

CALL FOR PAPERS

Centre For Political Studies – Bharat Krishak Samaj

4th Annual Conference

Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

DIGNITY QUESTION, RURAL - AGRARIAN DEVELOPMENT AND WELFARE STATE IN INDIA: EMERGING TRENDS AND ISSUES

Conference Dates: March 5 - 6, 2026

Call for Papers Open: September 8, 2025

Last date for Panel and Individual paper proposal submission: November 30, 2025

Selection of presenters: December 10, 2025

Last Date for Full paper submission: February 15, 2026

Final Program and List of Participants: February 27, 2026

Theme Note

The welfare state in India is regarded as a special case amongst the post-colonial states due to its unique approach of a mixed economic developmental model balancing it with a liberal-constitutional democracy. This model has witnessed a major shift in the past, and there have been debates regarding the emerging nature of welfarism in India. (Tillin 2025). With the increasing focus on technology-based solutions to the welfare policies, especially the cash transfer schemes of the Indian state claim to cover a much larger number of beneficiaries. Such schemes have been lauded not only by the government of India but also by various international agencies like the World Bank. These schemes are expected to ensure faster delivery of benefits to the needy and minimize the problem of leakage in the implementation of such programs.

There are significant technological interventions in the welfare programs meant for rural-agrarian development. The PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, for instance, has been regarded as the world's largest cash transfer-based scheme, directly benefiting millions of small and marginal farmers of India. Similarly, cash transfer schemes meant for women such as Laadli Behena or Ladki Behin scheme, have also been very popular policy interventions. Such schemes meant for women are expected to result into poverty alleviation, ensure food security and strengthen women's agency in the household. These policy interventions claim to minimize leakage and ensure the benefit reaches the person it is intended for. The introduction of Aadhar based identification for payment of wages under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is another case of increasing role of technology in defense of minimizing the leakage in scheme implementation. Technology-based interventions in this sense are expected to minimize the possibilities of corruption or favoritism in policy intervention. (Chibber and Verma). As per the government of India statistics, such schemes have ensured that benefits reach the person who deserves them instead

of middlepersons. The past decade is regarded as a massive success for such schemes, which have ensured benefits reach the deserving. The new welfare regime is claiming to be a departure from India's traditional social welfare regime and bringing in new paradigms.

Various scholars have made attempts to analyze the social welfare programs in India and how the Indian state can be characterized based on this analysis. Louis Tillin (2014) has defined welfarism in India as "precocious" in nature. During the early 2000s, the Indian state had moved in the direction of a rights-based social welfare system of providing various goods and services to the citizens. Under this regime, citizens were empowered to claim their benefits. Various mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability in governance of welfare programs were introduced to facilitate a more democratic welfare regime in the previous decades. This new governance regime was a departure from the 1950s or 70s welfare regime which had largely banked upon welfare programs in the form of schemes which were meant to address a time bound target. However, the rights-based regime is further witnessing a major shift or almost disappearing with the implementation of the technology-based solutions to the governance problems. These shifts are of taking place in two ways: firstly, there is a major enhancement in the budget outlay for various programs, especially for schemes meant for rural infrastructure development and agricultural development (PRS Legislature 2021). Secondly, with the focus on technology and outsourcing of monitoring mechanisms, there has been a massive expansion of beneficiaries in various schemes especially with multiple cash transfer schemes being introduced by various state governments. (Kumar 20250

However, these interventions have been questioned on multiple counts. First and foremost, the technology-based cash transfer schemes are seen as a deviation from the rights-based approach to development that India had successfully achieved in the first decade of the 21st century. The Right to Work ensured under the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Act ensured the right to work (Sen and Dreze 2015). Similarly, other policy initiatives like the Right to Information and Citizens Charter Act were implemented to ensure a governance model that would ensure the participation of citizens in governance.

A technology-centric model is not contingent upon citizen's active participation but tends to replace human intervention with machines, call centers, or AI-empowered responses. Besides, it takes away the very idea of a citizen-centric model of governance (Y. Aiyar and M Walton 2015) as citizens are mere receivers at the mercy of technological support systems. Even the implementation of MGNREGA has suffered similar setbacks with the implementation of Aadhar-based registration or similar technology-based interventions (Das Forthcoming).

Such welfare schemes are also seen as short terms measures at the cost of state bringing any structural change in the way a society looks at its poor or downtrodden segments. Especially in case of women, Carol Patmen has regarded such cash transfer-based schemes as example of 'patriarchal welfare state.'

Do these developments indicate any structural shift in the functioning of the Indian state? The way the Indian state engages with social welfare programs, does it change its outlook towards society? In what ways do these new welfarist measures help it reach out to newer social segments, both electorally and politically? Or are there newer forms of clientelistic features emerging in its governance functioning (McCartney and Roy 2016, Roy 2023)? There are also state or region-specific initiatives that have performed well for various governments. However, how far such initiatives have been able to ensure electoral gains for ruling regimes is a question worth studying. There are studies that explain that parties can win due to their social welfare programs and their implementation (Singh 2024). However, these generalizations may be too simplistic when analyzing similar questions in the context of various states. In addition, there are arguments about how these cash transfer based program may lead to diversion from long term structural investment programs like employment generation, women empowerment, creating more accessible and accessible public spaces etc.

A big question that needs to be explored is the political sociology of these new welfare measures? Do these measures create a new class that is involved in its design, implementation, monitoring etc? How does the various caste-classes engage with this new model of governance? Do techno-centric program open newer opportunities for marginalized groups, or it helps penetrate already prevailing dominant structures in the rural society? How the outsourcing of such functions to various external groups including private firms, not-for-profit organizations, think tanks or other non-governmental organizations impact the very notion of governance and service delivery?

Amidst these diverse set of questions, this seminar attempts to understand the emerging nature of the welfare state in India. Theoretically, do we need newer frameworks or concepts to understand this new state or in what ways the traditional theories of state-autonomy, class structure, state-society or governance framework can be useful for understanding the state. In this seminar, we look for answers that are theoretically enriching and substantiated by empirical insights. We also aim to have discussions around the social, economic, and above all, political aspects associated with the very idea of a welfare state. Is the welfare state in India really changing? Is it disappearing, or is it just another developmental phase we are witnessing? How can these new trends be theorized? Do these trends indicate only India-specific trends, or are there even global indicators about this?

The second CPS-BKS annual seminar had discussed how far income enhancement strategies for welfare can be an answer to the question of ensuring a dignified life for India's rural population. The next seminar in 2025 delved into the question of women empowerment and question of dignity. Continuing with the same series of discussions, the 2026 seminar attempts to raise wider questions about the nature of welfare state in India. We invite papers which are theoretical, empirical or having a mixed of both types. We specially encourage young researchers to submit single or join papers. Senior or mid-career professionals are encouraged to apply for panels based on a particular theme. We are in the process of identifying journals that can publish a special issue or set of articles based on a panel.

Themes

These are some of the questions that we intend to raise through this conference. We invite panel proposals as well as individual proposals around the following themes:

1. How has welfare state evolved in India in the past three decades? Are there any qualitative changes in welfare regime?
2. Has Technology really brought a change especially in view of DBT schemes?
3. In what ways the new welfare regime engages or (re)define the very idea of rights-based citizenship and welfarism?
4. How do social scientists engage with the structural Issues (like caste, gender, religion etc.) in this new welfare regime or have they become oblivious to such questions?
5. What are the procedural nuances of technology and outsourcing Based Governance?
6. Has Indian villages become poverty free?
7. What are the ways Indian state can be theorized in view of these political and governance changes?

Format

The presentations in the conference will be in a dialogic framework where the chair will pose some questions to each panelist based on their paper. Every speaker will be given ten to twelve minute to respond to these questions followed by a second round of questions by the chair. The third round will be opened for the audience.

Best Paper Presentation Award

We will also have the Best Paper Award in the seminar. Winner will be given a prize of 5000 INR and a trophy.

Panel Proposals

Panel proposals must have at least three paper presenters and one coordinator (Maximum Five presenters). The convener of panel must submit an abstract of the proposed panel along with the abstracts of individual paper presenters. The panel abstract should not be more than 300 words. Individual abstracts must follow the guidelines for individual paper submissions. For individual papers the below mentioned guidelines should be followed.

Click on the link below to submit panel proposals

Individual Papers

Individual paper abstract should be of maximum 300 words with three to four keywords. Individuals submitting proposals are also expected to send their brief CV.

The last date for panel and individual paper submission is December 15, 2025. We will send our response on your submission by December 31, 2025. Those whose papers would be selected need to submit their full papers by February 15, 2026. Participation in the conference will be confirmed only if the selected researcher submit full papers by the due date.

You are requested to send your abstracts and proposals through online submission system by clicking on the link here

[PANEL PROPOSAL SUBMISSION LINK](#)

[INDIVIDUAL PAPER SUBMISSION LINK](#)

Logistics

There is no registration fee for attending the conference or for presenting a paper.

Young researchers including PhD candidates will be provided a modest honorarium to cover their travel costs. We will also arrange a modest accommodation for participants. However, we may not be able to cover all your expenses.

There will be six sessions based on the themes mentioned below other than the inaugural session and special sessions. Abstracts are invited from PhD scholars, Post-doctoral researchers, NGO practitioners, industry researchers, scientists and other researchers.

In case of any queries write to us on ruralagrarianindia@gmail.com

Convener

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