

Azim Premji University

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| Course Title | Agrarian concerns, Food security and Sustainability | | |
| Programme Title | Master of Arts in Development (cross listed with MPG) | | |
| Mode | Online delivery | Level | L3 |
| Course ID | SUS -237 | Credits | 3 (36 hours) |
| Course Type | Elective | Semester | 3 (from September 2020) |
| Academic Year | 2020-21 | | |
| Course Designers | Seema Purushothaman | | |
| Course Instructor | Seema Purushothaman | | |

Agrarian concerns, Food security and Sustainability

Rationale

There are three reasons for offering this course:

1. Vast majority of India's farms are small and marginal holdings (8 crores in 1990, more than 12 crores in 2011). This mass based primary production system of the country is intricately linked to local ecology (including biodiversity, water, livestock, commons) as well as social practices (including caste, tenurial arrangements, labour practices, and the power dynamics of entrenched semi-feudal relations). An understanding of the relevance of small and marginal producers who are influenced by local and distant actors and forces, and are simultaneously active in non-farm informal sector, is essential for any student of development, especially those interested in catalysing welfare gains in rural India.
2. The contiguity and intricacy of the inter-linkages between the social and natural so evident in the fields of rural India have been overlooked by both forest-centric ecological concerns as well as food-centric agricultural concerns (when nearly 50% of our land area is degraded) articulated in development and sustainability discourses. Therefore, the social and ecological bases of the Indian farmers' production practices and prospects deserves to be investigated in conjunction with each other so as to bring together the dynamic linkages between food needs and culture, farming as an occupation, and large scale changes in ecology and political economy.
3. Stemming from the challenge of feeding more than a billion Indians living in the times of LPG (liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation) with changing food habits and health needs, any thinking about the future of Indian agriculture has to be grounded in the obvious and legitimate concerns of food insecurity. Importance of this concern is reinforced by the facts on imports, exports and per capita availability of nutrients.

Understanding the track record of responses to this challenge is critical for interpreting the political economy of food security and the food policy discourse in contemporary India. It is imperative for a student of development in India to examine whether food security policies enable or undermine their own stated intentions, and to investigate the reasons and implications of such a mismatch between intentions and outcomes. This understanding needs to be developed through a sustained engagement with changing rurality in contemporary India, investigating questions related to livelihoods, agrarian distress, de-peasantisation and emerging alternatives.

Objectives of the course and expected learning outcomes

The course is expected to provide students with an overview of the actors involved in India's agrarian sector and of the links between food production, consumption and sustainability as well as of the possible ways ahead. This course should enable the student to

1. Appreciate the intrinsic **inter linkages between food security, livelihoods, culture and local ecology and with political economy of land relations, production and consumption** in India.
2. Evolve a comprehensive understanding of the **status and politico-economic drivers of food security in India at national and household level** of the urban consumer and of the rural producer -consumer.
3. Explore the diverse ideas and critiques of the **role of family farms** in societal wellbeing and evolve a perspective on sustainability of small farm livelihoods, food, culture and ecologies within a globalised context.

At the end of the semester, students should be familiar with the ecological, economic, justice and welfare arguments for why small holders need to be sustained. Students should also be aware of the political and economic drivers undermining small farm livelihoods and of the ecological, cultural and nutritional implications of destabilizing small farms and of some possible ways ahead. In this learning process they will be familiar with the different meanings of food security at different scales, its distributional and nutritional underpinnings and its interface with consumption cultures so as to make themselves capable of planning and analysing rural development schemes and farm policies in general and more specifically at the regional scale.

Syllabus:

The course will be transacted in five units spanning 12 weeks, consisting of 24 class room sessions of 1.5 hours each (total 36 hours of classes).

Unit 1 (Week 1 and 2; 6 hours): Introduction to Agrarian India

Following a brief interaction on the rationale behind the course, units involved, assessment pattern and timelines, this unit will provide a bird's eye view of the key features of agrarian India. Discussions will start with experiential understanding of the class on farmers and agriculture before moving on to the essential readings.

Changing nature of our production landscapes and farmer communities, food and nutritional needs of as well as the production, consumption, import and export of major food products will be highlighted in the backdrop of green revolution, urbanization and neo-liberalisation of agricultural economy. Though several dimensions around farming will be briefly unraveled, two simple readings will make it an interesting exposure in two weeks.

Essential:

Dipankar Gupta 2005. Whither the Indian Village – culture and agriculture in rural India, special article, *Economic and Political Weekly*. 19 February 2005. P.751-757.

Ranganathan T C A (2015). Agricultural Oddities. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 50 (21):16-19.

Kumar, R, N K Agrawal, P.S. Vijayshankar and A R Vasavi (2020) State of Rural and Agrarian India Report 2020 - *Rethinking Productivity and Populism Through Alternative Approaches*. Network of Rural and Agrarian Studies.

Suggested:

Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) (2014). *State of Indian Farmers: A Report*. (Page 7-11, 15-20, 25-36)

Unit II (Week 3 and 4; 6 hours): Food security, food regimes and sovereignty

This unit unpacks the overarching concept of food security, building on the understanding from the previous unit on agrarian India. We will explore the politically convenient notion that pitches the consumer against the producer, while differentiating what food security entails in national and household contexts. Politics, governance, trade and distributional aspects are key in these discussions.

Tracing the policy trajectory of food security from independence, this unit will investigate protectionist project of newly independent India designing import substitution strategies (e.g: green revolution) and then moving to the popular imports based model and how in the pandemic ravaged world at present, we try to do both the above. We will see how the ‘free’ but ‘unfair’ trade regime together with an agri-business food-regime took food security away from the idea of alleviating hunger & malnutrition towards a trade facilitating tool.

Readings will be bit more denser than the previous unit. To facilitate learning, there will be other supportive resources like **video** talks.

Acharya, S.S. (2009). Food Security and Indian Agriculture: Policies, Production Performance and Marketing Environment. *Agricultural economics Research Review*. Vol. 22. January-June 2009 pp 1-19.

Foran *et al* (2014). Taking complexity in food systems seriously: an interdisciplinary analysis. *World Development*, 61: 85-101.

McMichael, Philip and Schneider, M (2011). Food security politics and millennium development goals. *Third World Quarterly*. 32(1)119-139.

Agarwal, Beena (2014). Food sovereignty, food security and democratic choice: critical contradictions, difficult conciliations. *Journal of Peasant Studies*. DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2013.876996

Suggested:

Bernstien, Henry (2015). Food regimes and food regimes analysis. Talk delivered at conference on *Land grabbing, conflict and agrarian- environmental transformations: perspectives from East and Southeast Asia*. Chiang Mai University. Thailand.

Narayanan S. (2015) Food Security in India: The Imperative and its Challenges. *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies*. 2(1): 197-209.

Unit III (Weeks 5, 6 and 7; 9 hours): Political ecology of vulnerability and distress

As increasing yields/ productivity becomes the mantra for both food and livelihood security, why is it that the related increase in costs, declining ratio of outputs to inputs, as well as the diminishing capacity of land to support the family and its livestock get overlooked? As we explore how mis-informed policies add to the vulnerability of small holder farming, we also will reveal how distress in the hinterlands is then used to justify imports of farm products from scale-economized and subsidized farm sectors of the developed world as also corporatization of farming. The above discussion will link to the domestic constraints like restrictions on produce movements and on entry of traders, apart from the ecological and equity outcomes of lopsided subsidies for inputs and dominant food grains. A key learning outcome concerns linking the local with the global and understanding the dynamics therein, linking to the emerging concepts like deskilling, individualization and de-peasantisation. We want students to be able to see how markets simultaneously driven by demand and supply, and trade negotiations at the WTO, regional agreements or in the commodity markets determine small farm livelihoods and sustainability of Indian agriculture.

Essential:

Münster, Daniel. (2015). "Ginger is a gamble": Crop booms, rural uncertainty, and the neoliberalization of agriculture in South India. *Focaal*. 2015. 10.3167/fcl.2015.710109.

Vasavi (2009). Suicides and the making of India's agrarian distress. *South African Review of Sociology*, 40(1):124-138.

Stone, G.D.2007. Agricultural Deskilling and the Spread of Genetically Modified Cotton in Warangal. *Current Anthropology*. (48)1: 67-97.

Stone G.D. and A. Flachs. 2017. The ox fall down: path-breaking and technology treadmills in Indian cotton agriculture, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, DOI:10.1080/03066150.2017.1291505

Mc Neil.2000. The Green Revolution. In *Something New under the Sun – An Environmental History of the 20th century world*. Allen Lane. Penguin Press. London. P.219-27.

Kumar, R (2019). India's Green Revolution and Beyond. *Visioning Agrarian Futures on Selective Readings of Agrarian Pasts*. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 54(34): 41-48

Kripke G. (2015) Food Fight: What the debate about food security means at the WTO. *Canadian Food Studies, Global Food Trade*. Special Issue: Mapping the Global Food Landscape. 2(2): 77-87.

Jishnu 2019. Fighting the Skewed WTO system. *State of the Environment*. CSE.

Suggested:

Bajpai V. and A. Saraya. 2018. Food Security - The Gaffes of the Past and Options for the Future (Part I and II). In *Food Security in India - Myth and Reality*. Aakar Books, India. pp. - 227-300.

Araghi, F (2009). *The Invisible Hand and the Visible Foot: Peasants, dispossession and globalization in Peasants and Globalization: Political Economy, rural transformation and the agrarian question* edited by Haroon Akram-Lodhi and Cristobal Kay.

Dogra, Bharath. 1991. *The Life and Work of Dr.R.H. Richharia*.

Unit IV (Weeks 8 and 9; 6 hours): How to approach sustainability in Indian agriculture

Sustainability in the agricultural context – what does it mean to us? Is it about ensuring food and nourishment for all, about ensuring reliable livelihoods in farming or contributing significantly to economic growth and foreign exchange earnings or about following agro-ecologically prudent practices? Can it be all of these? Does sustainability construed as any/all of the above depend on scale of farming? How do the efforts at each of these objectives play out on small holders and poor consumers and in different production systems from in-land plains to riverine and coastal or mountainous terrains? Deliberating these in the backdrop of diverse farming ideologies will be an interesting discussion, building on students' experiential accounts and literature.

Essential:

Scott, James C. 1998. "Taming Nature: An Agriculture of Legibility and Simplicity." In *Seeing Like a State*, 262-306, 414-423. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Hansen J W (1996). Is Agricultural Sustainability a Useful Concept? *Agricultural Systems*, 50: 117-143

Pretty, J and Bharucha, Z.P (2014). Sustainable intensification in agricultural systems. *Annals of Botany* 114: 1571–1596.

Unit V (Weeks 10, 11 and 12; 9 hours): Why India needs its small holders and what can be done?

Here we will train the lens close to the dominant but invisible player – family farms. This unit will see how small farms came into being as the dominant entity in different production landscapes of the country - the socio-economic entity that combines the roles of producer and consumer at the bottom of the economic pyramid; their practices, preferences and ecological relevance. Leveraging a broad-brush but historically informed characterization of agrarian relations and transitions in the dominant agrarian regions of the country, we will also briefly discuss differentiation among Indian small holders and how do they compare with their counterparts elsewhere, including the historical 'peasant'.

While societies in the North are responding to globalization's lengthening of distance between producer and consumer through mechanisms like farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture; how is

it that in India the disconnect between primary producers of food and consumers is unchecked and widening? The course will conclude by deliberating the pros and cons of different strategies to address this reflected in dominant trends and institutions as well as emerging concepts. The changes in farm policies, farming activities and consumer needs driven by the pandemic (e.g. recent marketing reforms and pesticide ban), along with potential ways to deal with these and other challenges already discussed in the course, will be covered as part of the student projects.

Essential:

Negi V (2014). Where have all the small farmers gone! The story of Agriculture and the Small Indian Farmer. (Page 15-28)

Fan and Chan-Kang (2005) Is small beautiful? Farm size, productivity and poverty in Asian Agriculture. *Agricultural Economics*, 32 (1): 135-146.

van der Ploeg 2013. Peasant-driven agricultural growth and food sovereignty. Conference Paper #8. International conference on Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue, Yale university, 2013.

Singh, Sukhpal (2008). Producer Companies as New Generation Cooperatives. *Economic & Political Weekly* 43(20): 22-24.

Kesavan, P.C and Swaminathan, M.S. 2008. Strategies and models for agricultural sustainability in developing Asian countries. *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci*. 2008 February 27; 363(1492): 877–891

Purushothaman, Seema. 2019. The Science and Economics of Family Farms. Guest Editorial. *Current Science*. 117 (11): 1763-1764.

Altieri, M A. and Toledo, M.V. 2011. The Agroecological Revolution in Latin America: Rescuing Nature, Ensuring Food Sovereignty and Empowering Peasants. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(3), 587-612.

Suggested:

Hazell 2011. *Five big questions on 500 million small farmers*. IFAD. Rome. pp.3-15.

Assessment: The plan is for continuous assessment throughout the five units with a combination of oral (30%) and written (55%) responses, including a project involving telephonic interactions with farmers and FPOs, followed by an analytical report. In each grading process, student’s incremental understanding during the course and effort put in will be the criteria.

| | | | Weightage |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Response paper | End of week 3 | 25 |
| 2 | Debate (small groups) | Part of weeks 7 and/or 8 | 30 |
| 3 | Project report | Week 12 | 30 |
| 4 | Class engagement | Continuous | 15 |