



Centre for Development Studies Alumni Association (CDSAA)

Issue 03

News letter



September 2026



Dear friends,
Wherever this newsletter finds you in the world, we hope these pages bring a piece of CDS back to your inbox. This third edition of the Newsletter is being released on the occasion of the two-day in-person alumni event, including the National Conference on Development and Structural Transformation in India: Evidence and Policy on 25-26 September 2026, and the Alumni Meet and dinner on 25 September. We are excited about reconnecting with many of you in person. The Annual General Body Meeting of CDSAA will be held in the afternoon of 26 September 2026, where a new team will take over as the association's executive committee.

In this edition, we once again bring you the latest updates on key events organised by CDSAA, alumni sharing their CDS memories, and news and experiences from the CDS campus shared by current students. The CDSAA organised an online colloquy on "Water & Times" in July, an eclectic theme deftly handled by two distinguished CDS alumni: Mihir Shah and Tirthankar Roy. The Special Interest Groups that bring together CDS's MA and PhD students with alumni experts on specific topics have continued. Alumni contributions to the Student Welfare Fund have helped support some current students. Campus news features the second CDS PhD Colloquium and the colourful farewell organised for graduating MA students. A new feature added to this edition is the 'Book Shelf' page, showcasing recent books published by alumni.

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We invite you to engage actively with CDSAA and keep it vibrant with new ideas and activities. Please send us stories and photos of your time in CDS, informal meetings with other alumni, and career opportunities for graduating CDS students to cdsaa@cds.edu.

Warm regards,

CDSAA Executive Committee.

Special Interest Groups of CDS Students

The Special Interest Groups (SIGs) were formed to create focused discussion forums around key research areas and to provide structured mentorship opportunities. Following a suggestion at the Annual General Body Meeting (AGBM), the CDSAA helped facilitate these groups and organized regular interactions between current students and alumni, as well as invited experts. They create spaces for in-depth discussion, peer learning, and intellectual exchange beyond the classroom, while also providing mentorship support.

Dr Md. Zakaria Siddiqui from Jamia Millia Islamia led an online informal interactive session with the PhD scholars on 6th May, 2026. Each scholar explained their area of research to Dr Siddiqui, following which he deliberated upon the ways to improve the work. Scholars in the initial years of PhD asked for suggestions on how to develop and narrow down research questions and information on various datasets for their specific research interests. The final-year scholars received suggestions on how to develop individual papers from thesis chapters. Finally students enjoyed a thought-provoking discussion on how to maintain a balance between our scholarly integrity and responsibility towards society and making ourselves compatible with the market.

Dr Balakrushna Padhi from BITS Pilani had an informal interaction with the students on 7 September 2026. During the session, he discussed the students' research areas and provided valuable suggestions and inputs. The discussions covered a diverse range of topics, including job complexity and wage returns, labour processes in the gig economy, the resource curse, fieldwork in the mining sector, and the aviation sector in Indian industry. Following the individual discussions, Dr. Padhi also shared his insights on job market prospects and career development. He emphasised the importance of making novel research contributions, publishing in reputed journals, and developing the skills and competencies demanded by the contemporary academic and professional job market. Overall, the interaction was highly informative and useful, providing students with valuable academic guidance as well as practical insights into research and career opportunities.

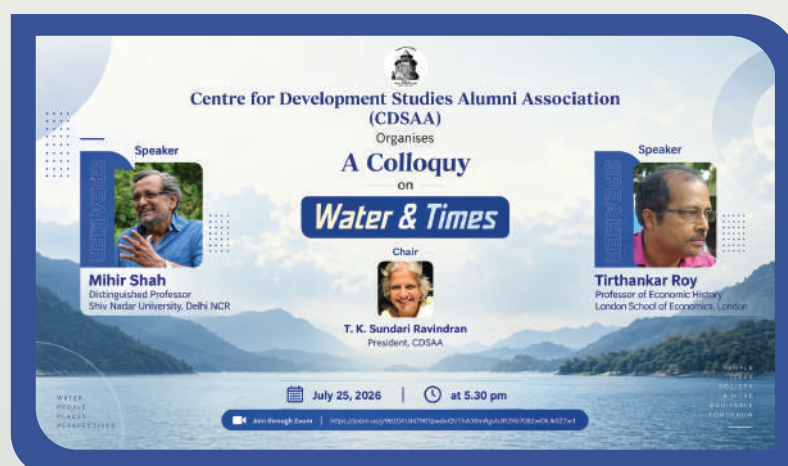


Colloquy on “Water & Times”

The CDSAA organised an online colloquy on “Water & Times” on July 25, 2026. The rather broad and eclectic theme was handled deftly by two distinguished alumni – Mihir Shah of Shiv Nadar University and Tirthankar Roy of the London School of Economics. The highly informative and polemical treatment of the subject was attended by a large number of participants across the nation.

With rich and extensive field, policy and teaching experience on the subject, Professor Shah delineated aspects of a paradigm shift in water management and governance in India. Taking off from a sharp critique of the ‘command and control’ of nature underlying the conventional technocratic/official view of curbing water flowing to the sea ‘wastefully’, he delved deeper into a new perspective on the science, availability, regeneration, and use of water. Drawing upon numerous examples of flawed policy (including the grand idea of interlinking of rivers), he laid bare the maze of water misunderstood and misappropriated in a large scale, especially endangering its availability in India’s vast drylands. The silos-based thinking on water as opposed to the much-needed ‘integrated’ view has been the undoer of a possible solution to the looming crisis. His hope lay in engaging the community, importantly, farmers to find innovative solutions (as through an agroecological perspective) to the universal challenge. He linked the unprecedented phenomenon of suicides of over 400,000 farmers in recent decades to the unscientific handling of soil and, in turn, water. His quintessential argument pointed to pursuing a multistakeholder and multidisciplinary approach to addressing the water challenges of our times.

Professor Roy, drawing upon his two recently published books (Monsoon Economies, MIT Press 2023; Water and Development, OUP, 2025), delved into the relationship between water management and economic development in semi-arid and arid tropical regions. The entire discourse was done from an economic history perspective, as distinctly different from the usual environmental history one. The central challenge has historically been not procuring more, but controlling water better. Tropical environments present distinctive barriers to development because of high temperatures, seasonal rainfall patterns, drought risks, and limited water availability. Historical responses included water storage systems, irrigation works, population movements, and long-distance trade networks. More effective water-control tools and institutions emerged from the late nineteenth century onward, including dams, wells, canals, pumps, groundwater extraction systems, state financing mechanisms, and public demands for water justice. These innovations helped some tropical regions achieve agricultural expansion and economic convergence with wealthier parts of the world. However, they had side effects: growing inequality, environmental degradation, groundwater depletion, and increasing climate-related water stress. Both experts responded to several questions and comments posed by the audience.



The Centre for Development Studies (CDS) hosted its second PhD Colloquium, Crossroads 2026, from 5–7 February 2026. The event brought together doctoral scholars from universities and research institutions across India for vibrant scholarly discussions on contemporary development issues. Designed as a platform for research dissemination and academic engagement, the colloquium embodied CDS's interdisciplinary ethos, fostering dialogue across economics, sociology, political science, public policy, and allied disciplines. Young researchers benefited from presenting their ongoing work and receiving constructive feedback from CDS faculty.

The academic programme featured 24 paper presentations and 8 poster presentations, organized into eight thematic panels: Technology, Identity and Power; Firm Dynamics and Performance; Development and Vulnerability; Economics of Climate Change; Causal Inference; Agriculture and Rural Development; Labour Markets and Outcomes; and Policy and Macroeconomics. These themes showcased the diversity of contemporary development research by doctoral scholars and highlighted the broad research expertise of CDS faculty.

The papers demonstrated a rich blend of empirical, theoretical, and policy-oriented research. Presentation topics included artificial intelligence, digital technologies, gender, identity, higher education, firm productivity, industrial development, labour markets, climate change, agriculture, public finance, fiscal decentralisation, and social vulnerability. Scholars utilized diverse methodological approaches, ranging from qualitative field-based research to advanced econometric and causal inference techniques. Poster presentations further expanded the thematic scope

by highlighting research on occupational health, innovation, foreign policy, fisheries, higher education, fiscal policy, political anthropology, and digital political participation.



**Bhatraju
Jithin Sree**
(PhD 2023)

A hallmark of the colloquium was the diversity of its participants. Scholars hailed from a wide range of institutions, including Jawaharlal Nehru University, University of Delhi, Christ University, IIT Hyderabad, IIT Guwahati, IIT Mandi, BITS Pilani, Ashoka University, IGIDR, IIM Raipur, Madras School of Economics, Pondicherry University, IISER Bhopal, Central University of Kerala, University of Kerala, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kannur University, Nagaland University, South Asian University, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Centre for Economic and Social Studies, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, and many more. The selection process intentionally ensured diversity in institutional representation and promoted inclusion across gender, regions, communities, and disciplines.

Eminent academicians from CDS and other institutions chaired each technical session. CDS faculty members actively participated as chairs and discussants, alongside experts from the University of Kerala, GIFT, Kerala Agricultural University, and SCTIMST. After every presentation, discussants provided detailed feedback on the research question, conceptual framework, methodology, empirical strategy, interpretation of findings, and policy implications.

These discussions offered participants valuable suggestions for strengthening their dissertations and preparing their work for publication, while upholding the rigorous academic standards of CDS.

Beyond the technical sessions, the colloquium included three special lectures on distinct aspects of academic research. The inaugural lecture, "Perspectives on Research," delivered by Prof. Suraj Jacob (CDS), encouraged participants to reflect on the purpose of research, the importance of asking meaningful questions, and the value of critical inquiry in advancing knowledge.

The session "From Manuscript to Publication: An Editorial Perspective" was led by Nachiketh Kulkarni, Senior Assistant Editor, Economic and Political Weekly (EPW), and Shweta Shetty, Assistant Editor, EPW. The speakers offered practical guidance on manuscript preparation, responding to reviewers' comments, editorial expectations, and common reasons for manuscript rejection, equipping doctoral scholars with valuable insights into publishing their research in top academic journals.

The final special lecture, "AI and Research," delivered by Prof. S. Chandrashekar (IGIDR), explored the expanding role of artificial intelligence in academic research.

The talk examined how AI can assist with literature reviews, data analysis, and research productivity, while also highlighting ethical considerations, academic integrity, transparency, and the responsible use of AI in scholarship.

Crossroads 2026 reaffirmed the Centre for Development Studies' commitment to nurturing the next generation of researchers. By convening doctoral scholars, faculty members, and experts from a broad spectrum of institutions and disciplines, the colloquium offered a rigorous platform for presenting research, receiving expert feedback, and engaging with emerging debates in development studies. The event strengthened scholarly networks, promoted interdisciplinary collaboration, and reinforced CDS's position as a leading institution for doctoral training and research in development studies.

Student Welfare Fund

Thank You, dear donors, for your financial assistance.

Last year, the SWF has funded the canteen fees of two of the three candidates who had approached the committee for financial assistance. This semester, we have been approached by three candidates for financial assistance. We will assist all three but not to full extent given the limited funds available. In time, we hope the corpus will grow with generous contributions from our alumni and other donors.

Link to SWF

<https://sbcollect.sbi.bank.in/sbcollect/collecthome.htm?corpID=381789>

Finding Growth, Community, and a Home at CDS - Reflections of a MA Student

When you first step onto the Centre for Development Studies campus, one of the most surprising things you experience isn't academic—it's the culture of warmth.

Coming from the outside, it feels almost awkward at first when complete strangers look at you and smile as you pass them by. But very quickly, you realize that this is just the way of life here. In this campus, we live, study, and grow together as a family.

For me, the lush, green campus itself has been a quiet anchor. Nature is everywhere here, and on the days when academic stress felt overwhelming or I felt personally broken, the leafy pathways and silent corners of CDS served as a space for healing. The physical beauty of the campus has a unique way of caring for you when you need it most. That comfort is vital because the M.A. program here is undeniably rigorous. It demands your absolute best, pushing you to your limits. Yet, that intensity is exactly what keeps you on the right track. It forces you to build your own routine, discover your own space, and truly construct who you want to become.

We are never left to navigate this rigor alone. The professors at CDS are incredibly kind and deeply dedicated; they don't just teach—they actively push you through the odds to help you realize your potential. And then, there are the peers. To my friends here, I owe a massive debt of gratitude.

Without you guys, I simply wouldn't have survived this period. You are my support system, and "without you, I am nothing here."

The sheer weight of the history we are stepping into hit me vividly just this morning. I boarded an auto, and the driver immediately referred to CDS as "that college where Dr. T. M. Thomas Isaac studied." It was a striking reminder

of the enormous legacy we inherit. This institution has consistently produced successful economists, policymakers, and leaders who shape the world.

That vibrant legacy comes alive in our everyday academic culture. At CDS, seminars are treated like festivals. Every single lecture shifts your perspective, bringing you face-to-face with brilliant minds and personalities who possess an inspiring depth of knowledge in their respective fields.

Ultimately, CDS is more than just a place of rigorous academic training; it is a transformative space. It challenges you, heals you, connects you to an illustrious past, and provides the ultimate community to build your future.



Harshavarthini
(MA 2025-27)



Hey, Tea? - Reflections of a PhD Student

The only consistent thing we are doing is having tea in the evening." This has been a fun and entirely factual joke among my friend circle at CDS. In the midst of deadlines, seminars, fieldwork, and thesis writing, our evening tea ritual has remained the one constant in our otherwise unpredictable doctoral lives.

Every evening, almost without fail, I wait for the familiar ting-ting notification on my phone around five o'clock. The message is never elaborate—just two simple words: "Hey, tea?" Yet those words are enough to set everything in motion. Within minutes, people begin appearing from different corners of the campus. One strolls in from the library. Another shuts their laptop in the PhD Bay. Someone else joins from the LH. Regardless of what we had been doing, our response is almost instinctive: we gather.

Over time, we developed an unspoken consensus about where to go. Five-Star Thattukada became our default destination, while Palace Restaurant and Malabar Bites served as reliable alternatives when we craved a change. After hours spent poring over books, research papers, computer screens, or even enjoying the occasional afternoon nap, the short walk to the tea shop became a refreshing transition—an opportunity to stretch our legs, breathe fresh air, and leave academic worries behind.

Our regular visits turned us into familiar faces at the tea shop. Eventually, words became unnecessary—a smile, a nod, or a simple hand gesture was enough.

The tea master knew exactly what each of us preferred: who wanted strong tea, who liked less sugar, and who enjoyed a

medium-strong brew. There was something quietly comforting about being recognized in that way.

Honestly, the tea was never really the point. What mattered was everything that happened around it. Our tea-time conversations hold a special place in my heart.

Those conversations touched upon research, cinema, politics, sports, dance, family, health and everything in between. Tea-time often became an informal classroom, a support group, a debating society, and sometimes even a therapy session. More often than not, a quick tea break stretched into an hour or two. One cup of tea would be followed by another cup, then another round of conversation, and before we realised it, dusk had settled over the campus. Years from now, I may not remember every paper I read or every assignment I completed at CDS. But I am certain I will remember those evening walks, the familiar call of "Hey, tea?", tea-talks, and the simple joy of sharing a cup of tea with friends. Sometimes, the most ordinary routines become the most enduring memories.



Anfas K.M
(PhD 2021)

Farewell for the 2024-26 Batch of a MA students

The MA Farewell, conducted in the last week of April 2026, turned out to be the perfect way to end the academic year 2025–26. The vibrant evening caught the attention of not only the MA graduating batch, but also the rest of the CDS community. MA students, PhD scholars and the faculty made the most out of the evening.

On that sweltering summer evening, the event began with a cool, refreshing pineapple lime served in the shamiyana. The graduating batch arrived in their finest attire—elegant sarees, sharp suits, and stylish dresses—making the event a colourful celebration. We greeted them with beautiful handmade bouquets, ushering them into a magical evening. The auditorium and shamiyana were intricately decorated, enhancing the ambiance.

The evening showcased a wide array of talents through both solo and group performances. Ardra, Rakshit, and Sudipto enchanted the audience with their soulful singing, while first-year and second-year MA students lit up the stage with energetic and enthusiastic acts.

The performances spanned Bollywood hits, Odia melodies, lively Telugu numbers, and vibrant Tamil and Malayalam “kuthu” dances. The infectious beats had the audience

bouncing in their seats until they couldn't resist getting up to dance.

Fun-filled games like cup stacking, newspaper balancing, and musical chairs brought together every part of the CDS community—from students and faculty to their family members. We presented the outgoing batch with a heartwarming memento, along with playful titles for each member to cherish their time at CDS.

The evening concluded on a bittersweet note with the screening of two meticulously compiled videos. The first featured individual interviews of the outgoing batch, interspersed with comic reactions that had the crowd bursting with laughter. The final video, showcasing memories from the batch's time at CDS along with their farewell sign-offs, brought tears to many eyes.



Chythra C
(MA 2025-27)



The celebrations wrapped up with a cake-cutting ceremony and a delicious dinner in the warmly lit shamiyana, setting the perfect aesthetic for the evening. The graduating batch shared their memories and messages on the gratitude wall displayed in the auditorium.

The event was organized seamlessly with the enthusiastic participation of the entire MA 2025 batch.

We poured our heart and soul into ensuring its success. Volunteers eagerly took charge of different segments,

organizing each with utmost care and dedication. Along the way, we created countless beautiful memories, drawing us closer and strengthening our bonds. The praise the event received made us proud, and for me, organizing it will forever remain a cherished memory of CDS..

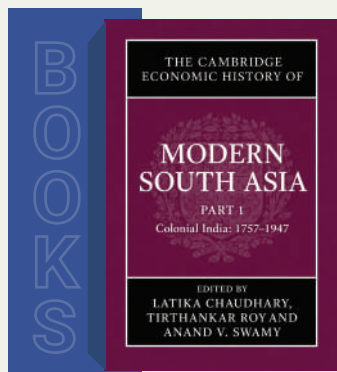


India's High-Tech Leap, Industrial Policy and Future of Innovation

Sunil Mani

Edward Elgar Publishing, 2026

Examines how strategic industrial policy and government support can strengthen innovation and competitiveness in India's high-technology sectors. Drawing on cases including pharmaceuticals, software, vaccines, wind, solar photovoltaics and electric vehicles, it considers pathways toward stronger domestic capabilities and technological resilience.

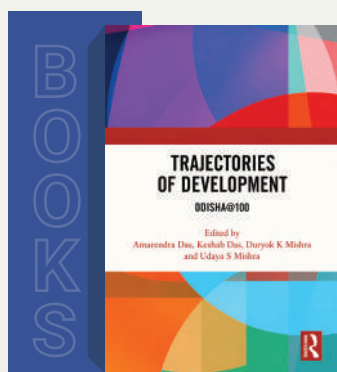
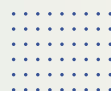


The Cambridge Economic History of Modern South Asia: Part 1 Colonial India: 1757-1947

Latika Chaudhary, Tirthankar Roy & Anand V. Swamy (Eds.)

Cambridge University Press, 2026

A landmark economic history that revisits colonial India through updated scholarship and diverse perspectives. The volume brings together research on regions, agriculture, industry, trade, infrastructure, population, labour, gender, caste, environment and entrepreneurship to offer a more nuanced understanding of South Asia's colonial economic past.



Trajectories of Development: Odisha@100

Amarendra Das, Keshab Das, Deepak K. Mishra & Udaya S. Mishra (Eds.)

Routledge, 2026

An interdisciplinary assessment of Odisha's development journey from the formation of the state to the present, examining economic growth alongside social, distributional, ecological and governance challenges. The volume brings together evidence on agriculture, industry, health, education, demography, migration, poverty, tribal development, disasters and regional disparities.

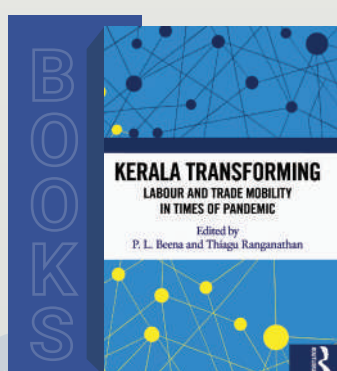
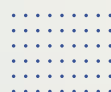


Secession of the Successful: The Flight Out of New India

Sanjaya Baru

India Viking, 2025

Explores why many of India's successful, skilled and affluent citizens choose to build their futures abroad, and what this means for India's human capital and development. The book connects migration and diaspora with questions of economic opportunity, social openness, national aspirations and the future of India's global talent.

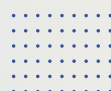


Kerala Transforming Labour and Trade Mobility in times of Pandemic

P L Beena & Thiagu Ranganathan

Routledge, 2026

This book examines Kerala's recent development trajectory and highlights the impact of COVID-19 on its economy. It analyzes Kerala's growth and structural transformation while engaging critically with issues related to employment and migration.



Alumni Spotlight

Rajeswari Raina



Having spent years 'de-centring' after I left CDS in 1992, I have been asked to write about my

Centre times. The Centre taught me

how to learn; to communicate and convince, to laugh and sing, to shun power and embrace camaraderie, to love the field and its inhabitants (human and non-human), and most importantly, to "stay the course", never give up. I teach now as a Professor at Shiv Nadar University in Delhi NCR, and I'm still learning! To remain 'a curious toddler on a steep learning curve'; that is the blessing I stole from CDS. Yes, stole! I never intended to be at CDS, and did consider quitting the PhD programme during my very first year at the Centre. A protective family that would not let me apply to PhD programmes abroad, a father who flooded my mind with the schizophrenia of agricultural development in the rainfed tropics, and a few friends (who are now my family) brought me in and cultivated me at the Centre.

The sources of learning were many and rich. They included eminent Governing Board members who would spend more time in the cafeteria with us students rather than in boring meetings, our dear cooks (Manian and Thankappan Nair) and the one and only Meenakshi, the over-worked library staff with more patience than mother earth, the distinguished architect of the Centre and some of his friends, our own precious circle of friends- some on a high, some hiding from supervisors, some hearing cases against peers from the same (at times opposing) ideological shades, some just hanging around (or out - clothes that would land on the prize-winning head of an illustrious economist), some hoping against hope (yes, they were our teachers) that we would submit our dissertations and leave – especially on the nights we would take over their kitchens and make ourselves at home.

One of the miracles of learning is that you survive, can be very happy (and frustrated occasionally) and have a ball with no money at all. Prosperity is an attitude! The three of us, Keshab Das, K. T. Rammohan and I (the 1987 PhD admissions), did exactly that for over one year, with no fellowship (I did disclose to some friends who borrowed from me even then that I had an aunt giving me pocket money throughout that marvellous year).

It was when Vaidy (Prof. A. Vaidyanathan, a great teacher and mentor who was never called Prof. or by his full name) called us "the CDS mafia" while delivering the keynote address at IRMA's silver jubilee celebration in Anand that I confronted my calling. Yes, there were about 14 or more of us from the Centre at this anniversary of an organisation with a presence in rural India. We were the foot soldiers of rainfed agriculture, women-led micro-credit, local calls for ecological justice, rural innovation, water science and policy, eco-restoration, agro-forestry and commons, agricultural markets, science-technology-society studies, living soils, land and biodiversity.

As we huddle in the trenches, fire hard-hitting one-liners (when we are painfully aware of losing the day's battle), strategise on pathways to sustainability, and rewrite the epistemology of subsidies and natural capital, we are learning. We are happy that we have friends and co-conspirators from the Centre who sing with us:

"Come senators, congressmen, please heed the call.
Don't stand in the doorway, don't block up the hall"

The times are changing. I am still the little waif from the Centre. Still learning ... and eagerly looking forward to visiting the Centre... perhaps take a boat once sea levels rise along this splendid coast!

Alumni Spotlight

Aravind Sardana



One of my most enduring memories of CDS is the culture of sharing, the generosity and the pleasure of engaging with each

other. This was upheld by both the faculty and students. Engagement could take the form of research questions, data, activism, or art and literature. We were also encouraged to collaborate on themes of interest. I remember working with SK, my classmate and old friend, to examine balance-sheet data available in the public domain to see whether many firms are profitably engaged in both trading and manufacturing at the same time. We found a fair amount of evidence, especially from Babu's fieldwork studying the rice mills of Sambalpur, but we were encouraged to find out whether data gleaned from balance sheets would show such a pattern for particular industries, such as cotton. This was for a term paper that took a long time to complete.

Many people worked in different geographies on related themes. They helped each other with readings and frameworks. This sense of collaboration built fraternal ties far beyond CDS days.

To be honest, these 'adda' conversations were also unsettling. We were not clear what we might be doing later. We would swim between activism, research, academics, teaching, economic journalism, institutional finance, films and literature. And as I look back at my contemporaries, we chose many different paths. The fascinating point was that this was not frowned upon or discouraged.

The faculty was really liberal in bringing together a heterogeneous group. This rubric of "applied economics" was not only for research but also for the imagination of social change. However, the more one read about barriers of caste, gender, region, unequal distribution of land and feudal power structures, the more these seemed to swamp attempts to imagine new frameworks for social change. Yet somehow, we were hopeful, possibly because there were many social movements and experiments for transformation at that time. There's a tinge of sadness as one recalls the engaging presence of many contemporaries who are no longer with us.

Another enduring memory was reading and exposure to nature. If we move away from viewing nature as merely a pool of natural resources for production, what theoretical conception would fulfil an ecological outlook; align with constitutional equity; respect other cultures, especially forest dwellers; and not be antithetical to production and growth? On a different plane, our colleagues gave us a fascinating exposure to and immersion in the forests of Kerala and introduced many of us to a real feel of nature. They took us on many treks through rain, slush, and often with no food. Their feel for the forests was fascinating to watch and learn from. They were all associated with some aspects of the environmental movement in Kerala. The silence of the forest was a fruitful and welcome contrast to our continuous chatter and argument. This immersion, including the trail of leeches that cling on without notice, remains etched in one's mind.



Alumni Spotlight

Indervir Singh



I still remember entering CDS for the first time as an MPhil student in 2006. It was not the first time I had entered a new

institute for a degree. However, I knew that CDS was different from any institute I had studied at earlier. My university teachers, Prof Sucha Singh Gill and Prof Lakhwinder Singh, had already told me it was one of the best research institutes in India. During my interview, I realised that CDS was not a typical academic institute. Everyone on the interview committee was kind, and the non-teaching staff facilitating the interview were equally considerate. Still, little did I know or imagine the impact CDS would have on my life, particularly on the way I think.

After attending a few days of foundational courses, I realised CDS taught economics differently. While I continued to learn economic models and mathematics in class, I was being taught to think about them differently. Instead of memorising the models, I learned how researchers use abstract models to convey their ideas. Although I was not yet able to construct an abstract model, this realisation made me see economics in a different light. Later courses taught me the importance of theory and empirics: an effective argument requires both an abstract framework and empirical evidence.

This marked the beginning of a process that fundamentally rewired my thinking. While this was important, it was not enough on its own. What truly helped me grow as a researcher was exposure to diverse arguments and an environment that encouraged free thinking and allowed room for mistakes. I remember my supervisors, Prof. V. Santhakumar and Dr N. Vijayamohanan Pillai, telling me my arguments were half-baked, then patiently explaining where I went wrong. I recall people debating passionately

in seminars or over email.

Listening to others articulate and defend their positions helped me avoid many mistakes that might have otherwise taken years to correct.

CDS not only helped me develop critical thinking but also shaped how I perceive reality and conduct research. I came to understand that ideas in the social sciences are not absolute truths; reality exists somewhere amidst diverse arguments. This realisation did not prevent me from holding my ground or arguing my point. In fact, I was perhaps one of the students who made the most of this freedom—I argued whenever I felt strongly about an issue or idea. I wasn't particularly skilled at writing at first, but through these email debates, I gradually improved my ability to write. I remember my friends, Anoop and Sravanthi, reading my emails and telling me how much I had improved in presenting my ideas. Much of this growth in my writing would not have been possible without my friends, especially Rajeev. My friends—Binoy, Anoop, Saravanti, Minnu, Rajeev, Rikil, and Luca—and I would often gather in Binoy's or Rajeev's room for long discussions. During these sessions, I realised how culture and exposure shape our worldview. In later years, my interactions with others, particularly Rajesh GK, Krishna, Jatinder, Kiran, Ashapurna (who became my life partner), Namrata, Sushma, and Gurpreet, helped deepen my understanding of development issues.

Looking back, I realise I have come a long way since I joined the CDS. It was here that I transformed from someone with half-cooked or unrealistic ideas to someone who can think in a structured way, and then to someone who can make an argument while appreciating the complexity of real life. I owe this growth to my learning at CDS. I have been in academia for over 13 years, and yet I have not seen an institution that nurtures its students like CDS.



Alumni Spotlight

Rachel Simon-Kumar



When I think back to my years at the Centre for Development

Studies in Thiruvananthapuram, I realise how profoundly it has shaped the way I understand the world. It wasn't just a place to learn development theory—it was an intellectual ecosystem with a distinctly left, critical, and often openly Marxist orientation. I remember lunchtime conversations that could easily turn into spirited arguments about Kerala's political economy or global capitalism. That critical lens has held me in good stead in the 30-plus years since I left CDS.

I would like to acknowledge my teachers – especially Dr B.G. Kumar and Dr Irudaya Rajan, who were my MPhil supervisors – who taught me the foundations of rigorous, interdisciplinary, and politically aware scholarship. From them, I learnt to move comfortably across disciplinary boundaries of economics, sociology, demography, gender studies, and policy studies.

After graduating, I joined the Centre for Management Development, where I spent a couple of years working on projects that were both practical and quietly transformative. One of the most influential was a collaboration with IDS Sussex on a study of NGO life cycles among fisher communities in Kollam. That project taught me a lot about communities and grassroots work, including the power of participatory research. Soon after, I worked as a consultant on a three-country project on 'Reproductive rights as Human rights.' That work broadened my exposure to international development practice and deepened my interest in gender, rights, and policy. Around the same time, I received a scholarship to pursue a PhD at the University of Waikato in Aotearoa New Zealand. My doctoral research examined reproductive health policies in Kerala, and the PhD became my entry point into feminist studies, policy analysis, and critical social science. It also marked the beginning of my career as an academic and my longstanding association with New Zealand.

After completing my PhD, I took my first academic appointment at the University of Auckland, where I taught development and gender studies. After a couple of years, I moved into public sector research for the New Zealand government, gaining valuable experience in applied policy work. In 2007, I returned to academia and joined the Women's Studies programme at the University of Waikato, where I taught for seven years.

A sharp pivot came when I accepted a position in the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences at the University of Auckland in 2014. As a social scientist in a medical faculty, I found myself in an interdisciplinary space that echoed my CDS training. In fact, one of my most cited papers is a class analysis of NZ's migration policy ... and guess where that lens of analysis stemmed from?

In recent years, my work has been increasingly centred on the health of Asian and other racialised migrant populations, and my research has expanded to include violence in ethnic communities, multiculturalism and migration politics, racism, neighbourhoods, equity in health, and feminist theory. Alongside my focus on structural inequalities, I also began to explore identity politics and their impact on people's wellbeing. Working alongside Māori and other Indigenous colleagues further shaped my understanding of structural inequities and culturally-grounded, decolonised research. Across these spaces, it feels like a continuation of the intellectual commitments first seeded at CDS.

I was appointed as Professor in our faculty a couple of years ago – one of the handful of women of colour in that position at the University. I am conscious of the challenges of being a woman – and a minority – in academia and see my responsibility in advocating for leadership opportunities and pay equity within the institution.

Metamorphosis - A Photo Story

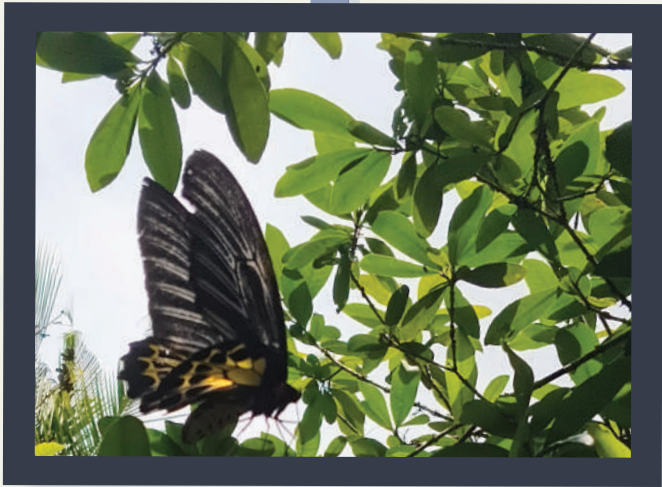
By Nature Club



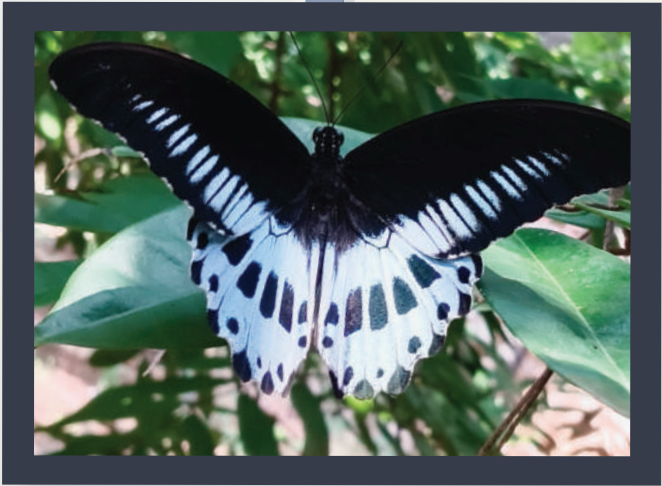
Every year, students arrive at CDS carrying different aspirations, uncertainties and dreams. By the time they leave, they are often transformed in ways they never expected. The butterflies of our campus remind us that transformation is one of nature's oldest stories. These three species are a quiet tribute to the journeys unfolding every day at CDS, both in its classrooms and among its trees.



Common Pierrot



Southern Birdwing



Blue Mormon





If you have not done so yet, we invite you to enrol as a member of CDSAA through the following link: <https://cds.edu/alumniassociation/#Membership>