

PARADIGM SHIFT

2021-2022 #3

Modernizing Indian Agriculture: In Whose Interest? Farmer's or Corporate?

“Corporations have been trying to impose free trade deregulation of agriculture since 1990s. Freedom for corporations translates into unfreedom for farmers and consumers. Farmers incomes collapse, consumer prices increase, polarization of prices, super profits for corporations...”

- Dr. Vandana Shiva, December 7, 2020

“The agrarian crisis has gone far beyond the agrarian. It's a social crisis with people leaving agriculture and not getting absorbed anywhere else. Between 1991 and 2011, 1.5 crore farmers dropped out of agriculture, with most becoming landless farm laborers....It's a civilisational crisis...lakhs of farmers have committed suicide...”

-P.Sainath, Outlook, February 23, 2021

“...What the Indian farmers are enduring now happened in the US almost four decades ago. The Reagan era furthered the farm crisis through deliberate federal policy changes, with systematic erosion of parity prices and other deregulatory efforts...Farmers with the means to consolidate have been rewarded for growing monoculture commodities. Tribal nations and traditional producers as well as small farmers who have always practiced or shifted to diversified agro ecological farming have effectively been subsidizing the US agriculture sector. It is rare for these food producers to make a living without supplemental income. Unsurprisingly farm suicides in rural America are 45% higher than the rest of the population”

– Food Advocacy Organisations and Farmers, USA.

Comment:

Agriculture in India has been a widespread occupation right since ancient times; well beyond the fertile plains of the North. There have been 12 sites in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka growing pulses, millet, wheat, barley, cotton, linseed including fruits. Settled life soon followed with implements and techniques being developed for agriculture. Double monsoons led to two harvests being reaped in one year. Indian products soon reached trading networks and foreign crops were introduced.

On their return trip, the Macedonian army carried the “honey bearing reeds”, thus

spreading sugar and sugarcane farming. Indians had also invented by about 500 BC, the process to produce sugar crystals. In the local language, these crystals were called 'khanda', the source of the word candy.

The history and past accomplishments of Indian agriculture have been influenced, in part, by colonialism, slavery and indentured labour in the new world, in the 18th and 19th centuries. Prior to the 18th century, cultivation of sugar cane was mostly confined to India. But a few merchants began to trade in sugar with European traders where it grew in popularity. In the 19th century and 20th century sugar-cane plantations, just like

cotton farms, became the driving force of large and forced human migrations of Africans and Indians—influencing the ethnic mix, political conflicts and cultural evolution of Caribbean, South American, Indian and Pacific Island nation.

On Independence, India had however acquired some semblance of food stability. It adopted steps to prevent another major famine. The Government expanded the amount of land that could be used for farming. In some cases, they provided financial aid to clear and prepare areas so that those farmers could more easily grow crops. Despite some stagnation during the later modern era India was able to develop a comprehensive agricultural programme.

In recent times, however, India has been facing an agrarian crisis with problems of depleting natural resources, global warming, and climate change. The New Economic Policy of 1991 had already destroyed the life and livelihood of small and marginal farmers. With the COVID-19 pandemic the farmers have also been severely affected by lockdowns. All these together have led to suicides among farmers due mainly to bankruptcy, indebtedness, unemployment and related concerns. According to the census records of 2011, between 1991 and 2011, the number of cultivators has also dropped (1)

The structural transformation that subsequently followed -- from a predominantly agrarian economy to becoming an industrial and service-hub -- has been quite ironic. For, the agricultural sector that was supposed to strengthen, to hold the other sectors firm, has been reduced to a residual sector (2) an activity that produces to liberally feed the nation, has remained neglected, given the paradigm of growth. The Economic Survey of 2019-20, the annual growth (real terms) of the farm sector has stagnated at an abysmal rate of 2.8 per cent for over a half decade now(2) Whereas the significance that agriculture holds for ensuring food security for all is enormous.

Behind each meal lie the struggles of countless farmers.

In June 2020, the Central Government promulgated 3 Ordinances (or temporary laws) dealing with agricultural produce, their sale, hoarding, agricultural marketing and contract farming reforms among other things. The Prime Minister circumvented Parliament procedures to push through Bills that eased restrictions on private players in agricultural markets. Like many of Modi's major projects, the Bills were passed in haste by the Rajya Sabha, and via a voice vote, completely overlooking request of the Opposition for a full vote (3). That is, the Bills were passed without input from key farming groups or farm unions; primarily to favour mega agri-business corporations but turning against and driving away the middle level farmers from the agrarian sector. Ostensively, they were passed to “modernize” agriculture; to make it market friendly; and to deregulate farming from the stranglehold of middlemen.

However, the legality of these 3 Acts (see Box below) has been questioned as both agriculture and markets are under State list. Above all, as pointed out above, the laws is a unilateral attempt to open up the agricultural industry – employs half of the entire Indian workforce – to private corporate interests, while removing the few legal protections that keep many farmers afloat. Besides, the legislation makes no mention of the minimum support price (MSP), a financial safety net for farmer that guarantees a set payment for key crops even if the market takes an adverse hit.

It is against this anti-farmer policy that demonstrations have been going on ever since without any break! The farmers further maintain that there is a hidden Government agenda behind the laws viz., to facilitate corporate control over agriculture and food. This has obviously become very clear by now. The Indian mega corporates, Reliance and Adani Group, cronies of the Modi government, have naturally incurred the full wrath of the farming community. The farmers

have made the coterie of corporate big wigs -- Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Storefronts and Reliance Jio infrastructure -- the sites of their protests. While Ambani had insisted that his Corporation had no plan to enter corporate farming, his purported political networks and accumulation of wealth have generated trust deficit between farmers and Corporates (4)

At the macro level the 3 farm laws intrude upon the regulatory power of State Government and intensify the already severe power asymmetry between mega business houses and the mass of Indian farmers, nearly 86 % of whom cultivate less than two hectares (5) The Clause like one that bars farmers – or anyone else- from seeking legal recourse over contractual disputes - cement the fear that the laws stack the deck against farmers. The economist, Sudha Narayanan holds that the putative benefits for farmers have little empirical justification and, in fact, these laws “collectively invisibles trade area transactions, contract farming and stocking in a way that makes them unregulatable” (5) Moreover, the government allows corporate buyers to purchase farm produce outside the supervision of and without the payment of taxes and fees to mandis; limit state intervention in retail prices; and provide a framework for farming, on contract, to corporate and MNCs!

These farm laws support commercial cultivation of specific crops and the uncritical adoption of modern farm technology to maximize output. As a result India's food basket has been homogenized as certain crops mainly high yielding varieties of rice, wheat and pulses get prioritized. Land got depleted by mono cultivation of high yielding seed varieties. The costs of inputs needed to keep producing, forced farmers into the cycle of debt (6) The increase in agricultural [productivity came at an enormous cost to the environment viz., loss of soil nutrients, excessive irrigation, water scarcity, indiscriminate application of some nutrients and pesticides and loss of biodiversity.

There is also the fear among the farming community that these laws would eventually lead to landlessness, bondage and their destitution; they portend a total hollowing out of the state-regulated procurement at mandis that, to this day, signal prices with regular announcing of MSPs, and if they are weakened any further than they already have been, they will be fully exposed to debilitating price pressures. The reasoning behind this is that the farmers are protesting not because the existing system is fair, but because it is being replaced with an even more inscrutable system that will further disadvantage them.

The whole government approach to these 3 laws has been on the basis of a trickle-down approach that is highly upper caste, male oriented with large land holdings with ready access to irrigation. They have not been designed to factor in the basic concerns of marginalized farmers who are invisible (7) – whether Dalit or women farmers. (Along with regional and demographic diversity there is gender diversity) Even if the concept of growth is considered, it will only come if the purchasing power is put in the hands of rural India. (The experience of national policies is greatly distanced for farmers on the margins, in Adivasi areas untouched by modern technologies). While deep-water lands face periodic flooding, droughts go unreported in remote areas)

While the farmers have been in the forefront of their struggles against the farming laws, the government on the other hand hails these farm laws as a watershed reforms that will usher in a Golden Era of prosperity for farmers, backed by corporate investments. The current agricultural system will be streamlined and farmers will have lot more freedom to sell their products, at any price, directly to private corporate, unlike in the earlier practice of selling through auction known as the “mandi system”

This handing over Indian agriculture to global corporations has not been an over-night phenomenon. The World Bank and TNCs

have been trying for long, right since 1991 SAP programmed, to introduce laws to dismantle India's food sovereignty.

Despite several rounds of talks there seems to be little hope of a resolution when the problem is framed as a zero sum game of either implementing the laws or repealing them.

A related concern of the farmers' protests is the ecological roots that go back to the so-called Green Revolution, a Cold War stratagem rather than a humanitarian initiative, (5) that was essentially to promote capital-intensive industrial agriculture. In reality, these "farms bills" are really 'Food System Bills' that will determine food production, farmers' incomes, food prices and will have impact on soil, biodiversity and natural resources endangering years of regulatory system to protect small farmers livelihoods and food sovereignty of the country. They also push for contract farming wherein farmers enter into legally binding agreement with corporates and MNCs. This however places the farmers in an unequal power equation, as a failure to deliver crops due to harvest loss could even mean loss of land. These laws however fail to get to the root causes of the agrarian crisis. Thus, farmers in India today are dealing not only with the legality of the Green Revolution but the added impact of climate change. They now have to face disasters like drought and floods, etc.

The farmers' struggle is therefore for the survival of over 50% of the Indian farmers – a struggle against corporate control of the several dimensions of the farm economy; ranging from production, to fair pricing, to stocking (hoarding), to markets and to retail marketing. Their struggle also highlights a number of other disturbing trends, viz.

- * the Centre's violation of principles of federalism, by legislating on a state subject without consulting the farmers or the state governments;

- * exposes how the laws take away legal and judicial recourse and put in place only executive redress;

- *the struggle is also for defining the basic democratic and constitutional right of the Indian people of the right to association, the right to protest and the right to be heard.

Further, the absence of any regulation and declining purchasing power of the impoverished poor, could lead to increasing exports in food grains, while the poor continue to go hungry. In the past, governments have withstood the pressure of the WTO and the North, and gave leadership to the other third world countries, arguing for a peace clause, which defends its public stockholding of food gains for the purposes of the public distribution system (PDS).

II

Farmers and the "Green Revolution"

Indeed, the so-called Green Revolution package had created more problems than it solved! In fact, even a celebratory review in 2003 was forced to concede that the main benefit of the package was lower food grain prices, whereas the vast majority of farmers and farm laborers had suffered declines in incomes. In short, the "Green Revolution" secured cheap cereals in exchange for justice and ecological sustainability. Recent research calls for a total revision of the "Green Revolution" 'success story', even questioning whether there was an overall food scarcity plaguing 1950s India, the purported reason for its introduction".

By the 1980s, even the geographically limited package proved fiscally onerous. As State support declined, the problem of remunerative prices and debt escalated. So did the ecological crisis such as falling groundwater tables, saline and degraded solids, biodiversity loss, and health disorders from pesticide use –culminating in a full-blow agrarian crisis by the 1990 and an epidemic of suicides by farmers.

One result of the "Green Revolution" was the growing inequalities and disparities in rural areas between the rich farmers with huge farm holding assets and a vast surplus of

agricultural labour. Post Green Revolution wheat and rice production doubled because of initiatives of the Government, and the decline in the production of crops like indigenous rice varieties and millets.

In his lecture on winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970, Norman Borlaug, one of the “fathers” of the “Green Revolution” provided an obtuse defense of the program: “Some critics have said that the green revolution has created more problems than it has solved. This cannot be accepted, for I believe it is far better for mankind to be struggling with new problems caused by abundance rather than with the old problem of famine”. Five decades since, we have come full circle, and it is evident that the new problems of industrial agriculture have added to the old problems of hunger and malnutrition.

Given the expense, the “Green Revolution” strategy was rolled out only in a few, well-endowed districts of Punjab and a few other states. As bumper crop production inevitably depresses prices farmers were guaranteed procurement through state-run ‘mandis’ or market yards at MSPs that was declared in advance. State procurement was therefore crucial to transforming Punjab into India’s breadbasket. (5)

In short, the Government held out the promise of provisioning the hungry with subsidized cereals and pumped massive investment to win over the well-off sections of landowning farmers. Alternative ideas for science-backed agricultural development such as relying locally available varieties and agro-ecological adaptations were never seriously considered

Despite obvious setbacks to the scheme the Government continues to stubbornly oppose the farmer stand on their just demands. Responding to the situation, the Prime Minister said “The Government is committed to modernizing agriculture and the efforts of the government will continue in that direction. This attitude of the government makes it crystal clear that it is adamant in its stand not to help ordinary farmers but to

‘modernize agriculture’. At the outset, this objective appears laudable! But a closer look on the actual implication of this farm “modernization” will reveal an ominous hidden agenda!

Over the years, the stress in the farm sector has only increased and the Importance of farming and environment concerns has repeatedly come to the fore. For instance,

- In late 2018, during the legislative elections in M.P. Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan farmers' protests was a serious issue;
- In August 2018 Kerala suffered from a devastating flood which caused an estimated economic loss of rs.310 b. Of this the loss to the agricultural sector was so significant that the State Agricultural Minister stated that Kerala would renew its agricultural activities and policies;
- In January 2020, hailstones and unseasonal rains damaged crops in Haryana's Rohtak area.

With climate change, the variation in the temperature and rainfall has increased. This can seriously result in crop losses and harm the interests of farmers. This is another major reason the farming community believe that environmental issues is an important factor influencing Indian agriculture and therefore demand MSP as a safety net for the time, effort they invest in agriculture.

III

Farmers' Opposition and Protests, 2020-2021

The earliest reflection of the farming crisis is embedded in British colonial history. In 1917, Gandhi had launched a political movement in the village of Champaran in what is today known as Eastern Bihar. Poor farmers had been forced to grow indigo used in the making of dyes. The colonial authorities who saw this as a highly lucrative trade coerced the farmers to grow this crop even as they were poorly paid. If they refused, they were heavily taxed. Gandhi believed that violence against the British colonial empire was

counterproductive so he launched a non violent civil disobedience movement, Satyagraha. He applied the concept effectively to protest the colonial salt tax laws that prevented private production of salt, forcing Indians to buy this vital dietary staple at exorbitant market prices set by the colonial power.

In 1931 Gandhi organized a march to the seaside town of Dandi in West Gujarat. In a gesture of defiance to the Salt Law, Gandhi and his followers picked up salt from the beach to demonstrate that they had the absolute right to produce their own salt. The colonial authorities responded with violence and imprisoned Gandhi and his supporters. Gandhi however refused to back down.

Following Independence, peasant movement led by communists launched a massive struggle against the Government with the demand to redistribute land from landlords to peasants (5) But the Government, beholden to landlords for electoral support in rural areas, was unwilling to implement comprehensive land reforms.

The advent of the 60s saw agriculture changed further. The introduction of the so-called Green Revolution involving the growth of high-yielding wheat and rice crops to address the food scarcity. This scheme was promoted by the US Government to pre-empt a Soviet-style "Red Revolution". This is according to the administrator of USAID (US Agency for International Development) W.Gaud who made this statement in his speech in 1968. It comprised to subsidise fertilizers and irrigation, rice and wheat varieties bred to absorb higher fertilizer dose, and state-led training programs to assist farmers in transitioning to new practices.(5) The advent of the 90s saw the introduction of corporate-owned GMO crops supposedly to increase even higher yields that goes back to 1943 and the Bengal famine. An anthropogenic famine the food shortage killed an estimated 3-4 m. people, forced many to sell their farms, and left the country reliant on foreign food aid for

decades.

This change also marked the beginning of industrialization of the agriculture sector in India; introducing new methods of fertilization, use of pesticides, etc. On the GMO farming strategy, some farmers rightly felt they had been conned into producing these high-yielding crops, for the Government.

On the whole, support for the farmers' protests as been generally positive both within India and abroad. Most governments however supported the Indian government position. However, the Australian, Canadian and EU the US governments' stand has been erroneous. Their claim is that India's MSP distorts trade.

While US farmers extended solidarity to the Indian farm protests, (8) the US Government has been eroding the concept of parity (similar to MSP in India) in the US for years has supported the Indian government stand. Its support flows to mega agribusiness farming operations instead of the independent family farms. On the 3 Indian laws, the US official stated,"...US WELCOMES steps that would improve the efficiency of India's markets and attract greater investment". The US support is hardly surprising.

Over the years the US has been pushing for market-based reform in agriculture. India's long-standing concern at the WTO has been the US attack on the farm subsidies, offered by India in the form of market price support -- that is, Minimum Support Price (MSP) and input subsidies to fertilizers, seeds, etc. In May 2018, the US questioned India's subsidies framework with the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) at the WTO. The AoA was crafted mainly by the US and EU to serve their vested interest while countries of the Global South like India were reduced to mere spectators.(9).

Since its launch, the farmers' protests have claimed over 70 lives; many died of the cold; some even committed suicide as a political

statement. The standoff is not merely about the repeal of the 3 laws but also the demand that the State guarantee minimum support price (MSP) for all public and private purchases of produce. Currently the MSP is assured for just a few crops including vegetables, for all to produce. This would ensure that farmers, burdened by massive debts, receive a fair price for their produce. MSP is the price at which the government also buys staple grains like wheat and rice, from farmers for its public food programmes so that the poor can access subsidized grains. While the Government only procures a small percentage for its food programmes, the MSP is a key price signal to other traders, and it ensures that farmers get a fair price for these specific crops.

A major characteristic feature of the farmers' struggle is the participation of women farmers most of whom hail from landowning and Dalit castes. They have been and continue to face the

wrath of the establishment forces. As farming has become less profitable, women farmers are taking more and more off-farm work to supplement the family income. They also have the extra burden of performing domestic chores apart from farming. Along with their men folk the women farmers have also been facing chilling cold for 4-5 months, facing police violence, crackdowns, false police cases, and massive economic loss. The protests have ranged from sporadic protests in August 2020 to the biggest peaceful civil society protest the world has ever seen!

The farmers' protests have since rejected a Supreme Court of India stay order on the implementation of the farm laws as well as the involvement of a Supreme Court appointed committee. They have also rejected a government proposal of January 21, 2021 of suspending the laws for 18 months. Several rounds of talks have been held without any conclusive result.

The Three Farm Laws

In June 2020 the Government of India promulgated 3 ordinances which dealt with agricultural produce, their sale, hoarding, agricultural marketing and contract farming, reforms, etc. These ordinances were passed by the Lok Sabha on 15 and 18 September 2020. Later, on 20 and 22 September, the 3 bills were passed by the Rajya Sabha. The President of India gave his assent by signing the bills on 28 September, thus converting them into Acts. The legality of the Acts has been challenged as both agriculture and markets come under State list. These Acts are:

1. Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act. The law expands the scope of trade areas of farmers produce from select areas to "any place of production collection and aggregation". Allows electronic trading and e-commerce of scheduled farmers' produce. Prohibits

state governments from levying any market fee, cess or levy on farmers, traders and electronic trading platforms for a trade of farmers' produce conducted in an 'outside trade area'.

2. Farmer (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act. It creates a framework for contract farming through an agreement between a farmer and a buyer before the production or rearing of any farm produces. It provides for 3-level dispute settlement mechanism: the conciliation board, Sub-Divisional Magistrate and Appellate Authority'
3. Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act. This allows for the centre to regulate certain food items in the course of extraordinary situations like war, famine, etc.; it requires that imposition of any stock limit on agricultural produce be based on price rise.

Among other demands, the farmers have been demanding the MSP to be guaranteed by the government in writing. Their demands include

- Convene a special Parliament session to repeal the farm laws;
- Make MSP and state procurement of crop legal right;
- Assurances that conventional procure system will remain;
- Implement the Swaminathan Panel Report and peg MSP at least 50% more than weighted average cost of production;
- Cut diesel prices for a farm use by 50%;
- Repeal the Commission on Air Quality Management in NCR and the adjoining Ordinance 2020 and removal of punishment and fine for stubble burning;
- Release farmers arrested for burning paddy stubble in Punjab;
- Abolish the Electricity Ordinance 2020;
- Centre must not interfere in state subjects, decentralisation in practice
- Withdrawal of all cases against and release of farmer leaders

The farmers' agitation has received wide coverage in both the national and global media. Factual reportages have, however, been few and far between. These were mainly from a few video channels and individual journalists like P.Sainath. On January 21, a user generated National Geographic magazine cover was circulated as a real cover depicting the farmers' protest as a cover story!

On the whole however the coverage in the National media lacked balance and objectivity. As fake news was quite rampant, the reportages were thus prejudicial. There were allegations of "separatism", "sedition" and "anti-national" activities on these demonstrations (2020-2021). The fake news reports include:

- This last January a BJP politician accused protesting farmers of vandalizing

signboards on high ways, sharing images of such signboards. In reality, these images were taken from old news article covering protests in 2017 on the placements of Punjabi language signs on these boards!

- A popular TV news announcer, Rajdeep Sardesai, also spread a fake news-story of a farmer being killed by Delhi police during the tractor parade Republic Day parade! Reportedly, Mr. Sardesai had subsequently retracted his statement but not before India Today took Sardesai off air and deducted a month's salary for false unverified report;
- This year, Zee news aired decorated tractors claimed this as proof of forthcoming protests by farmers with the comment, "Why such tractors of terror in the farmers' protests? Are these tractors a means of waging war with the law? Are these farmers' tractors, or, terror tractors?"

This video in question had persons speaking in German! This was confirmed as having been taken from a rally in Germany in December 20, in which tractors were decorated, and displayed to raise funds for children being treated for cancer!

- A BJP politician shared another video of police removing the turban of a Sikh and falsely claimed that the protestor was a Muslim! And that along with other Muslims they were instigating the farmers' protests!

On the other hand there have some opposition to the various fake-news reports on the farmers' agitation and from within the ruling Establishment. For instance, BJP leader, Surjit Singh Jyani, strongly opposed such fake news, stating, "...branding them (farmers) 'tukde-tukde gang and anti-national will not end the deadlock". The Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Udday Thackeray opposed the labeling of protestors as "anti-national". Such fake claims have also been opposed by Rajasthan C.M. and Congress politician, Ashok Gehlot.

Farmers' Suicides: In India and US

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) nearly 4 lakh farmers committed suicide between 1995 and 2018. (The NCRB had started recording farmers' suicide in 1995 but discontinued the enumeration in 2019). Out of total farm suicides, 10 are taking place in rural India. The suicides are not confined to any single state but spread throughout the country. Besides, the census records of 2011, between 1991 and 2011, the number of cultivators has fallen by 15 million. (People's Reporter) Nor are the suicides among male farmers and workers. Suicides among women farmers too have been on the rise. (Barely 8 percent of Indian women have land in their name. In the case of her husband's death, the land does not pass into the hands of women easily. Normally it is divided between the sons) Studies of women in farming have found high levels of stress and high work load. Farm women, unlike men, experience stress not only due to the farm operations but also due to the Impact of farming stressors on the physical, social and financial wellbeing of all family members (10) This makes them a high risk category for suicide.

In the US too as in other western countries suicides by farmers are recurring phenomena. A study by the Centre for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC), noted that in 2012 male members in 17 States of the US committed suicides at twice the rate that of the general population, and, 1.5 times higher in 2015.(11) Experts however add that these farmer suicide rate might be higher as an unknown number of farmers disguise their suicides as farm accidents.

America's continuing family farm crisis began in the 80s. A wrecking ball for rural America, it was the worst farm crisis since the Great Depression. In the Midwest farmers in hundreds are dying by suicide (12) Market prices have crashed and interest rates doubled overnight. Farmers were forced to liquidate their operations and evicted from their land. There were fights at grain elevators, shootings in local banks. The suicide rate skyrocketed.

In the spring of 1885, farmers descended on Washington DC in their thousands. For weeks, the protesting farmers occupied a tent on the Mall, surrounded the White House, and marched along Pennsylvania Ave. Farmers marched with black crosses – each with the name of a suicide victim – to the USDA building and drove them into the ground.

The farm crisis intensified soon after a fire that broke out on American Thanksgiving Day in 1982. The bank raised their interest rate from 7 to 18%. Since 2013, net farm income for US farmers declined 50%. Median farm income for 2017 was projected to be a negative \$1,325. And without parity in place (essentially a minimum price for farm products) most commodity prices remain below the cost of production

Apart from above reasons for the farming crisis and suicides of American farmers, there was the fact that China freezing the imports of US grain due to President Trump's tariffs. This move turned out to be a body blow to thousands of farmers and ranchers who were already struggling to get by. Exports to China were down by \$1.3 b. during the first half of the year, 2018. For instance, China had been buying \$9 to \$10 b in soybeans per year. Moreover, Trump's decision to exempt an additional 31 small oil refineries from incorporating ethanol – made from corn and accounts for 40% of total corn use per the USDA – will put extra stress on farmers.

The US farmer suicide crisis echoes a much larger farmer suicide crisis globally: an Australian farmer dies by suicide every 4 days; in the UK, one farmer a week takes his or her own life; in France, one farmer commits suicide every 2 days.

Help Lines: In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255. In the UK the Samaritan can be contacted on 116 123. In Australia, the crisis support service Life Line is on 13 11 14. Other international suicide help lines can be found at www.befrienders.org.

- The farmers' protests have also been highlighted in the global news outlets with comments from academics, the UN, Human Rights Watch, among others.

People by and large supported the bandh. However a section of them expressed their wrath. Typically, their comprehension of the whole farm protest was warped through the myopic lens of social media. This reflected their lopsided comprehension of the whole farm crisis and the farmers' protests. Their myopia and ignorance over the bigger picture prevents them from seeing the fact that 4 lakh farmers have since committed suicides and the so called 3 farm laws are driving away the remaining millions from farming! They are more angered over the minor inconveniences due to the bandhs. Nor are they conscious that the comforts and conveniences they enjoy today are the very fruits of various strikes and bandhs that have since been held! "The callousness of the increasing numbness of these middle class voters is a very grave threat to life, liberty and security of the ordinary people" (1)

IV 'Modernisation' of Indian Agriculture

Generally, people understand 'modernisation' to mean mechanization and that is essential to enhance agricultural production. However, the farmers who are at the forefront of the protests are fairly well-to-do people who have been introducing all the modern farm machines. So, what the government aims through its so-called modernization is not mechanization but whole sale transfer of agriculture to business corporations, by neglecting not only the life and livelihood of millions of ordinary farmers but also its impacts on the life of a vast number of the general public.

Realizing this grave danger all political parties except the ruling party the BJP organized the National Bandh on September 27, 2021 in solidarity with the struggling farming community and to demand for the withdrawal of the 3 farm laws

Lest we forget: When the Covid 19 lockdown paralyzed the manufacturing and the services sector of the economy, and sent millions of domestic migrants from cities and town back to their native villages, it is farming that sustained lives and livelihoods in their villages.

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Next Issue: Covid 19 Pandemic

Paradigm Shift is a quarterly factsheet to highlight the shifts in various socio-cultural and political fields that affect especially the marginalized communities including transgender people. **Paradigm Shift** also aims to unpack the unsustainable development practices, outsourced to India -- adversely affecting the environment -- and responsible for where humanity finds itself today.



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