
Intensifying Peasant Struggles and the Demand for Remunerative Prices in Contemporary India

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Résumé

Neo-liberal policies in India has manifested in progressive decline of state support to agriculture in the form of input subsidies, price support, public funded research and extension, and opening up of agricultural output markets to global price competition. While farmers' suicides and agrarian distress in India are discussed widely in the literature, what is unexplored is why such large scale decline in agriculture has not resulted in adequate policy response from the government. In the current year, the country has witnessed large mobilizations of the peasantry on issues of remunerative minimum support prices across the country and especially in the national capital. On November 29th and 30th, a Kisan Mukti March was coordinated under the banner of All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) – a conglomeration of 150 farmers' organisations "representing the stakes of all farmers including agricultural workers, adivasi and dalit farmers and women farmers" from different parts of India. While the political ideologies and demands varies across the political spectrum, it is the demand for higher MSP upon which a common consensus was built to hold a large protest in the national capital.

However, the State and central governments have largely been apathetic to these demands. It is in this backdrop that this paper tries to analyze the recent peasant mobilizations in different parts of the country, where the major objectives of the paper are to examine first, the empirical justifiability and relevance of the demand of raising MSP (over C2 accounting method of cost calculation). Secondly, we conduct a differentiated analysis of costs of production, using spatial as well as class factors, to assess which types of peasants are most affected by the neo-liberal policies in terms of profitability and incomes from agricultural production. We also assess the relative changes in household incomes, given the demand is accepted, across peasantry to gain insights about the class interests and demands raised. Thirdly, we try to understand which sections of the peasantry participated in recent peasant mobilizations and their role of class differentiation in these mobilizations.

For the first two objectives, the paper uses official sources of secondary data, such as the Situation Assessment Surveys of Agricultural Households by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and data from Cost of Cultivation surveys by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP). It supplements the secondary data with village survey data from the Project of Agrarian Relations in India conducted by the Foundation for Agrarian Studies. The third objective would be analyzed based on interviews with leaders of mass organizations that spearheaded the recent farmers' protests.

This paper tries to argue that the sections of farmers who have been most affected by neoliberal policies are the small and medium peasantry, while large farmers have often been able

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to take advantage of neo-liberal policies and opening up of opportunities within and outside agriculture. The advocacy of these demands on a common platform is strategic caste-class alliances to unite the peasantry. The author is critical about this being a new development in the upcoming trend of farmer movements, though the scope for broad inclusion of all sections would require a further issue based unity, as the trend suggests, along with fundamental changes in the policy scenario to address the problem.

Mots-Clés: Peasant Struggles, Economics of Crop Farming, Minimum Support Prices