Gender analysis of Development Studies
A French-Indian dialogue from social sciences and humanities

Session 2 February 11th

Gender and labour:
a comparison from agriculture and fishing context

4.00 to 6.00 pm

Issue: French Institute of Pondicherry

Nitya Rao, University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom and R. Manimohan
“Migration for capital accumulation: Changing class and gender dynamics among small-scale fishers on the Coromandel coast, Tamil Nadu”

Abstract
In the face of growing competition for limited open access resources, and consequently, a rapid capitalization of fisheries, this paper explores the processes of negotiation and renegotiation of both gender and class identities, and their intersections, within fisher communities and its impacts on gendered vulnerabilities and well-being. Based on data collected from a survey of 200 households and in-depth interviews with about 20 households in Cuddalore District in Tamil Nadu, India, it points to visible differentiation, with those who are able to invest reaping benefits and others being reduced to a labouring class. A number of young men from fishing communities migrate to raise capital for investment in boats and related technologies in order to retain their status as fishers rather
than labourers. New forms of cooperation and collective organization are emerging amongst small-scale fishers to overcome the problem of insufficient capital for investment in boats. Dowry has become a major source of capital and status, with negative implications for the survival of girls in the communities. We highlight the ways in which new institutional practices and forms of cooperation (and conflict) are enabling a more equitable sharing of resources and benefits, and in which ways are they further entrenching inequalities?

Biography:

Nitya Rao is Professor, Gender and Development at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom. She has worked extensively as a researcher and advocate in the field of women’s rights, employment and education for over three decades. Her research interests include exploring the gendered changes in land and agrarian relations, migration and livelihoods, especially in contexts of climatic variability and economic precarity. She has done fine-grained research on households and intra-household dynamics in these contexts to draw out implications for gendered wellbeing, empowerment and justice, with a particular focus on food, nutrition and health security. She has published extensively on these themes in international peer-reviewed journals and books.

Soundarya Iyer, post doctorate student, IFP

“Women’s work in Indian agriculture: a review of the literature”

Abstract

Women’s low and falling labour force participation rate (LFPR) in India has puzzled researchers and policy makers in the last two decades. Economic data from nationally representative surveys have been critiqued for not capturing women’s work adequately. While women’s low work participation rates in India have been researched in rural contexts since independence, the issue of declining participation in work has thus far been noted only in longitudinal village studies apart from secondary data. This paper reviews the literature on women’s work in agriculture and rural contexts, specifically focusing on studies that explain the decline in women’s work in India’s villages. Overarching themes that emerge are; exclusion from non-farm work, feminization of agricultural labour, increase in female LFPR with male migration, multilocal household strategies, the role of technology, dowry and marriage expenses, caste and mobility. The paper identifies areas for future research and methodologies that may be used, drawing from a few global examples.

Biography

Soundarya Iyer is Postdoctoral fellow at French Institute of Pondicherry, Pondicherry, India. She is interested in interdisciplinary approaches to the study of agrarian change, gender, livelihoods and urbanization in India. She was recently the Sir Ratan Tata Post-doctoral Fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK.