

SUMMARY REPORT

Network of Rural and Agrarian Studies (NRAS)

Sixth International Conference

WHITHER RURAL COMMONS?

STATE POLICY, NATURAL RESOURCES AND RURAL INDIA

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INTRODUCTION¹

The importance of commons such as forests, grazing lands, water bodies, and fisheries cannot be underscored enough as they provide a wide range of raw materials that cater to the food, fodder, fuel, grazing, medicinal, construction, and artisanal raw materials needs of rural people. Starting with Garrett Hardin's (1968) work that brought to the policy forefront the 'tragedy of the commons' to Elinor Ostrom's (1990) pioneering work on governing the commons, the commons have been at the centre stage of debates on development, sustainability and environmental challenges. Broadly, the study of commons has focused on the management and governance of common pool / common property resources in the face of degradation. The commons have faced threats from direct state appropriation (both the colonial and independent state through the forest department, for instance) and the marketisation and privatisation of resources including enclosures by powerful individuals within the community and / or by corporate interests aided by a pliable state.

In India, N. S Jodha's seminal work (1986, 1990, 2000, 2001) has been instrumental in shaping the understanding of the commons or common property resources (CPRs) as they are called. Beginning with colonial enclosures of the forests and the overtaking of commons such as grasslands and water bodies by the colonial state, independent India continued with similar policies, especially of labelling many CPRs as 'wasteland'. Other research on the commons has looked at forests (Agarwal 1986) and grazing lands (Damodaran 1988). Another front of conflict has arisen with the displacement of forest-dwelling adivasi groups to make way for national parks and sanctuaries (Sharma 2011). There has been a growing call for decentralised management of CPRs. Yet, those arguing for community-level governance have had to contend with caste, class and gender hierarchies in shaping access to the commons and influencing the nature of governance. Barring a select few monographs that review village-level institutions shaping the governance of common resources (Wade 1998, Brara 2006), there has been little systematic engagement with this issue in the field of agrarian studies.

With the growth of intensive agriculture, the threat to the rural-commons has increased over the last several decades, and post-liberalisation, the growth in corporate and industrial interest in water, land, forest and fish resources has worsened the situation, in terms of both inequity and conservation of CPRs. The Indian state has been the conduit for both preserving the commons (through wildlife and forest conservation projects) and destroying them (through the facilitation of enclosures like SEZs, mining leases, and exclusive water rights, to name a few). Various experiments in community-led management of common pool resources, such as joint forest management (JFM) committees have had mixed results, with the state apparatus and local politics playing a crucial role in shaping outcomes (Murali et al. 2003). Given the

¹ This summary report has been prepared by Richa Kumar, Indian Institute of Technology Delhi with rapporteur support from Sailen Routray, Centre for Human Sciences, Bhubaneswar, Natasha Koshy, Indian Institute of Human Settlements, Bangalore, Vrinda Acharya, JNU, Delhi, Neeraj Kapoor, PRADAN, Delhi, Anand Prakash, IIT Delhi, Debottam Saha, IIT Delhi, and Abhigya, IIT Delhi. The theme of the conference was originally formulated by Sudhir Kumar Suthar, JNU, Delhi and the concept note was jointly written by him, Richa Kumar, IIT Delhi and AR Vasavi, Independent Scholar, Bangalore. They also formed the program committee for the conference.

growing degradation of natural resources globally, with the growth of extractive economies (mining and real estate), increasing usage of chemicals in agriculture, the loss of biodiversity through monocultures, besides the increasing pressure on rural populations having to survive on already degraded lands, the idea of the ‘rural-commons’ can be a useful frame through which to understand these transformations.

The contemporary agrarian crisis is shaped not only by the immediate needs for socio-economic survival; it has brought forth several moral, ethical and political questions to the forefront. The sustainability of natural resources poses existential dilemmas on questions of ownership, on the relationship of humans to ‘nature’, and on the very framing of ‘nature’ through the lens of a ‘resource’, to name a few. With the rural itself being marginalised in favour of the urban, both, spatially and culturally, what does this mean for the rural-commons? In the last few decades, the commons have been interpreted in a global sense with the idea of the ‘knowledge commons’ associated with seed saving and biodiversity (Herdt 1999, Kloppenburg 2005, Patnaik et al. 2017). In addition, our concerns should also be extended to understanding how global warming and climate change are impacting common resources.

The **sixth international conference of the Network of Rural and Agrarian Studies (NRAS)** proposed to bring back the issue of the rural commons to the forefront of current debates on the future of agriculture and the transformation of rural India. Whereas past NRAS conferences have looked at: the multiple definitions of the rural and the agrarian (Bhopal 2014), the transformations of the rural through new technologies and new market arrangements (Allahabad 2015), the relationship between urban and rural flows of resources and people (Bhubaneswar 2017), this conference at **Central University Gujarat (2018)** sought to bring together scholars to **rethink—spatially, physically, socially, economically, culturally, and even philosophically—the relationship between the commons and the rural.**

The conference had six technical sessions as follows:

1. Understanding and Interpreting the Commons
2. Seeds as Commons
3. Governing the Commons: Water
4. The Politics of Land
5. Appropriating the Forest: Commons and Community Rights
6. Sites of Contestation: Managing the Commons

A panel discussion with farmers from near Gandhinagar was organised with translation done by professors from Gujarat Vidyapeeth. The sixth conference also included a mentoring session for students from the region as part of the outreach activities of the NRAS.

The NRAS expresses its deep gratitude to Prof. Dhananjay Rai and Prof. Tulika Tripathi for organising the conference in the most professional manner. It is also thankful to the Hon’ble Vice Chancellor, CUG, Prof. SA Bari and Dean, School of Social Sciences, Prof. Indira Dutta for their support and encouragement.

The NRAS was started in 2010 by Prof. A.R. Vasavi with a view to bring back the concerns of rural societies and livelihoods into mainstream academic and policy discussions. The broad objectives of the NRAS at one level, was to get researchers back to the rural space and to encourage research across multiple disciplines. Secondly, it seeks to make efforts towards inclusion of rural and agrarian issues in school and college curricula. The NRAS also seeks to bring to the fore the question of how do academics engage with policy making regarding rural and agrarian spaces. It has held six conferences, four mentoring workshops and one policy conference between 2010 and 2018 across India. These have been held in collaboration with the National Institute of Advanced Study (NIAS), Bangalore, Annamalai University, Chidambaram, Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM), Bhopal, GB Pant Institute of Social Sciences, Allahabad, Nabakrushna Chaudhury Centre for Development Studies (NCDS), Bhubaneswar and the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS), Simla.

The NRAS expresses its gratitude to the Ford Foundation, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) for supporting this conference at the Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar.

MENTORING AND OUTREACH SESSION

The Fourth NRAS Mentoring and Outreach Session held on the third day of the conference saw the participation of 15 scholars paired with 12 mentors. Each scholar received mentoring from two mentors: from the first mentor on their written submission sent beforehand and from the second mentor on an oral presentation of their submission made on the spot.

Feedback from the scholars was very positive with the one-on-one format being appreciated. Mentees expressed satisfaction in terms of the support and comments they received on their work. Suggestions included providing more time to each scholar to discuss with a mentor, presenting the paper to all mentors and receiving feedback from a larger group (including a general audience), better pairing of mentors and mentees according to disciplinary area, and accepting abstracts / papers in other Indian languages. There was also a need expressed to hold a writing workshop that could provide guidance on paper writing (journal articles for example) as well as proposal writing.

INAUGURAL SESSION

Inaugurating the conference, Professor Indira Dutta, Dean of the School of Social Sciences, CUG, briefly discussed the emergence of the idea of commons referring to the seminal piece by Garrett Harding—‘The tragedy of commons’. Dr. Dhananjay Rai, co-organiser and Assistant Professor, CUG, introduced the theme of the conference and suggested that the idea of commons provides a crucial premise for participatory decision making and negotiations while acknowledging the institutional challenges faced in the process. Dr. Richa Kumar gave a brief summary of the aims of the NRAS and invited everyone from the audience to contribute to the interdisciplinary space and think about their engagements with agrarian issues in the domains of academic research, policy making and teaching.

Dr. Sudhir Kumar Suthar discussed the significance of bringing together the rural and the agrarian. He noted that India is a unique case where the population is largely rural and agriculture is their mainstay. This is exceptional because most countries are agrarian but are not necessarily rural. However, India is struggling to retain its rural character. There are different kinds of contestations within the urban space as well. Referring to Polanyi’s idea of ‘the great transformation’ he argued that it is important to analyse how both the rural and urban are transforming each other.

Shri. S.D.P. Sharma, General Manager, NABARD Gujarat discussed NABARD’s interventions with regards to ‘commons’. NABARD as an organisation has paid significant attention to villages. Their representatives have gone to the villages and have been working there. He suggested that exploitation of the commons by those who have control over a larger share of resources restricts access and leads to alienation of voiceless communities along with resulting in the withering away of commons. There is a need to promote need based use, responsibly, in order to prevent this.

For example, using ground water for sugarcane cultivation leads to the exploitation of voiceless communities. He argued that financial development lies at the core of sustainability measures and for undoing exploitation of vulnerable sections. He discussed various interventions made by NABARD in Gujarat, such as the tribal development fund, watershed development fund and the climate change adaptation fund, solar power and micro-irrigation projects. He said that these projects try to utilise the resources in the village to make the projects work and that the profits go back to the projects.

The Keynote address was given by **Prof. Y.K. Alagh, Hon’ble Chancellor, Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar** on the **Changing Contours of Land Policy and the Commons in India**. He emphasised the need of a larger policy frame in which the discussions on ‘commons’ can be incorporated. He said that while local action is important, relationships and interlinkages are crucial. There is need for identifying champions for projects and interlinkages and the types of institutions and rules through which the cause of the commons can be furthered.

He questioned the institutional development policies and emphasised the need to understand agricultural technology and resource management. This was not being anti-

technology but embedding technology in the process of development. There is a need for time-honoured practices for saving the commons but it also raises the question of being able to keep up. There is a need of organisations where 'tribal' people can work together with producer cooperatives and there are many success stories in this domain. He said that the farmer is sacrificed by the onslaught of big corporations by citing the example of farmer producer cooperation in coffee cultivation. There is a need for a shift from crop-oriented policies to production oriented policies.

The question of land is very crucial in terms of commons. Colonial policies and laws played a significant role in shaping the access patterns of forests by aboriginals and tribes, which were collectively referred to as adivasis by the colonial government. He said that land rights are important and the question of collateral and land is crucial. While there should be land markets, at the same time common access should be retained. This will require planning by the planning commission and add to the cost of land. However, you have to give the farmers their share and then acquire land. He underlined the importance of land use planning and taking into account non-agricultural use on land which is not a part of the forests. Land use policies should not alienate the farmers. It is imperative to have a process for protecting the commons and negotiating global trade.

In his Presidential Remarks, Prof. S.A. Bari, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar said that subsistence usage of commons by tribals needs to be protected and these issues need to be taken in to consideration by academic research as well as policy makers. Professor Bari acknowledged IIT Delhi as the knowledge partner of the event and congratulated Professor Indira Dutta, Dr. Dhananjay Rai and Dr. Tulika Tripathi. He said that he would like young teachers to come forward for these programs and bring together people from different organisations.

TECHNICAL SESSION 1: UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING THE COMMONS

The session was chaired by Prof Y. K. Alagh, Chancellor, Central University of Gujarat.

Reimagining the Rural Commons – Lessons from the Past

N. Rajaram, Former Professor and Dean, Central University of Gujarat

N. Rajaram, in this presentation, examined the nature of 'management' of the relationship and the tension between state, economy, and society. He examined the collapse of the Soviet Union and some features of globalization, reflecting upon neoliberal features such as hypergrowth (companies growing annually at the rate of more than 40%), privatization & commodification (he showed a can of packaged air from Hawaii as an example of how even air can be commodified), integrated and merged economies of all countries and centralization in decision making.

In response, he analysed four cases of collectivization and cooperatives to understand how alternative pathways have fared across the world—the Israeli kibbutz, the Chinese commune during the Great Leap Forward, and milk and cotton cooperatives of Gujarat. The kibbutz was amongst the earliest attempts in the 20th century of the co-operative way of living through voluntary participation and generating socio-economic development. The kibbutz emphasized economic equality and believed that collective good and individual good can be managed. With the formation of the Israeli state, the growth of the kibbutz declined, and in the late 20th century, with new technologies (mechanisation in agriculture and industry) and changing values (market oriented), the kibbutz was 'left behind'.

In contrast, the Chinese commune was run along military lines and followed a top-down approach, which had disastrous consequences. The milk cooperatives of Gujarat are management dominated and function like a milk producer company—they have survived now and can even take on MNCs. However, cotton cooperatives followed the principle of pooling (tried to sell when prices are high), but after 60 years they are facing challenges due to changes in technology. He emphasized that these co-operatives have not tried to be different from the private ginning and pressing factories in their attitude to wage labor. He further emphasized that this process was enabled by the Gujarat government which encouraged market forces.

He concluded by emphasizing that today when the state is itself promoting market forces it is difficult to preserve the commons. If commons have to be protected, then forces of the market should not be brought into commodities which are essential to human beings.

Common to Whom? Environment and Development-Making Practices in Uttarakhand

Natasha Koshy, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bengaluru

Natasha examined the pattern through which ecological, political and social get co-constituted in the context of commons. She does so by looking at the variations in understandings and practices of the (rural) common good. She did her ethnographic work in three villages situated in the Parvathy river valley of Bagheswar district for 14 months.

She uses the lens of environmental subjectivities (first formulated by Arun Agrawal) to understand different forms of forest governance and shift in environmental consciousness. She explained how the rural-urban and environmental landscape is changing in Uttarakhand by giving examples of the growing out-migration, construction of dams and associated environmental risk, environmental disasters and decrease in Uttarakhand's forest cover. She also explained how the change in agricultural practices, reduction in livestock holdings and human-wildlife conflict were associated with different forest management practices and how things had deteriorated,

She examined local attitudes and multi imaginaries of how people live and relate to new forms of environmental governance. She further explained how capitalistic transformation in Uttarakhand was happening by giving examples of appropriation of mountains and changing nature of consumption that privileges a shift away from natural resource-based livelihoods. She concluded by emphasizing on the need for a new understanding of the commons that account for the dynamism of a changing rural-urban landscape and environmental subjectivities.

Exploring the Changing Commons in the Rural: A Case Study of Chamba and Puducherry

Krithi S. Assistant Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad

Krithi examined the changing nature of commons and its relevance in today's context. She has conducted surveys and interviews in Chamba (N=300 HH) and Puducherry (N=200HH). Main findings from her survey showed that in Chamba, Uttarakhand, more than 85% of the sample households used at least one produce from the commons. In rural Puducherry, more than 50% of the sample households used at least one produce from the commons. But such use is highly tilted towards the poor and marginalized sections, with about 95% of the lowest income quartile sample households in Chamba and 72% of the lowest quartile of sample households in Puducherry using at least one produce from a common.

She examined the changing nature of groundwater ownership. Groundwater doesn't remain common any longer and large farmers have access to private sources of water. In Chamba, now water is drawn under private ownership and more than 75% of proposals for private ownership came from private companies. In Puducherry, tank water is getting privatized and post-2007 witnessed renewed forms of informal contracts, diversion of tank water to fish cultivation and diversion to the private owner. Landless and small farmers are

alienated from tank water. She explained the process through which the state is withdrawing from ownership and management of water tanks and playing an active role in rent collecting. She further said that the state is disengaging from the production and consumption process. She concluded by emphasizing on the need of the state to engage itself in the process of production and distribution as local institutions can become exclusionary.

The Commons as Place, Resource, Usage, Memory: Perspectives from Western Awadh

Sudha Nagavarapu, Research Associate, Sangtin Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan (SKMS), Sitapur district, Uttar Pradesh, Richa Kumar, Associate Professor, IIT Delhi, Surbala Vaish, Sangtin, Sitapur and Richa Singh, Sangtin, Sitapur

Sudha began by explaining that this paper was a part of their larger research project looking at the transformation of diets through a hunger and nutritional lens. The findings in this paper were based on focused group discussions with older people across caste, class and gender (n=120) in 12 villages of the Western Awadh region which sought to find what they ate in the past (got from the commons, got for free) and where was the food sourced from. These discussions showed that the commons played a crucial role in shaping diet diversity and alleviating hunger in the past. She classified commons into two types—de jure (official commons—forest and water bodies, fish and lakes) and de facto commons (not officially recognized—fallow lands, local fruit trees, edible weeds in fields with traditional farming practices).

She examined the process through which commons have changed over the past 50 years. She explained that post green revolution, advent of new irrigation systems and agricultural technologies brought about an agricultural transition in this region. It increased the demand for land, changed cropping patterns and cultivation practices. All this reduced the availability of foods from the de facto commons. Large parts of the de jure commons were ‘redistributed’ under land reform / land consolidation activities and lost due to encroachment.

She further explained that for marginalized communities, the past is associated with hardship, deprivation and hunger. She linked this to historical inequity in access to resources and social discrimination. In the present, respondents from these communities said that they were no longer hungry. However, nutritional standards are alarming in this region. Respondents felt they had a more comfortable life, yet no strength in their bodies (*‘abhi aaraam hai par taakat nahi hai’*). This contradiction needs to be understood in the wider context of the loss of food diversity and the demise of the commons.

Commons in "no-man's land": Status and governance of rural commons in the urban fringes of Bengaluru city, India

Seema Mundoli, Research Associate, Azim Premji University and Harini Nagendra, Professor, Azim Premji University

Seema's presentation examined the status of rural commons in villages in the fringes of the metropolitan city of Bengaluru, Karnataka. She examined how the rural commons in the city fringes were undergoing changes in status, use, perception and governance. A mixed methods (remote sensing and spatial analysis, archive and oral history) approach was used to examine the changes and map the trajectories. Total of 199 commons in 25 villages were selected for the research. Out of these, 105 or 53 percent have been converted to other land use (74 percent, 52 percent and 83 percent of ponds, wooded groves, and grazing lands, respectively, had been converted to other forms of land use).

With regard to degradation, 44 percent or 23 of the wooded groves and 33 percent or five of the lakes were degraded. She explained that lakes in Bangalore are part of an interconnected system and shape of lakes have significantly shrunken from 1973 to 2013 due to massive quarrying and changes in land use (roads and buildings). It was also used as a landfill site where the waste of the city is dumped.

She also examined the changes in cultural and social spaces in relation to the commons. People were associated with traditional forests in multiple ways such as worshipping of local trees and shrines and worship of local deities. However, in the current system, the perception of people regarding commons had also changed. Local residents no longer felt associated with these commons and viewed it as the property of the state. Village commons in the periphery were caught up between two opposing forces: the impacts of urbanization on one hand and changing perceptions of rural residents on the other. She concluded by stating that the ecological footprint of urbanization is contributing to the slow demise of the common pool resources.

Discussant: Richa Kumar, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

Richa started by emphasizing the diversity of the presentations in terms of types of commons, types of regions and different methodologies used. She commented on the first paper by cautioning against the idea that the state was irrelevant (the success of neoliberal ideologies is in masking the role of the state in shaping markets and enforcing contracts) and emphasized the need to bring back the state in the discussion. She argued that the only public engagement that is possible is through the mechanisms of accountability built into the state system in India.

She also cautioned against romanticising cooperatives or collectives (or traditional practices or even feminist practices) and reflected upon the elite capture of the cooperative movement in India especially along the lines of caste. She suggested that local institutions are not necessarily democratic. One needs to understand them in their messy intersection with practice, with aspirations / meanings, and with the needs of livelihoods.

The rest of the papers on the panel came up with detailed, granular, descriptions of the messy reality of the commons and the challenges involved in managing / governing them—especially factors driving the fate of the commons. The presentation by Natasha Koshy pointed towards the ‘neoliberal’ state-driven practices that shape agriculture and micro-hydel projects, and in this context there was a need to understand the public-private partnership model. The example of groundwater highlighted the state’s role in shaping incentives such that farmers chose to grow crops that use more water, and thus, extract more groundwater.

The example of Uttarakhand emphasized the need to understand the process of aspiration building and meaning making by the people. What has shaped the loss of identity? Why should rural residents be expected to conserve the commons, when there is no such demand on urban residents or private institutions? She also commented that this session addressed the important question of urbanization and attempted to understand how these common spaces had turned into places of extraction and sites of dumping (what kinds of resource extraction, consumption patterns and waste generation were occurring in these spaces?). She concluded by asking who is the ‘we’ who will be governing and managing the commons? Whose use will be privileged? Is a recreational park acceptable and not a sacred grove? Do the commons have any inherent value and what is the process of attaching value to them? These were some questions to consider.

Question and Answer Session

While answering questions from the audience, Natasha responded by stating that gendered practices were very evident in Uttarakhand and women were doing most of the work. Krithi was asked about the quantity of consumption and irrational use of resources in Puducherry, to which she responded by stating that the quantity of consumption matters but the whole conception of rationality is problematic. The notion that people are not using resources rationally is problematic. Sudha was asked about problems in the economic understanding of food, to which she responded by emphasizing on the need to move beyond counting calories and the quantification of food. Seema was asked about a system through which common property resources should be suitably used in peri-urban Bangalore. She answered it by explaining that government planning always sees rural and urban as binaries and emphasized the need to do away with these binaries and bring science and social science to understand the interconnectedness.

TECHNICAL SESSION 2: SEEDS AS COMMONS

This session was chaired by Tulika Tripathi, Assistant Professor, CUG.

Seeds, Sustainable Practices and Biosocial Commons

Archana Pattnaik, Assistant Professor, IIT Kharagpur and Joost Jongerden, Wageningen University, Netherlands

The presentation looks at seeds as a form of resource, going beyond the economic understanding of resources. The story of seeds needs to be understood both in terms of their tangible and intangible properties. Tangibility can be understood in terms of different uses of seeds in connection with ecological conditions like soil, water and sunlight. Intangibility is understood in terms of diverse flows of networks, intellectual information, knowledge, values and traditions around seeds. Both tangible and intangible properties of seeds are interconnected and inter-dependent with each other.

Archana presented the case of a community seed bank initiative known as Sangham, run by a group of Dalit women in Medak District of Telangana to revive the cultivation of millets. She sought to understand how the diverse practices of a seed sharing network induced a space for commons. By using the concept of 'Bio-Social Commons' by van Dooren, she argued based on her ethnographic work that seeds are an example of commons, where both non-human and human actors shape each other's perspectives, values and ideas. The conventional economic understanding of resources and resource management doesn't easily capture the ways in which resources give meanings to human lives. It doesn't look at multiple layers of inter-connections between nature and society.

The definition of sustainability looks at both the notions of resilience and persistence, which are connected in multiple ways as seen in how indigenous technological practices (ex: basket made of cow-dung and neem paste to store seeds in order to control the temperature and protecting them from insects) are revived, used and shared across the network. It becomes an enriched source of community knowledge, where seeds do not remain under the ownership of one individual but are distributed and circulated among different actors within the network. With the circulation of seeds, the knowledge systems around it also become mobile unlike the water-tight division between so-called expert knowledge and lay knowledge.

Hence, seeds become both intellectual and cultural resources beyond the economic understanding of resources, when seeds banks are controlled and accessed as commons. Seeds as a form of cultural resources also manifest the diverse food culture in the area because they are also sources of staple foods in the area. Finally, the encouragement for millet production through this seed bank is linked to the revival different religious and cultural practices that used to take place in the region before high-yielding varieties of seeds were introduced. She further showed how processes of community knowledge production through the maintenance of seed

banks are shaped and reshaped by categories like caste and gender. The women of Sangham come from the Dalit community, and they have asserted their own rights over seeds and crop production through this seed bank.

Understanding the Process of Rural Commons through Indigenous Seed Conservation Practices

Neeraj Kapoor, Member of PRADAN, New Delhi and Ashutosh Kumar, Action Research Fellow in Rayagada, Centre for Development Practice, Ambedkar University Delhi (AUD)

The presenters began by suggesting that the advent of capitalists' relations of production have led to the demise of expressions, through which tribal communities share their bonding with nature. As a result, community meanings shared by tribals in terms of access, usage and distribution of natural resources, have been deliberately ignored. The tribals' idea of nature as 'sacred' necessarily goes beyond the simplistic, instrumental and rationalist idea of controlling nature through apparatus of techno-centric science. The idea of sacred here identifies the symbiotic relationship between human and nature.

The presenters use the concept of 'common' and 'commoning' in order to understand the shared and community experiences of tribal groups in terms of their understanding of nature's resources. Their study of the indigenous agricultural practices and seed conservation methods of a tribal community from Gumla District of Jharkhand and Rayagada of Odissa is based on ethnographic action research. Unlike the individualistic possession of resources, resources in the form of commons refers to the democratic processes through which resources are produced, circulated, distributed and consumed. By understanding resources as common, the sensibility of community develops. Every individual from the community uses resources intelligently, so that others can also have opportunity and access to resources—this includes equal distribution of resources and their preservation to ensure sustainable and long term usage across different generations.

The processes of communing facilitates ideas of co-production, collective production and distribution. The presenters talked about the seed bank, through which seeds are being exchanged and circulated within the community. This restores the sensibility for communing in the community, which is important for the survival of tribal women in the village, even under the most detrimental conditions. Since these tribal women didn't own land, obtaining land communally created a close network of kinship between them. They both produce and consume communally for their own survival. It acts as a safety valve for them.

The women had to choose between the two conflicting paradigms—high production of crops and sustainably produced crops. The women chose the latter keeping in mind the texture of land, the water holding capacity and the nature of crops. They understood that if they have to ensure production in long-run and survive for longer period of time, they would rather go for indigenous and sustainable methods of agriculture. However, this choice was not easy at all, since the first one looked more lucrative than the second one. But, the sensibility of

communing or to address the issue of collective justice facilitated the ethos of more sustainable methods of farming.

In other words, the exchange of seeds, restoring the indigenous agricultural practices, preserving the indigenous crop diversity and communal ownership of land by marginal communities like tribal women of these two areas is linked with their questions of survival. Losing all these effort under the capitalist ethos of ownership, production and consumption necessarily curtails their choices and their everyday strategies to survive.

Discussant: N. Rajaram, Former Professor and Dean, Central University of Gujarat

The discussant pointed out that Archana's paper did not address the larger political economy question of the Sangham. Where did the funding for the project come from, who has access to it and how it is being distributed? He talked about new kinds problems that have emerged with the coming of NGOs and their effort to preserve tradition in relation to a neo-liberal lens. What is the political economy in which this project is embedded? Questions were also raised regarding the larger politics around seed preservation— who preserves for whom and why? How far these Dalit women really have access to those seeds and who ultimately consumes these seeds need to be addressed. How far this method of preservation is helping in making seeds as commons accessible to commons needs to be understood critically.

The discussant pointed out that the second paper was rich in terms of a theoretical framework, concepts and categories but it missed out the complexities, nuances and everyday practices of field. Neither of these two papers talked about the role of state, international agencies and bureaucrats at large. The idea of community presented by them is a romanticized notion of community. What about hierarchies within? There is a presumption that community is linked to democracy, which may be incorrect. Also, what are the different ways in which the perception of community may have changed regarding nature and resources? Assuming a stagnant world-view treats the community as out of time and context.

Archana further shared an interesting narrative about shift from millets to rice in that particular area. Women found rice to easy to cook and less time consuming along with other household works, so they moved from millets to rice. Gradually, this led to the acceptance of rice cultivation instead of millets. But Sangham is trying to revive millet cultivation using the links between women.

TECHNICAL SESSION 3: GOVERNING THE COMMONS: WATER

This session was chaired by PS Vijay Shankar, Director of Research at Samaj Pragati Sahyog, Dewas, Madhya Pradesh.

Everyday Politics of State-community interactions: A case of water management in Eastern Vidarbha Region

Rashmi Mahajan, PhD Scholar, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE)

Rashmi highlighted the efforts made in the Eastern region of Vidarbha in promoting community-based management of water as commons. This emerged as a consequence of the state's failure in managing water resources. However, community-based efforts are affected by factors such as caste, class and gender, and this brings in the relevance of the concept of power, its effects over the access to resources and its implications on the claims over commons. In her research, 203 households were surveyed spread across 8 sites and 14 villages, along with 22 focus group discussions, 50+ interviews and field related documents, to understand the changing trajectory of water management systems in the region pre- and post-independence, beginning with the 200-300 year old *Malguzari* regime.

The primary actors associated with the *Maji-Malguzari* tanks were farmers, fishermen, the irrigation department, fisheries department and the forest department. It was noted that before 1950, the *Malguzars* were responsible for collection of revenue which was channelled towards the construction and management of tanks structures and the catchment, along with the responsibility to provide irrigation across villages. Known as *Patels / Patils*, they functioned like the *Zamindari* system. It involved the participation of several communities such as the *Kohli, Panwars, Gonds, Kunbis* and *Brahmins*.

However, as a consequence of the Madhya Pradesh Abolition of Proprietary Rights (Estates, Mahals, Alienated Land) Act, 1950, the ownership of tanks was shifted to the state irrigation department. Newer engineering techniques led to the restructuring of the *Maji Malguzari* tanks and the smaller tanks were to be maintained by the *Zila Parishad*. The establishment of water management committees under the new system led to the delegation of responsibility to maintain the tanks. The state also gave *Nistar* rights to the ones with pre-irrigation rights under the *Malguzari* period. Rashmi notes that this has led to negative impact on the *Dhinwar* fishing community, as primary rights were given to irrigation. The formation of the Fisheries Cooperative Societies in the 1970s and the introduction of five-year lease system gave some rights to the fishermen.

Analysing the everyday politics of water management in the region, she explained that actors and institutions in the present times have different stakes, hence leading to a clash of interests. Farmers without *nistar* rights have no say and are obliged to pay fees to the irrigation

department. Farmers use water through pumps, hence generating conflict with fishermen. There is negotiation of conflicts at the local level and if not resolved, the issue is handled by referring to the state. The state is also crucial for funding the maintenance and repair of tanks. Conflicts and negotiations are about the legitimisation of claims of one group over another, rather than about maintaining the resource. It was suggested that devolution alone, or invoking tradition cannot help a system flourish. Action and policies must be formulated considering all social, economic, historical and cultural factors.

A Community based model of managing common pool resources (CPRs): A Case of Ahar-Pyne Irrigation System in South Bihar

Gopi Verma, Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) and Anand Venkatesh, Professor, IRMA

The *Ahar-Pyne* system is an old, easy and cheap source of irrigation which involves very less masonry work. It is a diversion- based irrigation system wherein water from a river-stream is diverted through a channel, locally referred to as, *Pyne*, into one or more reservoir(s), known as *Ahar*. One of the major drawbacks of this system is that it can only be used in *kharif* season, unlike the tank system which is functional throughout the year. Around 9,000 *Pyne*s and 35,000 *Ahars* were found in the Magadh region alone.

The ownership is based on the command area village(s) and does not endow to any individual person. The practice of sharing water and distribution is done on the basis of customary rights which are well documented and specified in statutory documents called *Lal Bahi* or *fardawpasi*. The system also followed a structure of people's institutions at three main levels: River-Basin Level (RLA), *Pyne* Level Association (PLA) and Village Level Association (VLA). The system also required the maintenance of a detailed book of accounting and systematised channelling of funds for renovation.

However, Gopi highlighted that the system of irrigation has seen a steady decline since the post *zamindari* period. This is essentially due to the disintegration of property which led to the emergence of several petty *zamindars*. Additionally, the influence of Maoists in the Gaya region of South Bihar did not allow the sustenance of the system. Due to the dysfunctionality of the community institution or *Goam* various kinds of encroachments mushroomed in the region. The other major drawbacks were—weak dikes or breaches, working less than 10% of its capacity and lack of community participation. This also led to the deprivation of small and medium farmers of irrigation facilities and to an acceleration in the inter-village and intra-village conflicts over water rights.

Gopi suggested that adherence to Elinor Ostrom's framework could help revive the *Ahar-Pyne* system which includes—clearly defined boundaries, proportional equivalence between benefits and costs, collective choice arrangements, monitoring, graduated sanctions, an effective conflict resolution mechanism, and autonomy to own institutions to devise rights.

Revisiting Community-based Traditional Irrigation System of South Bihar

Kumar Gaurav, M. Sc. Student, School of Ecology and Environmental Studies, Nalanda University, and Aviram Sharma, Assistant Professor, School of Ecology and Environmental Studies, Nalanda University

There is an emerging critique against state-led big irrigation structures premised upon three broad footings: economic unfeasibility, ecological disturbances and societal injustice. The need to revive traditional irrigation systems has emerged as a response since it utilises home-grown knowledge and materials, is resilient to local climatic conditions and is non-authoritarian. Kumar Gaurav analysed the revival of the *Ahar-Pyne* traditional irrigation system in south Bihar in relation to this by using the framework of a socio-technical system. Drawing from the Science, Technology and Society Studies, he argued that the *Ahar-Pyne* technology is not value-neutral but is largely influenced and shaped by socio-political and economic factors.

While some literature on community management of common pool resources has considered communities as homogenous entities, later work has problematized the definition of a community and the difficulty in establishing its boundaries. In relation to this, his research studied the *Ahar-Pyne* technology from the perspective of subaltern groups in the region. He asked three central questions: First, are there communities behind community-based traditional irrigation systems? Second, how changes in social organisations at the community level shape the traditional irrigation technologies and vice versa? And third, how to understand the relationship between labour and technology in the context of a traditional irrigation system?

Using archival material, folk songs, and ethnographic methods, the paper shows that there is no idyllic community either in the past or the present that managed or can manage the *Ahar-Pyne* irrigation system. Rather, community work in the *ahar-pyne* system was led by the *goam*, on the call of *zamindars*. Construction and maintenance was done by lower caste groups known as *beldars* under conditions of bonded labour and exploitation. After the Permanent Settlement in 1792, the decline of the system began, as *zamindars* shifted to a rentier economy with little regard for productivity, and *beldars* moved to the brick kiln industry. However, the exploitation of the *beldars* continued therein also.

The paper further shows that in the present, with the political mobilisation of lower caste groups, migration to the cities for work, reduced size of landholdings and growth of sharecropping has impacted the availability of labour and reduced the interest of the powerful castes in organising a *goam*. The advent of borewells has removed the need to rely on this common resource. Further, new excavation technologies and construction materials have physically transformed the structures making them more expensive, less resilient and more prone to erosion. Thus, the expectation that a 'traditional', 'community' managed irrigation system can be revived in the present is entirely misleading. Understanding the *Ahar-Pyne* as a sociotechnical system helps us see that inequalities have shaped the very functioning of the system, with benefits accruing to some and costs being borne by others. Thus, the common property resource framework needs to be carefully re-examined in light of this perspective.

The Commons as (demanding) social constructions: The case of aquifers in rural Karnataka

Frederic Landy, Director, French Institute of Pondicherry, Laurentz Ruiz, INRA-IRDM-IISc, Julie Jacquet, University of Lyon and Roma Hooge, Agro Paris Tech/ Department of Social Sciences, French Institute of Pondicherry

Frederic Landy focused on problematizing and defining the term “commons”. He argued that there is nothing inherent in specific resources like grasslands, air or water that ‘naturally’ makes them commons. Rather, following Dardot and Laval’s (2014) definition, he argued that a common is a common, only if the society wants it to be; it is essentially a social construction.

Using the notion of “tragedy of non-commons” (Dardot and Laval 2014) he described the decline of groundwater in Chamrajanagar district in South Karnataka, a site where they have been working for several years. India is the biggest consumer of groundwater ever since the Green revolution and the country has witnessed an even greater and continuous process of intensification in groundwater extraction. As aquifers have gone dry, some communities have made a return to reliance on rainfed irrigation.

Frederic argued that groundwater has never been understood as a commons in the region historically, and neither are the conditions stipulated by Elinor Ostrom fulfilled in the region, presently, to suggest that collective action can be undertaken to protect the resource. For instance, farmers need to use groundwater for growing crops to be able to repay loans and even survive in the short run. In the long run, their children might not be farming at all. For them the tragedy is not the exhaustion of the resource but of their inability to dig deeper to get water. Further, local power hierarchies make collective action fraught with benefits of conservation likely to go to some. Free electricity and flouting of rules regarding digging tubewells is the norm.

Unfortunately even the Model Groundwater (Sustainable Management) Act, 2016, which acknowledges that “groundwater is not amenable to ownership by the state, communities or persons” and promotes an aquifer based approach, does not create institutions to implement this on the ground. The Panchayati Raj institutions empowered under the Act are ill-equipped, both in terms of expertise and in their ability to promote a mandate for collective action.

Frederic concluded by arguing for the need to develop ways to promote collective action by focusing not as much on the ‘substantial commons’ (the physical resources) but, on a complementary ‘normative commons’ (the more abstract result of collective action). This would mean working towards bringing together not just local stakeholders, but also environmental experts, women’s associations along with local government bodies to understand and manage groundwater at an aquifer level.

Groundwater as Commons: Exploring Hydraulic Solidarities among Tribal Communities of Central India

Raghav Chakravarthy, CSO (Consultant), Samaj Pragati Sahayog, Dewas, Madhya Pradesh, Harshala Jambhulkar, Samaj Pragati Sahayog and Rajaram Mory, Samaj Pragati Sahayog

This paper studies three villages where collective action to preserve and manage groundwater as a commons has been undertaken as part of Samaj Pragati Sahyog's (SPS) work in Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh. The paper evaluates the institutional arrangements developed in the villages in relation to Ostrom's suggested criteria for the same. These villages are in the hills with hard basalt rock underneath that makes aquifers difficult to map and also inaccessible. Historical water deprivation has driven adivasi communities in this region to consider creating sharing arrangements for its use and this has been facilitated by strong kinship ties within communities.

The institutional arrangement at the village level is embedded within the larger self-help group federation structure created through SPS which facilitated aquifer mapping in the region. These arrangements mandate the kind of pumping technology to be used, the crops to be grown each season, micro-irrigation practices and disallow private borewells, water intensive crops and the use of chemical fertilisers. This is supplemented with agroecological farm extension supported by SPS. Villagers are also encouraged to grow millets and backyard vegetables for home consumption. All points of the agreement are interdependent and contingent on one another to enable the equitable accessibility and usage of groundwater.

These agreements clearly fulfilled four of Ostrom's criteria: clearly defined boundaries of the aquifer and of the households, congruence of rules with local conditions, collective choice, and monitoring. However, conflict resolution and sanctioning mechanisms required the intervention of the gram panchayat in one case, which was also unsuccessful, and the groups had no clearly defined mechanism for the same. Further, state policies incentivising water intensive crops (especially the price-deficit scheme started in 2016) and providing cheap electricity had the potential to adversely affect self-regulation by communities. It was suggested that formalising SHGs under the gram panchayat framework might give them more teeth in managing groundwater resources as a commons.

Question and Answer Session

PS Vijay Shankar commented that the most common word in all the presentations of the session was Ostrom but there was a need to go beyond this framework. Speakers focused on the interaction and emerging differences between the state and the community, on the role of technology, shift in traditional patterns and the conflict between centralisation and decentralisation. He suggested that the use of the term "contestation" could have been more appropriate to describe the negotiation between stakeholders in Rashmi's study. He referred to the work of Professor Mayank Kumar on pre-colonial irrigation in Rajasthan which showed

the indispensable role of the state in supporting community efforts in enabling accessibility and conservation of water. A measured role of the state in providing support to community decisions can enable the strengthening of the community efforts, he argued.

Rashmi Mahajan was asked, who are the real beneficiaries of water management in present times, given that Vidarbha is the hotbed of farmer suicides? She responded that the entire Vidarbha region does not experience suicide. Her research is in the eastern region which is resource rich and receives 1100mm rainfall. 90% of the lands are under paddy and sugarcane cultivation. The beneficiaries of *malguzari* are the ones who own *nistar* rights and malguzars own large areas of land. Historically the land ownership pattern has not changed much.

Raghav Chakravarthy and Harshala Jambhulkar were asked, why are community borewells coming up as major alternative? They responded with an example: there emerged a conflict between four brothers over water in a village during their fieldwork, which could not be effectively resolved by the gram panchayat. The absence of exclusive arrangements makes any water management system very complex, along with the perpetual fear of intrusion. Therefore, community borewells have emerged as an effective alternative with mutually agreed regulatory mechanisms.

Sudhir Kumar Suthar thanked Frederic Landy for defining the commons and also problematizing the given category. There was a need to deliberate on the meaning of commons apart from focusing on the governance aspect. **Frederic** responded that there must be local organisation and social construction at the level of resource management and aquifer management. It remains a challenge to decipher the commons which are not visible.

Richa Kumar also pointed to the repetitive usage of Ostrom's framework and argued for a need to move beyond it. One of the major drawbacks of this framework is that it dissociates history and context from the present outcome of the situation, which is highly problematic. **Carol Upadhyay** noted that the state has always existed as one of the major actors in the management of resources.

TECHNICAL SESSION 4 THE POLITICS OF LAND

The session was chaired by Sudhir Kumar Suthar, Jawaharlal Nehru University. Setting the stage he said that the question of land is one of the most heavily contested issues related to the commons, worldwide, and has been at the centre stage of discussions.

The Inadequacy of Law: Land, Protests and Demands in Bhavnagar, Gujarat

Vrinda Acharya, PhD Scholar, Centre for Political Studies, JNU, New Delhi

Studying an on-going protest movement in Bhavnagar, Vrinda attempts to show how farmers have interpreted the law to make particular claims over land that a reductionist interpretation of law cannot encompass, given its inability to account for emotive elements. The paper is based on secondary literature, newspaper reports and Vrinda's engagement with the protesters for one day on the 21st day of the protest, along with members of the NGO mobilizing farmers. The protest was ongoing from December 2017 with farmers from 12 villages participating. It was based on Gandhian principles of satyagraha and non-violence. In February 2018, the protest site witnessed a violent crackdown. Police stationed on farmlands created an environment of terror. Despite this, there was very little reporting on the issue and hardly any academic endeavours to look at farmers protests erupting all over Gujarat.

Vrinda met farmers at the protest who had an average landholding of 15-30 bighas. They told her that their land was fertile, irrigated, and with good linkages to markets. Twenty years ago, when the original acquisition took place (it was to mine lignite for electricity production by a public sector undertaking), their fathers were pressurized into giving consent. Further, although the government provided adequate compensation (five times the market rate amounting to Rs. 48,000 for non-irrigated land per hectare and Rs. 72000 for irrigated), it was not paid entirely and the land was not taken away. So farmers kept cultivating until 2017 when NTPC began finally extraction. Suddenly asked to leave, the farmers found no other employment available. It was a form of dispossession without proletarianization (cf. Sanyal 2007) in an area (Saurashtra) with high levels of poverty. So the farmers began protesting.

They provided an alternative interpretation of the idea of public purpose, going beyond the narrow legal framework of acquisition and compensation—why would the welfare of farmers not be considered as part of 'public purpose', they asked? They further said, once the state invents machines to create vegetables, they will stop the protest movement. Farmers do not want to part with their lands at all, an emotive connection that Vrinda calls a 'transcendental association'. But law cannot take into account this emotive element. Hence, the farmers had to channelize their protest through the language of the law. They used three strategies in collaboration with civil society organisations.

First, they traced loopholes within the law: as more than five years passed post acquisition and the land was not possessed by the state, the 2013 Land Acquisition,

Rehabilitation and Resettlement (LARR) Act states that the acquisition is void. Thus, the current possession is arbitrary and illegal. Second, they highlighted the environmental repercussions of the proposed mining activity on the Gulf of Khambat and questioned the validity of the 'public purpose'. Third, they sent a 'death plea' to the government saying if they cannot get land, their right to live cannot possibly be guaranteed, so they should be granted a 'right to die'. They said if they are an impediment to the nation's development, they are anti-nationals and should be shot by the jawaans (referring to the police crackdown already taking place).

Vrinda argued that engaging with the law might facilitate a fresh round of acquisition and more compensation (as the LARR Act foregrounds rehabilitation); but it would fail to address this emotive connection to the land. She pointed out that such a connection need not be linked to a tribal identity alone (as in Niyamgiri, Odisha). She argued for addressing the inadequacy of law by addressing the issue of restorative justice and seriously thinking about finding ways to taking into account these narratives of people.

Rural Real Estate: Agrarian Land as a Financial Asset

Carol Upadhyya, Professor, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore

How do we link question of land with commons? In approaching that question, the founding moment is the enclosure of land, leading to private property in land and industrial capitalization. Carol proposed to do this by studying the on-going transformation in the value of land. Her current research on land began when she became curious about so-called housing layouts seen scattered around highways and coastal roads. They are made by converting agricultural land and are usually purchased by middle class residents in nearby towns, NRIs, and urban residents. She also looked at the peri-urban changes around Bangalore, where revenue land became housing areas and built up. It started off as an illegal process that later got regularized. But curiously, land did not just get divorced from agriculture, it also did not do its urban function as being for industrial and housing purposes. It just lay vacant.

This conversion of agricultural land is not a process of urbanization, but points to a position on and shift in the value of land. Land is becoming financialized—a key site of accumulation. The paper unpacks how this is happening. As rural economies are incorporated in circuits of finance capital, it is not just that land becomes commodified; it becomes a source of a particular kind of financial value.

The question now is no longer about land being acquired by a state for public purpose, but acquired to hand over to real estate developers. That's how land is being financialised. There is a policy shift: from land for production to land for the market. It is not just about state appropriating land and crony capitalism, but you have a transformation of land markets that have been documented in Gurgaon, Rajasthan, that allow for spectacular profits. Land is used as equity, not for production value. The same model operates in the smart city model. This is also a model of financialization from below though: it is not just real estate developers, wall street bankers etc. disrupting land market. All kinds of actors are involved: local farmers as

well. You have the emergence of a whole new economy around land. This also illuminates the nature of the peri-urban: the new kinds you see in villages. The development of micro-property, and layouts existing alongside commercial developments. These in turn are linked to a water crisis. The only way to get water is groundwater since there is no municipal connection, so people depend on a network of tankers. Throughout the global south, the trajectory of globalization very difficult. One needs to understand the urban in relation to the agrarian question.

Access to and Control of Village Common Lands in Punjab: The State Policies and their Contradictions

Sukhpal Singh, Professor, Centre for Management in Agriculture (CMA), IIM, Ahmedabad

Sukhpal began by saying that access to water and other resources like credit has been mediated through access to land, no matter how large or small. Many small and marginal farmers in Punjab are out of farming, of whom a large proportion are Dalits. Before this was by default, now by design. Work opportunities for them in agricultural labour are low because of mechanization in wheat and rice farming. Most of them work as manual and semi-skilled labour in urban areas where they wait for work as casual daily labour at labour chowks, with some of them even migrating to other states as far away as Gujarat for seasonal cotton-picking work.

Dalits own just 6% of all land holdings or 3.5% of the cultivated area in Punjab. As per the 1961 Common Land Act, 33% of village common land is reserved for leasing by Dalit families. But in practice, this was not implemented at all or manipulated by upper castes by putting up dummy Dalit candidates at the time of lease auction, until a few years ago. In some villages, the common land has been allocated to gaushalas and gurudwaras which has led to Dalits losing access to land altogether. However, in several villages, Dalits have successfully come together to bid for farmland as a collective. While lease rates are still exploitatively high, access to land has improved the condition of Dalit households with livestock rearing becoming an additional source of income.

Unfortunately, state policies on village common land / panchayat land are rife with contradictions that are creating greater contestation over land and making it harder for Dalits to access common land. For instance, the Industrial Policy 2017, states that the state government will help identify and transfer village common lands and unutilized government land to the infrastructure development authority for development of industrial parks besides being a land bank maintained by the authority. The authority would also design a land pooling scheme for acquisition of land for industrial parks which will be in partnership with the land owners. This directly conflicts with the land leasing income received by Panchayats to the tune of nearly 300 crore annually and the access of Dalit households to land.

On the other hand, the Draft Agriculture Policy states that the government shall make efforts to preserve and restore ecosystems to promote climate resilient agriculture. A biodiversity reserve of 1 acre is to be created in each village. At the same time, it insists that

village common land should be leased to farmers from disadvantaged sections. However, cultivation of paddy is not to be allowed on leased land, which will be disadvantageous to lessees. Under the current leasing policy, there is no restriction on the choice of crop during period of lease, which is usually one year. Another policy asked Panchayats to plant fruit and medicinal trees on common lands to increase tree cover but such a policy found little traction in Gujarat where it was originally implemented.

There is clear conflict in law between provision of land for industrial use, for environmental preservation and for providing livelihoods for Dalits. The only way the latter have been able to get access has been through struggles and violent contestations. Sukhpal ended his paper by highlighting the Kudumbasree movement in Kerala where women are leasing land to do value production and suggested the need to explore how the same could be made possible in Punjab.

Decommonization of Common Land in Punjab; Interplay of Caste Gender and Power

Pampa Mukherjee, Professor, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Pampa's paper was based on field work in three villages in Sangrur district of Punjab looking at the changing nature of village common lands and its impact on Dalits and on women. It draws upon the idea of 'decommonisation', which refers to a process through which a jointly used resource under commons institutions loses its intrinsic characteristics. All three villages studied had a high Dalit population (27-29%), had seen a mass movement led by Dalit women to claim access to common lands, and had witnessed caste based violence resulting from this assertion.

In Punjab, village common lands that could be leased to Dalit groups or backward classes comprised of two types: Nazool, which was remainder of the land belonging to Muslims who migrated to Pakistan at the time of partition, after a part was given to Hindu and Sikh families that migrated from Pakistan and Shamlat, which was owned and managed by panchayats, with one-third being reserved for leasing by Dalit families. Shamlat land in these places was significant for Dalit women for growing crops, obtaining fodder, manure, dry wood and straw, for doing ablutions, and even used for building shelters for Dalit families. It was a source of dignity and security for them.

In the three study villages, Dalit groups have come together as a collective and successfully bid in the auction over the last several years, displacing dummy candidates put up by upper castes. They have formed Sangharsh Samitis to ensure the land is not encroached upon. The mobilisation has focused on the right to village commons, the right to live in villages, recognition that Punjab's agrarian crises is being borne by the landless and for ending the impunity for sexual violence against women. However, all this has escalated the conflict between Dalits and Jats. It has also resulted in an informal social boycott against Dalits and further atrocities and violence against women. Finally, although they have got common land, these Dalit farmer collectives need water for irrigation and that is another major concern.

Discussant: Sailen Routray, Centre for Human Sciences, Bhubaneswar

Sailen suggested that while the papers approached land from very different framings and methods, the common theme was affect versus rationality. The politics of identity was linked to questions of claiming. One of the key way to think of issues of land in the future was to see claiming not just in a unidirectional way, but as having different ways to do it.

Land was part of a larger system of legal fictions and one needed to understand what is entailed in maintaining these fictions. Land was also a source of identity formation. These papers foregrounded the role of civil society and the state, but also of social actors not conventionally thought of as civil society.

Question and Answer Session

Sudhir Kumar Suthar how do we understand sociological change such as tourism in farmhouses and its linkage to how people relate to land, when there is a revival of the village and assets in the village: is it leading to a clash in the rural economy and politics? To Vrinda, he said, one crucial theme in the paper was the question of language, and how it is being legally framed, and how commons are being used to articulate voices. How do linguistic categories become a platform to develop protests and interest when the formal legal framework does not address linguistic categories? To Carol, he asked, that in the context of real estate, how are particular land enclosures being chosen for real estate networks? How do these networks emerge between different kinds of actors, and how do locals perceive the entire process and react to it? Also on the issue of advertising, how is a site is being shown as a worthy site of real estate? To Pampa he asked, how do women negotiate with the market to sell produce from collective farming?

PS Vijay Shankar, Samaj Pragati Sahayog mentioned that in Madhya Pradesh, Chief Minister Digvijay Singh allocated common land to the landless but there was a lot of conflict as a result. One needed to look at the current state of common land, if there is encroachment already. To Carol he asked, has the financialization of land translated to the sale of land for the small farmers? Will they earn more from sale than cultivation? What does land mean to a person owning a small piece of land?

Karthik Cavale, Ahmedabad University recalled that Sukhpal made a conceptual distinction between land as property, commodity and capital. What is interesting about the present juncture is that a lot of rural land was turning into capital. What allows land in some places to be capital and land in other places to be not capital, how is this institutional unevenness being produced?

Suresh, CSD asked Vrinda that many people who protest are labelled Maoists. Are there any solutions for this?

Vrinda Acharya responded that she was incapable of providing a policy suggestion at this point of time. She was interpreting right to life as part of an expansive interpretation that included the right to die, right to work, right to sleep etc. The third strategy used by farmers

was to pose themselves as anti-nationals—they were using nationalist language to get attention from the state. She could not highlight critical legal studies readings in the presentation but she uses them to talk about how emotion and law are linked.

Carol Upadhyay responded that in most parts of India, land has value beyond financial or sale value. So in what situation are farmers willing to sell? The areas where she is working – peri-urban and new city – pressure on land is different than in rural areas. When land values go up to astronomical levels, small farmers often are the first ones to sell. If small and marginal farmers sell first, large farmers wait till prices rise. How are sites chosen for real estate development? This is difficult to answer. A lot of this is particularly hush hush. Or else prices will go up, other developers may come in. Developers don't choose particular sites, land aggregators buy up large parcels of land and wait. When a developer comes along, they start making that deal. But there is no way to buy land without local intermediaries knowing. She is trying to trace this in her work on Bangalore. The policy framework is crucial: from central to state and municipality, governments are using land based financing mechanisms. This means extracting land.

Sukhpal Singh responded that no one wants to stay in Punjab, because the conditions are pathetic. Big farmers do agri-tourism, funded by the state, but that is not the real scenario of Punjab. People are saying Punjab is becoming empty. Upper castes and dominant castes in Punjab overlap (Jats and Sikhs). That's why recently there has been a counter movement by the leather worker community, the Jamals. This Dalit community went abroad, so they have resources now. They are now challenging the Jats. But all institutions have been captured by the Jats. Jats have also moved into local agri-business.

Pampa Mukherjee replied that there isn't enough common land in the villages she studied. Women produce just enough for consumption and there is no surplus to market. But pooling of resources and labour gives women strength. Further she said, agri-tourism is not true of Punjab. But there is market tourism in the form of marriage halls. These things exploit imagery: better than urban, cluttered. You'll also have an NRI bungalow with an aeroplane or something on top. This signifies transformation. We need to see how different actors perceive these changes.

Sudhir Kumar Suthar concluded that populist politics have become important in the agrarian and rural question. These papers set an agenda for a policy intervention.

TECHNICAL SESSION 5

APPROPRIATING THE FOREST: COMMONS AND COMMUNITY RIGHTS

This session was chaired by Dhananjay Rai, Assistant Professor, CUG.

Factors affecting Fuel Wood Extraction within adivasi village communities and its impact on the forest ecology: A case study from Sheopur District, Madhya Pradesh, India

Saurabh Chowdhury, Ambedkar University Delhi and Samrakshan Charitable Trust (SCT), Agara, Madhya Pradesh

Through their study on the use of a reserve forest by local communities in Sheopur District of Madhya Pradesh, Saurabh and SCT analysed the extent of ‘degradation’ of forest resources interrogating popular claims that fuelwood extraction was the main cause of forest degradation. Using three sets of methodological tools—preliminary survey, vegetation sampling and a socio-economic survey, the study showed differential use of three forest zones by various groups, including marginalized adivasi groups, upper caste villagers, and the Forest Department.

They defined access as a ‘bundle of power’ that ensures the ability to derive benefits as opposed to property which is defined as a ‘bundle of rights’ over resources. They called this political accessibility, which referred to the various degrees of access of different stakeholders in exerting their rights on existing natural resources. In contrast, physical accessibility only referred to proximity or distance from forest zones.

Their work showed that overall access to forest resources was controlled by the existing forest governing bodies (Forest Department and Joint Forest Management (JFM) Committees). The committees are supposed to be representative but given the power relationships in the villages under study, only influential villagers were members of the JFM committees. Further, caste was highly correlated with economic and social status of a household. Upper caste households were accessing more resources from the forest and had greater bargaining power to break forest use rules. In contrast, marginal groups like adivasis, often found themselves being labelled criminals and trespassers, despite collecting the least amount of resources from the forest overall.

At the same time, the forest rules prevented the cutting of the ‘khair’ tree species in the name of conservation (it was labelled a protected species and was found in abundance); but in fact, it was a commercial species of value to the forest department, hence no one else was allowed access to it. Overall, if there was overuse of forest resources, it was not due to the livelihood needs of the poorest but due to the ‘indiscriminate and unquestioned’ use of forest resources by people related to those in power.

Finally, the study argued that degradation is central to the concept of nature and there is nothing called pristine nature-in-itself devoid of human intervention. The idea of a reserved

forest looks at nature as unchanging, stagnant and pristine, and ignores the dynamic relationship between the forest and the community which has lived in the midst of forest land. Unfortunately, Garrett Hardin's influential linkage of the idea of 'degradation' with the 'over exploitation' of commons like forests by communities has perpetuated this problematic notion.

In their analysis of the actual usage of forest land by looking at changing species, lopping of green trees, and other human activities in different forest zones, the study showed that there existed variability in forest use by the local community because of distance from their habitat to the forest. Not all areas of the forest were being used equally. Further, there was no evidence to claim that the forests were 'ecologically degraded' as defined by political ecologists. The very idea of degradation needs to be understood in more complex terms, taking into account the interplay between political access and physical access. Saurabh and SCT argued that simply blaming the local community for 'degradation' was a way to sideline issues related to the politics of access and detracted from understanding the ecological health of the forest.

Interpreting the Rural-Commons in light of the Forest Rights Act

Nikita Sonavene and Tanay, Working Group for Women and Land Ownership (WGWLO)

Nikita and Tanay looked at the impact of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in Navsari, Dang and Panchmahals districts in Gujarat with regard to access to forest land and its detrimental effect on the local community, particularly women. They specifically looked at the dilution of the FRA with the advent of new legislation such as the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act (CAFA) 2016, among others. Afforestation on all eligible land is proposed to be carried out by state and national level authorities with no consent required from the gram sabha. This comes into conflict with the traditional rights of access, usufruct and management of CPRs that have been given under the FRA.

Using oral histories of communities obtained through focus group discussions, the paper highlights the lack of rigid private property boundaries in the time before independence. It further highlights the multiple uses of the forest for obtaining medicinal plants, fodder, grazing land, edible plants and animals, timber, wood and other resources including water. Women were largely responsible for collection, there were no restrictions on access till the 1970s and resources were managed through 'informal, trust based systems founded in a community understanding'. Individuals had obligations towards the community as well as towards the forest and access was shaped through religious-cultural practices that also incorporated notions of sustainable use.

However, the state's forest governance mechanisms have supplanted these earlier practices, primary among them being privatizing land ownership and limiting access to forest resources. Ironically, Joint Forest Management Committees have been colluding with the state authorities in denying access to others in the village. The quantitative and qualitative decline of forest resources over the last few decades can be traced back to deforestation by the Forest Department to harvest timber and to sand mining contracts given to private companies. Further,

several claims, especially community resource claims are pending under the FRA. More problematically boundaries of community forest resources have been clearly demarcated and villagers are not allowed to access resources from another village's gauchar land. Such rigid demarcation of individual forest rights claims has also created conflict amongst individuals in the face of overlapping claims due to the historical practice of shifting cultivation. Afforestation by the Forest Department under CAFA has promoted monoculture plantations of teak and eucalyptus without community consultation or consent on traditional grazing land. Overall a logic driven by bureaucratic rationality has replaced a rich tradition of community led management of CPRs at the cost of forest health and community access. They have become trespassers and criminals in their own land.

Forest as contested 'commons': Some ethnographic notes on the Quest for Forest Resources and Emerging Democratic Consciousness

Kamal Nayan Choubey, Assistant Professor, Dyal Singh College, Delhi University

This paper begins with a historical overview of forest related laws in colonial and independent India, and then presents the struggles of Tharu women in obtaining community forest rights under the FRA in Dudhwa National Park in north-central Uttar Pradesh. Kamal highlights the work of women activists in creating awareness amongst young Tharu women about their rights under the FRA. Whereas in the past these young women accepted that their entry into the forest meant trespassing on the property of the Forest Department, even if it was for fulfilling their everyday needs, through interactions with the activists they realized they had every right over forest resources. Rising up against patriarchal structures in their own society as well as against the Forest Department, these women mobilized themselves under the banner of the Tharu Adivasi Mahila Mazdoor Kisan Manch.

Kamal highlights the emergence of 'legalism from below' which refers to the use of law by marginalized groups to assert rights over resources. He argues that the forest has been a contested terrain with legal pluralism—multiple and contradictory laws governing it—which has been used by the Forest Department to reject claims of tribal communities. However, the FRA has become a space for mobilization and a legal tool that is being used by tribal women not only to stake a claim over resources but also to collectively demand better prices for minor forest produce and freedom in collecting and marketing the same. It is important to recognize that the forest is a political space infused with multiple layers of power, dominance, contestation and resistance.

Discussant: AR Vasavi, Independent Scholar, Bangalore

The discussant appreciated the diverse methodological approaches these papers have taken in order to understand the forest as a dynamic space in relation to access, dominance, power-play and resistance. This questions the simplistic understanding of the forest as static, mute and unchanging. She also pointed out the recent initiatives of commodifying forests for

the purpose of eco-tourism at the cost of evicting the inhabitants from there. The state plays a significant role in encroaching forest commons and monopolizing its control over it. She further pointed out recent instances of the forest being sold to corporates in the name of private maintenance as well as about the possible roles that civil society can play in protecting the rights of the marginalized.

Question and Answer Session

A question was raised highlighting the nexus between civil society and state officials, which has increased the vulnerability of the local tribal community, particularly, of women, who have to engage with forest-lands for their everyday sustenance. Another question was raised regarding the role of law and what would be the possible ways through which law can be executed for the protection of rights of those on the margin.

While the two presenters portrayed two different pictures of the FRA in two different contexts, the common thread was the issue of incorporating community knowledge and invoking multiple interpretations within the legal framework using everyday practices. This can make law more subjective and nuanced. This approach from 'below' can make law pluralistic in addressing the complexities of the issue.

PANEL DISCUSSION WITH FARMERS FROM GUJARAT

The session was chaired by Prof. Indira Dutta, Dean, School of Social Sciences, CUG. Translations were done by Prof. Vikram Singh Amravat and Prof. Amarendra Pandey from Gujarat Vidyapeeth.

Kalu Bhai, Santarampur village, Central Gujarat (Foundation for Ecological Security)

Kalu bhai has been farming for 20 years, growing vegetables and doing animal husbandry. He spoke about the connection between agriculture and animal husbandry and the importance of the forest and its connection with the process of farming. Arguing that forests were a common property resource, he said that forests, agriculture, water, animals, birds are all inter-linked in a positive environmental cycle and the misuse of one aspect makes all the other aspects suffer. All fertilizer and manure comes from the forest itself and there is a critical link between forests and water. The further one moves away from the forest, farming begins to require more water and more fertilisers.

Natural fertilizer based farming will produce a pure crop and will have positive impact on overall health and environment. Such organic food will help in capacity building and will produce healthy individuals. He added, "I can work hard, do all kinds of labour, talk, walk, even at this age because of the organic food I eat."

Parvat Singh, Begumpal village

Parvat Bhai brought the attention towards the problem of irrigation which is crucial for crop production and argued for creating avenues to ensure irrigation in the present changing environment. He also raised the question of poor remuneration for organic products. He was growing organic wheat and pulses but no one was willing to pay extra. Their expectation was to get 20-25% higher rate but there are no buyers and the rate is low so he was planning to stop growing organic.

Shyamal bhai Patel, Jagpura village:

Shyamal Bhai is 73 years old and has received 3-4 awards for his farming as a sakriya kisan. He raised several concerns. First he spoke about the problem with wild animals like wild boar and Neel gai which destroys their crops. Pigs were a recent nuisance thanks to neighbors who reared pigs and left their animals to roam at night. Neel gai ate selectively and after that the plant may still grow back, but pigs destroyed the field entirely. The panchayat has not been forthcoming to help him.

Second, he started organic farming 3-4 years ago in part of his field but it takes nearly 3-4 years to get government certification for organic products. He has been growing organic paddy but hasn't yet received a premium price for it.

Third, he talked about the fluctuations with market prices. Despite an MSP being declared, farmers always ended up selling at a discount, sometimes nearly 40% below MSP. Agriculture was always at a loss and with manure, seeds, fertilizers, water, all these costs could not be covered in the price received. Moreover, traders would cheat farmers through incorrect weighing and insist on price cuts on the basis of quality, and the farmer would be forced to compromise. He gave the example of potatoes he had sold for 100 rupees for 20 kg. As soon as 80 per cent of farmers sold it the price increased to 170 rupees and those selling potatoes from the cold storage were able to take advantage of this price and make a profit.

Fourth, he raised the issue of fluctuation in the price of milk, which was decided on the basis of fat content of the milk. Even though milk prices for consumers stayed high (especially during and post-festivals), fat price for farmers was reduced as soon as the festival was over. When farmers sold the milk at Rs. 26 per litre, the same milk was sold at Rs. 52 per litre by dairy dealers. Middlemen were regulating the price of fat. They were the beneficiaries here. He spoke about adulteration of milk by farmers, who, when questioned, responded by arguing that companies also adulterated livestock feed and farmers had no choice but to resort to such practices. The cost of livestock feed had also more than doubled from 750 Rs per 40 kg bag to nearly 1600 Rs with adulteration levels being close to 10 per cent. Even seeds and pesticides being sold on the market were spurious.

Finally, he lamented that no one is ready to marry a farmer's son, especially in the Patel community. Despite having farmland and livestock, without having a house in the city, marriage was impossible. Even a 3000-5000 Rs per month job, as long as it provided stable income was acceptable. Even being a labourer with stable income was acceptable, but not a farmer, and certainly not a dairy farmer – no girl wanted to participate in all the labour involved.

Rajaram More, Dewas district, Madhya Pradesh

Rajaram Bhai raised the issue of Adivasi rainfed farmers in the Nimar (ghat neche) region of south-western Madhya Pradesh. Poor soils and the vagaries of rainfed farming resulted in very low output. He asked for the MSP for irrigated crops and rainfed crops to be calculated differently. Further, given the remoteness of these villages to markets, farmers were reliant on traders and large farmers to take their produce to the market. Many times, large farmers purchased the produce at a lower price, took the pauti (land record) of farmers, sold it at MSP to the government by showing the pauti and made a profit.

Moreover there were several farmers without a pauti in their name and these farmers were excluded from accessing crop insurance as well as MSP. He ended by saying that if the farmer faces ruin, so will the consumer [kisan maraa, aap bhi mare]. We put chemicals, so you also eat chemicals [hum davaa dale, aap bhi davaa khayein]. The responsibility for fixing the situation was not with the farmer alone but also with consumers.

Respondent: Shambhu Prasad, IRMA, Gujarat

Shambhu Prasad lamented that we as researchers actually do not understand the issues of farmers in letter and spirit. What are the categories through which farmers represent their own ideas? What a diversity of experiences exists in this single region. We need to understand this and do research along with them.

The narrative of Gujarat is that it is highly agriculturally advanced, power supply is not a problem, Bt cotton was first introduced here, agricultural markets work much better, APMC functioning is much better here. But in the last few years there has been large scale farmer unrest and distress that has been mostly under-reported. For instance, the severe drought in Saurashtra and Kutch region, lack of remunerative prices, water not being released so that farmers are unable to grow a second crop. What is the cost of keeping the Gujarat model going? The Anand-Gandhi Nagar expressway has impacted communities on either side – grazing lands have been separated. There has been large scale capture of commons in this state. With SEZs coming up, all this is reflected in farmers' agitations and farmers' concerns. The Patidar agitation is a reflection of social ills.

The base of agricultural productivity in the state was a result of water conservation work of the past. But this can get undermined because of the way agriculture has got transformed. There is a need for alternative spaces for farmers to speak out. Agricultural universities need to research what is the right path towards agricultural sustainability. Despite well-functioning dairy cooperatives, the narrative of farmer income doubling through milk has not played out. The new age of surplus in the last 3-4 years has led to reducing prices and rising costs, leading to lower returns. Even lakhpati (rich) farmers are facing a different kind of agricultural crisis in an advanced agricultural state like Gujarat. With so many farmers' movements engaging with the state, the narrative is changing.

Question and Answer Session

N Rajaram shared that water from the Sardar Sarovar dam is being released for industries and not for farmers. The water goes to urban areas like Vadodara and Ahmedabad. Further he said one cannot romanticize cooperatives. Milk cooperatives did not open in Saurashtra and cotton cooperatives failed to work.

In response to questions on natural farming and its viability and on changing irrigation methods, farmers responded that natural farming for major crops is not possible due to deficiency of seeds but it can be done for vegetables. To ensure irrigation, there is a need to move towards new technologically advanced methods of drip irrigation and sprinkler and make them farmer friendly and affordable. With the water level at 750 feet in the borewell, there was a real concern.

TECHNICAL SESSION 6

SITES OF CONTESTATION: MANAGING THE COMMONS

Hybrid forms of placemaking in Urban Commons Management: Lessons from the Kaikondrahalli lake in Bangalore, India

Amrita Sen and Harini Nagendra, Azim Premji University, Bangalore

This study, based on an empirical fieldwork on the Kaikondrahalli lake, situated in the city of Bangalore in India, argued that urban commons can be managed by hybrid forms of environmental placemaking. In doing so, the researchers drew on eight conversations with two age-groups of people (20-45 and 45-70), who regularly visit the lake and relate to the lake space in multiple ways. The lake is jointly maintained by the apex municipal body in the city or the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) and an NGOs named Mahadevapura Parisara Samrakshane Mattu Avibrudhi Samiti (MAPSAS) as well as the local communities.

Being located amidst a web of proliferating industrial hubs and residential complexes, the lake was subjected to immense degradation from the year 2007, by garbage dumping, sewage and industrial effluents. This triggered community action by a range of self-motivated citizens to rejuvenate the lake and assist BBMP for the purpose. Traditional usage patterns were kept in mind while designing the restoration plan and it was, thus, not subjected to the ‘middle class fetish’ of preserving pristine urban environments. In urban areas, commons might have multiple as well as contrasted usages of recreational and livelihood services.

Interviews with younger informants suggested that they valued the lake for its health benefits, especially as a place to exercise, run and meditate. It also affected children’s mental health positively. There was a school in the lake premises that catered to children from marginal backgrounds. Students used the lake ground for playing, sports day activities, reading etc. They also came on Saturdays to watch the fishermen fishing, to collect jamuns and coconut and take them back home, play khokho, long jump, kabaddi, cricket etc. Interviews with older informants suggested that the lake was a place for socialisation. It was a safe place especially for aged people as the community had made tremendous efforts to restore the lake and maintain it.

These interviews suggest multiple ways in which communities belonging to different socio-economic positions and different ages relate to the urban ecological commons in a city. Such experiences also let us consider how urban environmentalism comes out of its usual preoccupations with an elite approach, necessitating natural spaces as pristine. There can be multi-scalar linkages of the people with the urban commons and the natural green spaces in the city, which although diverse, are not necessarily exclusive mutually.

Local communities in the South have been represented as ‘too poor to be “Green”’, for their repudiated rights to the natural resources (Guha and Alier 1997: xvii). However, such a version of environmentalism misses out essentially on the local instances of environmental

placemaking: the meanings, identities and attachments that shape ideologies and practices on sustaining physical natural habitats collaboratively, as shared neighborhoods.

The study argues that environmentalism in global South cannot be comprehended linearly through polarized and resistance-based environmental movements, articulated for rights-based recognition and restoration of the ecology. It is rather imperative to explore a version of Southern environmentalism which incorporates attempts towards environmental placemaking through integrative yet multiple socio-ecological processes.

Of Swiddener-turned Farmers, and Farmer-turned Migrant Labour: Changing Adivasi-Commons relationship in Baiga Chak, Eastern Madhya Pradesh

R. Venkat Ramanujam, PhD Scholar, ATREE, Bangalore

Venkat's paper gave a historical overview of changing livelihoods of adivasis in the Baiga Chak region of eastern Madhya Pradesh and studied how this was transforming the relationship of adivasis with the commons. It is based on 21 months of ethnographic fieldwork (2015 to 2017) in Saraidadar Village (pseudonym) and 10 days spent in an industrial unit in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu. It also uses archival material, colonial reports, memoirs, writings by missionaries, twentieth century ethnographies and recent region-specific scholarly literature.

Baiga Chak is an upland forested region where Baigas are primarily dwellers of the upland forests and Gonds are dwellers of the lowland forests and valleys. Baiga (in majority) are the original inhabitants and were shifting cultivators and hunter gatherers in the past. However, colonial administration wanted to 'civilize' the Baigas and turn them into permanent cultivators. The colonial imperative for maximising forest revenues from timber extraction, and of increasing land revenue from extension of permanent cultivation to fallows, grassland, and 'wasteland' (aka forest without sal or teak) shaped the Baiga chak. Sal and teak forests were reserved for exclusive state use. From 1890 onwards there was forcible settlement in forest villages that were under complete control of the Forest Department. Gonds were invited into uplands as permanent cultivators. There was a deliberate 'civilising' policy of mixing Gonds with the Baigas.

Post-independence, the Forest Department's influence continued and shifting cultivation was discouraged. However, in an environment ill-suited for permanent cultivation, falling agricultural output and expanding populations led to a situation of intense food insecurity for the Baigas. In the 1990s, land levelling (*samtalikaran*) and check bund construction (*med-bandhaan*) [LL & CBC] were started by NGOs in this area for wage-based livelihoods support leading to agricultural intensification and a shift to paddy cultivation. 2008 onwards LL and CBC were also promoted through MGNREGS. This improved food security, both through greater output but also by enhancing cash availability and enabling purchase from the market.

However, this also led to reduced dependence on the forest and entrenching a sense of 'private' ownership of land and greater land conflicts. The FRA has also been feeding into this

sense of 'privatisation'. There is a rush for titles to individually cultivated land (Individual forest rights or IFR). Private ownership of farmland supersedes community solidarity and CPR management. The net effect of internal conflict is to disrupt unified identities such as village community (or even a unified Baiga or Gond community), and to weaken the potential for collective action in the service of community-based protection or conservation of the forest commons.

Along with an explosion of first generation school goers and mixed peer groups, the influence of mass media through mobile phones in Baiga Chak is pervasive. Amongst the younger lot, there is a desire for mobile phones, trendy clothes, accessories, the need to look cool, and an aspiration to experience the city. The weakening of MGNREGS since 2015 has given further impetus to growing outmigration for work. Household then monetisation of the Baiga Chak subsistence economy together with the formal education experience and youth tendency for long-distance migration produces fragmentation at the level of the individual. One outcome of recent propensities towards individualisation has been a noticeable disdain for certain kinds of manual labour pertaining to agricultural tasks, gathering of forest produce, and household chores among Adivasi youth. Traditional commons-based livelihoods and lifestyles are not perceived as aspirational.

Venkat asks, is what we see in the Baiga chak a fragmentation of the notion of the collective? As identities shifting from community to the household (agricultural intensification) to the individual (migration), are new forms of 'cultural' commons emerging? Can we engage with Baiga Chak Adivasis in a sense of mutual respect, and thereby with changing notions of the commons?

Politics of Cultural Commons: A Case Study of Sacred Groves in Central Kerala

Vinay Sankar, PhD Scholar, BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus

Sacred groves are defined as areas of land and bodies of water, as well as constructions and items, which are spiritually and/or religiously meaningful for local people and where sacral practices are performed. Vinay's study sought to analyse sacred groves using the framework of a common pool resource and to see the implications of a common property rights regime for access to and ecological conservation of these sacred spaces.

He chose ten groves from the sacred groves inventory by the Institute of Foresters, Kerala using purposive sampling to cover different ownership types and communities in Thrissur district. This district houses the most famous serpent worship centre across Kerala that can consecrate sacred groves and expunge spirits. A field survey using an observation schedule and semi-structured interviews was undertaken, focusing on bio-physical, social and institutional aspects of the management of sacred groves. He sought to describe the nature of the relationship between sacred natural sites and various actors such as communities, clergy, state and parastatal organizations like NGOs, and temple committees.

The management of sacred groves in the field sites in Thrissur does not show much evidence of collective choice. There is a tendency of sacred groves to become ‘club goods’ over a period of time. There seems to be a transition from ‘*porumboke*’ (collective ownership) to individual private property. Sacred groves are also increasingly imbricated in identity politics with the concomitant usurpation of public spaces using religious symbols.

In the past, regardless of actual ownership of the land (private family, family trust, temple committee, public trust, Devaswom Board etc.), the stake of a wider public as believers or seekers of spiritual succor made these groves a common pool resource from a cultural perspective, apart from the standpoint of ecology. While groves were customarily managed by specific caste groups (dominant Nairs or even scheduled caste groups), access was not physically restricted (except by invoking the fear of spirits, which also served as a means of ecological protection and regeneration).

However, the recent construction of concrete boundaries around groves, the building of temples and offering daily prayers have altered the physical and cultural character of these spaces. They have enabled discriminatory prohibition of access along lines of religion, caste and gender. Customary usufruct rights of dispossessed communities have been lost. From the principle was ‘no removing and no improving’, concretisation has disturbed the ecology (vegetative cover and biodiversity) and ironically, much of this has been funded by the state through schemes meant to protect the groves.

Vinay argued that the commons perspective was ineffective in capturing the dynamics of power underlying the institutions revolving around sacred groves. Despite their growing exclusive nature as elitist, closed concrete temple spaces, these sacred groves were part of new political projects that continued to evoke the notion of a (new) cultural commons. This politics of empty space that seemed to be unfolding required a different language, perhaps of political ecology, to understand this transformation.

Socio-environmental Conflicts in the Fisheries of Southern Kerala

Charles-Alexis M.P.B. Couvreur

Charles-Alexis presented his study of a conflict between two neighbouring fishing communities in the Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala that has resulted from the building of a mini-fishing harbour in the region and the subsequent use of ring seine net technology for fishing by one community. The study uses qualitative research methods and participant observation to provide a fine-grained picture of economic transformations from the perspective of artisanal fish-workers themselves.

He draws upon Stephen Gudeman’s work on differing conceptions of value and asks the following questions: (1) how do artisanal fish-workers conceptualise their own economy? (2) how do they perceive and engage with changes around its boundaries? The discussion of value begins by identifying the ‘base’, which is central to the economy, and, in this case, it is the sea, the coast and the blurring boundaries between them. The sea is a provider of livelihood, material and/or sacred. It replenishes and is seen as the object of all knowledge. Access to and protection of the sea is seen as the role of the community – a form of commons. Coastal land

(shore) has both legal (multiple tenures) and physical fluidity (coastal erosion and accretion) and together with the sea, this forms the fundamental embodiment of value for the fishing community, which is Latin Catholic Mukkuvar. As per Gudeman's framework, value is also embodied in social relationships, in trade and finally, through accumulation of resources, relationships, goods and money capital.

The building of a mini-fishing harbour based on demands from local fisherfolk in Anchuthengu village led to severe coastal erosion in Poothura village, negatively affecting the latter's fishing livelihood. Many from Poothura migrated to the Gulf and some to the north of Kerala. They returned with a new idea and new means. In the late 2000s some of them started investing in ring seine technology for fishing.

Charles-Alexis studies the conflict that arose, subsequently. Ring seine technology allowed for larger boats, bigger catches and more income in Poothura, which was also seemingly shared more equitably between owners of boats and workers on boats. However, the traditional artisanal fishers in Anchuthengu criticised the new technology as destroying the ability of the sea to produce fish – a critique framed in the language of the ecological commons. For Poothura, caring for the future generations rested on accumulation of value in the form of money capital (selling as many fish as they could). For Anchuthengu, it rested on preservation of value in the base i.e. in the sea itself.

However, the study highlighted the limitations of using Gudeman's approach in further understanding the conflict. Missing was a historical understanding of power relationships that had shaped use of the sea, especially that of the powerful Catholic Church as well as the 'modernising' influences of the state. Equally problematic was the assumption that Anchuthengu villagers wanted to save the environment as their sole aim, thus challenging the typical framing of the 'environmentalism of the poor'. Informants from Anchuthengu made it clear that they, too, wanted to 'develop' (an idea that needs to be unpacked) and become less reliant on the environment.

Charles-Alexis argued for the need to go beyond the framing of the commons and to use a variety of approaches including insights from ecological economics, political ecology and possibly, theories that take the biophysical reality of the sea and the coast as actors to better understand the contours of the conflict and the framing of value.

Question and Answer Session

Amrita Sen was asked questions of livelihoods, usage, class, gentrification, and the regulatory body managing the lake. She responded saying that, there is some data to show that the villagers abutting the lake having socio-cultural and religious attachments with the lake. Cattle grazing and fishing were not earlier allowed in the site. The affluent sections who are now influential in lake management allow only certain types of community activities.

Shambu Prasad remarked that we may want to see the lake and its management within the framework of recreational commons. He offered Lodi Gardens from Delhi as a comparative frame. He also wanted the authors to be cautious as it seemed that a lot of conclusions were being drawn from only eight interviews. He foregrounded the need to focus on the relevant institutions, and the need to map out a greater range of practices.

Venkat Ramanujam was asked questions on MNREGA, FRA, recent displacements of Baigas from tiger reserves, rural roads and their impact on migration patterns, and migration as a working holiday. He responded saying that elderly Baigas do not like the changes. It is mostly middle-aged and younger Baigas who like the recent changes. The latter feel that there is less hunger. The youth like the new media. Middle aged women from amongst the Baigas are not so happy with the changes either. People in general are unhappy about recent changes in the implementation of MGNREGA (online payments and Aadhar linkage).

The Baiga Chak does not fall within any tiger reserve. Roads have played an important role in immigration. There are push factors for migration. People have got used to spending cash for mobile vouchers etc. They need access to regular income. Even other forms of expenditure such as relatively lavish marriages with DJs have made inroads. People need cash for all of this. There is also the pull factor of an aspirational city life. **Shambu Prasad** remarked that the paper shows a disproportionate reliance on colonial history. There is a need to draw more from the post-independence experience. There is a need to include some quantitative data in the discussions surrounding MGNREGA.

Questions were raised to **Vinay Sankar** about the very definition of a sacred grove – what makes a patch of woodlot a sacred grove? The need to bring out the uniqueness of each sacred grove was also foregrounded. **Shambu Prasad** also questioned the wisdom of trying to fit the case and the data to Ostrom's design principles. **Vinay** responded by saying that this is a work in progress and he wants to use a political ecology framework to analyse the emergent issues from the field. One also needs to take into account cultural factors where sacred groves often acted as communities' medicine chests. Kerala is a syncretic, plural polity. The origin stories of many sacred groves reflect this. But this seems to be changing over the last 10-15 years with increasing polarisation. Barriers are being put to entry into sacred groves, especially for animals, menstruating women and non-Hindus.

Charles-Alexis Couvreur was asked about the role of the state, the kind of technology the state makes available, the intertwined relationship between the Church and the state, the role of frameworks such as those by Ostrom in overdetermining our analysis, on fisheries rights, fisheries regulations and availability of fish. He responded that he needed to conduct more research on the role of the state and the Church. Further, those using ring seine boats also consider themselves as artisanal fisherfolk. Shoreline changes are also crucial and needs to be factored in understanding such conflicts. **Shambu Prasad** remarked that using photographs of harbours and nets would have been useful. He also wanted the author to engage with the literature on fisheries and conflicts in a more engaged manner. He further said that the discussions on commons needs to step back to basic questions regarding collective action and cooperation.

CONCLUDING SESSION: NEXT STEPS FOR NRAS

In the concluding session, chaired by AR Vasavi, Independent Scholar, Bengaluru, PS Vijayshankar reiterated the need to bring rural areas back into research and take stock of progress made so far. Shambu Prasad said that NRAS is not an organisation, rather a network. He said that it has been a conscious decision to hold the conference in different regions, to benefit host institutions and scholars from the region. He said he would like to hear people's experiences and have feedback from students.

One of the students raised a question on the awareness about the idea of commons, such as wells, land etc. at the village level. Vasavi responded that engagements at the village level are important for mobilising people and these engagements can be brought about through the participation of students and young scholars at the local level. Another student asked a question on the need of papers in regional languages. Vasavi said that NRAS conferences have had sessions on regional language, there is a provision for submissions in regional language and it is highly encouraged. While responding to a question on the need of writing and mentoring workshops, Vasavi encouraged the students to write in regional languages for popular press, media, etc.

A query was raised on the mismatch between policy discussions and practical interventions and the need for groups which work at the level of society to slowly bring about transformations on the ground. Sudhir Kumar Suthar acknowledged that the agitation over lack of policy outcomes is valid. However, he emphasised that the process of knowledge generation is not entirely about policy, rather such engagements facilitate exchange of ideas. He argued that academic discussions are an independent and necessary exercise and we should try not to be so anxious about policy outcomes. He insisted that discussions around the ideas, like the idea of commons are important in themselves.

Tulika Tripathi added that such engagements help one to come up with shared understandings of the issues underpinning the policy process. She said that there is a gap between policy and practice and a divide between politics and academics, particularly in India. There are problems in the other parts of the machinery. But many participants are doing overlapping jobs and are active at the community level. Hence, academics is not totally insulated from the policy process. Shambu Prasad added that the network character of the organisation helps people respond to the needs highlighted by members and to have a conversation around themes and helps break barriers across disciplines and facilitate dialogue at different levels such as the university level. He said that the network should work on self-organising principles and there is a need to have people from policy and the field.

Dhananjay Rai said that there can't be public policies without public finances. He noted that the National Agricultural Mission launched in 2012, had no vision for agricultural development and that successive policies have further hollowed the framework. Public policy is faced with issues of funding and negotiating with political agencies and requires co-operation and participation in order to bring about transformations.

PS Vijayshankar said that publication is a critical issue for young scholars. NRAS website works as an interface for exchange of research initiatives by NRAS and helps in networking and bringing more people into the picture. The need of a writing workshop was repeated many times. Vijayshankar proposed a farmer's initiative as a distinct, full-fledged exercise.

Shambu Prasad thanked Prof. Bari and Dhananjay Rai for showing a keen interest in the conference and the generous funding for the event. Tulika Tripathi also thanked Prof. Indira Dutta for facilitating smooth coordination, logistics and overall organisation of the conference. Richa Kumar thanked the faculty members and student volunteers of CUG for managing food, transport, posters and overall finances. She applauded Dhananjay Rai's coordination of the farmer's session, which worked very well due to professional help from Gujarat Vidyapeeth for translation. P.S. Vijayshankar thanked Richa Kumar and Sudhir Kumar Suthar for their work in the program committee. He mentioned that this was the first NRAS conference to be organised at a central university and noted that it is a good precedent for the coming years.

Central University of Gujarat
School of Social Sciences
in collaboration with
Network of Rural and Agrarian Studies (NRAS)
organises sixth international conference of NRAS on

**Whither Rural Commons?
State Policy, Natural Resources and Rural India**

September 20-22, 2018
Sector-29 campus, Seminar Hall, Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar.

Knowledge Partner
Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi
Co-Sponsored by
The Ford Foundation, New Delhi
National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)
Foundation for Ecological Security (FES)

Programme Schedule

DAY ONE Thursday, September 20, 2018

09:00 - 09:30 am	Registration
09:30 - 10:45 am	Inaugural Session
Welcome:	Prof. Indira Dutta, Dean, School of Social Sciences
Introduction of Conference:	Dhananjay Rai, Assistant Professor, CUG, Coordinator
Introduction of NRAS and Theme:	Richa Kumar, Associate Professor, IIT Delhi, and Sudhir Kumar Suthar, Assistant Professor, CPS, JNU
NABARD's interventions in Natural Resource Management:	Shri. S.D.P. Sharma, General Manager, NABARD Gujarat, RO Ahmedabad
Keynote Address:	Prof. Y.K. Alagh, Hon'ble Chancellor, Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar <i>Changing Contours of Land Policy and the Commons in India</i>
Presidential Remarks:	Prof. S.A. Bari, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar
Vote of Thanks:	Tulika Tripathi, Assistant Professor, CUG, Co-Coordinator
Rapporteur:	Abhigya, Research Scholar, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

10:45 am - 11: 00 am Tea Break

11:00 am- 01:30 pm Technical Session 1: Understanding and Interpreting the Commons

Chair: Prof Y. K. Alagh, Chancellor, Central University of Gujarat

1. N. Rajaram, Former Professor and Dean, Central University of Gujarat: *Reimagining the Rural Commons – Lessons from the Past*
2. Natasha Koshy, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bengaluru: *Common to Whom? Environment and Development-Making Practices in Uttarakhand*
3. Krithi S. Assistant Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad: *Exploring the Changing Commons in the Rural: A Case Study of Chamba and Puducherry*
4. Sudha Nagavarapu, Research Associate, Sangtin, Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan (SKMS), Sitapur district, Uttar Pradesh, Richa Kumar, Associate Professor, IIT Delhi, Surbala Vaish, Sangtin, Sitapur and Richa Singh, Sangtin, Sitapur: *The Commons as Place, Resource, Usage, Memory: Perspectives from Western Awadh*
5. Seema Mundoli, Research Associate, Azim Premji University and Harini Nagendra, Professor, Azim Premji University: *Commons in “no-man’s land”: Status and governance of rural commons in the urban fringes of Bengaluru city, India*

Discussant: Richa Kumar, Associate Professor, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

Rapporteur: Anand Prakash, Research Scholar, Indian Institute of Technology Delhi

01:30 pm - 02:30 pm Lunch

02:30 pm - 03:30 pm Technical Session 2: Seeds as Commons

Chair: Tulika Tripathi, Assistant Professor, CUG

1. Archana Patnaik, Assistant Professor, IIT Kharagpur and Joost Jongerden, Wageningen University, Netherlands: *Seeds, sustainable practices and biosocial commons*
2. Neeraj Kapoor, Member of PRADAN New Delhi and Ashutosh Kumar, Action Research Fellow in Rayagada, Centre for Development Practice, Ambedkar University Delhi (AUD), New Delhi: *Understanding the Process of Rural Commoning through Indigenous Seed Conservation Practices*

Discussant: Richa Kumar, Associate Professor, IIT Delhi

Rapporteur: Debottam Saha, PhD Scholar, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

03:30 pm - 03:45 pm Tea Break

03:45 pm - 06:15 pm Technical Session 3: Governing the Commons: Water

Chair and Discussant: P.S. Vijay Shankar, Director of Research, Samaj Pragati Sahyog, Dewas, Madhya Pradesh

1. Rashmi Mahajan, PhD Scholar, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE): *Everyday politics of state-community interactions: A case of water management in Eastern Vidarbha region, India*

2. Gopi Verma, Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) and Anand Venkatesh, Professor, IRMA: *A community-based model of managing common pool resources (CPRs): A case of Aabar-Pyne irrigation system in South Bihar*
3. Kumar Gaurav M. Sc. Student, School of Ecology And Environment Studies, Nalanda University and Aviram Sharma, Assistant Professor, School of Ecology and Environment Studies, Nalanda University: *Revisiting Community-based Traditional Irrigation System of South Bihar*
4. Frederic Landy, Director, French Institute of Pondicherry, Laurent Ruiz, INRA-IRD-IISc, Julie Jacquet, University of Lyon and Roma Hooge, Agro Paris Tech/Department of Social Sciences, French Institute of Pondicherry: *The commons as (demanding) social constructions: The case of aquifers in rural Karnataka*
5. Raghav Chakravarthy, CSO (Consultant), Samaj Pragati Sahayog, Dewas, Madhya Pradesh, Harshala Jambhulkar, Samaj Pragati Sahyog and Rajaram Mory, Samaj Pragati Sahyog: *Groundwater as Commons: Exploring Hydraulic Solidarities among Tribal Communities of Central India*

Rapporteur: Vrinda Acharya, PhD Scholar, JNU, New Delhi

07:00 pm NRAS Meeting

DAY TWO Friday, September 21, 2018

09:30 am - 10:45 am Panel Discussion with Farmers from Gujarat

Chair: Indira Dutta, Dean, School of Social Sciences, Central University of Gujarat

Discussion with Farmers

Discussant: C Shambu Prasad, Professor, IRMA

Rapporteur: Neeraj Kapoor, Member of PRADAN, New Delhi

10:45 am - 11:00 am Tea break

11:00 am - 1:30 pm Technical Session 4: The Politics of Land

Chair: Sudhir Kumar Suthar, Assistant Professor, Centre for Political Studies, JNU, Delhi

1. Vrinda Acharya, PhD Scholar, Centre for Political Studies, JNU, New Delhi: *The Inadequacy of Law: Land, Protests and Demands in Bhavnagar, Gujarat*
2. Chinglen Laishram, PhD Scholar, Central University of Gujarat: *International financing and pressure on Indigenous peoples land in Manipur: Case study of ADB projects post 2010*
3. Carol Upadhyaya, Professor, National Institute of Advanced Studies: *Rural Real Estate: Agrarian Land as a Financial Asset*
4. Sukhpal Singh Professor, Centre for Management in Agriculture (CMA), IIM, Ahmedabad: *Access to and Control of village common lands in Punjab: The state policies and their contradictions*

5. Pampa Mukherji, Professor, Panjab University, Chandigarh: *Decommissioning of Common Land in Punjab: Interplay of Caste, Gender and Power*

Discussant: Sailen Routray, Director, Centre for Human Sciences Bhubaneswar

Rapporteur: Natasha Koshy, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Indian Institute for Human Settlements

01:30 pm - 02:30 pm Lunch

2:30 pm - 4:00 pm: Technical Session 5: Appropriating the Forest: Commons and Community Rights

Chair: Dhananjay Rai, Assistant Professor, CUG

1. Saurabh Chowdhury, Ambedkar University Delhi and Samrakshan Charitable Trust, Agara M.P.: *Factors affecting Fuel wood Extraction within a adivasi village communities and its impact on the forest ecology: A case study from Sheopur District, Madhya Pradesh, India*
2. Nikita Sonavane, Working Group For Women And Land Ownership (WGWLO): *Interpreting the Rural-Commons in light of the Forest Rights Act*
3. Kamal Nayan Choubey, Assistant Professor, Dayal Singh College, Delhi University: *Forest as contested 'commons': Some Ethnographic Notes on the Quest for Forest Resources and Emerging Democratic Consciousness*

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

Rapporteur: Debottam Saha, PhD Scholar, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

04:00 pm - 04:15 pm Tea break

04:15 pm - 06:15 pm Technical Session 6: Sites of Contestation: Managing the Commons

Chair and Discussant: C. Shambu Prasad, Professor, IRMA

1. Venkat Ramanujam Ramani, PhD Scholar, Ashoka Trust For Research, In Ecology And The Environment (ATREE) Bangalore: *Of swiddener-turned farmers, and farmer-turned migrant labour: Changing Adivasi-commons relationships in the Baiga Chak, eastern Madhya Pradesh*
2. Amrita Sen, Azim Premji University and Harini Nagendra, Professor, Azim Premji University, Bangalore: *Hybrid forms of urban commons management: lessons from three lakes in Bangalore, India*
3. Vinay Sankar, BITS-Pilani, Hyderabad campus: *'Tragedy of Cultural Commons'- Sacred Groves in Kerala*
4. Charles-Alexis M. P. B. Couvreur, PhD Scholar, University of Oxford, UK: *Socio-environmental Valuation Conflicts in the Fisheries of Southern Kerala*

Rapporteur: Sailen Routray, Director, Centre for Human Sciences Bhubaneswar

DAY THREE

September 22, 2018

09:30 - 10:45 am Concluding Session

Chair: AR Vasavi, Independent Scholar, Bangalore

Discussion on Conference Proceedings

Next steps for NRAS

Rapporteur: Abhigya, Research Scholar, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

10:45 am - 11:00 am Tea Break

11:00 am - 1:15 pm: Mentoring Workshop

Presenters:

1. Ashvin N Vasava (CUG): *Resistance Movements Amongst the Adivasis of Gujarat: A Case Study of Kotwalias Movement*
2. Inamul Haq and Sheeraz Ahmad Sofi (CUG): *Kashmir Conflict and Water Resources: Impact of Indus Water Treaty*
3. Mudasir Dar and Sabzar Bhat (CUG): *Impact of Globalisation on Indian Agriculture in Post-reform Period*
4. Murari Behera, Centre for Study in Economics and Planning (CSEP, CUG): *Addressing an Overview of Agrarian Distress in India*
5. Ashok Nayak and Neha Rai (CUG): *Indebtedness Inequality of Agricultural Households*
6. Pankaj Soni (BHU): *Ascertaining the role of Agrarian Culture in the Economic Transformation*
7. Priya Gupta, National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS): *Commons in wildlife conservation areas: Contemporary notion of community resources*
8. Vrinda Acharya, Centre For Political Studies (CPS, JNU): *Constitutionalism and Politics of Land in the Global South: Laws, Rights And Protests On Land Acquisition In India And South Africa*
9. Waseem Hussain Rather (CUG): *Agrarian Crisis in India: The Root Cause, Consequences and Remedies*
10. Angshuman Sarma (JNU): *Riparian Agriculture and Rural Commons of Char Areas*

01:15 pm - 01:30 pm Vote of Thanks

01:30 pm - 02:30 pm Lunch