

REPORT OF THE SPECIAL LECTURE

Date: 9th December 2025

Venue: Classroom 1, Post Graduate Department of Economics

Speaker: *Prof. Vikas Kumar, School of Development, Azim Premji University, Bengaluru*

Topic: *Rethinking Government Statistics for Public Policy*

1. Introduction

The Post Graduate Department of Economics, University of Kashmir, organized a Special Lecture on “Rethinking Government Statistics for Public Policy” on 9th December 2025 at 11:30 am in Classroom 1. The lecture was part of the department’s effort to expose students and faculty to contemporary academic and policy-relevant discussions.

The event witnessed participation from faculty members, scholars, students, and members from other departments, reflecting the broad relevance of the theme.

The proceedings began with a welcome address by Mr. Saeed Owais Mushtaq, followed by an introduction of the distinguished speaker, Prof. Vikas Kumar, an eminent scholar known for his unique work on the political economy of government statistics and census systems in India.

2. About the Speaker

Prof. Vikas Kumar serves at the School of Development, Azim Premji University. His academic training spans engineering and economics, and his work is recognized for its interdisciplinary depth. His prominent contributions include:

- *Numbers as Political Allies: The Census in Jammu & Kashmir* (2023, Cambridge University Press)
- *Numbers in India’s Periphery: The Political Economy of Government Statistics* (2020)
- *Waiting for a Christmas Gift: Essays on Politics, Elections and Media in Nagaland*
- Numerous book chapters and journal articles on census politics, data deficits, diplomacy, and ancient texts such as the Arthashastra

Prof. Kumar has received prestigious honours, including the Elizabeth Adishesah Award for Distinguished Contributions to Development Studies (2024), and other fellowships such as the Asia Link Fellowship and NSE–NYU Research Grant.

Apart from academia, he is also known for his philatelic exhibitions that combine art, history, and social narratives.

3. Summary of the Lecture

Prof. Kumar’s lecture offered a deep and insightful exploration into how government statistics—often assumed to be neutral and scientific—are shaped by political, social, and institutional realities. Key themes included:

a) Importance of Statistics for Public Policy

He emphasized how modern governance relies heavily on data for decisions related to poverty, employment, health, demography, and fiscal planning.

b) Historical and Institutional Context

He traced the evolution of census operations in India, drawing examples from regions like the Northeast and Jammu & Kashmir to illustrate administrative challenges and political negotiations embedded in data collection.

c) Politics of Counting

Prof. Kumar discussed how statistical categories are often contested, how communities may resist enumeration, and how numbers can influence political debates. He highlighted that statistics are social constructs shaped by incentives and power relations.

d) Understanding Data Deficits

Drawing from his fieldwork in Nagaland and J&K, he explained issues such as incomplete datasets, methodological gaps, mistrust between authorities and communities, and the broader policy implications of unreliable statistics.

e) Building Better Statistical Systems

He advocated for:

- Decentralised data systems
- More transparent methodologies
- Stronger engagement with local populations
- Interdisciplinary training for data professionals

He argued that strengthening the credibility of statistics is essential for democratic governance.

f) Message for Students and Researchers

Prof. Kumar encouraged students to:

- Critically examine data sources
- Combine quantitative skills with contextual understanding
- Appreciate the link between evidence, governance, and citizenship

4. Interaction Session

An engaging discussion followed the lecture, with questions on:

- Census reforms
- Digital data systems
- Regional disparities
- Data transparency

- Capacity building in statistical institutions

Prof. Kumar responded to each question with depth, drawing from research experiences and regional case studies.

5. Conclusion

The session concluded with a formal vote of thanks by Dr. Ghulam Mustafa.

The lecture was highly appreciated for its intellectual depth and relevance, offering students and scholars new perspectives on the functioning of government statistical systems.

The Department expressed its sincere gratitude to Prof. Vikas Kumar for delivering an enriching and thought-provoking lecture.