

Farmer's movements against the Farm laws

December 10, 2020

Agriculture is considered as the backbone of Indian economy. History has given us numerous instances of farmer movements which are prominent even today. Recent passage of three farm laws and the opposition those laws are facing and the features of such movements has to be analysed in detail from upsc mains point of view.

In News: Farmers are protesting countrywide against the new farm laws.

Placing it in syllabus: Indian society

Static dimensions

1. History of major farmer movements in India
2. Features of the farmer movement
3. Techniques and Nature of struggle
4. Important Pressure Groups of Farmers in India

Current dimensions

1. In news

Content

In news:

- Three farm laws enacted in September, 2020 to allow agri-businesses to freely trade farm produce without restrictions have gained criticism countrywide.
- They permit private traders to stockpile large quantities of essential commodities for future sales and lay down new rules for contract farming.
- Farmers are of the view that the reforms will make them vulnerable to exploitation by big corporations, erode

their bargaining power and weaken the government's Minimum Support Price system that offers cultivators assured prices from the government.

- The laws are being blamed as pro-corporate and will eventually be detrimental to the farm sector.
- Thousands of farmers have been camping at Delhi's borders and disrupted traffic movement from and to Haryana seeking the repeal of the laws.
- The blockade has also hit the supply of goods from Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir.
- However the government has maintained the laws bring freedom from middlemen even as the farmers see intermediaries as necessary service providers.

The Central government sent a **proposal** to 13 farmer unions protesting near Delhi which has the following points:

- On concerns raised by farmers about the scrapping of the MSP regime and shifting of trade to private players, the government said that it was ready to give a written assurance that the existing MSP will continue.
- On farmers' fears that mandis would weaken after the new laws, the government said an amendment can be made wherein state governments can register the traders operating outside mandis. States can also impose tax and cess as they used in APMC mandis on them.
- On concerns that farmers may be duped as anyone having just a PAN card is allowed to trade outside APMC mandis, the government said to rule out such apprehensions, the state governments can be given the power to register such traders and make rules keeping in mind the local situation of farmers.
- On the issue of farmers not getting the right to appeal in civil courts for dispute resolution, the government said it is open to making an amendment to provide for an appeal in civil courts. Currently, the dispute

resolution is at SDM level.

- On fears that big corporates will take over farmlands, the government has said that for more clarity, it can be written that no buyer can take loans against farmland nor any such condition will be made to farmers.
- On demands to scrap the proposed Electricity Amendment bill 2020, the government said there won't be any change in the existing system of electricity bill payment for farmers.
- On farmers demand to scrap the Air Quality Management of NCR Ordinance 2020, under which there is the provision of penalty for stubble burning, the government said that it is ready to find an appropriate solution.

History of Major Farmer Movements in India:

Agrarian movements in post-Independence India fall into **three categories:**

Anti-feudal movements against exploitation by landlords or against the state:

- Such movements demanded redistribution of land, higher wages for labour, lower rents to small peasants, and an end to other exploitative practices.
- In the immediate post-Independence period, discontent arising out of the failure of the state to fulfil its promise of land reform resulted in several 'land grab' movements led by peasant leaders, who in many cases belonged to Socialist and Communist parties/organizations.
- The developmental state was entrusted with the duty to ensure productive ownership of land resources by abolishing intermediaries and oppressive tenancy practices.
- Thus, the government came with institutional means to reform land distribution.

- The state was quite successful in abolishing zamindari as it was a remnant of colonialism and the zamindari class was regarded as oppressor by the agrarian struggles.
- The peasant struggles took a radical turn in the post-1960's such as the Naxal Bari movement mainly due to the apathy of the state which was misappropriated by Maoists who promoted violent means of uprooting the state.

Movements by rich peasants/capitalist farmers following the Green Revolution in the 1960:

- Led by rich farmer organizations, these movements acted as pressure groups upon the state and demanded policies beneficial to them.
- A section of the bigger farmers who benefited from the **Green Revolution** became the new power holders in the countryside.
- The state, and not the landlord, was viewed as the 'enemy', and larger issues such as urban versus rural interests and terms of trade with industry have been central to these movements.
- Employing strategies different from the first category, they have in some cases mobilized the smaller peasantry, but have little to offer to small tenants and landless labour.
- The increasing class differentiation made bigger landowners conscious of their interests, leading to rich farmers' movements in the 1970s.
- There is a positive correlation between the high productivity districts and these movements: Punjab, Haryana, western UP, Gujarat, irrigated districts of Maharashtra and Karnataka, coastal Andhra Pradesh, and parts of Tamil Nadu.

Farmers' movements post globalization:

- These movements are smaller, largely against state governments that have introduced market-oriented policies, and no longer attract the small/marginal farmer as issues have undergone considerable change.
- The state's inability to prioritize agricultural development is regarded as a primary factor for growing agrarian crisis in post-1991 India.
- The adoption of the **Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1991**, leading to the globalization of the economy, has resulted in major policy shifts, with serious implications for agriculture: freeing of controls, removal of subsidies and price support, a move towards dependence on market forces, and the opening of the economy, leading to the freer import/export of agricultural commodities.
- The state is considered as the primary culprit for the rising farmer's suicides due to the state ignorant attitude towards the state of small and marginal farmers facing the burden of fragilities of Monsoon, Market and other externalities.

Features of the farmer movements:

- These movements believe in the principle of going beyond locality, that is, beyond nation/nationality to internationalism.
- They believe in united or undifferentiated struggle.
- They refuse to divide the social categories on the basis of economic position.
- The farmers' movement believe in the single point agenda of analyzing the backwardness from the perspective of remunerative prices and believe that the remunerative prices to the agricultural commodities, if given, will have a filter-down effect.
- The movements believes in secularism and many times resort to constitutional means such as agitations and dharna.

Techniques and nature of struggle of Farmers Pressure Groups:

- The organisations send **letters and petitions to the ministries** and other executives of the government to argue their case and get concessions.
- They may **protest** which takes any form – from a peaceful gathering to competing elections against some unpopular politician or even bandhs and hartals.
- They form several homogenous voting groups and **pressure groups** to put forward their case. E.g. Kisan Sabhas
- Often farmers' organisations directly **fight the elections** and enter the Parliament and State Assemblies. They try to influence the government policies either supporting the government or pressuring it with the opposition. Ex: Political outfits such as Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, Swabhimani Shetkari Sangathan in Maharashtra.
- The farmers' organizations **offer support to the political parties during the election** time and sometimes even during the non-election times. They control the parties through this voting-in-a-bloc mechanism.
- In recent times, the **long march** of farmers to prominent cities for their demands has become an active medium of voicing their issues.
- With the gains made in mass media and education level, there are various experts and members of these farmers organizations who constantly raise their issues and opinions **through media, social media and interviews.**

Important Pressure Groups of Farmers:

- **Bharatiya Kisan Union (Indian Farmers' Union)** is a non-partisan farmer's representative organisation in India. It was **founded by Chaudhary Charan Singh** from the *Punjab Khetibari Union* (Punjab Farming Union). The western Uttar Pradesh branch of the union was founded on 17

October 1986 by Mahendra Singh Tikait. The union is **affiliated to the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee.**

- **All India Kisan Sabha (All India Peasants Union, also known as the Akhil Bharatiya Kisan Sabha)**, was the name of the peasants front of the Community Party of India formed by Sahajananda Saraswati in 1936. It later split into two organisations.

All India Kisan Sabha (Ajoy Bhawan), attached to Communist Party of India.

All India Kisan Sabha (Pt. Ravi Shankar Shukla Lane), attached to Communist party of India (Marxist).

- The **Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS)** is an Indian farmers' organization that is politically linked to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, and a member of the Sangh Parivar. It was founded by Dattopant Thengadi in 1978.
- **Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana** or **SSS** is a farmers union based in Kolhapur, Maharashtra. It is part of the Shiv Sena.
- All India Kisan Sammelan led by Raj Narain

Mould your thought:

1) Farming pressure groups play an important role in shaping government policies. Discuss.

Approach to the answer:

- Brief about why it is in news
- Write how farmer pressure groups emerged in India
- Techniques used by farmer pressure groups
- Conclusion