparent, accountable and trustworthy institutional mechanisms. Gokul Patnaik insisted on the need in regulated markets due to the predatory role of middlemen and wondered about the best technology for the agricultural growth. Sachit Madan (ITC), described the positive sides of the contract farming and how it can solve the problem of unstable prices for women. He believes in free markets as ensuring more justice for farmers. Ved Sinha presented the ecological efforts of his company to lessen the damage from stubble burning.

Another session focused on other countries' strategies of rural and agrarian development, especially after the neo-liberal economic reforms. The session was moderated by Sanjay Pandey. Ahilan Kadirgamar described Sri Lanka's neoliberal globalization efforts and the current economic crisis. Sri Lanka adopted policies of import substitution and self-sufficiency but reduced the state's role in agriculture to providing fertilizer subsidies. The crisis erupted when fertilizers were banned overnight in 2021, which determined the 40–50% decrease in the agricultural productivity — a crucial factor of the current economic crisis. Dr. Kadirgamar attributed these changes to the decreasing importance of the issues of land, rural development and agriculture, which led to the redistribution of capital in favor of the city in the last 13 years. He defined the overnight government ban of fertilizers in order to make Sri Lanka an organic producer in 2021 as another manifestation of the neglect of the rural-agrarian crisis.

Alexander Kurakin made a presentation about the abandoned rural land and settlements in Russia due to the rural outflow to urban regions. Russian case is of a particular importance due to the government's focus on the national food security as a combination of independence, self-sufficiency and 'sovereignty' in food production. Kurakin emphasized the changing patterns of the agricultural production in Russia in terms of both nature and scale: households' production (an opposite of collective farming which had historically prevailed in Soviet Russia) intensified after the crisis of the 1990s, when the new agricultural classes started farming. Today family farms compete with corporate farming in marketing and scale of production.

Rural-agrarian India in politics

Rural India is actively involved in politics unlike the countryside in Europe or Russia, in which urbanization, migration from rural areas and depeasantization led to depoliticization of the countryside. Rural India is a site of the active political mobilization and resistance. India has recently witnessed a massive farmer agitation at the outskirts of its capital Delhi, and this rural unrest was discussed at the session chaired by Alexander Kurakin from the RANEPA.

H. Sylendra from the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) considered different state legal compulsions in connection with the peasant struggle against them. Shamsher Singh from the Flame University (Pune) argued that we should consider farmers' movement not as purely spontaneous but as a way to get heard and to oppose the state's attempt to disenfranchise them. Mekhla Krishnamurthy from the Ashoka University (Haryana) presented interesting facts about the farming laws and agricultural market. She

argued that those laws were basically agricultural market laws rather than farmers' ones. India never had a strong state-run agricultural market (*mandis*) system, which is why farmers' response to the laws differed by region. Amod Shah from the ISS (Netherlands) described the political economy of coal mining and suggested alternative ways to combine agrarian and climatic concerns. Harinder from the JNU denied the presentation of farmers' movement as a unified political moment due to the contradictions in the farming community and farmers' protest (on the example of the Dalit land rights movement in Punjab).

Regionalities and marginalities

Scholars also considered rural changes and agrarian development as leading to various types of marginalization, land grabbing and climate destruction. Ravi Kiran argued that despite the use of alternative sources of energy (like solar pumps) ground water exploitation had not decreased in Rajasthan, and equipment ownership patterns still affected class relations. Gurkirat Kaur described the changes in the meaning of ecology determined by irrigation and modernization in Ganganagar known as the food basket of Rajasthan due to the Indira Gandhi canal. Other issues were the monocultures' productivity in the modernist sense rather than in the regional agro-ecological perspective; the developmental regime as creating ambiguous metanarratives of regional wastelands and, thus, a strive for productivity. Rashi's presentation showed that rice mills served as the ground for capitalist accumulation in Chattisgarh, thus, determining the political economy of this state.

The special session focused on the role of women in rural and agricultural development: although women are actively involved in farming activities and their share in farming increases with the feminization of agriculture, the representation of women in popular culture and decision-making in agriculture is still marginal. Shipra Deo argued that this had significant and adverse consequences for both agriculture and women farmers who do not have access to credit and other resources. Dr. Deo believes that we need to increase women's representation in agricultural decision-making and refers to the Food and Agricultural Organization's claims that if women have equal access to resources with men, they can achieve the same productivity. There were attempts to strengthen the women's position in the agricultural sector: in 1938, the national women subcommittee was established; several acts were adopted such as "Sustainable Development Goals", "Hindu Succession Act", "Forest Rights Act"; some institutions were created — Farmer Producers Organizations, women cooperatives, NGOs like SEWA, PRADAN, PANI, and so on. These efforts should be continued to ensure that women get the due recognition and rights in the agrarian sector.

The Indian state took serious measures to ensure rural development. However, such measures' outcomes depend on multiple factors, such as regional differenced in the adopted policies. Some states consider agricultural development as a strategy to fight poverty, while others focus on urbanization or industrialization. These decisions affect the measures of rural development taken in other parts of the country.

Prachi Hooda studied gender relations and changing social milieu in rural Haryana through the everyday life of women, focusing on the changing interpretation of femininity as affected by the sports culture. Based on the government's Digital India initiative, Sarika Dixit explained the impact of the policy on lives and economic empowerment of tribal women in Alirajpur: the digital gap can be closed by the special service centers for women and a targeted gender approach. Prabhakar Kumar presented the canal development projects as a means of the state development policy: for instance, the Kosi River canal should increase agricultural productivity in the Kosi-Seemanchal region. Raya Das used lots of the economic data from the West Bengal state to present the pluri-locality and pluri-activity of farming sector as a manifestation of diversification determined by the lack of farming opportunities.

Jiaul Haq described the patterns of migration from the Seemanchal region (rural Bihar) and denied the conventional explanation of migration as an escape from economic despair. Migration became a way to overcome poverty for the first-generation migrants allow the next generations to make more lucrative careers. However, this economic prosperity brings contradictory changes: on the one hand, we see better attitudes to education and professional training and an increase in political independence; on the other hand, migrants adopt upper class/caste norms including restricting women's employment.

Supriy Ranjan focused on the Katihar region in Seemanchal to examine communality in the region where Hindus and Muslims developed an "antagonistic tolerant" relationship with few riots and pogroms. When explaining the growing communalism, Ranjan emphasized the rise of Bajrang Dal which tries to capitalize on urbanization in order to mobilize communal sentiments in the form of riots and clashes.

The major change in the development of rural areas near metropolitan areas is the rise of real-estate and rental economy. Vishesh pointed to the shift to rental economy from agrarian economy in Delhi — as the capital city it occupied more and more land, which made people rent out their houses. Thus, the economic identity of many migrants to Delhi changed to renting out as their primary occupation. On the one hand, this strengthens the caste system; on the other hand, this facilitates socialization and social ties of other kinds (family, friendships, etc.).

Sumit addressed an important and sensitive issue of mental health of small and marginal farmers in Madhya Pradesh. Despite growing

agricultural production, the state ranked 4th in India in the number of farmers suicides. Sumit believes that mental health issues were almost forgotten under and after the COVID-19 pandemic and suggests using the DASS survey method and creating more opportunities and assets for farmers.

Scholars from different parts of India took part in the discussions during the conference. They highlighted various concerns related to food security, seed sovereignty, the threat to land in view of increasing focus on infrastructure building etc. students also highlighted challenges of inclusion in agriculture and how it is absent from the current debates on agrarian studies in India.

Overall, the conference highlighted those crucial issues that would adversely affect the rural and agrarian landscape of India. There is a need to focus on the issues of equity, inclusion and social justice in the policies of rural development. The state should pay more attention to both rural and agricultural development, combining effective social and market measures, while scholars should suggest institutional mechanisms for such development.

Глобализация и будущее сельского хозяйства в Индии в XXI веке: проблемы, вызовы и возможности

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