


Chapter 8

Farmers set for a long haul...

elhi has been under siege by a hundred thousand farmers since 26th November 2020 at its Singhu and Tikri border, the two border crossing points between Delhi and Haryana and at Ghazipur border, which connects Delhi with Uttar Pradesh. In 9 months struggle 900 farmers became martyrs. Farmers had no choice but to use this tactic after months of protests failed to elicit a response from the BJP-led Central Government.

Farmers' Protest is taking place against the backdrop of a prolonged crisis in Indian agriculture, where farmers' incomes have fallen in real terms by about 1.36 percent annually between 2011-12 and 2015-16. The Modi Government's actions have exacerbated the crisis, including demonetization, the flawed Goods and Services Tax (GST) that benefits export-oriented MNCs and companies, reduction in corporate tax rates and personal tax changes and banning slaughter of cattle in many states.

Protests by farmers are an expression of their anger at Modi and BJP policies favouring the capitalist class and pushing the farmers and workers to the brink of disaster. Since the 1990's neo-liberal policies have sowed the seeds of despair for farmers and the working class. Modi and the BJP have accentuated the crisis and changed how economic indicators such as real GDP and unemployment are calculated, they cannot hide the reality of the working class - falling incomes, declining jobs, little to no social support, increasing labour rights violations, worsening environmental conditions, regressive agricultural policies and a general fear of life for India's most marginalized sections and oppressed citizens. Amidst the aggressive pro-capitalist reforms of Modi and the BJP, farmers and workers are taking risks and putting up a brave front against capitalist exploitation.

Farmers are protesting against three agriculture laws since 26th November 2020 at the Delhi borders, are Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act. Corporatizing the agricultural sector is the goal of these laws. As a result, Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs) would be eliminated, allowing market forces to determine the prices of produce. The law also curtails farmers' ability to challenge contract disputes in court and this aims to "drive

up investment in cold storages”. It encourages stockpiling and provides unfair advantages to big capitalists¹.

The basic purpose of APMCs is to ensure that all of the farmers produce must be brought in the designated market yard and then sold through auction.² This is a continuation of "agriculture produce market regulation programmes" since India's independence. Farmers were guaranteed a minimum price for their harvest by these laws. MSP is the minimum price paid and set by the government when it procures or regulates. Through APMC *mandi* models – a larger section of the Indian population is also benefiting. Food Corporation of India (FCI) is State-run largest procurer and distributor of food grains. It procures 15 to 20 per cent of nation's wheat output and 12 to 15 per cent³ of its rice output annually. That provides food through various Government- run welfare schemes at subsidized rate which helps poorer sections of society. The difference between MSP and subsidized rates is paid by the Government. It is no coincident that largest procure area of FCI is Punjab. These laws aim to eradicate all State interference in agriculture and allow market forces to determine prices of crops⁴. This will liberalize agriculture by limiting the role of *mandi* by offering tax-free rate outside the *mandis*. It will be beneficial for large retailers and capitalists like those of Ambanis while small and marginal farmers would be among the worst victims. Most importantly, contract farming undertaken by big corporate buyers would skew bargaining power against farmers⁵. Bihar is a perfect case study where these kinds of laws were enforced 15 years ago. These laws dismantled government procurement infrastructure and the “open” markets’ promised better remuneration could never be metalized for the ordinary farmers⁶. In 2020 farmers in Punjab sold rice for MSP at around Rs 1850 for 100 kilograms while Bihar farmers were forced to sell the same quantity at merely Rs 1185 in the open market.

However, farmers, who are still dealing with the long-term impacts of capitalist class intervention during the Green Revolution of the 1960s, fear that these 3 agri laws will leave them vulnerable to the interest of the capitalist class and could lead to the collapse of the subsidy system.

1 <https://socialistresurgence.org/2021/02/03/india-farmers-rise-against-the-modi-regime/>

2 <https://lis-isl.org/en/2021/02/01/india-el-levantamiento-agricola-contra-el-regimen-de-modi/>

3 www.marxistreview.asia/india-the-farmers-rise-against-modi-regime/

4 <http://www.marxistreview.asia/india-the-farmers-rise-against-modi-regime/>

5 <http://www.marxistreview.asia/india-the-farmers-rise-against-modi-regime/>

6 <http://www.marxistreview.asia/india-the-farmers-rise-against-modi-regime/>

In India, over 40% of the population relies on agriculture for their livelihood and they are protected from a fluctuating global market by government subsidies and corporate abuse.

With these 3 agri laws, corporates would be able to control every aspect of the food system, determining what farmers grow and how they grow it, and setting price points for maximum corporate profits. The 3 agri laws will further erode regional food sovereignty, leaving a vulnerable population of farmers and agricultural workers at the mercy of big capitalists.

In the nine months of 'Farmers Protest', Central Government had launched its vilifying campaign through its subservient mainstream media to defame the movement, unleashed violence through police and the private army of Hindutva storm-troopers. But as the days are passing, farmers movement is gaining strength and spreading in other states of the country. Delhi Police has been trying to muzzle the voice of the farmers by shutting down internet and putting up jammers to stop the internet in the protest sites.

3 Agri laws-Death knell for Small and Marginal Farmers

Marginal farmers alone constitute 67% of the total farmers in India. There is a consistent decline in average land holdings as it has dropped down from 1.15 hectare in 2011-2012 to 1.08 hectare in the year 2015-2016. Agricultural policy changes will increase polarization among farmers and 56 crore marginal farmers will be further pushed to the condition of impoverisation turning them into rural wage labourers. In India's capitalist mode of production, it is inevitable and bound to happen. Central Government, which is subservient to the interest of the capitalist class further accentuating the crisis and pushing small and marginal farmers to further pauperisation. As rich farmers, the rural elites would also be forced to give up their security of guaranteed returns from farming as they too would be forced to compete with MNCs. Few of the rich farmers having a close liaison with the power-that-be, would survive as is happening in industrial sector. In the days to come, MNC agro companies like Reliance Fresh, Adani Greens, Tata Sampanna, ITC, Monsanto India, Kaveri Seeds, and others will have free rein in the rural countryside. A major political advantage of these three agri bills is that they will clearly distinguish between rural capitalists and rural toiling masses just as they are identifiable in the industrial and rural sectors. The ambiguity clouding over class division in the rural countryside comes to the fore and it now it would clearly show who are the exploiters and exploited class.

The ongoing farmers protest for raising the Minimum Support Price (MSP) in which small and marginal farmers are participating, they are the most brutally exploited section of our society. As they compulsorily rear livestock too, their condition is more pitiable, worse than that of agricultural workers as they have no fixed working hours and have no choice as they have to toil in the field even when they are sick. Together, their kids and families own land that cannot be productive and economically viable, nor can it have enough surplus value to sustain them. Small farmers' landholdings are shrinking, while their misery, hopelessness, and depression are increasing. Marginal farmers are the only ones who commit suicide as their lives are worse than hell. Small and marginal farmers are on the firing line of the farmers' protest going on for 9 months, although big farmers are spearheading it.

Gail Omvedt, an American-born Indian Scholar and Activist, who died recently on 25th August 2021 at Sangli, Maharashtra has conducted a study on MSP-driven farmers movements in India and her report 'Capitalist Agriculture and Rural Classes in India' published in "Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars" in the 5th July 2019 issue. I quote a paragraph from the report, it says "Capitalist farmers are the main force behind the 'farmers' agitations that are dominating rural political scene. It is no accident that these agitations are centring in the more capitalistically developed regions, that their demand for higher crop prices itself indicates the commercialization of the rural economy, and that in contrast to pre-independence peasant movements they are not directed against any rural exploiter but rather seek to unite 'all peasants' with an ideology that claims the 'city' is exploiting the countryside."

However, the agri laws will hasten the annihilation of small and marginal farmers. Although small and marginal farmers are opposing the agri laws tooth and nail, this is a hard and bitter reality that cannot be wished away.

Green Revolution and Cancer Harvest

The most astounding fact of the present farmers protest at the Delhi borders is those at the forefront are that of the farmers of the states who are the pioneers of the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution in India has had its greatest impact on Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh. It is mostly in these states where farmers are showing extreme discontentment today. Farmers from these states were also among those who made India self-sufficient in the food production and raised its food security level. In spite of this, India's farmers have suffered under the Green Revolution. Punjab is on top of the Green Revolution and its resultant cancer.

However, Green Revolution in India began in 1967 when the then prime minister Indira Gandhi imported 18,000 tons of hybrid Mexican wheat seeds to Punjab. Starvation afflicted much of the country at the time and the introduction of high-yield seeds and chemical fertilizers resulted in a massive increase in the production of wheat, rice and pulse. India produced 50.8 million tons of food grain in 1950 and by 1990 that output jumped to 176.3 million tons, creating a surplus. Punjab was one of the fastest-growing economies in the country during the 1970s and 1980s, with a growth rate of almost 8 percent between 1985 and 1986, nearly double the national average. During the 1980s and 1990s, Punjab produced two thirds of the nation's wheat and rice, thereby curbing India's hunger problem. Consequently, Punjab's farmers became the richest in the country, making India an economic powerhouse.

During the two waves of COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown, the Abohar-Jodhpur Express, known as the 'Cancer Train', was halted for months and cancer patients haplessly suffered because they couldn't go to Bikaner for medical treatment. Now the Central Government is planning for its final stop. Cancer Train's main characteristic is that 60 percent of its passengers are cancer patients who had been visiting Acharya Tulsi Regional Cancer Hospital and Research Centre in Bikaner for treatment. Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, on an average 100 cancer-affected and 200 co-passengers went to Bikaner every day by the 'Cancer Train'. Punjab farmers make up the majority of these all age-group passengers. . Most of the farmers boarding the 'Cancer Train' are small farmers of Punjab's cotton belts – Mansa, Faridkot, Bathinda, Sangrur, Muktsar, Ferozepur, Moga and Fazilka. In Punjab, the advanced Cancer Institute and Homi Bhabha Cancer Hospital have also been opened to provide treatment to growing cancer patients, but Bikaner remains the first option for them.

Though Punjab is only a small part of India geographically, its share of pesticide and herbicide chemical consumption is as high as 20%. The indiscriminate use of agri-chemicals on seeds, crops, vegetables, and fruits and the generation of incurable diseases is not a hobby of Punjabi farmers; it is an essential pre-condition for the Green Revolution⁷. Now it is well known not only by inland companies that manufacture agrochemicals, scientists, doctors or government planners, but also by common people that agri-chemicals are extremely hazardous to health.

7 <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2021/state-editions/green-revolution-and-a-harvest-of-cancer.html>

In the last 50 years, the soil has been poisoned with a variety of pesticides – insecticides, fungicides, weedicides, herbicides etc. - that the land of the Green Revolution has become an island of poison. On poisoned soil there are traces of poison in cereals, pulses, fruits, vegetables, oilseeds, and spices. Chemical poisons are dissolved in the winds and the waters. Then how can animals and people live in toxic utopias and be healthy and happy. The soil lacks organic matter, micronutrients, and is dependent on chemical fertilisers and lethal chemicals.

The Kheti Virasat Mission, a non-profit and conscious civil society organization based at Jaitu in Faridkot district of Punjab, has been working with farmers to address the destruction caused by green revolution's chemical and hybrid farming. Sustainable, ecological farming practices as well as the conservation and regeneration of natural resources have been promoted to re-establish traditional wisdom and practices related to water. Evidence suggests that soils and water are increasingly polluted with toxic and highly poisonous substances, posing an environmental threat.

The Kheti Virasat Mission (KVM) believes farmers' movements should address environmental and health issues and farmers unions should support natural farming.

Food Sovereignty

In India where the Central Government is unabashedly subservient to the interest of the capitalist class, an endeavour should be launched to exercise food sovereignty so that communities are able to control the production, distribution, and consumption of their own food. Workers unions and federations, farmers unions, consumer forums and activists can come together and fight for food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is viewed as a radical alternative to conventional food and agricultural development. Since the 1990s, the concept of food sovereignty has evolved from being on the margins of communities to becoming a focus of discussion in international forum. In India the food sovereignty movement has also taken a shape.

Though food sovereignty is still relevant today, food sovereignty is evident in many aspects of daily cultural, social, physical, and economic life in contrast to the British colonial rule that has long ravaged community life in India. Food sovereignty is an issue that has always been relevant. However, there is minimal food sovereignty in India despite people having deep attachment to food.

Neither the producer nor the consumer is aware of the safety aspects of the food and the dire consequences of its ignorance⁸.

The right to grow nutritious and diverse food, as well as having access to safe, affordable, and healthful food at our convenience, constitutes food sovereignty or *Anna Swaraj*. Food Sovereignty tends to promote the consumers and producers rather than Multinational Corporations (MNCs) making profits. Family, community, regional, and national food security all grow out of food sovereignty.

Although the class-in-power has been wreaking havoc in the lives of Farmers, Adivasis, Dalits and pastoralists through its repressive policies but there has been seeds of resistance and assertion by them, as like 9-months historic Farmers Protest in the Delhi's border connecting Haryana and UP . The Food Sovereignty Alliance of India was founded in 2013 to create unanimity around a common vision of food sovereignty, while also protecting the rights of Mother Earth and future generations. In their plan, they proposed democratic governance of resources, including water, land, forests, and territories. Nurturing the soil and producing culturally appropriate, healthy, and organic crops, as well as freedom for consumers to make food choices. Labour, knowledge, and produce are proposed to be shared in a reciprocal system. Creating local food markets in which producers and consumers can connect, as well as planting more diverse crops, were proposed in Food Sovereignty Alliance of India.

Despite Food Sovereignty Alliance of India's existence since 2013 but even the status of food sovereignty is still not good even after lot of efforts put forth. Land is scarce or non-existent for farmers to grow their crops. There is no surplus for them to sell in the market, so they have meagre incomes. Now the 3 agri laws implemented by the Central Government is further to push the farmers to the brink of disaster. Furthermore, farmers don't enjoy food security. In addition, even the customers are not guaranteed food sovereignty because the farmers are always tempted to produce cash crops instead of food crops.

⁸ https://advocatespedia.com/India%27s_Food_Sovereignty

Lessons to be learnt from Socialist nations

What India failed to do for its farmers, pastoralists, fishers and fish workers, Adivasis and Dalits as the class which came to power in 1947 after India's Independence have been exploiters and oppressor.

China

China, which has a larger population than could partially bring a revolutionary change in the lives of farmers and the rural countryside. William Howard Hinton, an American farmer and writer, who is best known for his book *Fanshen*, published in 1966, a "documentary of revolution" which chronicled the land reform programmes undertaken in China.

William Hinton was sent by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration to teach farmers in the Chinese province of Hebei in 1947⁹. He was outraged at the corruption of the nationalist Kuomintang government of Chiang Kai-shek and crossed into a zone liberated by the communists in the civil war. Soon, he was teaching English in southern Shanxi province. As soon as his students joined the movement for land reform, he demanded to be included. In the year to follow, he gathered a thousand pages of notes, packed with earthy details, on the struggles against landlords and between different strata of peasants in Long Bow village. His memories of the lice, fleas, and poor food coupled with a young girl dying of tuberculosis would later come back to him - along with the horribly bad gruel eaten from an unwashed bowl. In 1948, he joined the retreat with the notes in his backpack when the Kuomintang attacked. A year later, he was able to witness Mao Zedong's triumph. Hinton had the good fortune to have studied the communist-led revolution at a time when the Chinese peasantry was finding its voice, before the official line had become distant from reality.

In Hinton's book, a particularly stirring moment occurs when the landlords, deprived of any armed force to impose their will, threaten the peasants with the wrath of their ancestors. Fearful and hesitation filled, a peasant finally strikes the headstone with a hammer and shatters it to pieces, cutting off the ancestor's head. At that moment, there is no thunderbolt from the skies, and the old exploiters' hold is greatly weakened, but not broken. The peasants remained afraid that Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists and their army would win and the old

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2004/may/24/guardianobituaries.china>

landlords would return; and the influence of the Catholics and their support of the old ways remained. Peasants encouraged by Communist Party of China (CPC) cadre pushed on. Here Mao De Zong's words found expression in the deeds of the peasants:

“What should we not fear? We should not fear heaven. We should not fear ghosts. We should not fear the dead. We should not fear the bureaucrats. We should not fear the militarists. We should not fear the capitalists.”

The People's Liberation Army was not present during land reform in Long Bow, just a few cadres from the CPC. Peasants often threatened to kill landlords, and the cadre often had to restrain them from killing them at once, often in merciless ways, and these efforts were not always successful. Thousands of years the rulers of old China continued. The millennium of beatings, rapes, thefts, killing of loved ones, and worst human degradation imaginable poured out against the old Chinese rulers. But Mao De Zong put it that revolution is not matter of tea.

In Hinton's book *New China* was impressive in many respects, but it arose on the ashes of old China and the suffering endured for millennia by the Chinese peasantry until¹⁰ the end of Chiang Kai-shek's U.S. backed rule. In Hinton's book Mao makes no appearance nor do other giants of the Chinese revolution, but we see the fruits of their work up close¹¹. Mao De Zong liked to say that to understand society one should look down, not up and *Fanshen* does just that.

Hinton called *Fanshen* as a documentary of revolution in a Chinese village. More important than simply giving land to the landless, that Mao Zedong's aim was to create political awareness among the poor peasants¹². He explained that the literal meaning of the term "fanshen" is "to turn the body over, or 'to turn over'," that is, in revolutionary usage, to change your way of thought and join the revolution. To "China's hundreds of millions of landless and land-poor peasants it meant to stand up, to throw off the landlord yoke, to gain land, stock, implements and houses¹³.

After Mao De Zong's death when Deng Xiaoping became the supreme leader, Hinton accused him having shifted "from the socialist road to the capitalist road". If there had been true leader then it would have continued what Mao was

10 <https://www.counterpunch.org/2009/10/08/remembering-hinton-s-fanshen/>

11 <https://www.counterpunch.org/2009/10/08/remembering-hinton-s-fanshen/>

12 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fanshen>

13 http://www.china.org.cn/arts/2011-06/30/content_22890344_6.htm

doing to change the lives of the peasants, workers and the toiling masses. But Deng did the just opposite by opening it for market reforms and foreign investments and it's no more a socialist nation.

Cuba

In Cuba, post to 1959 Socialist Revolution it has been able to complete and accelerate its modernization process. During the 1980s, it ranked number one in the region in the contribution of industry to its economy and had a more mechanized agricultural sector than any other country in Latin America. Cuba nevertheless showed the same contradictions, with its development model being of the dependent type, as other countries of the Third World did as a result of modernization. Agriculture was defined by extensive monocrop production of export crops and a heavy dependence on imported agrichemicals, hybrid seeds, machinery, and petroleum. While industrialization was substantial by regional standards, Cuban industry depended on many imported inputs¹⁴.

Cuban revolutionary government had inherited an agricultural production system strongly focused on export crops grown on highly concentrated land¹⁵. During the first agrarian reform in 1959, most of the large cattle ranches and sugarcane plantations were converted into state farms. State control of agricultural land increased to 63 percent with the second agrarian reform in 1962. Prior to 1959 revolution peasant producers formed a small part of the agricultural community and the export plantations dominated the rural economy, and the population as a whole was highly urbanized. The pattern intensified in the following years, and by the late 1980s, 69 percent of Cuba lived in the cities. In 1994, some 80 percent of the country's agricultural land consisted of large state farms, which roughly correspond to the expropriated plantation holdings from the pre-revolutionary era. Small farmers held just 20 percent of farmland, almost equally divided between individuals and cooperatives, yet they produced more than 40 percent of the country's food. In the state farm sector, as well as in a substantial portion of cooperatives, monocrops were cultivated under heavy mechanization, fertilizer and pesticide use, and large-scale irrigation

Post to 1989-90 when Soviet Bloc collapsed, small farmers and gardeners became the vanguard of Cuba's recovery from food crisis, however, there were

14 https://www.iatp.org/sites/default/files/Cuba_A_Successful_Case_Study_of_Sustainable_Ag.htm

15 https://books.google.co.in/books?id=UhV7wmnXROAC&redir_esc=y

no efficiency of large-scale corporates or state farms were required. In fact, small farms are more efficient than large production units if machines are not subsidized and chemicals are not imported. International food aid is often cited as the solution to food shortages, yet Cuba has found an alternative in local production.

Cuba uses intercropping, locally produced bio pesticides, compost, and other alternatives to synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. Increasing crop prices prompted Cuban farmers to increase production. When prices are artificially kept low, as they often are, farmers everywhere lack incentive to produce. Nevertheless, they produce when given the opportunity, so long as the conditions are favourable. Small farmers and gardeners are Cuba's most productive producers under low-input conditions. Indeed, smaller farms worldwide produce much more per unit area than do large farms. In Cuba redistribution was relatively easy to accomplish because the major part of the land reform had already occurred, in the sense that there were no landlords to resist further change.

Food prices shouldn't be dictated by world economic fluctuations, long distance transportation, or superpower "goodwill". Food produced locally and regionally offers a greater sense of security, as well as synergistic links that support economic development. Moreover, such production is more environmentally friendly, since international transport is a wasteful and unsustainable form of energy. Cities and their surrounding areas can become virtually self-sufficient in perishable foods, be beautified, and have greater employment opportunities if urban farming is promoted.

The Cuban experience illustrates that small or marginal farmers can feed the entire nation's population based on appropriate ecological technology, and in doing that the nation can become more self-reliant in food production. Farmers must receive higher returns for their produce, and when they do they would be encouraged to produce. Capital intensive chemical inputs—most of which are unnecessary—be largely dispensed with. The important lessons from Cuba that can be applied elsewhere, then, are agro-ecology, fair prices, land reform, and local production, including urban agriculture.

However, Narendra Modi led Central Government and the ruling class are presiding over a social catastrophe. The 3 agri laws are part of a much broader class-war assault aimed at making the working class and rural masses pay for their ruinous response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and for the systemic world

capitalist crisis, which erupted prior to the pandemic and has been enormously exacerbated by it.

It was a manifest failure to stop the spread of the virulent virus that the Modi led Central Government, without warning or planning, imposed a lockdown. Following its failure to provide social support to hundreds of millions of people who had been deprived of income overnight, it launched a reckless back-to-work drive that has led to mass death.

In the name of reviving India's economy from its severest-ever economic contraction, the BJP government is implementing what Modi has termed a quantum jump in "pro-investor" reforms. In addition, it has announced plans to privatize most Public Sector Units, including much of the coal industry, railway network, and banking sector as well as enacted pro-corporate agri laws. Implemented labour laws that further expands precarious contract employment, empowers large employers to dismiss workers and close plants at their will and makes most employee strikes illegal.

The BJP Government led by Modi has responded to the pandemic by doubling down on the two principal components of the Capitalist class strategy since 1991. It's a drive to make India a cheap-labour haven for Global Capitalism and to pursue closer ties with US imperialism, and since 2005 a India-US Global strategic alliance. It has resulted in India becoming one of the world's most unequal societies, with the richest one percent owning four times more wealth than the poorest 70 percent of Indians, of whom hundreds of millions are destitute and malnourished. Washington's incendiary war drive against China has turned India into a frontline state.

The BJP is well aware that the pursuit of its agenda will be met with ever-greater popular opposition. With the help of the police, Supreme Court, and the ruling class in general, they have relentlessly tried to stir communal tensions. Its aim is to split the working class and mobilise its fascistic Hindutva followers as shock troops against its opponents, above all the working class¹⁶.

Farmers Protest challenges BJP's Hindutva agenda and are set for a long haul.

¹⁶ <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/12/22/inst-d22.html>