

Rural – Urban Interlinkages and Social Dignity in India's Villages: An Agenda for Viksit Bharat

Concept Note

Over the past four years, the CPS–BKS (Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Bharat Krishak Samaj) conference series has examined the idea of dignity in rural India – moving from debates on agrarian transformation and income paradigms to questions of gender, labour, and the changing nature of the welfare state. Building on this intellectual trajectory, the present conference, in collaboration with the Department of Political Science and the Department of Economics, GITAM School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Visakhapatnam, introduces a spatial turn to the dignity debate by examining how changing rural–urban interlinkages are reshaping social life, political claims, and development pathways in India's villages.

Indian villages have long been embedded within wider economic and political circuits – from colonial revenue systems and commodity markets to post-Independence planning, agrarian reform, and the Green Revolution. Liberalisation further intensified migration, labour mobility, and market integration. Yet the contemporary phase of spatial restructuring differs in scale, speed, and form. Expanding infrastructure corridors, digital governance architectures, platform-based labour markets, real estate expansion, peri-urbanisation, and ecological stress have reconfigured rural spaces in profound ways.

These transformations invite a critical question: how are changing rural–urban interdependencies reshaping the social conditions under which dignity is produced, experienced, and contested in India's villages?

In this conference, dignity is not reduced to income enhancement or consumption capacity. Rather, it refers to the lived experience of recognition, accessibility, security, and belonging within rapidly transforming socio-spatial environments. As villages become sites of infrastructural expansion, labour circulation, environmental precarity, and digital welfare delivery, dignity emerges as a crucial lens for evaluating developmental change. In doing so, the conference aligns with national efforts toward inclusive growth, sustainable development, and citizen-centric governance, while contributing scholarly insights to ongoing policy discourse.

The vision of Viksit Bharat foregrounds economic growth, infrastructure expansion, technological innovation, environmental sustainability, and inclusive development. This conference seeks to examine how these aspirations are experienced and negotiated within India's villages. By situating rural–urban interlinkages within the broader developmental horizon of Viksit Bharat @2047, the conference aims to explore how economic transformation, social inclusion, and infrastructural expansion can collectively strengthen social dignity at the grassroots level.

Themes and Sub-Themes

We invite papers that engage empirically, theoretically, or comparatively with (but not limited to) the following themes:

I. Spatial Transformations and Social Belonging

- Rural–urban interlinkages and peri-urban expansion
- Infrastructure as dignity: roads, housing, digital connectivity, public utilities
- Environmental sustainability, climate stress, and ecological justice
- Modernisation and the preservation of local histories, occupations, and landscapes
- Rural and urban frontiers: land acquisition, displacement, and spatial inequality
- Question of commons and rural dignity

II. Labour, Livelihoods, and Economic Dignity

- Agriculture, diversification, and the changing rural economy
- Informal sector, gig economy, and platform labour
- Migration, commuting, and mobility
- Unemployment, wages, and precarity
- Land relations and the question of economic security
- Poverty eradication and employment generation beyond income metrics

III. Unequal Dignity and Social Stratification

- Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in transforming rural spaces
- Religious or faith-based minorities
- Women and gendered mobility
- Small and marginal farmers
- Agricultural labourers
- Persons with disabilities and questions of accessibility
- Elderly populations and social protection
- Children, education, and intergenerational dignity

IV. Inclusion, Accessibility, Inequality, and Justice

- Accessibility in infrastructure, digital systems, and public services
- Governance mechanisms and pathways toward inclusive development
- Social justice in development planning
- Role of Gram Sabhas
- Dignity as recognition, citizenship, and belonging

V. Actors and Politics of Dignity

- Role of social movements and grassroots mobilisation
- Civil society and community institutions
- State agencies and development planning

- Political negotiations around rural transformation

Objectives

The conference seeks to:

- Expand the dignity debate across sectors, actors, and social groups
- Deepen the conceptual understanding of dignity as spatially produced and politically negotiated
- Examine how rural–urban transformations redistribute opportunity and vulnerability
- Engage analytically with the developmental vision of Viksit Bharat @2047
- Foster dialogue between scholars, policymakers, and practitioners.