

International Seminar on Socio Cultural study of Agriculture 15-16th March, 2019, Mata Sundri College for Women:

Detailed Report

Mata Sundri College for Women, University of Delhi organized an **International Seminar** on the ‘Socio-Cultural Study of Agriculture’ on **15th and 16th March, 2019**. The seminar saw the presentation of approximately **70 papers** by researchers, policy makers, teachers and students from various disciplines and parts of the world and was organized keeping in mind the critical situation facing the nation in the form of farmer suicides as well as the need for sustainable growth of the agricultural sector. The seminar comprised **twelve sessions** besides the inaugural and award ceremony sessions, and these were presided over by **Dr Harpreet Kaur**, Principal of the college, **Prof Lokesh Kumar Gupta**, Convener and **Prof Kiranjeet Sethi** Co-Convener of the seminar. What follows is a detailed report of each session.

Day 1 (15th March 2019) _____

- **Inaugural Session**

Time: 9:30 am- 11:15 am.

Venue: Mata Sahib Kaur Auditorium

In the inaugural session, Professor Kiranjeet Sethi greeted everyone present as the anchor. The session began on an auspicious note with a prayer song sung by students and with the lighting of the lamp to symbolize the dispelling of ignorance by the light of knowledge. A floral welcome was then extended by Dr Harpreet Kaur, Principal to the dignitaries, which included the Keynote Speaker Prof. Ghanshyam Lal Devra, (Former VC, Vardgaman Mahavir Open University, Kota), the Chief Guest Ms Dakshita Das (Additional Secretary, Ministry of Finance), the Guest of Honor, Dr A.S. Narang (Ex Registrar and Professor, Pol Sci IGNOU), and Presidential Addresser Prof Ashok Vishandass (Program Director, IIPA). The convener Dr Lokesh Kumar Gupta (Dept of Hindi) presented bouquets to the Principal.

The principal’s speech emphasized the importance of the agricultural sector by noting that any disturbance in the former can lead to repercussions all over the country. She listed various challenges facing farmers today and urged policy-makers and researchers participating in the seminar to contribute solutions to the same. She also mentioned the contribution of women to farming practices and reminded everyone that Guru Nanak Dev Ji Himself worked as a farmer and brought back glory to this occupation when people were moving away from caste-based professions.

The address of the Chief Patron of the seminar, Honorable Chairman of the Governing Body, Padmashree Vikramjit Singh Sahney raised urgent concern over incidents of farmer suicides in the country, and expressed his hope and blessings for the participants of the seminar to come up with fruitful discussions to resolve this issue not just from economic but socio-cultural point of views.

In his speech Prof G.L. Devra spoke of the historically little-known role played by the Bania community in the field of cultivation. He cited his research into 200-300 year old revenue-records which show that the Baniya class, whose primary occupation is popularly imagined to have been only money-lending, contributed significantly to village economy through farming practices as well. Ms Dakshita Das brought attention to the gap between the neglected, often cinematically-romanticized farmer and the urban consumer. Citing her own association with the government she stressed that along with policy amendment, a philosophical revolution is necessary to build a symbiotic energy between the urban and the agricultural sectors. She urged students to work with NGOs and policy makers to help relieve the problems of the farming communities.

Guest of Honor Dr A.S. Narang took a historical approach and highlighted the continued sidelining and oppression of the farmers before and during the British colonization through to the post-independence national schemes and in the current times. He stressed that the Green Revolution in itself was not far-reaching and much more needs to be done for an even and thorough-going change in the agricultural sector.

Finally, in the Presidential Address Prof Ashok Vishandass talked of the need for a political as much as socio-cultural analysis of the farmer's plight, by looking at things from the international point of view. He mentioned the withdrawal of U.S. food supply to India following disagreements over the Vietnam War as proof that a nation needs to take care of its farming community. He lauded Indian farmers for their efforts in producing a surplus despite the low rewards and ended his speech with the slogan of 'Jai Kisan'.

The session broke around 11:15 am was followed by a brief tea break.

- **Technical Session 1: Sustaining Development of Agriculture**

Time: 11:30 am- 1:00 pm

Venue: Mata Sahib Kaur Auditorium

The session began with Dr. Amarjyoti Josen (Prof, Dept of Psychology) anchoring and introducing the presenters: Prof. R. P. S Malik (Former Principal Researcher, International Water Management Institute and Senior Water Resources Specialist, The World Bank), Dr Jaswinder Singh (Principal, SGTB Khalsa College, DU), Dr Surendra Kumar (Prof, Delhi School of Economics, DU), Mr Bimal Khadka (Executive Member, Nepal Council of World Affairs) and Dr. Amanpreet Gill. The distinguished guests were presented with bouquets by members of the Student Council.

The session began with Mr. Khadka's paper, which focused everyone's attention on the agricultural situation of Nepal. He argued that the constitution of Nepal had given full support to sustainable growth and development but still many challenges are left to be tackled by the country. Dr Jaswinder Singh traced the trajectory of economic growth of India through the example of Punjab and specifically brought to attention export-led growth problems for the farmers. He urged for the creation of multiple sources of income for them in order to tackle poverty. Dr Surender Kumar talked about the decreasing size of land-holdings in use for farming. He raised questions about the optimum farm size and criticized agricultural institutions for inadequate research into the matter. Dr. Amanpreet Gill began by emphasizing that a purely academic approach is not suited for tackling agricultural problems and must be replaced by real time field work. He raised concerns over the crises looming in the near future due to the desertification of the Indus-Ganga basin caused by disproportionate drinking-water usage for paddy cultivation in the state of Punjab. This has also led to the sidelining of more feasible food crops such as barley and millet. Dr R.P.S Malik talked about managing ground water for

sustainable agricultural development, and endorsed the WEA (Water- Energy -Agriculture) approach for the same.

The principal summarized the presentations for the benefit of the students and ended the session with a note of thanks.

- **Session 2 (Parallel): Research Paper Presentations**
Time: 11:30 am- 1 pm
Venue: Mata Gujri Hall

The session began Coordinator Miss Divya Pradhan (Assistant Professor, Department of English) welcoming the Chief Guest Dr. Rahul Kumar (Former Faculty, Hanyang University, Seoul, South Korea, Currently Working as Senior Researcher, (SES) JNU) and the Chairperson Dr. Jasjeet Kaur, (Associate Professor, Department of Political Science).

The session witnessed the enthusiastic participation of over 30 research scholars and faculty members. The first speaker of the day was Dr. Binu Sundas (Assistant Prof, Miranda House) followed by Dr. Suprita Jha from Dept of English, MSC. The research papers covered a wide-range of issues from literary and cinematic representations of farmers to scientific and socio-cultural studies of agriculture. The teachers from the Elementary Education department of the college presented a paper on the representation of agriculture in primary school textbooks, which gave an insight into how children's perception of the farmer is shaped.

An underlying theme of many papers was the problem of farmer-suicides in India as well as the various government interventions to find a holistic solution for the problem. In terms of geography, the papers covered a wide expanse from Jharkhand in the East to Bikaner in the West and even lesser-known regions like Tehri in Uttarakhand were surveyed.

The session concluded with a vote of thanks by the chairperson Dr. Jasjit Kaur.

- **Session 3: Research Paper Presentations**
Time: 11:30 am to 1 pm
Venue: Computer Lab 3

Session three included Paper Presentations in the Presence of Dr. Prithviraj Thapar, Associate Professor, Dayal Singh College (University of Delhi). The session was chaired by Dr. Daljit Kaur, Associate Professor, Department of History. The coordinators of the session were Dr. Amarbir Kaur, Associate Professor, Department of Punjabi and Dr. Harwinder Singh, Assistant Professor, Department of Punjabi.

There were thirty research papers presented by students with the underlying themes of food security, causes and resolutions to the problem of farmer suicide, sustainable development of agriculture, environmental impact of agriculture and measures to improve farming techniques.

The chairperson appreciated the efforts of the students and concluded the session. It was followed by lunch from 1 pm to 1:45 pm.

- **Technical Session 4: Historical Perspective on Agriculture**
Time: 1:45 pm – 3.15 pm

Venue: Mata Sahib Kaur Auditorium

The session began with a Welcome Address by the anchors Ms Panchali Devi and Ms Divya Surana (Assistant Professors, Department of History.) They introduced the guests: Prof. Ghanshyam Lal Deora (Chair), former VC, Vardhman Mahavir Open University, Kota; Dr Tripta Wahi (co-Chair), former Associate Professor of History at Hindu College, University of Delhi and a social activist; Dr Mayank Kumar (Speaker), Associate Professor in Satyawati College, University of Delhi and Dr. Suraj Bhan Bharadwaj (Speaker), Officiating Principal and Associate Professor of History, Moti Lal College, University of Delhi. The guests were felicitated by the students.

Dr Mayank Kumar was the first speaker who spoke in Hindi on 'Climate Variability'. He stressed upon traditional water management mechanisms (rainfall, small dams) compared to the modern expensive big dam projects for irrigation and gave the example of Jaisalmer, Rajasthan where check dams are assisting people. He asserted that adaptability is the best way to survive and how the varied topography and regional climatic character was responsible for the Indian and Chinese civilizations to have continued for so long.

Dr Suraj Bhan Bharadwaj spoke on 'The Meo Community of 13th to the 18th Century'. He explained that the Meos were initially tribal people, settled around 65 kms south-east of Delhi in Kala Pahar area of Mewat region near Alwar. During the Sultanat period they were described as dacoits. Quoting important Persian historical sources Dr. Bhan mentioned that Delhi Sultan Balban had tried to clear the forest around Delhi for almost a year unsuccessfully to check and control them, but it was during the period of Akbar, that the Meos peacefully came into the fold of Islam and became law abiding citizens. Then they started working as agriculturists as well as Dakiya (courier) and Khidmatiya (bodyguard.)

Tripta Wahi cited her research on water resources and discussed the relationship of caste system with means of production. She stressed upon the fact that control over the water resources, especially the well, throughout in Indian History has been under control of the upper castes in India. The untouchables or Dalits were not given the access to the water resources even when they were the labourers involved in making those well or reservoirs. She concluded her remarks by focusing on water resources and the situation of farmers of lower classes. She underlined the Sikh egalitarian principle and efforts made by Sikh Gurus, especially Guru Teg Bahadur and Baba Banda Singh Bahadur in digging hundreds of well in North India to liberate the lower classes from upper class control.

Prof Ghanshyam Lal Deora concluded the session with his remarks. He appreciated the speakers for their valuable input and applauded the audience for their dedicated presence.

- **Technical Session 5: Peasantry in Folk literature and Art**

Time: 3.30 pm – 4:30 pm

Venue: Mata Sahib Kaur Auditorium

The session began with Dr. Sudha Singh (Dept of Hindi, MSC) honouring the guests present with bouquets. These included Chairperson Dr. Jeevan Singh Maanavi, Renowned Senior Critic, Guest of

Honor Shri Ashok Bhoumick, Well Known Art Critic and Distinguished Speaker, Dr. Ravinder Kumar, Associate Professor, Department of Punjabi.

Dr. Jeevan Singh Maanavi began the session by speaking of the centrality of the peasant farmer to the Indian economy and familiarized the audience on the various artistic-literary representations of him. His extensive work on the literature of Braj and Mewat was helpful in this discussion. Dr Ravinder Kumar spoke about the representation of agriculture in Punjabi Literature. He cited his work on literary theory, cultural studies and Punjabi fiction, for which he has been awarded the “Dr. Karmjit Singh Nav-Pratibha Alochna Puraskar” by the Punjabi Sahitya Kala Parishad. A very interesting session took place at the end, when Shri Ashol Bhoumick used a series of slideshows to discuss the representation of farmers and peasants in art.

Dr. Lokesh Kumar Gupta ended the session with a note of thanks to the audience and the presenters.

Day 2 (16th March 2019)

- **Technical Session 6: Society, Environment and Globalization**
Time: 9:30 am to 11 am
Venue: Mata Sahib Kaur Auditorium

The session began with a formal welcome extended by Dr. Pooja Wadhawan (Assistant Prof, Dept of Psychology) to the guests: Chairperson: Prof. Bupinder Zutshi (Former Registrar, JNU, Professor in CSR, JNU), Co-Chairperson: Dr. G. K. Arora (Principal, B.R. Ambedkar College, University of Delhi), Speaker: Dr. Puneet Gaur (Associate Faculty, National University, Astana, Kazakhstan), and Speaker: Dr. Rupak Kumar (Former Post-Doctoral fellow, Haifa.)

The socio-economic reasons for rural distress and farmer suicides in the state of U.P. were analyzed by Prof Manjushree Singh in her paper by focusing particularly on indebtedness as a trigger. Dr Rupak Kumar discussed the toxic impact of Morpholine on health which is the chemical used to coat fruits and vegetables and suggested counter-practices before consumption including soaking, wiping, washing and detection. Dr G.K Arora spoke on the topic of rural distress by analyzing the contribution of globalization and privatization to the same. Prof Bupinder Zutshi ended the talks with his paper which was an elaboration on the production of BT cotton within the globalized economy and the complexities involved in the usage of GMO Seeds.

Dr. Wadhawan called upon Dr. Harpreet Kaur, who ended the session by thanking the four speakers for their papers.

- **Technical Session 7: Paper Presentations by UG and PG Level Students**
Time: 10 am to 1 pm
Venue: Mata Gujri Hall

The session commenced with a speech delivered by the Chairperson Dr. Kamlesh Kaur (Associate Professor, Department of Commerce). She set the tone of discussion on the various issues pertaining to the plight of farmers and how their growing debts were a major problem. The Chief Guest and judge of the session, Dr. Binu Sundas, (Former Project Fellow, Hiroshima University, Currently Working As Assistant Professor in Miranda House, University of Delhi) shared his expertise on the same. The coordinators of the session Ms. Mandeep Walia (Associate Professor, Department of

Mathematics) and Dr. Neeti Arora (Assistant Professor, Department of Economics) felicitated the guests with bouquets.

The session witnessed an enthusiastic participation of more than 28 budding research scholars from various backgrounds. They presented papers on diverse topics such as problems of small farmers, Punjab agrarian crises, negative portrayal of farmers in media, food security, policies, economic reforms and historical perspective on farmers. Most highlighted their struggles and the alarming situation of farmers by supporting it with factual evidence, illustrated in graphs and tables.

The session ended with a note of appreciation by the chairperson and the chief guest.

- **Session 8 : Paper Presentations by UG and PG Level Students**

Time: 11 am to 1 pm

Venue: Computer Lab 3

The session commenced with Ms Jaspreet Kaur (B. Com (H) III) introducing eminent guest Dr. Babita Sharma, (Post Doctorate from University of North Dakota, U.S.A, Currently Working in Kalindi College, D.U.), and Chairperson Dr. Sharda Garg (Associate Professor, Department of Commerce). The teacher coordinators for the session were Dr. Mamta Chawla (Assistant Professor, Hindi) and Dr. Meenakshi Sinha Swami (Assistant Professor, Department of Economics.)

A total of fifteen papers were presented in this session in English and Punjabi languages. The first paper by Miss Mita Sharma examined the detrimental impact of thermal plants on the agriculture of Punjab. Taranpreet Kaur of BA (H) Punjabi talked about the portrayal of land acquisition in the movie *Mitti*. Miss Jasneet Kaur of B Com (H) looked at the way Minimum Support Prices slowed down procurement process for farmers, and argued for the DCP system to be undertaken instead. Other presentations focused on cropping pattern in India, managing ground water for sustainable agricultural development, rural poverty, environmental impact, development of new psychological models for Punjab farmers, influence of globalization and climate change on the lifestyle of farmers, and the crucial role of agriculture in India's economic growth.

The session ended with a speech by Dr Babita Sharma who praised the efforts of the students and a vote of thanks by Dr. Sharda Garg.

- **Technical Session 9: Interdisciplinary Session**

Timing: 11:15 am to 1 pm

Venue: Mata Sahib Kaur Auditorium

The anchor of the session Dr. Harleen Kaur (Department of Commerce) welcomed the Chairperson, Dr. J. B. Singh (Principal, Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi), Chief Guest (Dr. Nandita Pathak, Social Entrepreneur, Executive Member, NIOS, MHRD), Speaker Shri Rajinder Kamboj (Department of Education, Chandigarh) and Speaker Dr. Puneet Gaur, (Associate Faculty, National University, Astana, Kazakhstan). Dr Meenakshi Goenka (Dept of Commerce) was the coordinator of the session.

The first lecture was delivered by Dr. Puneet Gaur, who discussed the challenges and opportunities for India and Kazakhstan in agriculture improvement. He also discussed the understanding of historical perspectives between India and Kazakhstan along with role of China. Dr. Rajinder Kamboj in his speech focused on the Green Revolution and its impact on environment quality and health, especially due to soil and water contamination by pesticides and fertilizers. The third paper was

presented by Professor Avinash Singh, Executive Director, INSTAFED. He discussed the importance and impact of genetically modified food products, traditional ratooning of sugarcane and its benefit. He also discussed about the block farming techniques to improve the agriculture. Finally, Dr. Nandita Pathak addressed the students and discussed about the benefit of socio-cultural study of agriculture and role of common people for improvement in this field.

In the concluding remark Dr. J.B. Singh, Principal, Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi, discussed the economic condition of agriculture and also focused on lack of research in the agriculture field. According to him agriculture seeks attention in the sections of production and marketing.

- **Technical Session 10: Agrarian Society and the Landless**
Timing: 2 pm to 3 pm
Venue: Mata Sahib Kaur Auditorium

A documentary titled “LANDLESS: Do the Scarecrows have their own land?” was screened in the tenth session in the presence Mr. Randeep Singh, Cinematographer and Assistant Professor, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab.

The documentary debunked the image of Punjab created in the famous song “It’s a matter of pride, we are born in Punjab—that’s why it’s called the Golden Sparrow” by realistically portraying the plight of peasants in the state and the wide gap between them and landowners. There are too many crop sharers of a single harvest, which leaves little for the peasants and their families. Hard-pressed to pay back their debts and to make ends meet, the hapless farmers either kill themselves or are ousted from their lands. Women strive to help by cattle-herding, but the earnings are not adequate. The documentary also exposed the abusive behavior of landlords’ goons when women attempt to get fodder from the fields. The situation is no better in upper-class society, as widows of landowners are bound by social codes and cannot undertake menial jobs to support their families. The caste system has widened the gap between people, and those who wield power never let the status-quo be shaken in order to retain the privileges of their class and caste. The documentary presented statistics: 80% farmers commit suicide because of heavy debts and the rest to protest the apathy of the administration to their exploitation by the state structure and encroaching landlords.

The session ended with the remarks of the director of the documentary Mr. Randeep, who expressed his hope that the film had helped to spread awareness of the reality of Punjab farmers.

- **Technical Session 11: Philosophical Counseling of Peasantry through Sri Guru Granth Sahib**
Time: 2 pm to 4:30 pm
Venue: Mata Sahib Kaur Auditorium

The session began as the anchor of the session Dr. Gurjit Kaur (Associate Professor, Department of Punjabi) gave a welcome address to the guests, Chairperson S. Harinderpal Singh (Chairman, Gurmat College and Member, DSGMC) and Co-Chairperson Dr. Rawail Singh (Professor, Department of Punjabi, University of Delhi).

The session saw a huge participation of around 100 audience members. The first talk was by Bhavana Malik, the Counselor of the college, on “Guru Granth Sahib and Agriculture”. She spoke that soil and soul are similar as we have to sow seeds of good thoughts/deeds in both to be able to reap benefits. Thereby she explained how cultivation, humanitarianism and food consumption are interlinked. The second speaker Gurpreet Singh Ji also stressed that cultivating noble thoughts is as important as cultivating land. Dr Rawail Singh proposed that young patrons must be given the right education. He lamented that the farmers of Punjab had given good produce to the entire nation but were themselves afflicted by suffering, including life-threatening diseases. He talked of the need for Sikhism to look outwards and broaden its reach. In the end Prof S. Harinderpal Singh linked with spiritual suffering of farmers with historical developments which had marginalized them, and how globalization as a phenomenon has degraded both cultures and cultivation all over India. He appealed that the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib, *Kirat Karo*, *Vand Chako*, be revived once again.

- **Valedictory Session 12: Agrarian Crisis in Punjab**
Time: 3 pm to 4:30 pm
Venue: Mata Sahib Kaur Auditorium

The anchor of the session, Dr. Harinder M. Sandhu (Department of Psychology) greeted everyone and a floral welcome was extended to the Chair, Prof. S. Sucha Singh Gill (Former Director General, CRRID, Chandigarh), S. Charan Singh (Non-Executive Director, Punjab & Sind Bank), Chief Guest, Dr. A. S. Narang, (Ex-Registrar & Professor, Political Science, IGNOU) and Distinguished Speaker. Prof. R.S. Ghuman (CRRID, Chandigarh).

Prof. R S Ghuman’s talk focused on the need to empower farmers with education and opportunities in order to counter the critical situation of farmer suicides. He discussed the causes for the same as the unavailability of credit, illiteracy and unfavourable MSP. Prof Charan’s speech also revolved around farmer suicide and migration problems. He suggested religious tourism, youth employment and growth of MSME in order to resolve these issues. Prof S Sucha Singh Gill analyzed the geographical distribution of farmer suicides and held capitalistic agriculture as the culprit behind the issue. The solution he suggested was the R+D expenditure, education expenditure and controlling of brain-drain with the support of good government policies.

- **Research Paper Award Ceremony and Vote of Thanks**
Time: 4:30 pm onwards
Venue: Mata Sahib Kaur Auditorium

The final session of the seminar included prize distribution to the best research papers followed by a vote of thanks.

Dr Kiranjeet Sethi anchored the session and welcomed everyone. She introduced the guests: Dr. Rajneesh Shukla (Chairman, ICPR/ICHR), S. Gurbhej Singh Goraya (Secretary, Punjabi Academy) and Dr. Ashok Umesh Kadam (Prof. CHS, Dean of Students JNU, Member ICHR Seminar). Dr Harpreet Kaur, principal, presented a bouquet to Dr Ashok Umesh Kadam, who addressed the audience and spoke about the seminar, which saw the presentation of more than seventy papers.

The winners of paper presentations and poster competitions were felicitated by the guests. There were also consolation and appreciation prizes for teachers and students who had presented papers.

The principal then shared highlights of the seminar and expressed her joy at the success of the event. She thanked the organizers for their efforts. Finally, Prof Lokesh Kumar Gupta concluded the seminar as the Convener with his vote of thanks to the guests, the advisory committee, organizing committee, student organizing team and the audience.