

Himachal Apple Farmers Organise Protests against Corporate Domination

The rise of liberalisation and neo-liberal policies on farm sector has seen two trends.

On one side, for farmers, there is a consistent reduction in subsidies, increased input costs through privatization of government seed and fertilizer companies, unavailability of government credit and enforcement of microfinance sharks. All these severely affected the majority of farmers and farm labour.

On the other hand, Private Corporates received huge subsidies-concessions; reduced or zero inputs costs- government providing free land, electricity; cheap public bank loans with no collateral; and above its conducive insolvency and labour laws. All these saw a sharp rise of billionaires and monopoly forces.

Opulent bellies on one side, starving stomachs on the other; the Government took a side, the side of the Monopoly capital, the side that accumulates by exploitation against the hands that toil, against the proletariat.

Himachal Pradesh, a state that has about 30% [5000 crore market] of our entire apple production saw the same trend. A decade ago corporates were given huge concessions for setting up controlled-atmosphere storage facilities. With the loans they got from public banks they initially paid high prices for apple producers and destroyed the small trades. Once they ensured the producers have no markets they started reducing the procurement prices.

Farmers also saw a tremendous increase in their input costs like fertilizers and pesticides after they were taken by private players.

Adani group which established complete supply chain line is the largest operator of controlled storage facilities in Himachal. It suddenly reduced the procurement price of apple by around 20% percent per KG.

Added to it, the Governments' collusion with big corporates like Adani ensured APMC norms are flouted with impunity. Even the condition that 25% of their storage facilities be allocated to farmers is also flouted. And if the Black farm laws are implemented, all these can be done legally.

Thus, this became a clear case for the ill effects of corporatisation of agri-sector and vindicates the stand of the farmers agitating across the country against the black farm laws, the blue print for this corporation of agriculture.

The case is equally worse with tand stone fruits farmers. Thus Himachal farmers saw themselves as part of a wider oppressed class and are joining broader movements by organising, protesting with other groups like SKM.