

Imperialist Giant Corporations into our Agricultural Sector!

Already the Indian agricultural sector is steeped into severe crisis due to the implementation of imperialist globalisation policies for the past four decades. Small and marginal farmers are pushed into abject poverty and distress. Imperialist giant seed corporations like Monsanto have caused the suicides of thousands of cotton farmers. Still these imperialist giant corporations are not content even after draining away the surplus created in the Indian agricultural sector in the form of profits, royalties and fees for supply of technical help. They are persistently making inroads into our agricultural sector, through devious means.

The imperialist global farm giant Walmart is one of such imperialist giant corporation that has already penetrated into Indian agricultural sector. It has entered through so-called non-profit organisations which are being funded by its philanthropy arm Walmart foundation. These non-profit organisations in turn create the so-called farmer producer organisations (FPOs) torting that they will help farmers thrive by building the collective strength of small and marginal farmers – those with land holdings of less than 1.1 hectares. They also claim that they also provide technical support to help farmers build infrastructure to connect to formal markets so that small holder farmer can grow their incomes and improve livelihoods and that they will cut out middlemen.

With such dubious promises, as if the small and marginal farmers are pushed in to distress due to lack of infrastructure and technical support to connect to formal markets Walmart by mesmerising farmers in penetrating into our agricultural sector. Vice president of Walmart philanthropy claims that the company complements union governments work.

Walmart which had already experimented in Central America and Mexico in the past, has penetrated into India, by farming network of 500 organisations (FPOs) with eight lakhs farmers across nine states – Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. These 'non-profit' organisations with different names are already working among small and marginal farmers cultivating coffee, cashew, mint, mango, vegetables, wheat and millet.

Walmart in 2020 launched the formation and scheme of promotion of 10,000 farmer producer organisations to push forward 10,000 new FPOs until 2027-28. Thus, Walmart created such a network linking with farmers and is promoting it.

'Non-profit' organisations like Techno Serve, Digital Green, Pradhan have entered into Andhra Pradesh 6 years ago associating with coffee farmers in Arakuvalley, cashew farmers and women farmers, and with farmers cultivating chillies, cashew and turmeric in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states.

These 'non-profit' organisations claim that due to their intervention 13% cashew prices increased and that the farmer's revenues have increased by over 500%. They specifically claim that they have brought on board a bunch of large institutional buyers such as Blue Tokai and Starbucks to purchase coffee from Arakuvalley. They claim that through FPOs the farmers benefited by getting improved yield and revenues. They also claim most of what is produced is sold domestically by the exposure in the reliance stores etc.

However it is unknown to what extent Walmart is being benefitted in the form of profits through their middle-man non-profit agencies by selling coffee, cashew, turmeric and chillies to large institutional buyers.

But, that Walmart is benefiting enormously by entering into Indian agricultural sector is a certainty. That without earning profits, it will never commit to invest \$39 million in India is creating FPOs is an unrefutable fact.

This type of farming FPOs may destroy the traditional 'mandi' system and weaken cooperative societies in existence and the entire agricultural market will be encroached by these imperialist giant corporations at the peril of small and marginal farmers. In the near future they may be pushed into bankruptcy to sell away these small land holdings due to the monopolisation of the markets as we often witness in the cases of tobacco cultivating farmers in various states of our country.

It is unknown whether the farmers have really benefited through FPOs or not but it is a hard fact that the prices of coffee, cashew, turmeric, chillies for the customers have abnormally increased. Probably by offering a pinch of extra revenue to farmers, Walmart must have been profiting and looting in mountains.

The experiences of the farmers of Central America and Mexico with regards to the experiment of Walmart through, FPOs created by its non-profit organisations is unknown and has to be studied in depth.

Probably Walmart's penetration into Indian agricultural sector is another refined form of East India company's entry into India.

But one thing is clear. Walmart is initially entering into agricultural market in India, with a profit motive. We have already witnessed how the transnational giant corporation Monsanto played havoc with our farmers and their lives.

So we have to be alert and cautious against this sort of penetration of imperialist giant corporations into the Indian agricultural sector and the impending perils attendant to such a penetration!