

Once again peasants took the path of struggle. Again they demanded for a better price for their crops. The govt responded with iron hand and empty promises.

The farmers in A.P. and Telangana were up in arms protesting a steep fall in the prices of Red chilli crop from around Rs 8000 to Rs 2000 a quintal. The unresponsive attitude of the government and the nexus between the big traders and market yard authorities had so infuriated the peasants that they beat up the officials and ransacked their offices. The government got them arrested and hand-cuffed them taking to the court. The government at last announced that it will procure red chilli crop at MSP, but by the time it came into operation, most of the crop was sold- "fire sales" to use the words of RBI.

In Maharashtra farmers went on strike for 10 days, demanding better prices for their tur crop(pulse). While the MSP declared was Rs 5050 a quintal, the approximate costs of production was around Rs 6240 a quintal. The traders were offering a price less than MSP with a plea that bumper crop along with imported stocks led to glut in the market. Due to two consecutive years of drought there was a fall in the production of pulses, the prices of which rose alarmingly. To bring down the prices the government imported around 27 lakh tonnes of pulses and private traders another 30 lakh tonnes. Still the prices of pulses like tur remained at or raised more than Rs 220 a kg. Even after receiving early reports of a bumper crop, the government took no steps to stop imports and stayed as mute spectator to fall in prices. It is only after the farmer's agitation that the government relented and announced Rs 30000 crore loan waiver for small farmers and immediate disbursal of new loans.

In Madhya Pradesh, the onion prices were made to crash by a handful of big traders. The farmers had to sell the winter crop of tomato and potato at throwaway prices. The Chief Minister announced to procure onions at Rs 8 a kg. But neither made arrangements to procure the crop on time nor intervened to ensure a reasonable price. This enraged the peasants. They went on a procession demanding better price in districts towns. The CM hurriedly announced a Rs 1000 crore price stabilisation fund which does not provide immediate relief to farmer. The police opened fire on demon-strating farmers at Mandsaur killing five persons.

The present farmers agitations came in relatively irrigated and cash-crop growing areas of Guntur and Khammam districts of two telugu states, Pune and Nashik divisions of Maharashtra and Ujjain district of MP, and not in the chronically drought affected areas of these states Rayalaseema, Vidarbha and Bundelkhand. It clearly shows that the distress of farmers is more wide spread and engulfs of both the irrigated and non-irrigated as well as food grain and cash-crop growing areas. It is note worthy here that the predominantly peasant castes of these areas are agitating for caste reservations as witnessed during agitations of Marathas in Maharashtra and Kapus in A.P. Isn't it a tactic employed by the ruling class sections to divert the peasants from the agrarian crisis facing them.

For over the last quarter of a century, the peasants are in distress as is evidenced by the continued suicides of peasants that crossed three lakhs mark. The policies pursued by the successive governments both at the centre and states have thrown the peasants into a deep crisis. In the name of reducing the burden of agricultural subsidies, they raised the input prices of fertilisers, seeds, irrigation water, diesel etc. On the other, they curtailed the operations of public procurement agencies, public distribution system and extension services- all these to be replaced by private market forces. Though the advances of banks to agricultural sector raised substantially at macro level of economy, the actual institutional loans accrued by the peasants in getting lessened each year, as the agribusiness is cornering the major portion of it. The agricultural produce markets are left to private traders by withdrawing public agencies and by providing finances and infrastructure facilities to promote market forces. As a result the peasants were thrown into the mire of debt. This all-round agri-cultural crisis is getting expressed in the form of insufficient crop prices to meet the costs of production and debt burden. And as a corollary, it is getting expressed in the form of demand for more bank credits and better prices.

During the election campaign in 2014, Narendra Modi promised to double the income of farmers and the BJP's election manifesto included the implementation of the recommendations of Swaminathan commission's report. Nothing has happened to double the income of farmers. Only a draft action plan for this purpose was released for discussion by the NITI Ayog in 2017. Not only the recommendations of National Commission for Farmers (commonly known as Swaminathan commission) were put in cold storage, (land reforms, irrigation, Bio-resources etc) but also exactly opposite of those recommendation are put on rails to be pushed ahead (institutional credit, public investment, strengthening of POS & and state procurement etc). Only costs plus 50% as MSP got focused which the government failed to implement despite its promises.

It is clear that the ruling classes and their political representatives are determined to alienate the peasants from their land through economic levers. Nothing can explain their apathy and palliative measure to the distress condition of farmers including their suicides. The only way left for the peasants is to fight unitedly against the policies of the government that are pauperising them.

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