

## Simmering Discontent in farming community: Causes and Cure

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### Abstract

The Union Government has recently proposed to impose tax on agriculture. However, agriculture is in deep crisis. The farmers are ready to abandon it on finding alternate occupation. Increasing input cost, impact of global warming, lack of adequate policy support of Government and poor agriculture infrastructure have rendered it an unviable occupation. Agriculture development is prerequisite for inclusive development and food security and for growth of industry and service sectors. Thus it should be the priority of successive Government at Union and State levels. In the post globalized period, the investment on agriculture has declined which has resulted into low capital formation. Thus, farmers are not getting the adequate returns due to poor infrastructure. The genetically modified seeds monopolized by multinational companies have further aggravated the problem. Farm waving as demanded in states in no remedy of this problem. It is only a temporary relief. The real solution to this problem lies in providing transport and irrigation facilities, enhancing research on agriculture, ensuring accessibility to market, creating storage system and providing remunerative prices to farmers. Majority of farmers in India are small and marginal farmers who find it difficult to sustain themselves in view of increased input cost. Thus, there is no logic in imposing tax on agriculture.

**Keywords:** marriage, love, discord, divorce, immigration, variety, diaspora, race

### Introduction

India had rarely witnessed the crescendo of violence that erupted during the recent farmer agitation in Madhya Pradesh. The earlier agitations had been by and large peaceful, but this one came as a bolt from blue for the incumbent BJP Government in MP and Union Government. The purpose of this article is to examine why the soil of rural areas proved to be fertile breeding ground for eruption of such a violent agitation. Agriculture plays a predominant role in the lifeline of in rural areas. Though it contributes just 14 percent in gross domestic product (GDP) but nearly 65 percent of India population is dependent on it. Thus agriculture development is essential not only for inclusive development but also for growth and development of industry and service sectors and for ensuring food security. Ironically, agriculture is engulfed in deep crisis and farmers are ready to abandon it on finding viable alternate occupation. Increasing input cost, adverse impact of global warming, lack of remunerative prices and inadequate policy support of Government have made the agriculture unviable occupation. Farming community of India played a significant role in making the green revolution a success in the decade of 1970s, thereby making the Nation self-reliant in foodgrain production. Quid-pro-quo green revolution also considerably improved the socio-economic positions of farmers, mainly big farmers. Green revolution experiment based on capital intensive approach proved to be short-lived and condition of farming community began to deteriorate in 1990s. The post globalized period has more than aggravated the condition of agrarian communities. Agriculture is no longer a lucrative occupation today and rural youths are in search of alternate employment. Price of agriculture inputs have increased manifold. Seeds are mainly supplied by Multinational Companies (MNCs) which are not only expensive, but also harmful for the health of soil. Fragmentation of land consequent to population growth,

inadequate extension services, poor quality of research and Government apathy towards research further aggravated the problem. Farmer is not getting remunerative price for agriculture produce. For example, the price of cotton was Rs 2500 per quintal in 1990, it is hovering around Rs. 5000 per quintal at present. Thus, it has registered a meager double increase. However, there has been more than fourfold increase in the price of seeds, fertilizers and agriculture machinery during the corresponding period. So, the real income of farmers has dwindled in the post-globalized period. Agrarian crisis has engulfed almost the entire rural population of India since all communities, irrespective of their social status, are directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture. This crisis is likely to precipitate in the years ahead as the WTO, led by developed countries, is persistently prodding the governments of developing countries like India to reduce subsidies on agriculture. Global warming has made its worst impact on agriculture. It has drastically altered the agro-climatic conditions particularly, for the last two decades. Large tracts of land remain uncultivated as the intensity of rainfall has considerably gone down. It is a matter of serious concern as large tracts of the cultivated land in India is still rain-fed area. Global warming has also changed the cropping pattern, for example, in Haryana, Cultivable land for cotton and gram is shrinking as the agro-climatic conditions are no more conducive for the cultivation and ripening of these crops. Production of white and black grams has drastically declined for the last two decades; the same is the case of cotton which is mainly grown in Southern districts of the State. The pest attack and consequent damage to cotton crops has made the conditions of farmers miserable. The Government has conducted the survey of damaged crop twice, but it is yet to compensate the farmers' loss. Thus, Government apathy has further added to the plight of farmers. Lacs of hectares of India's cultivable land is hit by water-logging. Similarly, soil

salinity has rendered a major portion of agricultural land incapable of producing any substantial crop. Government effort to reclaim this infertile land has not been successful to the desired level. People are abandoning agriculture for better opportunities, but the growth of secondary and tertiary sectors has not taken place to accommodate the increasing multitude of unemployed youth. The country has significant potential for the growth of agro-based industries which have a vast scope for employment generation, but due to the lack of vision and political will even the existing industries face the peril of shutting down. Public investment in agriculture is declining in consecutive Five-year Plans. Share of agriculture in Plan outlay was 4.4 percent in Ninth Plan (1997-2002); it declined to 3.9 percent in Tenth Plan (2002-2007) and further declined to 3.7 percent in Eleventh Five-year Plan (2007-2012). Consequently, capital formation has not taken place to an optimum level. This is root cause of discontentment among farming community. Adequate storage facilities could not be created due to low investment in agriculture. Consequently, farmers were forced to sell their crops at through away prices. It happened recently in MP where farmers could not get the benefit of bumper crop because of failure of timely procurement by Government. The State Government did not fulfill the promise of procurement and minimum support price (MSP) in respect of pulses and vegetables. In Haryana, this season (2016-17) witnessed bumper crop but farmers were finding it very difficult to recover even the cost of inputs for the last three consecutive years owing to drought and pest attack. How, in such a situation, can they repay the interest and principal amount of loan which they have taken from banks and other financial institutions? To repay the same amount they are forced to approach the moneylenders and *adhatias* (commission agents) who charge exorbitant rate of interest which they are unable to pay. In this way, farmers are getting caught in vicious cycle of debt trap. NSS data shows that 6.66 lakh households are in debt in Haryana. It comes out to be 42.3 percent of the total agrarian families, which is very alarming. As a result of the mounting debts and deficits, there is a big spurt in the suicides committed by the farmers. A majority of such suicide cases are not reported due to social stigma attached. Most of the farmers are engaged in agriculture not out of their choice, but due to their compulsion. Agrarian crisis has reduced the availability of fodder in the State. Consequently, the number of stray cattle have significantly increased. Time and again the Government is making statement for the protection of cattle but it has hardly shown any commitment to save the farmers. There is organic link between farmers and cattle. How the Government can save the cattle when farmer is dying. The farming community is facing problems of institutional finance. 85 percent farming community in India comprise small and marginal farmers. In addition to it, there is large percentage of agricultural labourers. Unfortunately, these poor sections does not have sufficient access to institutional credit system as the agriculture credit cards are issued by the banks only on the basis of occupancy of land. Consequently, only big farmers can avail the facility of institutional and subsidised credit system. Thus, small farmers are still dependent on rural moneylenders who charge exorbitant rate of interest. As a result of lacunae in the subsidised system, small farmers are caught in vicious cycle of debt and forced to take extreme step of committing suicide. The phenomenon of farmer's suicide has assumed a serious

proportions since last two decades. In 2004, 18,241 farmers committed suicide. National Crime Records Bureau reported 5,650 farmers suicide in 2014. The large percentage of it includes small and marginal farmers who find it very difficult to survive in view meager income and rising cost of living. Farmer's suicide rate has ranged between 1.4 and 1.8 per 100,000 total population, over a ten year period through 2005. (en. m. wikipedia. org)

Rural education system continues to be in a shambles. The nation has acute shortage of good infrastructure in school and quality education therein is sadly lacking. Nearly 80-90 percent children studying in Government schools belong to poor sections of society. Only few students from villages get the opportunity to join good urban, public schools. It has created inequality in access to quality education. The education policies of various governments have constantly worsened the situation rather than improving it. Semester system in some states was introduced without consulting teachers and parents who are important stakeholders. This system has proved to be the doom of education, particularly, in the rural areas. There have been reports in the media that even the students of fourth standard cannot solve the simple arithmetic sums of the level of second standard. The poor result of board classes bear testimony to the fact that school education system in rural areas is in drastic need for reform. Most of the children, particularly, those of weaker sections of society, attend the schools not for academic pursuits, but just to avail of the benefits of the mid-day meal scheme. Most of the teachers prefer to stay in cities to enjoy a better quality of life. Consequently, teachers are hardly seen attending the classes in rural schools, despite the provision of compulsory rural service in some states. High dropout rate is a cause of concern since the school education system is ill-equipped to prepare the students for higher learning. Thus, school education system needs to be overhauled. It is urgently required to introduce student-based learning system, proper monitoring and evaluation, performance-based incentives and disincentives to the teachers, capacity building of teachers and formulation of a better education policy, considering the interests of the important stakeholders, such as, the students, teachers and parents.

Similarly, it is also urgently required to improve the quality of medical infrastructure and manpower requirement, particularly, at primary health centres (PHCs) and community health centres (CHCs). The dependence of people on private health care is increasing. There is an anomaly in development process. While the Nation has made a good deal of progress economically, it is sadly lacking far behind in social parameters, such as, education and health. High percentage of anaemic women, high infant mortality rate, high dropout rate at school level and poor quality skill development speak volume about the tardy progress in social sector. Unless these substantive problems of rural India which form root cause of increasing unemployment are addressed, neither the development process can be sustainable nor meaningful in the true sense of the term. In the absence of quality education and skill development, poor people of rural areas will be struggling for unskilled jobs in urban areas and their quality of life can not be expected to improve significantly. Scope of jobs in the public sector is constantly shrinking in the post-globalization period. Rural economy is in dire need of revival which is not only essential for the well being of farming

community, but is also an essential pre-requisite for development of secondary and tertiary sectors. The problem of food security and hunger cannot be resolved without addressing multiple problems faced by agriculture sector. The State tries to be model employer in respect of service sector by making provision for amenities like quality health care, education to the wards of employees and other welfare measures. The Dearness Allowance of its employees is increased every six months to offset the impact of inflation. Does the State not have any obligation for the welfare of farmers who toil hard to feed the nation? The government can save the farming community only by means of encouraging the diversification of the cropping pattern, providing increased access to market, building post-harvest storage facilities, paying remunerative prices of their produce to farmers by implementing Swaminathan Committee report and setting up agro-based industries. This, however, requires political will to shift the focus of policy from corporate sector to rural areas where a majority of people still reside. Waving farm loan is no solution to this problem. In fact it is temporary remedy. Reviving agriculture need enhancing investment in agriculture infrastructure viz transport and irrigation, providing quality seeds and fertilisers at affordable prices, increasing research facilities, ensuring accessibility to market, creating storage facilities, bridging the gap between research institutes and farming community by providing extension services, rectifying the distortions in cropping pattern, creating a organic link between agriculture and industry with focus on value addition and employment generation. Agriculture should be priority for our policy makers and planners.

### **Conclusion**

Agriculture development is essential for development of secondary and tertiary sectors and for food security. Therefore, there is urgent need to lay emphasis on agriculture in order to ensure inclusive development. Agriculture employs nearly 65 percent people of country. Thus, agriculture development is prerequisite to make the development process real and meaningful. There is utmost need to increase investment for building agriculture infrastructure, enhancing research facilities, creating market accessibility and providing extension services to farming community to accelerate its production and empowerment of farmers. Thus, instead of proposing to impose tax on agriculture, development of agriculture should be priority of Government.

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