

## Farmers and their unrecognized humanhood

Naren Bedide (Kuffir)

**Abstract:** *This is a continuation of the series on Who is the Indian Farmer?*

I don't know the exact figures of the contribution of agriculture to the GDP or the national incomes in the west.<sup>1</sup> The population of farmers in America is less than 1% of the total. The contribution of agriculture to GDP is 1%. Which means, they are actually giving more than what it contributes. Even there, most of what is allocated to agriculture is not going directly to the farmers. They also give something called living dole, I think it is conditional.<sup>2</sup> Anyway, they are better than India. But most of it actually goes to the corporates. American agriculture is controlled so much by corporates from inputs to everything. They are ok in that sense.

In India, some states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana or the South—the contribution of agriculture is 10-20%. In the North it will be much higher, in Maharashtra much less. What goes into state support for agriculture is called input subsidies. Subsidizing the purchase of pesticides, fertilizers, seeds, and also agricultural implements. This goes to the manufacturers of these goods rather than the farmers. When they subsidize or buy from the producers saying they will pay a minimum support price (to ward off market operations)—which is always lower when compared to the real costs incurred in production—they are again subsidizing the consumers. That is the other side of the food security issue. They buy from the farmers and give it to ration shops. The benefits of this subsidy plus price support mainly goes to consumers. In many Southern states, the subsidized ration shop rice, at one rupee, two rupee a kilo etc. goes to hotels, to other players; sections of the beneficiaries, the poor, themselves sell it away. Now government is realizing they are not paying anything to the farmer, like the Americans and the West do. They have only initiated some schemes.



Naren Bedide (Kuffir): [bjati52@gmail.com](mailto:bjati52@gmail.com)

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<sup>1</sup> Globally, the agriculture share of central government expenditure fluctuated is around 1.6% between 2001 and 2017 (<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2019/07/25/usda-announces-details-support-package-farmers>).

<sup>2</sup> (<http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/investment/expenditure/en/>)

Then there is insurance, which is again tricky. Insurance companies do not want to make losses, obviously. Government might subsidize the premium payments to some extent. But the claims—there are many conditions. And they cover only the costs that the farmer has already borne. He is not getting anything extra. And it is all bureaucratic red tape ridden and it is usually not calculated correctly. And insurance companies, like always, don't want to pay. They come up with various kinds of reasons and pay nothing.

Effectively, they pay nothing. The so-called 1.6% also goes to corporates, consumers and various kinds of middlemen. Now they realize that these farmers are dying like birds (that's a Telugu phrase: 'dropping dead like birds'). They said, this could lead to social unrest. That sense is there, all through, among the rulers. For the last 20 years or so, there are political movements which in one way or the other talk about farmer suicides.

Telangana, Odisha governments maybe Tamilnadu and Karnataka, I don't know, they are paying a monthly or annual dole to the farmers. The central government has also announced some 6,000 rupees for every farmer. Let us see. In Telangana, even here it goes to the landholder. Even if the owner holds 30-50 acres that amount is paid. So, it is mainly landlord and caste driven. Nothing for the small farmers, the tenant farmers and landless laborers. Tenant farmers are slowly being recognized.

Odisha government did some good in recognizing the tenant farmer. It has paid something to the tenant farmer. In Amaravati also (where land was acquired for building a new capital for Andhra Pradesh), the tenant farmers are also paid some compensation.

The Amaravati farmers are getting something like 50,000 rupees, yearly. It is like they're being paid rent, and It is roughly around the same figure as the farmer would get if he could lease it to a tenant farmer. In effect, the ruling class has realized social implications of continued distress.

But, because this is a brahmin state, they will always want to keep the farmers on the edge of the cliff, or despair. They just give some mere bauble to someone about to kill himself, he might get distracted. They'll say, "Don't jump, don't jump, we will give this." This is the situation. It is slightly different from how the farmers were seen in earlier times. Now the farmer as human is slowly being recognized. So, it is sad, this is happening so late. I have written about this before, when writing on agriculture I have always demanded that any support to the farmer should not be linked to his productivity or his whatever...and it should be a flat average living support dole.<sup>3</sup> They should be recognized as human first and have rights. They should be compensated like how the government servants are. They should have pensions, reasonably on par with others, they

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<sup>3</sup> Bedide (Kuffir), N. (2019). Who is the Indian Farmer?. *Prabuddha: Journal Of Social Equality*, 3(1), 1-6. Retrieved from <http://prabuddha.us/index.php/pjse/article/view/41>

should have security. This is slowly happening now, but too slow and this is too late. And mostly it is again going to the caste landlords.

Instead of telling the bahujan farmers: to get out of this rut of agriculture, that they have to prepare for their next life, in a way of speaking, to get into something else. Instead of doing that, they are being offered some kind of incentives, to stay perpetually on the edge. Instead of helping them prepare their children for something else, because this ship is sinking. This will definitely sink. That is the law of nature, since agriculture was born, this was destined. A lot of rhetoric goes on, giving false hope, talking of the glory of being in agriculture, of farmers being the frontline of the nation and so on. This is wrong.

The issue is that you don't recognize the farmer as human. You will recognize everyone else. You will recognize government servants fighting for pay commissions. Upper caste 'poor' fighting for reservations, upper caste students demanding for repeal of reservations, fee hike in Jawaharlal Nehru University. The upper strata get the maximum attention. But the farmers who are below, those who labor for producing food for others, they've made those farmers who exert labor on behalf of society, to produce food, culpable for both production and non-production. Both are deadly sins. It is basically the marginalized farmers belonging to SC, ST and OBCs who are stuck here. They are being punished by the brahmin state because of their lower caste status or non-status. For every other person, you will ask, 'How will his family live, how will he send his children to school, pay for his health care?' if some misfortune befalls them. Not this farmer.

Their piecemeal schemes in healthcare, mid-day meals, government schools: these are all token acknowledgements of poverty not of these peoples' *Humanhood*. You don't talk about them in the same way as you talk of others.