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Agrarian Activism in India: A Study of the Movement Against New Farm Laws (2020)

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Abstract

In September 2020, the Government of India passed three highly controversial agricultural policies which resulted in a huge, sustained demonstration by farmers throughout India. This included the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion & Facilitation) Act, the Farmers' (Empowerment & Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act. This paper discusses the characteristics, dynamics and political significance of the farmers' protests that emerged as a response to these policy changes. Particular emphasis will be placed on mobilization strategies, organizational structures and ideological foundations of the protests led by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM). Using theories of social movements, hegemonic counter-hegemonic thought as articulated by Gramsci and an agrarian political economy framework will help to understand how peasant communities throughout Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh formed a broad range, cross-caste, cross-class and regional coalition against neoliberal agricultural policy reform in India. The role of digital media, diaspora support, and female participation will be examined as part of this sustained eleven-month protest against the state's repressive tactics to try to control the protest. This essay will critically evaluate the repeal of the three farm laws in November of 2021 as an important use of democratic pressure. The findings suggest that the movement represents not merely a sectoral protest but a broader assertion of subaltern democratic agency against the corporate capture of agriculture.

Keywords: Agrarian activism; farm laws 2020; farmers' protest; Samyukta Kisan Morcha; social movements; neoliberal agriculture; peasant politics; India; democratic protest; policy reversal

INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, farmers in India have made a living off their farms; today, 58% of the Indian population are still reliant on agriculture as a source of sustenance. Such dependence has created a dilemma within the Indian farming community, as farmers struggle to meet both subsistence needs as well as market demands. In India, following reforms introduced in 1991 (known as liberalisation), a more market-oriented agricultural policy was implemented, shifting away from government-supported pricing, but not without drastically affecting rural areas of India through increased amounts of stress placed upon farmers; increased levels of farm debt and an alarming number of farmer suicides occurred at this time as a result. The result of the long-standing agrarian crisis, the Indian government introduced three new agricultural laws in September 2020 without providing sufficient communications and discussions with farmers, leading to one of the largest protests in history of India.

According to the Government of India, the new farmer laws — Farmers' Produce Trade, Commerce (Promotion & Facilitation) Act (FPTCA), the Farmers' (Empowerment & Protection) Agreement On Price Assurance & Farm Services Act (FAPAFSA), and the Essential Commodities (Modification) Act (ECA) — are meant to be market-oriented reforms to connect farm producers to domestic and international markets & to enable facilities for contract farming and reduce the restrictions on the storage of food commodities in India [17]-[19]. The Government presented these laws as necessary steps towards achieving a doubling of farmers' incomes and to draw private investments into what have been inefficiently managed agricultural sectors. Farming communities, especially those located in the major paddy and wheat-producing states of Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, feel these three new laws present an imminent danger to both their Minimum Support Price (MSP) system, the established mandis under the

Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) and thus their overall livelihood security when engaging in agribusiness activities with large agri-business companies [10].

In September 2020, farmers in Punjab began their protests at the state level. By November, the protests escalated into the nationwide Delhi Chalo (March to Delhi) movement as hundreds of thousands of farmers from across the country made their way to the city at eight border points in Singhu, Tikri, and Ghazipur. These protests grew over the next thirteen months, evolving into one of the largest mass mobilizations in modern democratic history and involving more than 500 farmer unions that were organized under the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM). The protests were able to continue through the extremely cold winter of 2020-21, the extremely hot summer of 2021, and eleven rounds of failed government negotiations, before Prime Minister Modi surprised the world on November 19, 2021, when he announced that he would repeal all three laws. The protests demonstrated how the political power of ordinary citizens can influence government policies. The movement is also considered by many as an example of the collective effort by the agricultural community across India.

This research paper evaluates the farmers' movement using a dual lens approach of political sociology and agrarian studies within the framework of larger theoretical debates about collective action, peasant politics, and democratic contestation in the neoliberal era. Specifically, we will analyse: (i) the organisational and mobilisation strategies that allowed for the unprecedented scale and duration of the protest; (ii) the ideological framing, caste dynamics, and gender dimensions of the movement; (iii) the importance of digital media and transnational diaspora solidarity; and (iv) the political and policy significance of the outcome of the movement. The organisation of this paper is as follows. The second section will review the theoretical literature. The third section will present the historical and policy context. The fourth section will outline the research methodologies. The fifth

through seventh sections will provide an empirical analysis of the movement; specifically, the first section will explore how to investigate the anatomy of the farmers' movement; the second will explore the ideological dimensions of the farmers' movement; and the third will explore the digital media dimensions of the farmers' movement. The eighth section will discuss the outcomes of the farmers' movement and its implications, and the ninth section will conclude this research paper.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Agrarian Movements in India: Historical Overview

Peasant resistance has been documented over many eras in the historiography of peasant uprisings in India, with recorded history of peasant uprisings from colonial times through post-independence land reform movements to contemporary farmer's movements in the 1970's and 1980's. Guha's foundational research in the subaltern studies movement produced the understanding of collective action by peasants as being structured, purposeful, and carrying political weight rather than spontaneous or simply reactionary. Brass documented the new forms of farmer movement developed in post-Green Revolution India. These organisations (for example, the Bharatiya Kisan Union and the Shetkari Sanghatana) shifted agrarian agitation from a focus on land redistribution as a primary objective to concerns over monetising sufficient by way of price and specific trading opportunities. Omvedt highlighted that an intersection of caste, class, and gender relates to the creation and formation of these movements and that agrarian political action in India can't simply be framed through a single form of exploitation. Shah provided a broad overview of the manner in which Indian social movements, including those that arise from the peasant class, have manoeuvred through both class-based political models and identity-based political models since independence from colonial rule..

B. Social Movement Theory

This analysis draws on three key Social Movement Theory principles, namely Resource Mobilisation Theory, Political Opportunity Structure, and Framing Theory. According to Resource Mobilisation Theory (as developed by McCarthy and Zald), movement growth relies on the use of organizational resources such as finances, networks, leadership, and infrastructure to support their creation and long-term sustainability. Political Opportunity Structure (as developed by Tarrow and McAdam) focuses on how movements emerge in relation to the dynamically changing relationship between state power, elite alignment, and access to politics, and give us an idea as to why a movement may grow during certain points in history. Finally, according to Snow and Benford's Framing Theory, movements create a collective identity through the construction of Diagnostic/Prognostic Frames, which enables movements to mobilise their participants, challenge conventional frames, and maintain ongoing commitment.

C. Gramscian Perspectives and Agrarian Political Economy

The farmers' movements how they are counter hegemonic movements that oppose neoliberal agrarian reform through alternative moral and intellectual leaderships to establish power. Gramsci [6] spoke to this issue. Writers Byres [7] and Bernstein [8] explored what they refer to as the agrarian question within the context of global capitalism (whereby dispossession and differentiation create contradictory pressures to develop sustainable agrarian economies and societies). Lerche [10] described continued liberalisation in India that has created a semi-proletarian class of farmers that are continuing to be left behind, because the agricultural sector is experiencing non-structural transformation at the same time as millions of farmers are having continued access to the agrarian economy. Chatterjee [12] identifies how popular

democratic movements engage with the state from a perspective of political society; as opposed to formally established citizenship status, farmers in India are creating new forms of political power through social mobilisation. The double movement identified by Polanyi [28] also supports the argument being made in support of the farmers' movement: as market forces advance they create counter-movements as a means of protection against the advances of marketized capitalism, this phenomenon is being demonstrated by the protests in India arising from activities occurring in 2020-2021.

D. Digital Media and Transnational Agrarian Movements

The centrality of digital networks in today's global social movements has been well-documented by Castells [11], who cites networked communications as important not only for empowering horizontal mobilisation but also for challenging vertical power. The national and global contexts of contemporary agrarian movements have been theorised by Desmarais [21] and Moyo & Yeros [22], who hold that the resurgence of peasant politics in the Global South connects local grievances with global structural forces. Use of food regime analysis (McMichael [27]) situates national farm crises within a broader dynamic of global agricultural restructuring, thereby providing macro-structural interpretation of the Indian case. Agriculture's developmental role in low- and middle-income countries is emphasised by the World Bank's [26] analysis of the structural stakes for agricultural policy in India and other developed nations.

E. Research Gap

Although there has been increased media and initial academic articles written about the farmers' protest of 2020 and 2021, a substantial void exists in the application of solid sociological research using theoretical models to study the intersecting aspects of the farmers' protest and its

effects on democratic theory in India. This paper will address this gap.

II. HISTORICAL AND POLICY CONTEXT

A. Structure of Indian Agriculture and the Agrarian Crisis

Extreme fragmentation defines Indian agriculture. According to NSS, the majority of agricultural households (around 86%) are small and marginal farmers cultivating less than two hectares of land. Both Punjab and Haryana underwent transformative changes through the Green Revolution, turning them into the country's granary. However, these changes also caused Punjab and Haryana to become locked into intensively applied and monoculture agricultural systems with declining economic returns. The Swaminathan Commission reported this situation in immense detail and suggested providing farmers with legal protections for minimum support prices, which would be their cost of production plus 50%. The recommendations by the commission were not implemented before the protests of 2020. As highlighted, farmer suicide rates remained extremely high during the period 2015–2020 and this is symptomatic of the breadth of structural agrarian crisis documented by researchers.

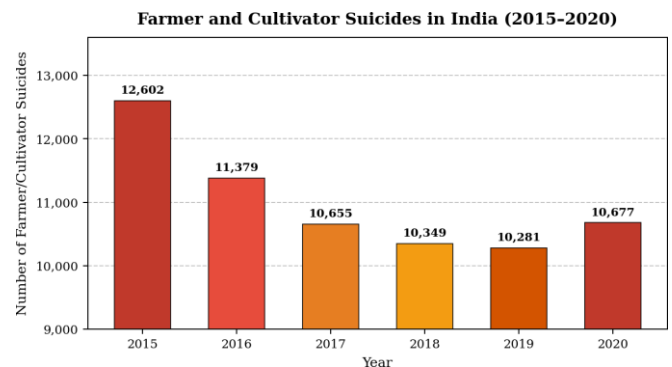


Fig. 1. Farmer and cultivator suicides in India, 2015–2020. Source: NCRB [15].

B. The APMC and MSP Mechanisms

Farmers have been given access to government-regulated wholesale markets through the APMC, where licensed traders bid on produce. The MSP system provides floor prices (or minimum support prices) for 23 crops and has served as an important benchmark for providing farmers with stable

incomes, despite limited procurement of crops at MSP (only rice and wheat in select states). Figure 2 shows that, for major crops, the MSP was always greater than the average market price for the fiscal year 2020–21, demonstrating how materially important a state-supported price floor is for a farming household, and why they would react with alarm to any perceived weakening of the system [17].

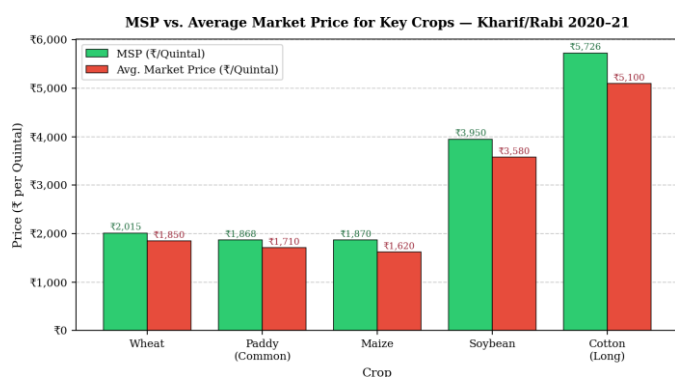


Fig. 2. MSP vs. average market price for key crops, 2020–21 (/Quintal).
Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare [17], [18].

C. The Three Farm Laws: Provisions and Controversy

The three agricultural laws enacted in September 2020 were the biggest change to Indian agriculture in the last 73 years. This report summarises the key aspects of the three laws and what farmers objected to about each. The FPTCA was presented as enabling "One Nation, One Market" where farmers could trade freely outside of APMC mandis, the FAPAFSA was presented as empowering farmers to do contract farming with companies, and the ECA amendment was represented as lowering the stock limits on commodities so farmers have more investment and less inflation.² Farmers rejected all three laws due to fears that these laws would eventually dismantle the regulated APMC mandate system and put farmers in a position where they were being subsidized by Agribusiness Companies to continue working, and there would no longer be

any legislative vehicle for the MSP support system thus reducing support for farmers [12].

In addition, the farmers also felt that the whole legislative process was unfair, as the bills passed in the Rajya Sabha on a voice vote without allowing a division, without constitutionally following the processes to refer to a Select Committee and without allowing the members to be heard [31].

TABLE I
OVERVIEW OF THE THREE FARM LAWS (2020) AND KEY FARMER OBJECTIONS

Law	Key Provisions	Farmer Objections
FPTCA, 2020 [17]	Trade outside APMC mandis; no market fee; e-trading platforms	Weakens APMC; threatens MSP; enables corporate monopoly
FAPAFSA, 2020 [18]	Contract farming with corporate sponsors; price & quality agreements	Tilted toward corporates; no MSP guarantee; weak dispute redress
ECA Amend ment, 2020 [19]	Deregulates stock lim-its for cereals, pulses, oilseeds	Enables hoarding; hurts small farmers; benefits large traders

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This research project utilizes a quantitative, non-experimental approach with a focus on sociology, political science, and other relevant disciplines. Data are collected through a combination of document analysis, thematic content analysis, and secondary data from multiple sources. Qualitative data analysis is con-ducted using multiple techniques to confirm the results of the analysis.

B. Primary Sources

The primary sources utilized are: official press releases, statements issued by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), and resolutions from November 2020 to December 2021; official records of parliamentary debate from Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha for the farm bills sessions in September 2020; ministerial statements and notifications issued by the Government; and recorded evidence of major protest events and negotiation meetings.

C. Secondary Sources

The secondary sources include peer-reviewed academic publications such as *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Journal of Peasant Studies* [9], *Journal of Agrarian Change* [10], and *Contributions to Indian Sociology* [29]; national datasets compiled officially by Organisations such as National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) [15]; National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) [16]; Ministry of Agriculture [17] - [19]; and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) [23]; as well as an analysis of the historical archives of leading national newspapers, including: *The Hindu*, *Tribune*, *Indian Express*, and *The Wire*.

D. Analytical Framework

The analysis of the protests utilises thematic content analysis and combines Resources Mobilisation Theory [2], Political Opportunity Structure [3],[5], Framing Theory [4], and Gramscian Counter Hegemony [6] to understand the emergence, dynamics, and outcomes of the protests.

E. Scope and Limitations

The analysis of the protests will be limited in geographic focus to Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, with consideration given to the national level broader. The timeframe for analysis will span September 2020 to December 2021. Limitations include reliance on secondary or publicly available primary data, rather than original field interviews, and the regional nature of the protests limits generalisations about Indian Agriculture as a whole.

V. THE PROTEST MOVEMENT: ANATOMY AND DYNAMICS

A. Timeline of the Movement

As displayed in Figure 4, the farmer movement unfolded in five stages. In Stage 1 (September – October 2020), the farmers carried out agitations against the three farm laws at the state level in Punjab and carried out rail and road blockades to protest. In Stage 2 (November 2020), large convoys of farmers (mostly tractor owners) marched from Punjab to Delhi as part of the Delhi Chalo protest, where they were greeted with police violence by way of water cannons and tear gas en route to the capital and then set up camps at the Singhu, Tikri, and Ghazipur border crossing points when they were ultimately prevented from entering Delhi. In Stage 3 (December 2020 to March 2021), the protesters formed self-sustaining encampments at the same locations as in Phase Two. In Stage 4 (April to October 2021), the protests were at a standstill after eleven rounds of negotiations with the government, having rejected partial concessions for the full repeal of the laws. In Stage 5 (ending in December 2021 with the repeal of all three laws), Prime Minister Modi unexpectedly announced on November 19, 2021 (the festival of Gurpurab) the repeal of all three laws, followed by formal repeal by parliament on November 29, and the withdrawal of the protests by December 2021.

B. Organizational Structure: The Samyukta Kisan Morcha

The umbrella group of more than 500 farmer unions from around India is the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) which has provided the backbone of this movement. The construction of the SKM as an umbrella coalition has created a new level of coalition-building across many different regions, politics and ideologies [25].

The SKM is a disciplined yet decentralised organisation that makes decisions with all of the different unions represented, and multiple leaders being an equal voice without any one leader being a dominant spokesperson, which was done on purpose in order to not have the state "target" any individual leader or to be able to co-opt those leaders. Democratic meetings are held once a week at each protest site (sammelans), creating

space for discussions to occur. To this extent, the organisation of the SKM follows McCarthy and Zald's [2] model of multi-organisational fields in social movements, where there is a high density of related organisations to provide greater resilience to being targeted or fragmented as a result of any form of repression.

C. Mobilization Strategies and Resource Pools

A critical aspect of the movement's success was resource mobilization over a long period of time. The langar system of feeding people, which is based on the Sikh tradition of creating community kitchens and engaging in selfless service to others through seva, helped to supply food, shelter and medical care on an ongoing basis to those involved in the protest and turn the border encampments into self-sustaining towns. The various farmer unions raised large amounts of money from the Punjabi diaspora, from people in Canada who were supportive of their efforts, and from the farmers themselves through donations. The farmers utilized various forms of non-violent protest, such as dharnas (large sit-in protests), rasta roko (blocking roads), rail roko (blocking freight trains), and tractor marches as a means to create maximum disruption of the ordinary course of life in the areas around the protests while still maintaining the moral superiority that comes with using non-violence as a method to challenge an oppressor, as is common amongst subaltern social movements. The volatility in the Agricultural GDP during this time period as shown in figure 5, illustrates the volatility of the agricultural sector and the farmers who mounted this unprecedented mobilization effort

D. Geographic and Demographic Participation

Figure 3 depicts that farmers protesting primarily came from Punjab (35%), Haryana (25%) and Uttar Pradesh (20%). These states have the best developed APMC infrastructure and depend most heavily on the government's purchasing of crops (MSP). There were solidarity actions by others in Maharashtra,

Rajasthan, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, thus demonstrating how this protest protested across all of India. Agricultural labourers, rural artisans, and urban civil society joined together to form a cross-class movement consistent with Chatterjee's [12] theories of political society.

Geographic Distribution of Protest Participation (Approximate %)

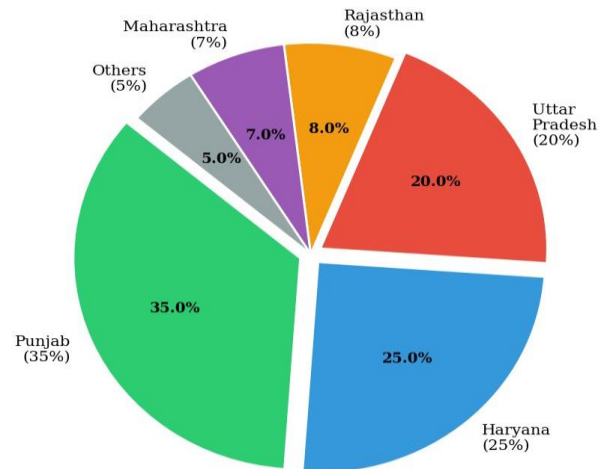


Fig. 3. Approximate geographic distribution of protest participation (%).

E. Caste, Class, and Gender Dimensions

The caste aspects surrounding the movement have been complex for several reasons: Firstly, the Jats are the majority ethnic group and the dominant peasant caste from both Punjab and Haryana are primarily represented by Jats (Dominant Ethno-Castes), both of whom have considerable possessions (i.e. Land) and Social Capital, and also organisational experience, with hundreds of thousands of member farmers part of (Bhaichara Kisan Union) [24]. Secondly, the landless Dalit agricultural labourers' relationship with land is that of agricultural labourers or workers rather than being owners, hence their involvement in the movement has been somewhat tenuous; many of their organisations have therefore participated in solidarity actions with Jat-led organisations but have also pointed out that the demands of the agitating organisations are based on minimum support price (MSP) requirements, and that the

vast majority of those benefiting from MSP requirements (i.e. West Asian / East African) will be primarily landed farmers not landless farmers [8].

Women's participation was symbolically important in that thousands of Mahila Kisans (women farmers) were present at the protest sites, with many women making independent camps at protest sites, giving speeches and participating in direct action activities. The female presence at protest sites challenged the state's ongoing delegitimisation of their motives and the dominant male-centred culture of agrarian trade unionism across Northern India [24].

VI. IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

A. Movement Framing

The success of SKM's protest can in part be attributed to the way the movement framed the issues at stake. According to Snow and Benford's [4] framework, the movement developed a strong diagnostic frame—kisan virodhi kaanoon (anti-farmer laws)—that spoke directly to the lived experiences of farming communities and their vulnerability to the market. The movement's prognostic frame called for the full repeal of the three laws and for a statutory guarantee for MSP, which was unequivocal. The movement's collective identity was constructed around the image of Annadata (the provider of food)—a symbol that invoked a sense of morality and positioned the farmer as a benefactor of the country who had been betrayed by the corporate sector [12]. The use of langar, as an example of the Sikh principle of sharing as a community, served to reinforce this identity frame, and provided an alternative image to that of an individualistic market rationale promoted by the laws.

B. Counter-Hegemonic Politics

According to the Gramscian perspective [6], this was an important instance of counter-

hegemonic struggle in the farmers' movement. The neoliberal agreement on agricultural market reform, which the government has characterised as an unavoidable step towards modernisation, was opposed to a new moral economy based on the principles of food sovereignty, regulated markets, and the government's obligation to support farmers.

The farmers' movement has to a large degree de-naturalised the government's description of the laws as "reforms", demonstrating that they are means used to create a corporate agrarian structure. This idea is consistent with Polanyi's [28] concept of double movement, where the advancement of the market creates protective counter-movements that restore the primacy of social welfare over market efficiency. McMichael [27]'s international analysis of food regimes places this dispute within the context of the broader global reorganisation of agricultural supply chains, which increasingly supports transnational corporations as opposed to smallholders.

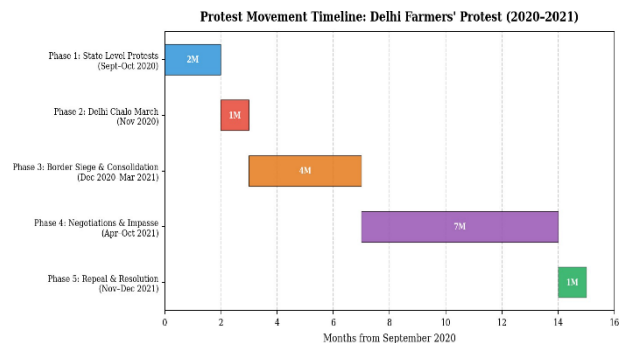


Fig. 4. Timeline of the Delhi farmers' protest movement (2020–2021).

C. Political Neutrality as Strategic Resource

The SKM made a crucial organisational innovation with its commitment to political neutrality by refusing to officially take sides with any one of the political parties. This served several strategic purposes. First, it prevented the co-optation of opposition parties looking for electoral gain. Second, it helped to preserve the unity of a new and diverse coalition that included farmers with differing political ideologies. Finally, by refusing to be associated with any one political

party, the SKM pre-empted any government actions to discredit the protests and delegitimise them as political in nature [2].

The Political Opportunity Structure theory suggests that both Punjab's and Uttar Pradesh's upcoming state elections were significant external variables that limited the government's political options and ultimately helped lead to its decision to repeal.

D. State Response and Repression

The government's response included using negotiation while also increasing repression through the use of brutal force such as using rubber bullets, water cannons, and teargas on farmers at their protest sites and by ensuring that all roads leading to those protest sites were completely blocked off by using multiple layers of barbed wire, razor wire, or barbed wire fences topped with sharp nails. These images have led to a major backlash from the international community. Farmers were also prevented from being able to communicate via the internet in several protest areas which was further restricting their ability to travel or communicate with each other or access information [11]. In an attempt to delegitimise the protests, the government tried to label the protesters as Khalistanis and link them to foreign influence what they did was create solidarity and embarrassment on the part of those governments toward their actions against farmers protesting for their rights. The Lakhimpur Kheri incident on October 3rd, 2021, where a vehicle driven by the son of a Union Minister allegedly killed four farmers while they were protesting, was a watershed moment that sparked a national uprising against the government, and may have caused it to backtrack on what it planned to do to placate the protesters [29]. Chandhoke [29] has theorized there are limits to the type of dissent that can occur within civil society in India. The Lakhimpur incident is an example of how acts of violence by the state can create greater movement strength through reinforcing the moral authority of that

movement versus attempting to diminish it by police repression.

VII. DIGITAL MEDIA AND DIASPORA SOLIDARITY

A. Social Media as Mobilization Resources

Farmers' protests in India may be the first of the larger-scale agrarian protests in India to utilize digital media as a primary resource for mobilization: this reinforces the thesis of Castells [11] regarding the networked nature of recent social movements. Hashtags on Twitter like #FarmersProtest and #IStandWithFarmers were globally 1 on trending lists, and provided worldwide exposure and therefore visibility that extends far beyond the sites of physical protest. Live streams on YouTube(s) from Singhu and Tikri, which were produced primarily by independent or citizen journalists, provided real-time coverage of the protests which bypassed traditional media, wherein the perception of traditional media is that such media were predisposed to favor the government's view of the protests. WhatsApp networks were used for logistical coordination, dissemination of relevant legal information to the various unions, statewide communication to the respective unions and; there were unsuccessful government attempts to restrict online coverage of the protests (e.g., requests to Twitter to close accounts of users providing protest coverage) that were sources of considerable and growing international controversy [11].

B. International Dimensions and Diaspora Solidarity

The transnational element/generation was facilitated through a very large and established diasporic population of Punjabi Sikhs, especially in Canada, the UK, and the USA. Riots were held by diasporic groups outside of Indian embassies; funds were collected for Langar Operations in India; the diasporic community amplified the message of the Farmers' Movement through

various social media platforms. This aligns with the analysis by Desmarais on the subject of “Transnational Peasant Solidarity” [21]. In February, 2021 when some celebrities from around the world tweeted that they supported the farmers in India, it created a significant “Diplomatic Incident.” The Indian Government issued a formal request to foreign parties to not interfere with its internal issues or affairs, and there was a subsequent wave of verified users of social media platforms who posted their own messages of “counter-solidarity” with the farmers. This was an example of the increasing interconnection of social movements within a nation with the global community of digital publics and supports the transnational nature of modern agricultural politics, as documented by Moyo and Yeros [22].

C. Counter-Narratives and Independent Journalism

Independent media sources including the Wire, Caravan, Gaon Connection, and NewsClick have been essential in providing objective and factual reporting that offers an alternative view of the stories published by pro-government mainstream media. The arrest of climate activist, Disha Ravi, in connection with creating and sharing a “toolkit” related to the ongoing protests resulted in exposing digital freedom issues and the criminalizing of dissent, giving greater attention to the issue from an international perspective, in addition to contributing to a reduction in the government’s international legitimacy [29].

VIII. OUTCOME, ASSESSMENT, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

A. Repeal of the Farm Laws

On November 19, 2021, PM Modi announced the repeal of all three farm laws, framing the decision as a failure to convince farmers of the laws’ benefits rather than as an acknowledgment of the movement’s democratic legitimacy. The repeal was completed through Parliament on November 29, 2021. Table II summarises the SKM’s principal

demands and their status at the movement’s conclusion. The SKM maintained the protest until the government issued a written commitment to form a committee on MSP legalisation, after which the movement was formally suspended in December 2021 [3].

TABLE II
SKM PRINCIPAL DEMANDS AND OUTCOMES AT MOVEMENT CONCLUSION

SKM Demand	Outcome (Dec. 2021)
Repeal of all three farm laws	Achieved – Laws repealed Nov.–Dec. 2021
Legal guarantee for MSP	Partial – Committee promised; no legislation enacted
Withdrawal of all cases against farmers	Partial – Most cases dropped; some pending
Justice in Lakhimpur Kheri case	Ongoing – Arrests made; trial continues
Electricity Amendment Bill withdrawal	Not achieved
Compensation for deceased farmers’ families	Partial – Varied by state government

B. Significance of the Repeal

The repeal was a landmark event in Indian democratic politics. It represents one of the very few instances in which a government with a strong parliamentary majority reversed major legislation in direct response to extra-parliamentary democratic pressure. For social movement theorists, it offers a striking demonstration that sustained, non-violent, organised protest can compel policy reversal even in conditions of democratic centralisation [5]. Agricultural GDP trends shown in Fig. 5 illustrate the structural volatility of the sector, which makes the movement’s thirteen-month endurance all the more remarkable.

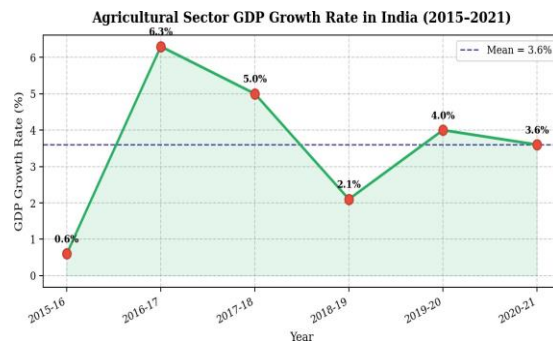


Fig. 5. Agricultural sector GDP growth rate in India, 2015–2021

C.Unresolved Agrarian Crisis

The repeal of the farm laws, while politically significant, did not address the deep structural agrarian crisis that had made farming communities so vigilant. The Swaminathan Commission’s recommendations [20] for MSP legalisation remained unimplemented. The fundamental contradictions of Indian agriculture—land fragmentation, input cost inflation, output price stagnation, and market exclusion—persist beyond the movement’s conclusion [7]. The FAO [23] has underscored the need for systemic reform of agrifood systems to build resilience and equity for smallholder farmers globally, a prescription directly applicable to the Indian context.

D.Implications for Agrarian Policy

The implications of this analysis for future policy-making can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Farming communities will fight vigorously against any attempt to implement legislation that threatens existing Min Supported Pricing (MSP) and Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) systems; any future reforms in Agricultural Markets must occur with genuine consultation and must also include good price floor protection [20];
- 2) The MSP committee set up as part of the resolution has the potential to be a vehicle to meeting the fundamental need for farmers to receive remunerative prices; however, its

effectiveness will depend on the political will and true representation of all farmers [10];

- 3) The movement demonstrated the inadequacy of existing social protection programs for agriculture workers and the landless and highlighted significant gaps in the current agricultural policies that need to be addressed in order to provide better welfare programs for the poorest of the rural communities [8].

The World Bank [26] has noted that as sustainable agri-cultural development progresses, consideration must not only be given to liberalizing markets, but attention must also be paid to the underlying social infrastructure—extension services, access to financial credit, and risk insurance to help smallholder farmers remain competitive.

IX. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A. Theoretical Contributions

The ongoing farmer protests against the recent Indian agricultural laws are an excellent opportunity to test existing theoretical models within the social movements’ literature. For instance, from the perspective of Resource Mobilization Theory [3] (RMT), the SKM (Samyukt Kisan Morcha)’s ability to sustain a protest of this magnitude for 13 months provides strong evidence that agrarian communities in India have far more organizational capabilities and financial/material resources than most people realize. Additionally, the langar system, as utilized by both the SKM and farmers at the protest sites, acted as an incredible mechanism for pooling resources and removing the hierarchical relationship between

movement resources and the governmental power structure.

Similarly, the point of sale (POS) analysis [5],[7] indicates that the upcoming state elections in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh served as a key contextual variable influencing how the government responded to the SKM by repealing their newly imposed laws, which confirms that electoral uncertainty and vulnerability continue to act as significant levers for subaltern democratic pressure.

Furthermore, utilizing a Gramscian analysis [8] of the SKM reveals that the movement's success was not just limited to achieving a policy goal, but rather, was busy removing neoliberalism, as a common-sense ideology that had dominated agrarian policy making for almost thirty years. Finally, an analysis using Framing Theory demonstrates how the Annadata identity frame mobilized moral solidarity beyond the immediate constituency of impacted farmers.

B. Implications for Democracy and Civil Society

The farmers' protest has much larger implications than just the particular nature of the farmers' protest or farmers' struggles; that the farmers' protest and movement form part of a larger context (i.e. economic inequality, oppression of civil society, growing extremism, etc.) could potentially threaten the stability of India's democratic institutions and rule of law. In this context, the SKM (Samyukta Kisan Morcha) proved that mass organised opposition is still a viable means of checking the power of government. The SKM emphasis on political neutrality and non-violence, on transparency in decision-making, and the refusal to allow themselves to be co-opted or intimidated by government created and modelled forms of civic engagement (in the form of protest) that strengthen rather than weaken democratic values. The government has consistently responded with repressive measures—through use of the state's machinery, such as internet shutdowns, sedition charges and physical barricades at or around protest sites—that cause serious concern for the government's commitment to its constitutional requirement to allow peaceful assembly.

C. Conclusion

The research presented here has analysed the movement of farmers against the 2020 farm laws, which is a complex, multi-faceted social and political movement that cannot be easily described simply as an interest group or a revolutionary challenge to the political establishment. This analysis shows that the success of the movement was the result of a combination of organizational innovation, strategic framing, resource mobilization, and both domestic and global solidarity. The success of the farmers' movement is evidenced by the repeal of three farm laws, which is a significant achievement that represents a new milestone in democracy.

However, the social and economic conditions that created the farmers' movement still exist today. Agriculture in India continues to deal with a crisis of viability, a crisis of sustainability, and a crisis of equity. Therefore, resolving these crises requires more than just repealing the harmful legislation; instead, it requires establishing a true farmer-oriented policy framework for agriculture in India.

The farmers' movement has shown that rural communities have both the determination and the ability to demand such a policy framework. Therefore, whether or not India's political system will deliver a farmer-oriented policy framework is an open question that is of utmost importance for democracy in India and the global community's efforts to create just and sustainable food systems in the twenty-first century.

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