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Global Capitalism and Agriculture Activism

An Analysis of Arena of Contest in South Asia¹

Abstract

South Asian countryside is potentially an attractive space on the globe though in actuality it is as yet comparatively much less globalised an arena. It has not only a potential vast capacity to supply the valued platter of tropical foods to the world but also a rapidly increasing actual capacity to be a huge reservoir market for commodity and capital of the world. Global capitalism is thus restless to penetrate this arena of South Asia; it has been conducive in bringing here a number of international institutionalised organisations to establish its sway. Combined with the already flourishing domestic organisation movements which have been resisting all that harms agriculture and the 'rural', the entry of such organisations which are fabulously magnified and huge in size is but a clear danger to the old regimes of the respective nation-states. Faced with the prospect of increasingly shrunken role in the economic sectors of manufacturing and services, the domestic state actors has a stake in maintenance of its presence in the 'rural' because agriculture here has not been displaced by either the industrialisation set in the early twentieth century or the agribusiness system dominating in the late twentieth century. They find here and here only a hassle-free terrain on a platter. The danger to the regimes of domestic states which has been created through sustained efforts by activities connected with the domestic organisation movements is magnified with such entry of external entities working at the behest of global capitalism. A tripartite conflict of interests has been unfolding for some time. As principal adversaries, not only the agricultural populace together with their newly-discovered supporters amidst the middle-class intelligentsia and media but also the alien arbitrators of the international inter-governmental mega-institutions and private multinational corporations is at the loggerhead with the native functionaries of respective nation-state.

Can the individual nation-state hold its autonomous presence in the south Asian countryside? The answer is difficult. In this regime of globalisation of capital, production and consumption of food under the aegis of globalised agribusiness firms and corporation, the dispute is certainly and transparently on the issues of principles and practices of sharing the fruits of economic advancement in south Asia. If at all the nation-states have to maintain their 'agrarian welfare state' image in the countryside, it is only the act of delivery of justice for the 'rural' that would be crucial in maintaining the legitimacy and acceptance of the states in south Asia. In such a situation as it obtains today, it is clear that the agenda of agrarian justice has already emerged as paramount in importance today than ever before. The domestic as well as international nongovernmental organisation movements are geared to this volitional agenda only.

Key Words: south Asia, global organisation, local movement, nation-state, rural, global capitalism, tripartite contest, hegemony, agribusiness firm, domestic organisation movement, agenda

Introduction

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Being spread over 412.09 million hectares of the surface area, South Asia is home to almost 1.3 billion people. It provides space to 3.16 persons per hectare of land. It is undoubtedly a populous region bounded by the international borders of at least seven countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives on the globe. Though almost 22 percent of humanity resides in this region only, it is not as yet an urbane society on the globe. Not even one-third of its populace resided in the urban space. Despite fast pace of urbanization observed during last couple of decades, its urban populace was merely 28.2 percent of total population in the year of 2000. It is principally a rural landscape, almost flooded with a vast populace of small peasantry. In this region of countrified landscape and predominantly rural inhabitants, small farmers constitute the largest section of rural population but commands lowest per capita resource endowment. The number of agricultural holdings is approximately about 125 million, spread over the operated agricultural land area of roughly 200 million hectares. The small farmers operate but merely one-third of the agricultural land. The average size of holdings varies from 0.3 hectares to 0.6 hectares. This is particularly the case in the countries of Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh; it is here that up to about 90 percent of operated land area is in the category of marginal and small holdings alone. South Asian society and economy is dominated by two big nations of India and Pakistan. These two nations strike a contrast with each other; the average size of holdings is 1.41 hectares in India while it is 3.04 hectares in Pakistan.

South Asia is one of the highly sensitive spots on the globe. It is an economically poor, politically rickety and socially troubled space. A number of racial, ethnic and linguistic communities have a historical baggage of conflict to carry with each other, and a mosaic of vested social interest groups have pulled and pushed each other over the years here. Political stability has been at tenterhook with the Nepali militants active in Bhutan, Tamil militants in Sri Lanka, Maoists in Nepal, Jihadi Taliban in Pakistan, Naxalite in India, and Islamic fundamentalist in Bangladesh. In the region, mass income and consumption poverty has been widespread since long time. South Asian region is home to almost 44 percent of the poor of the world whose aggregate income is but just less than 2 percent of the total income of the world. In 2004, the number of poor was almost 445.2 million; this number represented nearly 31 percent of the aggregate population of the region. Of all the poor population, the rural countryside was the home for about 75 percent of them. Being landless and having just limited access to land and other productive resources, these poor fail to have accesses to not only the commodity markets but also financial institutional setup as well in each country in South Asia (IFAD, 2001). Poverty breeds malnutrition, and this phenomenon afflicted almost 86.0 million children in this region alone in 1995. In total, there were nearly 294 million undernourished persons in 1996-98, representing nearly 23 percent of all population of the region. It is a unique social ethos of food insecurity in which poverty breeds malnutrition. In the granaries of public organisations, the buffer stock of food grains has been considerable however access of the hungry to it has decisively been worse, giving credence to the proverb 'Packed Storage-houses and Empty Stomach'. The public distribution system and its delivery mechanism, originating as it was during the colonial past, has been in all countries in the region in a shocking shape. In this tropical agricultural region characterized by pervasiveness of the monopoly of ownership of land in few hands, preponderance of the smallholding farmers, predominance of acreages operated under the cereal production, popularity of the tropical Monsoon rain-fed agricultural practices, apathetic status of the rural non-farm sector, scarceness of the rural infrastructure, widespread shortage of the safe drinking water, burgeoning incidence of high malnutrition and food insecurity and deprived state of the health and hygiene, a majority of the family labour based farms of small peasantry have been unable to meet both ends. They in turn have been suffering for long from the relentless misery of mass poverty and malnutrition.

This misery has further been exacerbated by the instrumentality of the exploitative nexus of the global mega firms and institutions serving the interests of imperialistic globalisation.

In this region of preponderant small peasantry suffering from relentless poverty, a specific tempo of agricultural activism has been in sight of late. The peaceful peasant movements have flourished here. The dissatisfaction of the 'rural' has given rise to the grass-root based democratic and peaceful civil resistance movements. The violent land grab organisations have struck roots here. A section of the nascent educated urbane middle class has emerged to be the mouthpiece of anything that is rural and the restoration of the claims and rights of the 'rural'. More recently, an upsurge of civilian controversy and debate surrounding the phenomenon of grabbing of farming land to establish and extend the frontiers of urban economic zones near and around the boundaries of metropolises and mega cities in India and other countries of south Asia has then stimulated the public imagination about the stake of agricultural population. Properly speaking, it has been neither the wretchedness of chronic poverty nor the misery of pervasive unemployment but the violation of rights and claims of human citizens around which the passion has continuously been aroused in the public discourse. In modern south Asia, the bourgeoisie replaced the nobility and aristocracy by making them surrender in silence and the preponderant suppressed mass of serfs and peasantry who were already for long rather forcefully gutted into the darkness of feudal centuries were allowed to be eclipsed by the ascendant mercantile and industrial capitalism. The patriotic and comprador bourgeoisie did never resolve the land issue and the agrarian question. The agenda of redistribution of property in land and institutional reforms in the use of land resource was not seriously taken up and addressed in the real earnest. In other words, the genesis of the specific tempo of agricultural activism witnessed today is to be searched in a south Asia characterised by glaring inherited level of and presently sprawling phenomenon of resource inequity and social injustices prevailing in agriculture and the 'rural'.

In the present paper, we proceed to develop a thesis about a bitter contest for hegemony among the ordinary rural populace, nation-state and global mega-institutions in the south Asian countryside, and its impact upon the growing activism in the sphere of agriculture, state and the academy in this impoverished region characterised by wretchedness of mass poverty and loss of human worth. In this ongoing bitter contest among non-market organisations, a decisive victory is seemingly far away since its ideological base in the discipline of agricultural economics and sociology is yet to mature.

Globalism and Locality: The Conflict

South Asian native states had been historically interventionist for a long time. Under monarchy as well as colonial setting, these super organisations had been sufficiently capable of bringing about domestic economic reforms. Such public reforms were mostly centrally directed and pertaining to agriculture and the 'rural'. William Moreland, an erudite British agricultural officer, concluded from his research way back in 1929 that the "idea of agricultural development was already present in the 14th century" India. The state intervention in agriculture was a continued process from pre-colonial through colonial setting of economy in the region. Agriculture including the sectors of commerce and manufacturing was decisively helped by the state investments during the 18th century, most remarkably around the capital cities in Indo-Gangetic plains and peninsular river basins. This was also true around the capital cities in Bengal and Gujarat as well, according to the findings of Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (1970) and Irfan Habib (1982). A colonial state

which was founded in the eighteenth century embarked upon the economic and trade integration of the countryside, though slowly but inevitably, from Dhaka to Murshidabad to Lahore to Madras. The colonial purpose was focussed at serving the vital economic interests of expanding industrialization in mother country of Britain. The sway of the East India Company – the then counterpart analogical entity of a private multinational corporation – was already completely removed from the countryside way back in mid-nineteenth century only. There was virtually no global mega-institution and no domestic organisation movement being in contest and conflict with the colonial agrarian state. This agrarian state continued to be a major intervening agency in the Indian sub-continental agriculture during the 19th century as well. It remained the sole supreme power over the countryside during the course of second half of nineteenth century and first half of twentieth century. The nature of colonial reformative growth model was as such that it invariably attempted to facilitate the swing of capitalist institutions and in particular, the sway of market as the integrative mechanism. Consolidation and development of a national market was what characterised the gist of all economic intervention attempts of the colonial states in the region (Ludden, 2005). Successful integration of capitalist institutions and consolidation of market was but never a smoothly flowing process. Challenges often used to emerge off and on in one or another nook and corner on the Indian subcontinent. There were witnessed a number of sudden uprisings of peasantry and labour, though such uprisings could not at all become the base of formation of any cohesive and sustainable domestic nongovernment organisation in the countryside. The landmark noncooperation and civil disobedience programmes under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Kisan Sabha in some parts of south Asia were also just occasional episodes, short of giving rise to a native nongovernmental organisation movement.

As the ascent of new phase of globalisation of capitalist finances and markets mounted in the early twentieth century, it required increasingly the creation of a base of supportive global organisations and non-market institutions. In the name of assisting generalised economic growth and development across the globe, there had been massive proliferation of not only an oligarchy of the trans-national private business corporations but also the global-level inter-governmental structure of organisations over the years. The multinational firms have flourished far and wide, enabling the mass production of commodities and centralisation of capital across the globe. The intergovernmental organisations have multiplied, enabling the establishment of a globalised legal framework and an international economic order. Such multiplication has produced both cooperation as well as conflict between the multinational private corporations and international intergovernmental organisations. It is in the logic of contradictions produced by the forces of global capitalism that the arena of contest among institutionalised structure of organisations frequently gets larger than the sphere of cooperation among them. Whatever be the saga of cooperation and conflict of interests, such entities have undoubtedly been placed, and do logically work, almost above each nation-state. The international institutions of all genres have therefore multiplied to the peril of arena of domestic influence and control of each budding nation-state. It is in the essence of logic of the globalisation of integrative mechanism of market that only those institutionalised structure of domestic organisations grow and get spread which serve - openly or tacitly - the interests of globalisation of capital, consumption and production. In concrete history, however, the counter-structure of institutional set up which are resistant to it also strike roots. In the global arena today, there has been massive growth of the international nongovernmental organisations resisting the anti-welfare activities of the capitalist organisations as well. The trio have been at bitter contest with each other with regard to penetration into and influence over the nation-state in all countries. The autonomy of each nation-state has become vulnerable, almost shrinking and shaking rather increasingly

with the passage of time. South Asian landscape has not been immune to the destabilising effects of such conflicts, being played among the trio at the global level.

Global capitalism has been restlessly pursuing the objective of bringing agriculture and the 'rural' into the network of global capital and finance. In the very early years of the second half of twentieth century, not only the transnational business corporations but also renowned private sector Foundations of the Ford, Rockefeller and Kellogs entered successfully the countryside of south Asia. A muted phenomenon of proliferation of global mega-institutions in the periphery has accompanied the spread of global capitalism. Contemporary globalisation has entailed three genres of mega-institutions to proliferate on a worldwide scale, and therefore, in south Asia as well. These are, namely, the intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), the multinational corporations (MNCs) and the international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs). In the leading fourteen richest countries of the world, the number of multinational business firms more than trebled from 7000 in 1969 to 24000 in 1994. With globalization of capital, commodity and supportive organizations progressing, all these mega-institutions are today championing the cause of sound climate on earth and projecting themselves as the climate saviors. The multinational private corporations have entered the agribusiness sector through monopoly over the seed market, other vital input markets and introduction of genetically modified crops in south Asia. In the short duration of last two and half decades, the number of intergovernmental institutions recognised by the Union of International Associations (UIA) in Brussels nearly tripled from 1039 in 1981 to 3019 by 2001. According to one count, the number of international nongovernmental organizations worldwide also grew from fewer than 10000 in 1978 to more than 40000 by 1997. All these led to a perceptible observation: something like a global associational revolution had taken place during the late twentieth century. This is similar to and resembles with the phenomenon of the rise of the nation-states during the late nineteenth century.

The proliferation of private multinational corporations has been catalytic in strengthening the grip of global capitalism in the periphery. It is through the sheer strategy of bio-patenting all genetically modified seeds, increasing market concentration and global mergers that these corporations have contributed to the wide expansion of production of the genetically modified crops on a mass scale around the globe. These mega production firms dominate over almost one quarter of the total value of the commercial seed market worldwide today. Genetically modified crops account for nearly 5 percent of total cultivable area in the world. It covers 12.3 million hectares. In 2007, 12 million farmers belonging to 23 countries, 90 percent of whom are resource-poor farmers from 12 developing countries, did produce the genetically modified crops only. In matter of genetically modified crops, the coverage of biotechnology increased by 67 fold within the decade of 1996 and 2007. With commercialised genetically modified seeds under the monopoly of ownership and control by the transnational manufacturing and marketing firms, there has been a phenomenon of death and decay of many ancient plants and crops. Historically speaking, there was a time when more than 7000 plants used to be grown for production of food in the world. Today, a mere 30 plants provide approximately 90 percent of global caloric intake, while only three (maize, rice and wheat) comprise over half. Thanks to the multinationals! It is estimated that the top ten seed corporations around the globe hold 49-51 percent of the commercial seed market whereas the leading ten agro-chemicals control almost 84 percent of the agrochemicals market. Nearly 80 percent of GM food market is virtually owned by only 13 commercial corporations. Accessibility to home-produced non-market food is fast declining, and control of individual and collectivity of peasantry over farms of food grains is being eroded fast under the multinational corporation directed global capitalism.

Prior to globalization of capitalist production firms and exchange markets, most commercial seed suppliers had been often small family-owned businesses that multiplied seed varieties. Some seeds used to be developed in the public domain by, for example, state agricultural experiment stations. With the development of a variety of hybrids and greater intellectual property right protection over them, the number of private firms engaged in plant breeding grew rapidly for some time. The new transgenic traits were increasingly licensed to seed developers which bred them into the germplasm. Such traited seeds were preferred over the traditional seeds by farmers because the former provided resistance to herbicides and insect protection. In India, *Monsanto*, *Emergent Genetics*, *Hindustan Lever*, *Syngenta*, *Advanta* and *Proagro* (a subsidiary of Bayer) are the leading seed multinationals. In 1996, Monsanto introduced the Roundup Ready trait in soybean, and by virtue of its market acceptance and broad licensing to third party seed developers, this multinational increased its market share from less than 2 percent of total planted major field crops in the U.S. in 1996 to 91 percent of the U.S. soy crop in 2007. The rapid acceptance of transgenic traits coincided with a trend towards concentration within the industry, so that today five multi-national companies own the most commercially successful trait technologies for crops. Given the increasingly sophisticated improvements in the hybrid germplasm and the introduction of transgenic technology into plant germplasm, the largest hybrid seed company of the Pioneer Hi-Bred International could garner almost 41 percent market share in hybrid corn by 1998. Transgenic seeds now account for 80 percent of planted corn, 92 percent of planted soybeans, and 86 percent of planted cotton. Monsanto's Roundup Ready trait has been bred into most seeds offered by third party seed developers, including Pioneer. These developments in transgenic traits and improved germplasm have coincided with increased crop yields. The farmers in the south Asia welcome it. The grip of the multinational corporations over them strengthened. Recently prices charged for the transgenic traits as well as for the underlying germplasm have increased dramatically. For example, corn seed in 2009 was reported to be 30 percent more expensive than it was in 2008, while soybean seed was 25 percent more expensive in 2009 than in 2008 in the USA. A number of farming households going through relatively higher cost of production and outlays on farms failed to recover it from the sale proceeds of the harvested crops in the market. While the farmers' suicides have been on the rise, the resourceful multinational life-sciences corporations such as *BASF*, *Monsanto*, *Bayer*, *Syngenta*, *Dupont* and *Biotech* partners have been advancing in new processes of gene and trait specific sequencing so as to respond to the impacts of climate change and these corporations already have filed 532 patent documents (a total of 55 patent families) on so-called "climate ready" genes at patent offices around the world. In the face of climate chaos and a deepening world food crisis, the Gene Giants are gearing up for patent rights to re-brand themselves as climate saviors.

In perspective, the United Nations and its various bodies have been active in developing social sectors in the countryside of south Asia. The Bretton-Woods institution of IBRD has pumped money and technical manpower in agriculture of south Asia quite a number of times. The grand designs of the western imperialist Foundations helped the Indian government in establishing the apex global intergovernmental organization called the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) at Hyderabad. The ICRISAT together with the already established International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT) in Mexico and International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Philippines needed to be coordinated through some international arrangement, and there came up the coordinating body called the International Board for Plant Genetic Resources (IBPGR) in Rome. Robert McNamara, the ex-president of the World Bank brought all these institutions under one umbrella by establishing the Consultative Group on

International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) with sponsorship from the Food and Agriculture Organization, United Nations Development Programme and World Bank (Ghosh, 1998). The Consultative Group (CGIAR) had been extremely valuable associates in an effort to strengthen the food economy and the livelihood of farmers in south Asia. Since the research in agriculture-related subjects had largely been considered extravagancies in the expenditure programmes of the national governments, the CGIAR came into existence in recognition of this extra baggage that went with agricultural research. The technological advance contained in the first Green Revolution was not solely the by-product of the works of the domestic public sectors alone in south Asian countries. In the advances made in the science and technology in various areas, and particularly in the sphere of biotechnology, being carried mostly as part of the research and development initiatives in the private sector, the Group has been having decisive impact. All in all, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) was finally established in Washington DC in 1975, and sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia was the main focus of the Institute. In 2002, IFPRI launched a new program called the South Asia Initiative (SAI), forming a network of policy analysts and advisers from South Asia named PAANSA, in line with its mission centered on looking for sustainable solutions to ending hunger and poverty. The idea was to capitalize on past experiences and to build synergy across the countries of South Asia. More generally, whether it is the social and economic impact of the Green Revolution or the study of subsidies or the future of smallholders or the role of high-value agriculture, IFPRI researchers have contributed to the policy debate on agriculture in developing countries. What is of significance is the observation that the CGIAR and IFPRI have been working above the nation-states of the countries in south Asia. In south Asia, each individual nation-state has increasingly been made subject to the pressures of not only these two mega-institutions but also others working above it, for example, the conditionality on agricultural trade by World Trade Organization.

In the largest population supporting country of India, the Nehru-Mahalanobis model based policies of economic growth and industrial progress often led to the marginalisation of agriculture and the 'villages'. Under Brahmanic socialism of Nehru, the 'rural' and villagers got obstinately and overwhelmingly identified with the 'charkhas' (spinning wheel) and 'haal' (ploughs). It was assumed that plough and spinning wheel needed no additional public support. Massive amount of resources and surplus were thus allowed to flow out from the 'rural' to finance the domestic resource based self-reliant industrialization. Once the Nehruvian era came to a close, much of the optimism associated with the expected outcomes from the multiplicity of overlapping programmes of providing for a whole range of inputs, service-agencies of research and extension and network of agricultural development centres had evaporated. The optimism associated with such schemes as the IADP centres under the Community Development Programmes initiated in India since 1960 on the suggestion of the Food and Agriculture Organization in its 'Provisional Indicative World Plan for Agricultural Development' (Rome, 1970) had already faded away, even the expectations about the potentials of productivity and employment enhancing 'Green Revolution' fizzled out in much of south Asia (refer to the work of Boudhayan Chattopadhyay, 1977, for an assessment). While a section of new affluent class of mixed farmers and absentee rural actors prospered, the mutually reinforcing phenomena of land alienation, deforestation and hunger of the masses increased. This had been more or less the story in other south Asian nation as well, albeit with a variation. The agrarian welfare state image has of late suffered everywhere in south Asia. The obstinate position of the state to clinch to the sector of food and farm sector has been producing only the undesirable outcomes.

Traditional nation-state institutions continue to dominate in the area of food supply and food security, particularly in poor countries where hunger problems are most acute. This dominance of nation-state is somewhat surprising, given the proliferation of so many powerful and influential public and private institutions both above and below the national level This proliferation of institutional alternatives to the nation-state has visibly weakened the control of national authorities in many areas of contemporary political and economic life Yet traditional nation-state institutions continue to dominate in the less globalised policy areas of farming and food security The traditional powers of the nation-state remain surprisingly dominant in most developing countries. State powers continue to be exercised through a broad range of public-sector institutions: national or parastatal marketing boards that monopolize the purchase of commodities, national or parastatal seed and fertilizer companies that monopolize the supply of key inputs, nationally controlled co-ops and nationally managed agricultural credit institutions, national research and extension services, national commodity import or export authorities, national irrigation or land-titling agencies, national forest departments, centralised service delivery agencies in areas such as health and education, and nationally organised public works projects such as food for work and public relief It is often where such national governance institutions most dominate that hunger problems are most severe (Paarlberg, 2002, pp.3-7).

This has been happening despite it that a nodal public agency called the Indian Council of Agricultural Research has continuously been boosted by the state exchequer. In 1997, the cadre strength of the scientific personnel of the ICAR was 6281 persons. In 2003-04, the enrolment of students in the study of agricultural science and engineering at various levels was 58700 in the country. In March 2007, the total number of employees of ICAR and its research institutes was 24622 persons. All these, and public failures abounded. While the sweep of the international private corporations in distorting the forced choices of third-world farmers and the hold of the international intergovernmental mega-institutions in influencing the semi-autonomous decisions of the nation-states in south Asia have increased by leaps and bounds, the resistance from the domestic service organisations have also increased, thickened and started acting as a leverage. Such domestic organisations have often colluded with the international nongovernmental organisations in resisting not only the sway of global capitalist multinational firms and global mega-institutions but also that of the individual respective vulnerable nation-state in the region. Domestically, such organisations have often exposed the vulnerability of native nation-states in the hands of international mega-institutions, and their stated explicit objectives have been centered at now-open-now-hidden opposition to the comprador policies of the domestic ruling class.

2. Domestic Movement: The Stalemate

Global capitalism has been instrumental in producing contradictory growth, not only at the global level but also the domestic one. It has not only pushed the internationalised mega-institutions with almost global reach into this regional periphery but also helped cementing a free space for the flourishing of a plethora of domestic local service organisations here. A number of social movements arose, for example, in India, and all these domestic localised as well as country-wide organisation movements such as the new caste movement, women movement, new farmers' movement and new environmentalism movements have already established themselves much before the actual onset of new phase of globalisation. Since eighties and nineties, the latter opened the space for the flourishing of the former. Much more complex and tricky situation has arisen with the entry of the so-called military organisations within the domestic boundary of the respective nations (for

example, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam in Sri Lanka, the Taliban and Mujahidin in Pakistan and the Maoist organisation movements in both Nepal and India). Such domestic micro-entities have undoubtedly been placed, and do logically work, almost below each respective nation-state in the region. Concretely speaking, these domestically structured organisations however have been observed to be working rather independently and with the passage of time, gaining strength beyond the effective control of the nation-state. In the domestic sphere, as at the global level, the contest for supremacy is thus again triangular among the domestic civil peaceful resistance platforms, the indigenous military-like organisation movements and the native nation-state machineries. While each nation-state had already been rather independently pitched for some time in the past to contest for supremacy of influence and control vis-à-vis the mega-institutions working above it at the level of global arena, of late it has been cornered and compelled to domestically deal with such civil resistance movements as well. The nation-state is a common party enmeshed in domestic as well as global level of the triangular contest for hegemony. Each nation-state has been put in doldrums situation – from above as well as from below - for last couple of decades in the region.

The new political movement of farmers arose in the 1970s to organise the rural producers of all classes and sections in India. This movement was characteristic in striking a difference with the traditional past movements of peasant resistance. Anti-Brahmanism and anti-urban were the core plank of this new movements though political views on the degree of desirability of integration of farming community with the market by farmers differed among the factions. In the early seventies, the formation of Zamindara Union (later named *Bhartiya Kisan Union, BKU*) in Punjab and the *Vyavasayigal Sangham* in Tamilnadu were pioneering initiatives. In the eighties, the formation of *Shetkari Sanghathan* by Sharad Joshi, *Karnataka Rajya Rayatu Sangha* by Prof. Nanjundaswamy and *Bhartiya Kisan Union* of Uttar Pradesh by Mahendra Singh Tikait, and the resurgence of *Khedut Samaj* of Gujarat, and reinforcement of *Vyavasayigal Sangham* of Tamilnadu under leadership of Narayanaswamy Naidu were noted events. Whereas the agitations over the issues on women, environment and caste have all peacefully and democratically earmarked by invoking the names of poor and marginalised agricultural and rural populace, the new farmers' movement has not been known to be belonging to the same genre. The nation-state rather than the civil society has been the target of agitations by the farmers' movement. In the course of last two decades of the twentieth century, factions arose within this movement. The Tikait-Nanjundaswamy faction voiced the political-ideological differences with Sharad Joshi faction of the farmers' movement. Whereas Sharad Joshi's view coincided with the American views on genetically modified seeds, Najundaswamy's stand coincided with the British scepticism. Under Najundaswamy's leadership, opposition to genetically modified organisms and transgenic seeds had been the main plank of the Karnataka Rajya Rayatu Sangha. The Sangha attacked the multinational corporations such as the Cargill, McDonald and finally Monsanto in Karnataka while the Sanghathan of Sharad Joshi supported the ongoing liberalisation and globalisation of Indian agriculture. In 1992, KRSS activists occupied and ransacked the offices of the seed giant Cargill in Bangalore and Bellary, and in 1995, their activists raided a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant in Bangalore. Direct actions against the transgenic seeds, targeting the Monsanto in India, began in 1998. The KRSS became a member of the international umbrella organization called the *Via Campesina*, and organised demonstration of activists against the World Economic Summit in Cologne in 1999. While all these violent agitations went on, Sharad Joshi in 2001 threatened the central government against burning of the Bt-cotton fields in Maharashtra. Whatever had been the history of factions in the new farmers' movements and contradictory strands of the peasant

organisations in the past, there has been general resistance movements going on throughout the year of 2010 against the introduction of Bt-brinjal on the agricultural farms in India.

A notable domestic organisation movement as a resistance to machination of global capitalism and exposing the vulnerability of the nation-state in India was the 'environmentalism of the poor' which arose in the 1970s with the social movements, notably the Chipko movement under the leadership of Sunderlal Bahuguna and *Narmada Bachao Andolan* under the leadership of Medha Patkar. Several other social movements such as the *Kerala Fishworkers' Forum* campaign against mechanised trawlers under the leadership of Father Tom Kocherry, the *Chilka Bachao Andolan* against intensive aquaculture, the mobilization against eucalyptus plantations on common lands in Karnataka, and several smaller campaigns against dams, power projects, and military installations were all raising the ongoing marginalisation of the agriculture and the 'rural'. The Adivasis were described as the environmentalist by default, and a marriage of the 'green' with the 'red' – the equity with the ecology – was organised under the banner of the so-called 'environmentalism of the poor'. In such movements, village community, hill women, tribal and indigenous, religious and traditional categories were valorised. They were however not the wage workers, dalits and slum dwellers who were privileged in such movements. There had been a demand for protecting the rights of tribal community to the natural resources which started with the Chipko movement of the nineteen-seventies and continued for two decades culminating in the ongoing Narmada Bachao Andolan. Such movements went on from strength to strength with metropolitan interest of scholars supporting these; Arundhati Roy, Jharna Jhaveri, Ramachandra Guha, Anil Agarwal and Madhau Gadgil as the scholars of environmentalism have been active in highlighting that environmental degradation and social injustice are two sides of the same coin. The writings of Vandana Shiva further consolidated the metropolitan link of the movements arising from the forest areas of the countryside. Over the years, the movements for restoration of status of farmers in the countryside and protection of the environment in general got often intimately connected with each other.

While the Indian nation-state was already in doldrums dealing with the international mega-firms and institutions impacting upon its policies from above and the domestic organisation movements constraining its working from below, a new genre of challenges arose from the violent grabbing of crop, farming land and forest resources by the outfits of new left-wing extremist organisation in the country. There are in total 5 known left-wing extremist groups in India, also described as 'Maoist' and Naxalite, having a base of some ten thousand ideologically committed cadres. Chattisgarh is now the principal centre of a coordinated Maoist movement though it is spread over a wide expanse of territory stretching across 14 states and covering almost 165 districts. Over the thirteen years period during 1994 and 2006, the organised violence that threatened the internal security of the country had killed some 50,000 persons in India. According to the Institute of Conflict Management, there were in total 2765 people succumbing to fatalities in 2006 under the rubric of violence. In 2006, the left-wing extremism alone caused the death of 742 persons, constituting almost 27 percent of total fatalities in India (Nayar, 2009, pp.202-5). In February 2010, the naxals and Maoists looted arms and ammunitions by attacking on the security staff camp in Midnapur of West Bengal, and massacred almost 24 army men in a single night. In addition to the sporadic violent movements organised under the umbrella of new farmer's movements and new social movements, sustained challenge mounted against the policies of the nation-state and the activities of the foreign multinational corporations in the sustained violence organised under the left-wing extremism. Such violent left-wing extremism in the form of Naxalist and Maoist terrorism, challenging the very legitimacy of the nation-state, is distinguished from the 'Jihadi' terrorism originating from neighbouring Pakistan and

Kashmir in India since the latter is invoking religion and community and not the poor, agriculture and countryside. The increasing frequency of strikes against civil populace dissenters and state paramilitary forces and police by the Naxals and Maoists in tribal areas in the countryside are certainly alarming by virtue of it being organised, sustained and wide spreading as a parallel system of governance below the nation-state. Whereas the Jihadi terrorism as part of international Islamic fundamentalism is considered in the government parlance as a threat to peace, human lives and civil properties the left-wing terrorism is a direct threat to the existence, legitimacy and sovereignty of the nation-state in India. The ascendant noticeability and visibility of agriculture and the 'rural' is coming into national focus day after day with it being turned into a site of domestic contest between the constitutional authority of the nation-state and the extra-parliamentary left-wing extremists body of so-called Naxals and Maoists.

These two genres of non-state domestic and international organisations and their activities are direct challenge to the rationale of a traditional state everywhere. In this age of globalisation of capital and trade flows, each nation-state in every nook and corner of south Asia is hankering to remain present and rather consolidate the position of authority and legitimacy in the less-globalised policy area of food and farm sector. The nation-state has of late been just attempting to recover the jurisdiction already being increasingly lost in view of the onslaught of international mega-organisations and to seek refuge in the agriculture in view of being already dislodged from the domestic sectors of manufacturing, services, finance, and trade. This may be treated as a state-led agriculture activism. The shrunken mass of agricultural populace in collaboration of domestic and global nongovernmental service organisations is but contesting against the international mega institutions and the nation-state with the intention of just sharing the fruits of economic improvement without being disrupted and uprooted from the 'rural'. This is another side of what constitutes the main force of the agriculture activism. These two sources of agriculture activism, differing in nature, objectives and way of functioning, are but at sharp conflict with each other, only to assume alarming proportion in view of increasing penetration of institutions of global capitalism in south Asia.

A Remark

Backdrop being provided by the tripartite bitter conflict in orchestration with regard to establishing an arena of influence in agriculture, a budding activism is in sight in south Asia. An 'activism' there inside and pertaining to the countryside is amply observable. The rural populace and their middle-class intelligentsia including the media as well as the state are boisterous participants in this activism. Populace is raising the banner on the streets, media agents are chattering on the screen, and the statesmen are raising the slogans in the parliament. The passionate debate on the price rise in the corridors of the Parliament of India in February 2010 is a pertinent reminder.

In its immediate motivation, this sudden bout of vocal and otherwise activities is an outcome generated by the interplay of contradictory forces of presently ongoing actual instances of agrarian distress and explosive boom in rural aspiration. What has happened is simple: with accelerated growth being obtained in the last two decades since the onset of the neo-liberal reforms and economic liberalisation, the inequity has increased. This has in turn led to a profound sense of deprivation. The economic advances in the macroeconomy and in particular the information technology and information technology-enabled services sector

have made the continued acceptance of the inherited economic deplorable position and status intolerable. When a section of population see the others, who were earlier in a similar position and status, marching ahead, a sense of relative deprivation originate. This sense of deprivation is but quite distinct from the one emerging from the actual worsening of material conditions as a result of economic stagnation and decline. It is the combination of these two qualitatively different senses of deprivation that led to the sense of loss and deficit among the rural masses. It is not accurately the anguish and sense of loss about the neglect of agriculture but rather the changing scenario of the power equations among the machineries of nation-states, intermediaries of international mega-institutions and domestic service organisations of rural populace that is conducive to something called 'agriculture activism' on the part of all contending forces. The activism is the offshoot of the bitter tripartite contest to protect the zone of influence and hegemony. The imminent agrarian crisis with food insecurity in general has but undoubtedly added fire to the fuel of activism shown by global agents, native politicians and local bureaucrats towards agriculture.

In this unprecedented activism shown by the native rural populace on the one hand and the governments of nation-states on the other in south Asia, there are two remarkable facets which become immediately evident. One, such an activism is sprouting at a time when the very landscape called 'rural' is shrinking at an unprecedented historical pace, and the urban administrative jurisdiction and the boundary is correspondingly expanding at the cost of it. In south Asia, most of the metropolitan cities have already enlarged vastly in space, population, and pool of man-made resources by infringement upon the landscape of the surrounding rural hinterlands. The previous ascendancy and pre-eminence of the agriculture has already been waning for quite some time with its declining share in the national income (less than a quarter) and the pool of aggregate labour force (almost nearing half). In the present phase of withering away of the location of primacy of agriculture in the national economy and society, the origin of agricultural activism cannot thus be associated with the arguments invoking its primary hugeness. The present activism is not at all rooted and grounded in the old argument of dominance of agriculture in the national economy and society reckoned in terms of its relative contribution standing at more than half to the making of the national income and being the home to more than three quarter of national labour force in the south Asia. It is rather with the shrivelling of the 'rural' that the advocacy for the 'agriculture' is correlated with – a paradox. In comparison to all the preceding historical epochs, this gathering is a shrunk horde, bereft of its huge earlier head-count-number-power. That mass of agricultural actors who had already been reduced increasingly in numbers in the shrunken landscape of the rural is now coming out both on the national as well as the global platforms. Second, such an activism is emerging also at a time when there is the phenomenon of the shrinking interference and influence of the nation-state in the manufacturing and service sectors of the economy. Globalisation has pushed the nation-state nearly out of these sectors. It is the sway of unrestrained private entrepreneurs and free market rather than the government license and control which regulate the working of these sectors of activity. Retreating from such heavily globalised and liberalised sectors, the nation-state has been under compulsion attempting to seek refuge into the confines of the less-globalised sector of agricultural food and rural farming activity in all countries of south Asia. It has a history of being here since long and attempts to continue to be stuck here. In other words, the present stakeholder is not only the shrunken agricultural population and their middle-class advocates in the intelligentsia and media but the ruling classes of the shrunken nation-state itself. There is rural populace activism and there is state-led activism, and coupling together it constitutes the 'agriculture activism' proper. It is the instrumentality of global level forces that is giving the force of impetus to both the shrunken state and the shrunken rural mass in raising the spectre of demand for agrarian justice today.

Whatever be the historical paradoxical backdrop, an activism creates a set of multiple intended as well as unintended effects – a set of consequences – in the society. Such outcomes are either conducive or detrimental to the interest of the activists who are involved in carrying it forward. Since this specific activism is carried forward not only by the agricultural populace but also by a mixed-class of actors from the intelligentsia, media and social activist, there is all possibility of a decisive impact on the very discipline of knowledge under which the activism is studied – the agricultural economics and rural sociology. Such a specific discipline of study has already been continuously enriched with volumes of publications by lay-wo/men as well as budding experts in the region. There is now flooding of books being published on agricultural economics every year by manifold publishing houses. Increasing number of agriculture newsletters, journals and magazines are being published, and establishment of agrarian institutes in the country has multiplied. It is thus rather contemporaneously than ever before that the agricultural economics as a profession has got the prospect of maturing into a vibrant and visibly attractive occupation in the academic space of urban south Asia. A potential future direction of its growth may be read in the following remark:

Power will always attract the opportunists and the servile persons who have no scruples in identifying themselves with what they consider to be the 'winning side' and by their servility hope to gain, and do indeed gain very materially. In the charge of intellectual servility I would include all those globalized Indian academics today, who are intelligent enough to know very well what the real economic mechanisms are, but who find it impolitic to ever mention it in their writings, because their objective is to be acceptable to and to be lionized by the powerful North-dominated academic establishment It is a difficult situation indeed when comprador thinking and comprador elements pervade the intelligentsia and the administration, when many bureaucrats and academics alike in the positions of power, are prepared to sell their birthright for a mess of pottage The solution to the attempted recolonisation is to fight back through theoretical analysis and exposure of the agenda of neo-imperialism. Never has the discipline of economics in particular become more of a battlefield than it is today – as the other disciplines like history and politics have always been. This is not a time for continuing intellectual servility to the self-serving ideas generated in the mainstream of theorising in the Northern universities: the real issue must be understood and young people in particular must come forward to provide the badly-needed theoretical competence and moral commitment for a renewed resistance to economic recolonisation (Utsa Patnaik, 2007, pp.31-46).

All in all, the colonial discourse about the turnaround of the revenue paying capacity of peasantry and the post-colonial elitist concern and vocabulary of public discourse about the poverty and unemployment is at present being increasingly replaced with agitated debate about the agrarian justice in terms of food security for marginalised caste, class and tribe in the countryside. The discipline and profession of agricultural economics is about to enter its golden age now. The agriculture activism provides the space for its flourishing. The seed of a budding radical political economy of agriculture has already been sown, and the call to join it is getting stronger.

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