



Editorial Note

The first Issue of Artha Journal of Social Sciences in 2025 consist of papers presented at a virtual international conference on '*Imperialism and Agrarian Transition in South Asia*' organised by Dr Kusum Lata at the Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Delhi NCR Campus in collaboration with Prof. Kumar Sanjay Singh, Department of History, Swami Shraddhanand College, University of Delhi & Prof. Mritunjay Kumar Yadavendu, Department of Sociology, Mahatma Gandhi Central University of Bihar on 29th-30th April, 2024. Selected papers from the conference are published in an edited book by Aakar Books and the first Issue of Artha Journal of Social Sciences, 2025, with Dr Kusum Lata, Prof Sanjay Singh and Prof Yadavendu as Issue Editors.

This issue was conceptualized in the light of the fact that many problems of the agriculture sector which were thought to have disappeared have seen a resurgence in recent times thus calling for attention. This issue is a collection of such papers which are dealing with the problems of farmer suicide, indebtedness, caste inequalities & land relations, credit and marketing system, occupational diversification in non-farm jobs, contract farming, leasing, seasonal migration, increasing input cost, limited industrialisation or no industrialisation to absorb the peasants abandoning agriculture. One of the papers that dealt with the unfree labour of dalit women in Bihar is published in the next issue of Artha. The papers published in this issue primarily cover the areas of Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand. Three papers are based on field work in Punjab, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar and two are based on secondary sources. The plethora of issues listed above indicate that the Indian agriculture sector suffers from the fact that the development of capitalism was arrested due to the nexus of feudal and colonial powers thereby giving rise to complexities that do not align with the nature of the capitalism that developed in Europe. Mechanisation, which is seen as the most important indicator of the development of capitalism in India reflects an entirely different picture on the ground. Dinesh Rajak's paper brings to light the limitations of mechanisation in the Indian scenario.

Dinesh Rajak's paper shows that the non-farm activities in which the rural population of Bundelkhand is shifting to are computer shops, stationery shops, grocery shops, private schools and coaching and makeshift shops on motorbikes. However, he has demonstrated that since the income from such non-farm activities is not enough to run the household monthly expenditures, the small and marginal rural households prefer to opt for 'pluri-activities' which means that they earn through multiple sources of income through season migration and indulging in multiple occupations. So if the small and marginal farmers' diversification of occupations is 'distress-driven', the big farmers choose diversification out of choice. He has highlighted that due to the absence of a public irrigation system, one of the major input costs is the purchase of water, failing which the small and marginal farmers resort to either sharecropping or leasing. Along with water, these farmers have to hire machinery on rent which further increases the input cost forcing them to lease out or opt for sharecropping. In fact, those farmers who have machinery with them are finding it difficult to earn any returns on the machinery forcing them to abandon agriculture and explore alternative sources of income by migrating or engaging in occupations like security guards, operating tea stalls or running shops. He has shown that the landless peasants are not even able to opt for such diversification of occupations within the village due to their lower status in the caste hierarchy so the only option left for them is to migrate. The overall conclusion of Rajak's paper is that the nature of occupational diversification is a reflection of the existing caste hierarchy in which dalit landless peasants are forced to migrate and dominant and upper caste farmers diversify within the village or outside to earn more profit rather than investing it in increasing the productivity of the land. Such landlords do not even prefer to opt for simple extended reproduction showcasing the typical character of the landlords in India. His paper also debunks the myth of mechanisation as it is not generating any returns forcing the farmers to abandon agriculture. The paper also showcases that the non-farm income is not from industrialization, hence the 'depeasantisation' in Indian scenario is not a result of increasing industrialization as was the case with the Europe. A similar trajectory is narrated by Suraj Beri who has shown the limited development of industrialisation in Rajasthan.

Suraj Beri's paper has demonstrated how caste plays an important role in determining who will garner the benefits of whatever limited growth took place due to the limited expansion of agro-industry and manufacturing sector in a few parts of Rajasthan such as Jaipur, Bhilwara, Alwar, Jodhpur - which has also witnessed a downward slope after the 2009 economic depression. The economic reforms of 1990 have introduced new possibilities of non-farm occupations, but caste remained the single most factor in determining who will reap the limited benefits. He states that local agrarian dominant castes witnessed favourable effects after the Green Revolution who experience advantages from the technology-driven increase in agricultural output. Interestingly he has argued that this limited expansion of manufacturing was not in large scale industries, but small units. Within agriculture indebtedness, contract farming, rising input cost remain the crucial issues. He has highlighted an interesting aspect of industrialisation, however limited it is, in Rajasthan. He argued that small-scale industrialization was primarily concentrated in certain pockets. Further he adds that the share of agriculture is declining and it is the tertiary sector i.e. service sector which has seen an increase of almost 10 percent.

Navin Kumar's paper examines the credit and marketing institutions where farmers get financial services and market facilities. In particular he has focused on the impact of the transition from Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) to Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) in rural Bihar. He argued that the transition from APMC to PACS has benefited the Rajput and Bhumihar castes who are already the existing landlords. The small and marginalised farmers are forced to sell the produce to local traders in the village itself because castes exercise power in credit and marketing institutions making it difficult for the small and marginal farmers who specifically come from lower strata in the caste system. In his field work in Malpur Panchayat of Vaishali district of Bihar in the year 2023, he observed that out of the 2216 families, only 78 families were able to access PACS. Due to the absence of MSP compulsion, the local traders Galla, Paikar, Gaddidar purchase paddy, wheat and maize from the farmers at a low price. He also pointed out that the PACS president who generally comes from upper or dominant castes exercise complete

control to ensure maximum benefits to his caste members. Another constraint due to which the small and marginal farmers are unable to access PACS is the immediate need to encash. In PACS there is a serious problem of delay in payments that discourages the small and marginal farmers.

Gurmeet Singh in his paper discusses the magnitude and determinants of indebtedness among farmers in Punjab. He argues that as an impact of the Green Revolution, Punjab (which is considered the food bowl of the country) has witnessed an increase in the input cost forcing farmers to rely on debt. Since the procedure to access credit from the formal credit system is either tedious or not easily accessible, it forces the farmers to borrow from non-institutional actors at high rates of interest. He highlighted the agrarian crisis in Punjab showing how the indebtedness is leading to farmers' suicide. The decreasing rates of profit in agriculture have forced the farmers to quit farming and most of these farmers are small and marginal farmers. Out of the 9291 farmers who committed suicide in Punjab between 1991-2011, 77 percent were small and marginal farmers and 88 percent of them took this step due to heavy debt trap.

Jaya Kumari's paper discusses the significance of tenancy laws in Jharkhand. She specifically examines the significance of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act and Santhal Parganas Tenancy Act for the tribal population of Jharkhand. She argues that the postcolonial Indian state following the legacy of the colonial masters exploits the natural resources displacing tribals. These two Acts function as safeguards against the encroachment by the huge corporate giants and mining companies, but were later amended to allow land grab.

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L T Om Prakash, PhD

Editor, Artha Journal of Social Sciences

Issue Editors

Dr Kusum Lata

Prof. Kumar Sanjay Singh

Prof. Mritunjay Kumar Yadavendu