

हरियाणा की आवाज़



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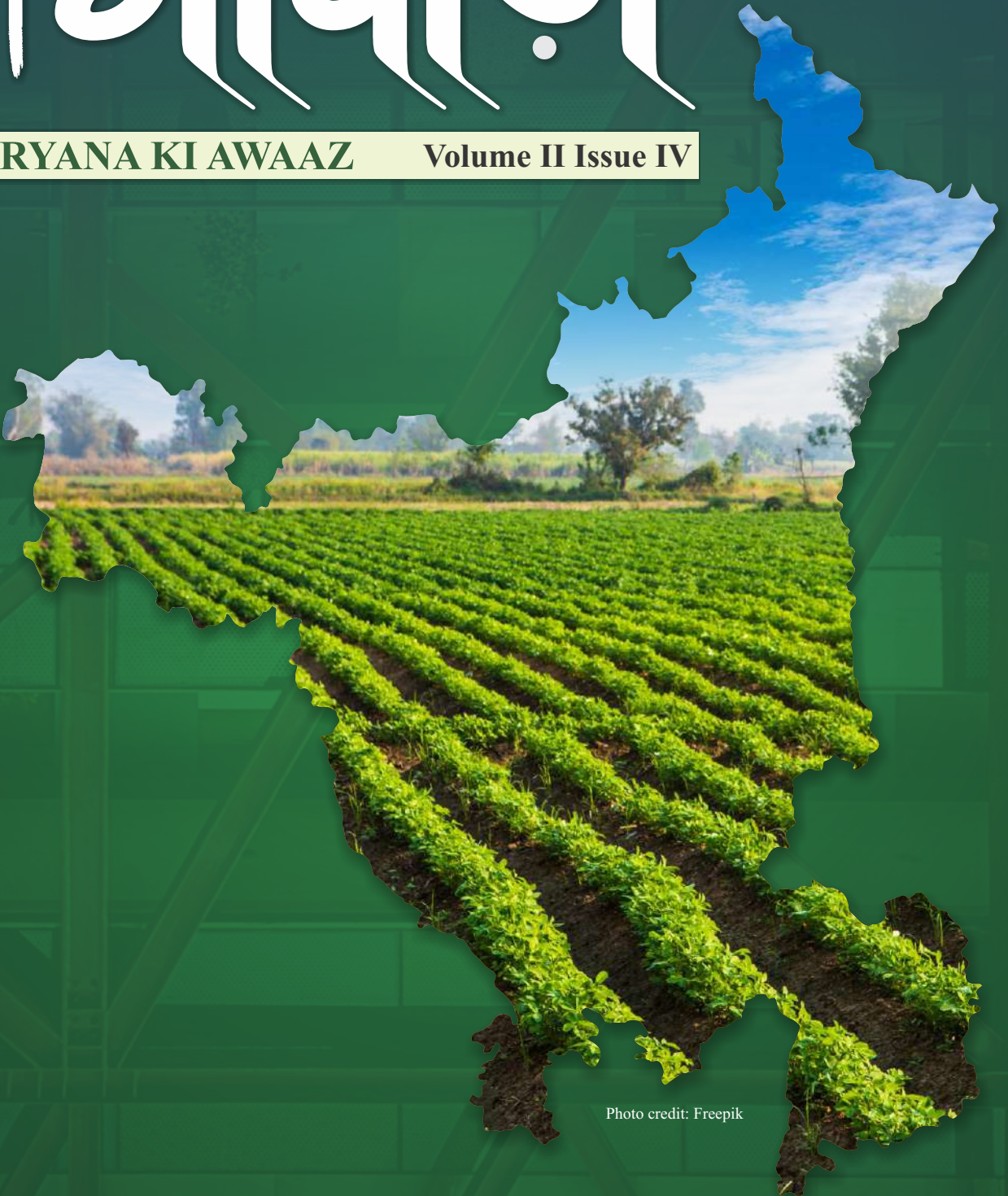


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We would also like to acknowledge and extend our appreciation to all the speakers, guests and discussants who joined us on November 1 for sharing his time and experiences with us.





**To,
Redefining and Reclaiming the Story of Haryana**



Prachy Hooda

Curator

There is always a stereotypical understanding of Haryana: rustic, rural (read: *dehati*), highly patriarchal and violent towards women. This had led to a very one-sided, homogenous representation of the region and its people, that lacks not just the nuances and complexities of its socio-cultural fabric, but a complete lack of interest and engagement by various stakeholders, in varied capacities (including mass media and academia alike), to acknowledge the depths of and differences in people's lived experiences.

My own experiences in “progressive” university spaces made me first-hand realise the “casual” stereotyping that those coming from the region face, mostly in the form of “jokes” (which aren't humorous) and even passing remarks like “*You don't look Haryanvi*” or that “*You don't speak like Haryanvis*”. This is also partly affected by the caricature-ish depiction of Haryanvis in Bollywood, where actors try to speak a language that is nowhere close to the different dialects spoken in Haryana. In this vast pool of poor projection of what is commonly considered Haryanvi (only by those who are not from the region), recent work by a few actors, social media content creators as well as young academics feels like a breath of fresh air, precisely because it consciously aims to challenge these stereotypes and carve out a space for grassroots voices.

In this backdrop, this monthly issue *Haryana Ki Awaaz* is a small step to counter this over-simplistic view of the region and its people by providing a platform to the people of Haryana, from all walks of life, to share their stories and lived experiences. It is aimed to project them as the active agents that they have always been but have never been given enough acknowledgement for. Each issue will focus on different facets of the socio-cultural fabric of Haryana as well as its diverse social groups.

I am thankful to the Office of Interdisciplinary Studies (IDEAS) at O.P. Jindal Global University (JGU) for its support in conceptualising this initiative.



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Haryana Day Special: The Changing Dynamics of Land, Labour and Identity in Haryana



On the occasion of Haryana Day, November 1, *Haryana Ki Awaz* organised a panel discussion on the changing dynamics of land, labour, and identity in the state. The discussion sought to engage critically with ongoing social, cultural, and economic transformations in Haryana. It addressed key concerns around rapid changes in land ownership and agrarian structures, migration, inequality, caste and gender relations, and evolving identities among rural youth.

The session opened with a welcome address by Prof. Deepanshu Mohan, Dean of IDEAS, who emphasised the need to critically engage with the region's immediate and often paradoxical socio-economic context. While several development indicators show progress, structural forms of oppression -- manifested through inequality, unemployment, and demographic churn -- continue to deepen. He also noted that Haryana's primary sector has evolved unevenly, largely due to the rapid expansion of the Delhi NCR, which has significantly reshaped land use patterns and employment opportunities.

These discussions marked the beginning of a broader institutional conversation aimed at encouraging sustained, on-the-ground engagement and research in nearby villages. The session, moderated by Prof. Prachy Hooda (IDEAS, JGU), featured a keynote address by Prof. Vikas Rawal (JNU), followed by a panel discussion with Dr Satendra Kumar (CSH, New Delhi and University of Zurich), Dr Sudhir Kumar Suthar (JNU), and Dr Prachi Bansal (JGU), and concluded with a grassroots dialogue with farmers from villages in the Sonipat district. This issue of *Haryana Ki Awaz* serves as a brief report of the session, capturing the key arguments, discussions, and perspectives that emerged during the event.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The keynote speaker, Prof. Vikas Rawal foregrounded the often-overlooked internal diversity of Haryana, cautioning against viewing the state as a homogeneous agrarian unit despite its relatively small geographical size. He highlighted sharp regional variations in caste composition, landholding patterns, cropping systems, labour deployment, and degrees of market integration.

Turning to agrarian change, Prof. Rawal noted the waning momentum of the Green Revolution in Haryana. Its declining profitability is evident in rising input costs, stagnant yields of major crops, and the absence of commensurate growth in farmers' incomes. Mechanisation has sharply reduced agricultural wage employment, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities in land ownership and income distribution. At the same time, structural exclusion remains stark with a striking percentage of rural households being landless, and nearly 75 per cent of Dalit households not owning any land. The top 20 per cent of landowners control over 70 per cent of agricultural land, underscoring the depth of disparities within the state.

Prof. Rawal emphasised that land inequality is foundational, shaping caste power, rural hierarchies, and broader social and political relations. The capitalisation in agriculture failed to generate alternative employment avenues for the displaced workforce. The result has been chronic underemployment, dependence on migration, weakened bargaining power for rural workers, and the setbacks for women's wage labour. Women were among the first to be displaced by mechanisation, as tasks traditionally performed by them were automated. Yet women's unpaid labour in livestock rearing and household-based farming continues to remain invisible. More troublingly, the persistence of unfree labour arrangements, where workers bound by debt accept highly exploitative contracts was also noted. The coexistence of such unfree labour with high levels of mechanisation underscores the urgency of policy frameworks that prioritise women's employment and equitable land distribution.

Younger generations from farming families are increasingly disconnected from agriculture, yet face a constricted non-farm labour market characterised by low wages and limited opportunities. Caste-based segmentation of labour markets further restricts mobility, which is already costly. This produces a condition of aspiration without opportunity among rural youth.



PANEL DISCUSSION

Dr. Satendra Kumar's Intervention

The first panellist, Dr. Satendra Kumar's interventions revolved around two interlinked questions: first, how shifting youth aspirations, particularly among Jats and backward castes, are unsettling older agrarian hierarchies in Haryana's villages; and second, how the rise of new forms of religiosity in rural Haryana is reshaping caste identities and political alignments.

He argued that neoliberal reforms, while promising expanded opportunities, have delivered very few secure and dignified jobs in Haryana. In the absence of meaningful industrialisation and service-sector expansion, the economy has failed to absorb rural labour, including educated and semi-skilled youth. As a result, economic uncertainty has intensified even as aspirations have risen: many young people, despite college education, find themselves unable to secure stable employment.

Despite mounting economic stress, farmers continue to rely on entrenched caste networks and political influence to access state benefits and social security. In this context, land, identity, and politics are inseparable, forming a single system of power. Landownership confers not only economic security but also political capital, which in turn reinforces caste consolidation and dominance.

On the question of religion and urbanisation, Dr. Kumar observed that Haryana's local religious cosmos is undergoing significant change. Urban culture, shaped by class norms and often influenced by ways of life of the non-agrarian groups, is mimicked and reproduced in rural settings. Through this process of urban imitation, a form of performative religiosity driven by cultural populism, which increasingly shapes identity politics in both rural and peri-urban spaces, gets solidified.

Dr. Sudhir Kumar Suthar's Intervention

The second panellist, Dr. Sudhir Kumar Suthar addressed the changing rural economy and politics of Haryana through the lens of identity crisis, focusing on the growing sense of frustration, disillusionment, and loss of certainty among agrarian communities. He linked these shifts to the “unmaking” of the rural self, arguing that economic distress and declining social prestige deeply affect notions of dignity and masculinity, with significant consequences for collective political mobilisation.

Engaging with the question of farmer suicides, Dr. Suthar noted that Haryana records comparatively lower suicide rates than states such as Maharashtra, Telangana, or Karnataka. This should not be misread as evidence of agrarian prosperity. Rather, it reflects the state's deep social embeddedness.

Strong caste networks, kinship ties, land-based identities, community institutions, and the symbolic value attached to farming generate a sense of belonging even when agriculture fails to provide viable livelihoods. These social ties produce a degree of solidarity, though they do not eliminate structural inequality.

While structural inequalities in land, labour, and caste persist, he argued that academic frameworks must also recognise rural aspirations, dignity, pride, and agency. People's decisions are shaped not only by economic necessity but also by their desire for self-respect and social recognition. To understand the region, it is important to examine how people imagine their lives and futures. The deeper anxieties of economic stagnation, erosion of social dominance, changing state policies, and demographic shifts linked to migration and education are also closely tied to changing notions of masculinity.

Dr. Prachi Bansal's Intervention

Dr. Prachi Bansal's remarks were based on her in-depth study of hundreds of households across many districts of Haryana to understand the interplay of labour, caste, and gender in Haryana's agrarian economy. She addressed two central questions: what current patterns of labour use reveal about the persistence of caste and class hierarchies in rural production, and how mechanisation is reshaping women's agricultural work in terms of both visibility and value.

Her empirical findings point to a striking continuity of caste-occupational hierarchies in Haryana. Despite decades of economic change, caste-based roles remain largely intact. This persistence cannot be explained by market forces alone. Dalits who lease land do so under highly unequal sharecropping arrangements, often receiving only one-fourth or even one-twelfth of the total output. As a result, they remain structurally trapped - not only in specific occupations but also within broader systems of economic and social subordination.

A major focus of Dr. Bansal's intervention was women's labour. Survey data showed that women perform majority of agricultural and livestock-related work, including fodder cutting, cattle feeding, dung collection, cotton picking, and dairy management. Yet this labour remains largely invisible and unpaid, as does women's extensive care work within households. Wage systems further entrench inequality: men are typically paid on a daily wage, while women are paid on a piece-rate basis for tasks such as cotton picking, paddy transplanting, and weeding. This system undervalues women's labour, intensifies work pressure, erases the notion of a fixed workday, and leaves women with little scope for negotiation or financial autonomy.

Haryana and Punjab exhibit among the highest levels of agricultural mechanisation in India. Rising incomes and remittances incentivise machine adoption, but labour absorption has declined sharply as capital replaces labour faster than diversification in cropping patterns or rural industries can occur. Neoliberal expansion has further fragmented labour markets, increasing reliance on casual work, insecure service-sector jobs, and seasonal migration. While wealthier farmers have diversified into horticulture and dairy, these sectors generate limited employment. Meanwhile, the private sector has failed to create stable jobs for rural youth, making rural-to-urban transitions fragmented and precarious.

Grassroots Dialogue with Farmers

Following the panel discussion, we had a grassroots dialogue with local farmers, centring lived experience and everyday realities of agrarian life in Haryana. While several farmers participated, three farmers in particular -- Rinku ji from Majra, Dinesh ji from Manoli, and Brijesh from Guna Farmana -- carried the conversation forward, responding to questions on daily routines, challenges in farming, access to state support, market linkages, and the future of agriculture for the next generation. Rinku ji began by expressing deep appreciation that the university community of JGU had created a space attentive to farmers' lived realities. Coming from a long lineage of cultivators, he owns and manages a family farm of nearly 80-100 acres and identifies himself as a *paramparik* (traditional) farmer. Agriculture, for him, is not merely an occupation but an inherited way of life sustained across generations.

Describing his daily routine, Rinku ji spoke of the intimate, embodied knowledge that traditional farming demands - skills learned through years of practice rather than formal training. Yet he also voiced a strong sense of anxiety about the rapid pace of mechanisation. Many of the manual skills he grew up mastering are no longer required, rendering traditional expertise obsolete. This transition, he noted, has unsettled farmers like himself, who now struggle to locate their knowledge and identity within a mechanised agrarian economy. He valued the seminar's acknowledgement of this unease, which is often absent from policy discussions.



When speaking about state schemes and cooperative structures, Rinku ji suggested that while policies exist, their reach and relevance remain uneven. Looking ahead, he expressed concern about sustaining farming as a dignified livelihood for future generations, even as he remains emotionally invested in agriculture as a familial and cultural inheritance.

Dinesh ji offered a sharply contrasting perspective through his engagement with polyhouse farming -- a technology-intensive, controlled-environment form of cultivation. He sees farming as a research-driven enterprise, experimenting with high-value and specialty crops such as seedless cucumber, strawberries, and mushrooms. He emphasised that such farming requires a close understanding of consumer tastes and market demand, as these crops cater to specific urban and elite consumption patterns.

Addressing the economics of polyhouse cultivation, Dinesh ji described it as a high-risk, high-reward model. Initial success in mushroom farming provided him with financial stability, allowing him to experiment further. He strongly critiqued public misconceptions about agriculture, recounting how consumers were led to believe that sweet corn consumed in 2021 was imported from the United States, when in fact it was locally grown: an example of how rural production is systematically erased from popular narratives.

He argued that modern farming extends well beyond production into marketing, branding, and digital sales and highlighted newer avenues for farmers to sell produce through online platforms such as Amazon and Blinkit. For him, entrepreneurship opens new possibilities, and he encouraged younger members of his family to make independent career choices, including moving beyond agriculture if they wish.

Brijesh, a young farmer with a strong academic background, felt that education shaped his farming practice by encouraging a more analytical and reflective approach. He sees potential in low-risk, technology-supported farming models as a way to attract youth back into agriculture.



He also critiqued the unequal distribution of state resources. Government supplies such as seeds and fertilisers, he observed, are often captured first by large farmers or those with close administrative connections, leaving little for small cultivators. At the same time, private buyers operate differently, selling inputs quickly but bargaining aggressively over prices, placing small farmers in a precarious position within both public and private market systems.

Together, these grassroots interventions grounded the seminar's theoretical discussions in everyday agrarian experience, revealing how technology, market integration, and identity intersect in complex and often contradictory ways in contemporary rural Haryana.



Meet our Team

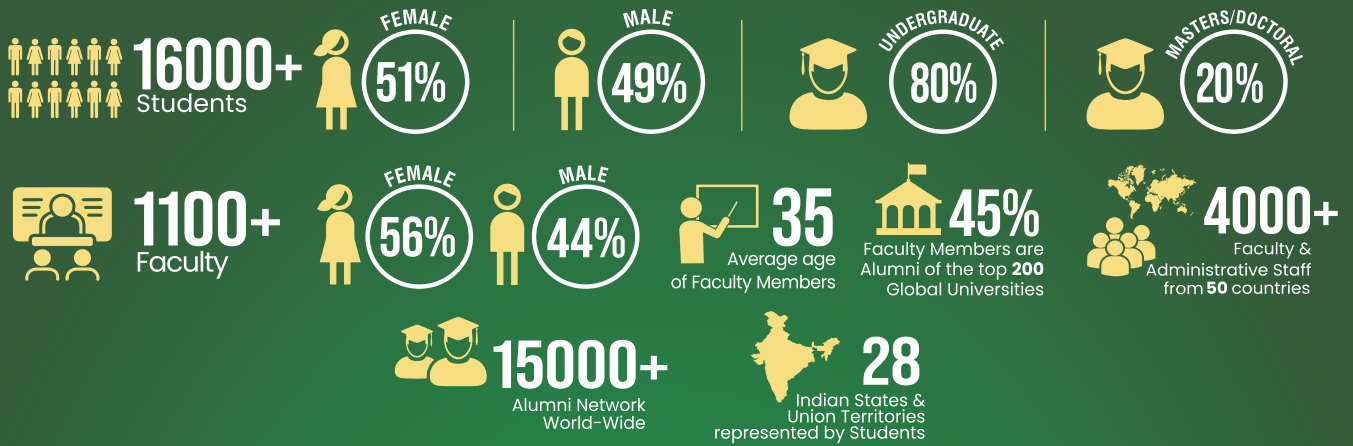


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