

MAPPING FARMERS' MOVEMENTS : AN INDIAN CONTEXT

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abstract

The on going farmers' movement is one of the most popular Indian Movements of the millennium. The annulment of three farm Laws, restoration of Mandi, APMCs and MSP are major issues of the rich farmers staging protest in a non violent manners for more than four months in Delhi. Neither Central Government nor farmers' are willing to budge. This is damaging already hit Indian Economy due to recession, waves of Corona and lockdowns. Good sense should prevail on both sides to end the protest at the earliest in larger interest of India.

Keywords : **Farmers' Movements, Khap, Mahapanchayats, APMCs & MSP.**

The farmers' movements is an integral part of social movements that have been significant part of India's socio-political history what V.S Naipaul paraphrased India in 1990s as land of million mutinies .Most of the social movements have largely been spontaneous ,apolitical and related to socio-economic issues like land rights ,land produce rights , language issues ,socio - ecological justice ,dalit and women rights etc .Social movements are generally against the state but largely in a non-violent manner with few exceptions. For example Naxalite movement was against Zamindars and feudal in a violent way and targeted state because it was treated it as an ally of exploiters i.e landed bourgeoisie. But again to emphasize that social movements are generally non violent and targeted directly against the state .The present ongoing farmers' movement since November 2020 is an important social movement of twenty-first century India. The movement is all set to continue since neither party is willing to compromise . The present ongoing Farmers' movement in India under Samuykta Kisan Morcha and Bhartiya Kisan Union under leadership of Rakesh Tikait is sustaining for more than three months . it is acquiring transnational dimension due to direct and indirect support of people of Indian origin from abroad and issues raised on international platforms like in UN .O etc .Some recent Toolkit imbroglio arising out of climate activist Greta Thunberg's supportive remarks for the movements and arrest of Indian environmental activist like Disha Ravi , Shantnu and their bail thereafter is a case in this point.

An ultra violent incidence found during Tractors rally on the 72nd Republic day and anarchical display of throng power on top ramparts of Red Fort invited wider criticism by public and media besides government whatever may be, but this is a typical social movement of this millennium .It deserves a serious introspection from academic point of view . There is a primary need to address the issues and objectives of the present movement. The movement initially aims to get three agricultural laws repealed which were passed by the parliament in September, 2020.

Three farm laws in question:

These three Laws include (1.)Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation)Act,2020.(2) The Farmer(Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act,2020 and (3)The Essential Commodities (Amendment)Act ,2020.

The above three laws and their repeal is main issue .The present NDA-BJP central government led by Narendra Modi has passed these laws and argue that these laws would reform and revolutionise agriculture sector. It would make it more competitive and lucrative .The first law promises to promote and facilitate free trading of farmers 'produce .producers can sale their produce outside government's authorised Agricultural Produce Market Commodities (APMCs) and that also without paying any state taxes et . Produce may be sold to the newly created class of licensed traders only. These traders are expected to get licence only after paying money to which they would try to multiply with the maximum profit .It can be possible only when farmers 'produce are purchased at minimum price .These licensed traders would fix approximately same price among themselves and farmers would have no option except to sale their produce at whimsically decided price of traders . The price would automatically be decided at buyer's terms. The government knows this dynamics and therefore it decided to maintain tactical silence on Minimum Support Price(MSP). This is the reason that the GOI cleverly, candidly , loudly and repeatedly claim that there is no restriction on MSP in the Act. The restriction is inherently implied. This is how deprivation from assured income based MSP causes discontent among farmers .

The second Act ,as mentioned above ,principally assures price of farmers 'produce and other services in the farming sector .It further promises to empower farmers and protect their interest. .But it appears quite difficult to discern in the provision of the Act . This Act essentially emphasizes contract farming on minimum assured price between farmers and business houses i.e processors and exporters. The defenders of the Act coincidentally quotes contract between low sugar content l potato growers and wayfers producers –processors-exporters namely Lays & Uncle chips etc. The Act also tries to assure farmers to enter into contract for produce only and not essentially for land .But experiences are different .The big houses enter into agreement with farmers on pro - traders terms and finance them with conditional quality produce .Later they reject the produce under pretext of poor and of substandard quality. Ultimately farmers sale rejected produce at lower rates at loss to pay debt to traders. In many cases farmers have to sale their land to traders at throw away prices .In few cases farmers become victim of depression and commit suicides This is the reality of contract farming in India and to an extent in America as well. The present second law on farming passed by our parliament in September 2020 also irritates and force farmers to protest in addition to first one.

The third Farm law is Essential Commodities (Amendment)Act. It is related with preparation of list of essential agricultural produce and framing regulations for their supply-price and stocking limits . The existing essentials are foodstuff f ,fuel and medicine. The food –based agro produce are cereal like paddy &wheat ,pulse, vegetable items like potato-onions ,oil and oilseeds etc. Their stock and supply are to be controlled and regulated especially to meet exigencies during extraordinary situation like war ,famine and other natural calamities if any. However there is no limit on stocking is applicable for items kept reserved for public distribution by Government agencies like Food Corporation of India , State Food Corporations and ware houses etc. Earlier stocking was permissible to producers and authorised Govt agencies only .Now private players and traders too have been

allowed for hoarding and stocking through this Act that irritate farmers among other thing. This is all about the three farm laws passed by Indian Parliament in September,2020

Implication of the Farm Acts, 2020

The fact of the matter is all the three farm laws passed by parliament and mentioned above are being opposed by the agitating farmers. They are demanding for its unconditional and immediate repeal. The movement paradigm appears quite binary. The leading organisation of farmers' agitation Samyukta Kisan Morcha and Bhartiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait allege these Acts as anti-farmer intended to incentivise big corporate houses coupled with to impoverish and enslave millions of India's primary producers peasants and farmers. The government, on the other, argue that recently passed acts aims to modernise agricultural sector and make it more competitive, lucrative and investors' friendly. This argument of the defenders appears illusive. Farmers feel that this is backdoor entry of big business houses to corporatize agricultural sector through introduction of Contract Farming (2nd Act Empowerment & Protection Act). Earlier experience of contract between farmers and traders –exporters have been bitter that resulted in ultimate loosing of land to big traders, falling in multiple debt traps that finally forced farmers to commit suicides nationally and globally. The gradual weakening of the hitherto existing mandi system through the farmers' first law on produce trade- commerce. This hits and hurts farmers the most. The law permits peasants a kind of freedom, as claimed by the Govt, to sale their produce outside Agriculture Produce Market Committees (APMCs) in the hands of licensed buyers. This is an effort to weaken authorised Government's mandis where minimum support price is paid to producers which ensure minimum income to the farmers. The licensed traders outside APMCs would collaborate among themselves and fix minimum price to buy agriculture produce. The farmers would left with no option except to sale their produce at whatsoever price available in the so called open market anywhere and everywhere dominated by licensed traders. The APMCs would automatically whither away. Similarly and simultaneously the issue of Minimum Support Price too would be gradually redundant. The government, therefore, maintained tactical silence on MSP. The adverse impact and implications of these farmers' laws are well understood, interpreted and argued by farmers. They are all set to agitate till these laws are abolished, abrogated, annulled and repealed. The Government and its interlocutors tried their best to convince farmer of its advantages through several rounds of talk, but failed. Farmer organizations are on roads blocking NCT borders and main entry points of Delhi like Tikri, Singhu and Gazipur for months. The court has stayed its implementation and formed four member committee to look into it and report. The opposition parties question the gross violations of procedures of passing these laws without sending it to parliamentary standing committees for proper scrutiny. Many of the provisions are anti farmers' interest as per perspective of the opposition parties and therefore they support farmers stand. These opposition parties and many of civil society groups of intellectuals do extend their support to the movement largely due to its democratic and non-violent civil disobedience Gandhian type of movement. Some kind of anarchy and violence during tractor rally on 72nd Republic day of 26th January 2021 in front of red forts was a sheer aberration. The agitation was and is largely non violent and to an extent in a semi-Satyagrah style. This is another issue that people and parties perceive it differently. The government castigate it as opposition parties 'conspiracy and terrorist anti-national

khalistani sponsored agitation .When Indian daisspora approve this agitation and international organization justify it for democratic rights ,Indian government and media brand it as an international conspiracy to weaken India. Sometimes this support is also taken as unnecessary internationalisation of the internal affair and undue interference of outside powers in internal affairs of India .Whatsoever may be the perspective, but this is one of the most popular Indian farmers’ movement of this millennium

No doubt movement is popular that receive wider national and international support .It is sustainable too that is continuing since December 2020. There does not seem any sign of its end. Besides, it is getting more intensified and base is gradually getting widened .The agitation is acquiring pan India expansion however with different intensity. North Indian states especially Punjab ,Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh are its epicentre. Whatsoever are the issues and howsoever are its justification, this is not good for country and its economic health .Agriculture is getting adversely affected . We may face shortage of food in future. That would result in price rise of basic food items which would worsen problems of common men . It would add into already existing misery on all round price rise due to high fuel rate etc .Hoarding would be another by product leading to law –order problem. Precisely long continuing agitation and its economic impact would be highly negative. Cities are blocked resulting into traffic jams .People are facing lot of problems. Some discontents against farmers’ movement is also brewing. Local residents living in movement area are protesting and fade up with it. But neither Government nor farmers is willing to budge. Such audacity would not be good in interest either of Govt, of farmers or of country at large .An early end is only sustainable solution .Unfortunately no silver line is noticeable in near future.

Peasant politics and movement in Post-independent India

As stated in the beginning that peasant and farmers movements are important part of socio-political history of world in general and India in particular. India is primarily agricultural society where there are many strata and categories like peasants , farmers(middle ,small ,marginal) landlords, rich/capitalist ,bullock cart capitalists who have been biggest beneficiaries of green revolution and agricultural modernization .These movements in India after Independence Can be categorised into many kinds .For example first movement in agricultural sector was of landless for land reforms and remuneration and those were targeted against the feudal and zamindar i,e Telengana & Teebhaga during 1940s.These movements of poor and landless were led by ultra left in Eastern and south – eastern India popularly known as Naxlite movement based on violent techniques. Later, with gradual onset of green revolution ,a new group of rich farmers emerged in North-Indian State of Punjab ,Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. These farmers formed a formidable pressure groups of peasants and dominant agricultural castes Unions. Chaudhary Charan Singh mobilised rich backward agricultural castes jats,gujjars tyagis and organised them into Bhartiya Kranti Dal(BKD)in 1960s.This was predominantly led by jats which expended its base with bhaichara and traditional caste panchayats Khap. The rich farmers’ movement in Karnataka was led by Karnataka Rajya Ryot Sangha (KRRS) and by Shetkari Sangathan (SS) in Maharashtra. These were strong organisations which carried out larger movements for higher price of their produce like wheat ,paddy ,onions, sugarcane , tobacco and cotton etc. and lower charge for power .agricultural tools, seeds, plus fertilizers and other inputs .These groups had reasonable skill of coordination and united fronts witnessed their massive strength

on boat club in 1980s. Kisan leader of BKU had organised big rally during Mandal commission and blocked India gate with tractors in support of of Tau Choudhary Devi Lal .Some of peasant organisations turned into political parties like Bhartiya/Rastriya Lok Dal in UP and Indian National Lok Dal in Haryana .Kisan leaders also tried their luck in electoral politics like C.Narayanswamy Naidu in Tamilnadu , Nanjundaswamy in Karnatka and Sharad Joshi in Maharashtra .But very few of these farmer leaders could succeed like Charan Singh and Devi Lal .The successor and son of Late Mahender Singh Tikait and present Farmers' movement leader Rakesh Tikait also tried his fate in politics ,but failed. Presently Rakesh Tikait is leading the ongoing movement for months in collaboration with other myriad of peasant organization.

But there is marked difference in movement of the poor and rich farmers. The earlier poor farmers' movements were against local landlords and feudal for land reforms, better working conditions , higher wages , land redistribution and abolition of high caste landed atrocities .Some leftist played role in organising these people against landed bourgeoisie and their coalition with state. This is still continuing in the newly expanded influential region of what is called as red corridor .This movement was and is violent .But rich farmers 'movement, on the other, is targeted against the state to protest harmful anti –agricultural policies introduced by the state whenever formulated and implemented and that too largely in a non –violent manner. The present movement is also a case in this point.

The Globalization introduced new agricultural laws that created new kind of discontents and death through suicide - syndrome among farmers. The GATT, Dunkel 's proposal ,SAP &SEZ etc tried to convert agriculture into commerce and agro business for capitalist intervention and investment .This neo liberal market oriented approach ended subsidies regime and left peasants at mercy of markets and as a tool of trade tycoons. The oil crisis added into cost of diesel too. The price rise of fuel, fertilisers ,tools and withdrawal of subsidies forced farmers to take loans at higher rate of interest from banks. The Poor ,marginal , middle and lower rich farmers were badly affected .Land holdings were getting fragmented from big to middle and from middle to small .Production cost was increasing .Peasants were forced to grow cash crops for quick returns which again was increasing due to competition and over production. The coming of MNCs tycoons like KFC, Cargill and Monsanto ,Lays &Uncle chips etc intensified the crisis .Banks were pressurising peasants to repay debt and confiscating their land ,gold ,cattle ,crops etc to recover loans. These helpless peasants were left with no option except to end their lives. Farmers' Suicides spread like an epidemic in Andhra, Karnatka, Maharashtra and Punjab etc .Many mini movements were launched locally by peasants in different states against local state laws since agriculture is state subject. These small scale local state based peasant movements against state and Multinational companies were typical feature of farmers' movement during the era of globalization.

This situation changed in present post –globalization era. This is digitalised world dominated by print ,electronic and social media ,world wide web.w.ww, network operated through handy smart mobile phones. The Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter ,myriad of hastags and instagrams ,Yahoo, Gmail and Redifmail etc type service providers have made communication and publicity all time faster, ceeper and easier. The Google is store house. It is treasure and archives of handy knowledge .The Indian literate and illiterate youths are quite capable of handling at their fingertips.

The information spread faster than air and fire today with the help of social media.. This has proved catalyst in igniting the ailing issues related to three farm laws , their flaws and quick mobilisation. Farmers living in nearby or remote areas were mobilised immediately after 26 th January Republic day violence in Farmers’ tractor rally to warm up cooled presence through these social media invitation on whatsapp and facebook .This is how mobilisation , reactions-counter reaction and responses are carried out by people ,leaders and other stakeholders. The movement has been sustaining with high and low ebbs during this days of what Rudolph&Rudolph call Societal and demand politics .Further Tharoor calls it Khap politics of Mahapanchayats. The inaction of central government led by Modi ji is irritating farmers who are vomiting venom against Prime Minister and joined election campaign not to vote Modi and his BJP presently to begin with from West Bengal and Assam and later to be concluded in states wherever assembly election is scheduled . The digital campaign and counter campaign of all the events including of farmers’ movement and their direct interest of involvement in politics as a tactics to generate pressure on the government to negotiate with them in their interest and on their terms to guarantee on MSP and annulment of three agricultural Acts passed last year in September 2020.The movement is continuing for more than four months. It is again difficult to say as to how long can it sustain.

Conclusions

Theoretical understanding of social movements considers it as a larger part of social activism as an integral feature of democratic process of India. Meyer and Tarrow brand democratic society as Social movement society. They believe that all social movements today including Farmers’ movements are no more sporadic and spontaneous, rather largely institutionalised , professionalised, specific issue –identity based and localised. The present farmers’ movement is addressed to issue of MSP and repeal of three laws. Further this is purely a regional movement of three north Indian states of Punjab ,Haryana and western part of Uttar Pradesh. The experience also exhibits that movement started with proper planning in a professionalised way by a host of farmers’ organisation separately and latter coordinated and carried out under one or two umbrella organisation ilke Samyukta Kisan Morcha &Bhartiya Kisan Union. Under Rakesh Tikait etc. The salient feature has been of its hitherto non –violent and non –political character. That has helped movement in acquiring wider national and international support from academicians . social activists, feminists and environmentalists etc. This is one of the most popular and long surviving Indian movement of this millennium. Now getting gradually politicised with peasant’s involvement in West Bengal assembly election. The government and farmers too should sit together at the earliest since it is damaging Indian economy Which is already hit by first round of Covid-19 likely to suffer further by upcoming of another one .Before Country becomes victim of another wave of corona, Farmers’ issue ought to be resolved to save Indian economy and society. Both of the parties should understand this and resolve at the earliest.

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