

**School on Political Economy**  
**Political Economy as People's Report: Rethinking a**  
**Nineteenth century Science for our Times**  
**26-29 December 2016**

Venue: French Institute of Pondicherry  
Organized by: The Social Science Collective

**SCHEDULE**

**December 26, 2016,**  
**10-30 am -1.00 pm**

**Changing Land and Labour relations in Rural Tamil Nadu**

ISSUES

**Discussion led by Vijayabaskar**

What is happening to Agriculture?  
The so-called "agricultural in retreat" phenomenon;  
What is happening to land in all of this?  
Who exits from agriculture and for what reasons? Caste and gender differentials  
The emergence of new forms of State participation in this process of change

RESPONSES

**Jerome, Meena, Srividya, Awanish, Mythri**

- a) Agrarian change: What happens to women's work? And women's role as those who ensure food provisioning, and who undertake care labour
- b) Agrarian change and Dalits
- c) Agrarian Change and Social Relations: Caste, Gender, Marriage (General)
- d) From other states: What compares with this, what is different?

**3.00 pm -6.30 pm**

**Understanding State Responses: Beyond "Rural Distress" and "Vulnerability"**

ISSUES

**Discussion led by Sundararaman**

- Examining the question of the vulnerable, with respect to health: Who gets 'left behind' and what does that mean in both in economic and policy sense.
- How are we to understand urban health concerns, with respect to migration, housing provisions for the migrants and lack of safety at work? What would be the caste and gender differentials in this respect?

RESPONSES

**Meena and Srividya**

- The question of women and health in the context of rural change
- Growth rates, health index and women

**December 27, 2016**

**9.30 am - 1.00 pm**

**Changing Nature of Production**

ISSUES

**Discussion led by Kannan and Vijayabaskar**

- 1) Thinking through New Conditions of Production: In the SEZs and elsewhere  
An Example: Sriperumbudur and what does this tell us about what capital does, and what does the State does; And what is the labour situation in places like this?
- 2) Primitive Accumulation, Developmental Capitalism and the State: Two Models  
Mining and The Coast and its Discontents

RESPONSES

**Geetha and others**

- a) Dispossession and emergent labour forms
- b) Destruction of Natural environments and the Problem of the Commons

**3.00 pm - 5.30 pm**

**Kavita Philip, Viren Murthy**

A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Capitalism in India : The Work of Kalyan Sanyal

**8.30 pm onwards**

**Chair: Geetha. Discussion led by Benjamin Zachariah**

Thinking through Histories of Development: India and South East Asian Experiences

**December 28, 2016**

**9.30am - 1.00 pm**

**The Labour Question**

ISSUES

**Discussions led by Geetha, TN Labour Blog, Kavita**

Thinking of Labour

- Dispossessed peasants, adivasis and fishers: a Precarious population
- Industrial labour: new articulations of the formal and informal
- Dalits and other subaltern castes – conditions of labour in the new circumstances
- Women's labour: provisioning, care and survival; sex work, and other forms of sexual labour

Working with migrant and local labour: Challenges in construction and other sectors

- Women workers: Garment industries and more
- New forms of contract labour – in service and knowledge industries (Universities, etc)
- The IT Sector – and emergent Labour concerns

RESPONSES

**Meena, Suneeta, Shreya, Subbu, Revati**

- Production, Labour and Reproduction: The Women Worker
- Migration and the Adivasi Labourer (Old and New Concerns)
- The Persistence of Caste Labour: As Itself and as constituting 'Informality'

**3.00 pm - 6.00 pm**

**The Resistance Question: Understanding and Action**

**Coordination: Geetha**

Interaction with Organisers from Agricultural Workers Union, Trade Unions, Fish Workers Union from Nagapattinam, Cuddalore and Viluppuram Districts

Working with the State/Opposing the State  
Rights-based activism and Needs-based Activism  
Expert Knowledge and the Activist  
Coalitions: Thoughts and Movements

**December 29, 2016**

**Trip to the Cuddalore Coast**

**Departure by 7 AM**

Led by Comrades from the Coastal People's Coalition, Cuddalore District

**3.00 pm - 6.00 pm**

Collaborative Knowledge Practices: Sharing and Creating Resources for Study and Action  
Ward Smith, Balasubramanian. D, Anil Menon and Dinesh TB

# Political Economy as People's Report: Rethinking a 19th Century Science for Our Times

## Questions

How do we understand the changed world of our economy? For those trained to work with categories evolved from an understanding of industrial capitalism or agrarian feudalism, the present poses many challenges. New phrases and concepts have become legion, which, rather alarmingly, describe as well as direct the nature of understanding. Thus, capital is almost always speculative capital, labour, precarious labour, 'informality' characterizes all production relations, 'commodification' is a term that covers a range of service activities and labour practices while we are all said to be bound to 'consumption', as if it were a transcendent ethic beyond whose horizon we cannot really extend our vision.

These terms work on many of us, theorists, as well as activists, as if they were transparent, self-explanatory and possess the capacity to instantly transmit a sense of real world processes. So much so that exploitation appears inevitable; injustice an effect of a self-contained rational system; and all interventions appear doomed to fail, or at least not worth the effort. In a sense, this is not unlike the 'verities' of capitalist political economy that Marx rendered critical and reflexive, by historicizing them, and demonstrating how in their very logic might lie the key to their dismantling and remaking. How may we take ahead in our context this project of returning an active critical gaze to political economy? What may we retain from the many traditions of leftist – and in the Indian context, other traditions of radical - thought that help us grasp our ineluctable historic moment?

While there exists research on several areas of the economy, there is no generalized debate of a high and rigorous order that can help communicate concerns without grounding them in a theoretical quagmire. There is the other danger as well: that the conditions of intellectual work today are such that, most of us – and we really are a surplus class – resign ourselves to affirming defiant positions of political correctness and while we rightfully react to problems and issues, but seldom go beyond affirming the current radical orthodoxy. This clearly poses a problem for those that wish to grasp the present, with a view of challenging its given nature.

## The Workshop

To address the above concerns, some of us have planned a workshop that hopes to outline ways of grasping the present of political economy – through an approach that combines careful empirical description with historical analysis, a study of actual production and labour processes that keeps in focus the experiences of the labourer, and the social and political contexts that structure the worlds of production and labour.

Comprising informal presentations/discussions initiated by individual speakers, we hope to evolve a model of interaction that will combine experiences from the field, the archive and from our respective locations, as teachers, workers, writers, researchers, concerned citizens.

The areas of study/discussion as we understand them are outlined below. Obviously we will not be able to cover all or even some of them. But these represent the range of concerns/interests that bother many of us, and we hope to be able to address some of them.

- a) The role of the state in building production regimes, in concert with capital, including the role of law, modes of governance and planning; and the manner in which this has resulted in shifting production frontiers, for instance with respect to mining, fisheries; the struggles that have ensued and issues addressed, not addressed, not address-able in these contexts.

- b) The transformed discourses of planning and governance, particularly the historic shift from addressing backwardness to promoting development; from extending production to supporting entrepreneurship; from poverty eradication measures to income generation projects, which have since morphed into empowerment through credit and into sustainable livelihoods; and the acute gendering of economic categories in these transitions.
- c) The land question: changes in understanding of land as property, resource and as a condition for a relatively free economic existence; the disappearance of the land question from left discourses; and the consequences to our understanding of a separation of the land question from environmental concerns, the caste and gender questions.
- d) The changed nature of work, and whether it is understandable in terms of exploitation and alienation merely; the urban and rural contexts of work, and the age-wise, caste-wise, gender-wise segregated work options that characterize the world of work.
- e) The need to reconceptualise class and production relations, in the context of questions posed by anti-caste movements, environmental struggles; and the women's movement on the one hand, and the generalized left understanding of upending capitalist production with a socialist model.
- f) The world of reproduction: the changed forms of nurture, well-being, and notions of health; the changed contexts of social reproduction, especially education, and its fate in today's context.
- g) The importance of recognizing several levels of resistance, protest and collective action that exist, along with an appraisal of what may be added to what people in movement do, by those of us who are given to thought, research and study.