

In fact, not all the farmers' movements claim that theirs is part of New Farmers' Movement. The Karnataka movement, under Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, calls itself as "Village movement" and develops the argument centering around village issues. While Maharashtra movement claims itself as New Farmers' movement, however, it has the problem of identifying peasant categories – it is strange that its discourse on *shetkari* also covers such categories as rural artisans as well as agricultural labourers.

8.3.4 Movements beyond Local to Global

One of the unique features of farmers' movements is that they moved from local to global. When globalisation was making serious inroads, some of the organisations went to support or oppose globalisation for various reasons. Those who opposed globalisation, particularly Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, Bharatiya Kisan Union of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, argued that globalisation would destroy the identities of peasantry, introduce western hegemony, destroy cultural life style, take away the right to produce, distribute and exchange agricultural commodities etc. On the contrary those who supported globalisation saw in globalisation an answer to rural backwardness, agricultural prosperity, and capitalist development.

Incidentally, the differences among different organisations emerged much before the decade of 1990s when globalisation was making serious inroads. The differences are much to do with the issues of approaching liberalisation and also globalisation. The Maharashtra movement, led by Sharad Joshi, in fact, was the one who supported liberalisation.

On the contrary, the farmers' organisations of Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab have been vehemently opposing the globalisation. The Raitha Sangha of Karnataka and BKU of Uttar Pradesh took out Caravan in European Continent during 1999. They protested in front of biotech company Cargill in Netherlands. During the same decade, the Karnataka movement burnt genetically modified BT cotton crops. This was part of what is called "Cremate Monsanto" campaign by the KRRS. The campaign used the following slogan, "Stop Genetic Engineering," "No Patents on Life", "Cremate Monsanto", "Bury the WTO", etc. It is here that its attacks centred on three principles: principle of opposing neo-liberal globalisation as a whole, World Trade Organisation regime and the principle of opposing global power structure embedded in G8 and NATO.

The Raitha Sangha of Karnataka also attacked an outlet of Kentucky Fried Chickens in Bangalore and destroyed the godown of Cargill Company in Bellary. Even though these attacks were symbolic, they conveyed the larger message of opposing globalisation.

This does not mean that each and every farmer's movement opposing globalisation joined every anti-globalisation forum at the global level. In fact, they do differ in this matter too. This became apparent many a time. Karnataka, as well as BKU of Uttar Pradesh, never became a part of World Social Forum- a conglomeration of thousands of civil society groups consistently opposing and critiquing the globalisation. During 2004, when the World Social Forum was organised in Mumbai, the Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh movement formed what is called Mumbai Resistance -2004 on the ground that the World Social Forum was not representing the "genuine anti-globalisation or anti-imperialist resistance". They were joined by other BKU units of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and others. This sustained anti-imperialist opposition reflected in the continued association with La via Campensina and Peoples' Global Action at the global level.

8.3.5 Ideology of the Farmers' Movement

Apparently the farmers' movement did not believe in single ideology as such. This is because of the fundamental differences among themselves about addressing the issues of farmers.

The Karnataka farmers' movement claimed itself as Gandhian but few of its arguments come closer to the argument of Dependency theory. It argues that the present day retarded development of the Third World is largely due to the colonisation of the Third World by the former colonial countries. This colonisation is once again being pursued, even after the independence by way of cheap goods, dumping secretive technology, patent regimes, imposing restrictions on the agricultural production, developing weak capitalism, urban biased policies etc. Similar arguments have been voiced in the arguments of the Uttar Pradesh and other farmers' movements.

However, what distinguished the Maharashtra movement under Shetkari Sangathana from other movements is the "novelty of idiom and its capacity to articulation". Its ideology is apparent in its argument of "Bharat versus India" divide- they are the "native and traditional nomenclature of the country". Sharad Joshi argues that "India corresponds to that notional entity that has inherited from the British the mantle of economic, social, cultural educational exploitation; on the contrary "Bharat" is that notional entity which is subject to exploitation a second time even after the termination of the external colonial regime. In brief, the black rulers have replaced the white rulers (Sharad Joshi, 1986, p.213). This is called a new agrarian thinking in the recent past.

8.3.6 Party Politics and Division among Farmers' Movement

In fact, the division within the farmer's movement was not a new one; there were many issues that divided the farmer's movement when it was at its peak at the all India level. One such issue was retaining the "non-political" character of the movement. The Punjab movement under Punjab Bharatiya Kisan Union initially believed that interest of the farmers would be best served by remaining non-political. This non-political stance had a different meaning: disassociating from the electoral politics, keeping distance from parties upholding agitational politics etc. However this process of remaining non-political underwent transformation, for the reason that the farmers' movement increasingly began to believe that remaining non-political would not benefit the farmers nor the movement.

In fact Narayana Swamy Naidu of Tamiluga Vyavasaigal Sangam was one of the firsts to form a political party. In 1982 he formed what is called Toilers' and Farmers' Party, much against the principles of Bharatiya Kisan Union. His party contested the election, but was unable to make any dent in the electoral politics.

This was followed by other movements too. The Maharashtra movement, under Shetkari Sanghathan, believed in contesting the election as well as negotiating with different political parties. This is the reason why the Maharashtra movement founded Swatantra Bharat Party in 1994. This party aimed at abolishing License permit raj and minimal government intervention. Earlier it associated itself with such political parties as BJP and Shiv Sena.

The Karnataka movement too made efforts to participate in the election. In 1984 it did try to enter into political domain through what is called Voters' Forum. During the same decade it formed Kannada Desha and contested the assembly election, but in vain. Unlike the Maharashtra movement, it desisted from associating with different political parties;

rather it believed in forming larger coalition of social movements. Of late, it has merged its party with a new political outfit party called Sarvodaya Party.

Uttar Pradesh is a different story altogether. Unlike Maharashtra, it initially believed in retaining the movement as a “non-political” one. However, in due course, it changed its strategy- except that it desisted from forming any political party of its own. This is where the differences among farmers movement can be discernible. The Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka movements believed in shifting their politics from pressure groups to electoral politics; on the contrary, the Uttar Pradesh movement still believes in remaining a pressure group, a characteristic of the farmers’ movement.

The 1990s saw the vertical split in the farmers’ movement. The split has much to do with the way the farmers’ movement addressed the issues of globalisation and liberalisation. One such movement which supported globalisation was Shetkari Sanghathana of Maharashtra. The Maharashtra movement, under Sharad Joshi, was vehement in supporting globalisation. Its support to globalisation nonetheless can be located in the beginning of its critique about the state intervention. In fact, right from the beginning, the Maharashtra movement was consistently opposing any form of state intervention in the economy. Therefore it conceptualised its movement as a movement against “Statism”. Further it argued that freeing the economy will not only help farmers to take care of themselves but also ensure the prosperity of the nation.

Further, the division is apparent when the Maharashtra movement advocated the principle of free economy vis-a-vis the state controlled economy. It believed that the state intervention in the economic development has come in the way of capital accumulation in the agriculture. They further argued that the expropriation of the agriculture by the state has rendered the agriculture uneconomical and that poverty is the result of such intervention. This is the reason why it advocated and supported the dismantling of state intervention.

In fact the Maharashtra movement, under Shetkari Sangha, has believed that the present stage is a stage of entrepreneurship. This is neither the stage of capitalism nor socialism. Such division among the farmers’ movement has reduced its capacity to address the issues of farmers vehemently. This has further weakened the movement both from within and without.

8.3.7 Social Bases of the Farmers’ Movement

The Farmers’ movements are often criticised for their class bias. It is often argued that the New Farmers’ movement is highly biased towards market-oriented farmers than those who are living in the subsistence economy. All through their struggles, these movements have raised such issues which have helped either the rich farmers or the middle farmers. For example, their argument in favour of writing off loans, remunerative prices, declaring agriculture as an industry, abolition of tractor loans etc ultimately helped the big or the rich/middle peasantry or the farmers. Even the movements have not addressed the issues beyond irrigated areas. The issues of non-irrigated areas have received scant focus in their discourse. This is the reason why the farmers’ movement began to lose its appeal in the years to come. The movement encompassing different categories of farmers, however, lost its vitality or appeal in due course. This is the reason why it is stated that its social bases are confined to rich and middle peasants including the farmers of commercial cropping and also market-oriented farmers.

Secondly, there are criticisms that movements never become the movements of or for all caste groups. In Karnataka, the Raitha Sangha largely became the movement of two dominant castes- the Lingayats and Vokkaligas. In Maharashtra, it did become a movement of Maratha Kunbis. However, it tried to encompass Dalits, Other Backward Castes, artisan castes, and others. However, their proportion was less when compared to Kunbi Marathas. On the contrary, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh movements became movement of Jats. In Tamil Nadu, it is argued that its membership derived from such castes as Naidus, Goundars, Tewars, Vanniyars and Nadaars. However, the representation from dalits, Muslims, etc. is minimal. In Gujarat, under Khedut Samaj, the movement was largely dominated by Pattidars, although others such as OBCs are also its support bases but in less number. This wide range of social bases has literally made the farmers' movement confine to their agitational politics or to their locality. Therefore it has become difficult to organise the farmers' movement at an all India level.

8.3.8 Gandhism in Farmers' Movement

There has been a debate whether to analyse these movements as Gandhian or not. In other words, to what extent the New Farmers' Movement may be treated as Gandhian Movement? What are the characteristics that make them to vouch for Gandhism?

Infact, the Karnataka movement, under Raitha Sangha, is very vehement in advocating that it is a Gandhian movement despite the fact that in its analysis, the arguments of and about Third World or the arguments of Marx, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg's internal colonialism are apparent. Hence it argues that its final objective is the realisation of "village republic". This is nothing but a "form of social, political and economic organisation based on direct democracy". In this democracy "affairs affecting several communities are decided upon through process of consultation involving all affected" (Nanjundaswamy, 1998). This is apparent in its organisational level or from the grass roots level to the top level.

These principles are apparent in different struggles. During the time of destroying Cargill seeds as part of global resistance and also as part of People's Global Action, it advocated the Gandhian principle of non-violence as the strategy or action. It looked at the issues of non-violence as respecting all the living-beings including police, the people who work for Multinationals and also non-genetically modified living beings. Interestingly it viewed the destruction of the property of MNCs, godowns etc as part of non-violence. Nonetheless, the Gandhian approach is further apparent in its decentralised campaign against globalisation, and reclaiming the natural resources etc.

Interestingly, while arguing for alternatives, the Karnataka farmers' movement advocated "Khadi Curtain" which means "Establishing equal relationship between India and western capitalism that would replace current – and unequal- forms of exploitation" (Muzaffar Assadi, 1994, p.321).

Nonetheless, Gandhism is also apparent in the adoption of different strategies that the Raitha Sangha adopted over the years. These are evident in such struggles as long marches, bandh, hartal, fasting, withholding taxes etc. Incidentally, it also added some new techniques- these can be called the post-Gandhian techniques- adopted to bring the system to listen to the farmers. These techniques are: "Continuous Laughing" before the Vidhan Soudha, "Prohibiting the entry of bureaucracy" to the village at all times. In the latter case, the farmers themselves decided the timing of the entry of the bureaucrats to the villages. In fact this tactics was later adopted in Maharashtra too. This is called "Gav Bhandi" in Maharashtra.

Interestingly, Sharad Joshi of Shetkari Sanghathana claims that he is neither Marxist nor Gandhian. His approach is principally to correct the anomalies in these two ideologies. In fact he may be called half Gandhian and a half Marxist. This is because he accepts certain arguments of Marx for his theoretical formulations such as materialist approach, capitalist accumulation, internal colonialism etc. Meanwhile he is opposed to the surplus value, or the theory of revolution advocated by Marx. Therefore he thinks that Gandhi and Marx are inadequate. His theory of "Bharat versus India" is nothing but independent system of thought neither advocating Marxism nor Gandhism. Nonetheless, he appreciated the Gandhian method of non-violence for its practical value but not as a principle. Infact, Shetkari Sanghathana uses militaristic language, which is incompatible with Gandhian movement such as Rana Niti, Fauzi, Senapati etc.

The Bharatiya Kisan Union of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, and the Khedut Samaj of Gujarat are no different from the Karnataka movement. They have been using the language of Gandhism. Most of the strategies they adopt such as long marches, dharnas, fasting etc are largely borrowed from the Gandhian movement. They even believed in the Gandhian principles of simple living, decentralisation etc.

8.4 SUMMARY

The New Farmers' movement emerged at a time when agriculture was undergoing tremendous crisis. It emerged when terms of trade were going against agriculture, income from agriculture was dwindling, input prices were going beyond the reach of farmers etc. It started in Maharashtra under Shetkari Sanghatana when it demanded remunerative prices to onion. It was later on followed by Karnataka under the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, Bharatiya Kisan Union in Uttar Pradesh etc. Although they started almost simultaneously, the differences among the farmers' organisations checkmated the movements into becoming a big force in Indian politics.

Despite differences the new farmers' movement did bring about a paradigm shift in the discourse, analysis and perception about farmers in India. It made the policy makers to address the deep rooted crisis of agriculture as well as agrarian classes in India. It has also helped the farmers to be a part of international movement against such issues as globalisation, imperialism and capitalism.

Nonetheless they have not been effective in bringing radical transformation in the country side. This is because of the fact that the movements, from the very beginning, were unable to overcome the internal conflicts as well as contradictions. Secondly, they did not carry any radical agenda from within- for example they never bothered to demand radical land reforms, nor were they concerned about the atrocities perpetrated on marginal classes including the Dalits in the country side. Since the movements, from the very beginning, were identified with rich or market-oriented farmers, the other categories received scant focus in their politics. This is the reason why they have been losing their social bases. Further, their operational areas are confined to those localities wherein the classes of rich or market-oriented farmers have come to stay. This has further reduced their areas of operation.

Whatever may be the weakness, one should not over look the fact that the New Farmers' Movement has given new meaning to the study of farmers' movement in India. Despite the differences, one can say that they reflect Gandhism although not all the organisations vouch for Gandhism.

8.5 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the peasant movements during the nationalist movement.
2. Explain the importance and significance of Gandhi-led movements.
3. Discuss the debate on New Farmers' Movement in India.
4. Explain the reasons for the division among farmers' movement in India.
5. "New Farmers' Movement is neither totally Gandhian nor totally radical". Analyse.
6. Write short notes on the following:
 - (a) Ideology of Farmers' Movement
 - (b) Globalisation and the Farmers' Movement
 - (c) Major Struggles of New Farmers' Movement

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Judith Brown., Gandhi's Rise to Power, Indian Politics, 1915-22, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1972
2. Nanjundaswamy, An Open Letter, 1999
3. Sharad Joshi., Farmers' Movement in India, New Quest, No.58, July-August 1986, pp.208-216
4. Muzaffar Assadi., "Khadi Curtain" "Weak Capitalism" and "Operation Ryot' Some Ambiguities in Farmers' Discourse, Karnataka and Maharashtra, 1980-93, The Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol.21, No. 3-4, April-July 1994, pp.212-227.
5. Muzaffar Assadi., Politics of Peasant Movement in Karnataka, Shipra Publications, New Delhi, 1997
6. Brass, (ed), New Farmers' Movement in India, Frankcass, London,1997
7. Gail Omvedt, The New Peasant Movement in India, Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, vol. 29, 1998