

What are the Indian Farmers' demands in Lok Sabha Elections 2019?

Rakesh: Just before India's 2019 parliamentary elections, farmers' groups from across the country have come together to present an 18-point agenda outlining their problems and demand political parties to include it in their manifestos with a clear timeline for implementation. Our country is still an agri-based economy with over 60% of the population dependent on agriculture. A few days back, the All India Coordination Committee of Farmers' Movement comprising all the significant farmers unions in India released an 18-point agenda demanding all the political parties to include in their manifestos with clear timelines for implementation.

These unions have voiced their displeasure with the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government and has said it is not doing enough to address rural distress. The Suno India Show reached out to representatives of these farmers' unions to understand more.

Kannaiyan: So my name is Kannaiyan Subramaniam. I am the General Secretary of South Indian Coordination Committee of Farmers' Movements. Which is a coordination of many farmers' movements in South India. And we are associated with, we are member of Indian Coordination Committee of Farmers' Movements. And also member of Via Campesina, La Via Campesina, International peasant's movement.

Kannaiyan: I am a farmer by profession. I am doing farming in small piece of land. So that eighteen points, because our forty farmers' unions across the country, they met in Delhi and there are expressing what all their demands. We just compiled all those eighteen demands and we have said with the media but actually, the main meeting which we conducted in Delhi on RCEP, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which is free trade and investment agreement India is negotiating with fifteen other countries in Asian region. That comprises more than close to fifty per cent of the world's population and major economies like China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, all those countries, along with ten Asian countries with whom we already have a free trade agreement. What we fear, Indian farmers are demanding fair and remunerative price for their produce. For a long time. This is not a new demand anywhere. It was Swaminathan Committee which recommended to give a fifty per cent margin above the cost of the production. To ensure that and remunerative prices, any country which should have policy space and to regulate the tray import surges coming from outside the country like the edible oil which we have been importing in a large quantity, more than 60 per cent of the India's domestic consumption of edible oil is coming in the form of either palm oil or sunflower oil, which has very badly impacted the local market in India of the oil seeds. And destroyed the local production and it created a huge depression in the farming community. Similarly, time to time, we have imported sugar, we have imported sometimes milk powder, we imported, we are importing pulses in very large quantities, more than fifty per cent of the domestic consumption in India is met by imports. So, this is not an ideal economy where our small and marginal farmers can survive. Indian small and marginal farmers are not just made to compete. The industrial scale farmers of the Western countries or the palm oil plantation in Indonesia, Malaysia and other countries and Indian farmers also exposed to the [unclear] of the developed countries, they are giving huge subsidies to their farmers. Predominantly they are the corporates who are producing the grains and oil seeds and whatever you call. So, small and marginal farmers were at the receiving end of very small, minimum supports, like Minimum Support Price which is not very effectively implemented in India, and the crops are failed, there is no effective insurance schemes to bail out the farmers from the loss they have met out. And an absence of stronger social security. If a farmer woman or man, man suffers any disease, they go to hospital, their economy is totally ruined. And some schemes like this Health Insurance Scheme at the end of the term of Narendra Modi ji's government has come in, we have to wait and see how it is being implemented. In different states, there are different social security policies are there. Farmers need a sound, old age pension. Widows of those farmers who have committed suicide needed to be supported. Their children's educated should be

taken care, and the free education should be provided to the farmers. It's all those things together will make the farmers to get themselves out of the crisis. But the country is going in the opposite direction. For example, the Fasal Beema Yojna, which Narendra Modi ji implemented in this country, we were all very enthusiastic to see that the Beema Yojna will really help the failing of the fasal in the farms. But it helped the private insurance companies to see a windfall profit, that is more than 11 thousand crores, they have made profits, whereas farmers were not adequately compensated. So these are all the issues together farmers raise.

Rakesh: Just before India's 2019 parliamentary elections, farmers' groups from across the country have come together to present an 18-point agenda outlining their problems and demand political parties to include it in their manifestos with a clear timeline for implementation. Our country is still an agri-based economy with over 60% of the population dependent on agriculture. A few days back, the All India Coordination Committee of Farmers' Movement comprising all the significant farmers unions in India released an 18-point agenda demanding all the political parties to include in their manifestos with clear timelines for implementation.

These unions have voiced their displeasure with the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government and has said it is not doing enough to address rural distress. The Suno India Show reached out to representatives of these farmers' unions to understand more.

Kannaiyan: So my name is Kannaiyan Subramaniam. I am the General Secretary of South Indian Coordination Committee of Farmers' Movements. Which is a coordination of many farmers' movements in South India. And we are associated with, we are member of Indian Coordination Committee of Farmers' Movements. And also member of Via Campesina, La Via Campesina, International peasant's movement.

Kannaiyan: I am a farmer by profession. I am doing farming in small piece of land. So that eighteen points, because our forty farmers' unions across the country, they met in Delhi and there are expressing what all their demands. We just compiled all those eighteen demands and we have said with the media but actually, the main meeting which we conducted in Delhi on RCEP, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which is free trade and investment agreement India is negotiating with fifteen other countries in Asian region. That comprises more than close to fifty per cent of the world's population and major economies like China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, all those countries, along with ten Asian countries with whom we already have a free trade agreement. What we fear, Indian farmers are demanding fair and remunerative price for their produce. For a long time. This is not a new demand anywhere. It was Swaminathan Committee which recommended to give a fifty per cent margin above the cost of the production. To ensure that and remunerative prices, any country which should have policy space and to regulate the tray import surges coming from outside the country like the edible oil which we have been importing in a large quantity, more than 60 per cent of the India's domestic consumption of edible oil is coming in the form of either palm oil or sunflower oil, which has very badly impacted the local market in India of the oil seeds. And destroyed the local production and it created a huge depression in the farming community. Similarly, time to time, we have imported sugar, we have imported sometimes milk powder, we imported, we are importing pulses in very large quantities, more than fifty per cent of the domestic consumption in India is met by imports. So, this is not an ideal economy where our small and marginal farmers can survive. Indian small and marginal farmers are not just made to compete. The industrial scale farmers of the Western countries or the palm oil plantation in Indonesia, Malaysia and other countries and Indian farmers also exposed to the [unclear] of the developed countries, they are giving huge subsidies to their farmers. Predominantly they are the corporates who are producing the grains and oil seeds and whatever you call. So, small and marginal farmers were at the receiving end of very small, minimum supports, like Minimum Support Price which is not very effectively implemented in India, and the crops are failed, there is no effective insurance schemes to bail out the

farmers from the loss they have met out. And an absence of stronger social security. If a farmer woman or man, man suffers any disease, they go to hospital, their economy is totally ruined. And some schemes like this Health Insurance Scheme at the end of the term of Narendra Modi ji's government has come in, we have to wait and see how it is being implemented. In different states, there are different social security policies are there. Farmers need a sound, old age pension. Widows of those farmers who have committed suicide needed to be supported. Their children's educated should be taken care, and the free education should be provided to the farmers. It's all those things together will make the farmers to get themselves out of the crisis. But the country is going in the opposite direction. For example, the Fasal Beema Yojna, which Narendra Modi ji implemented in this country, we were all very enthusiastic to see that the Beema Yojna will really help the failing of the fasal in the farms. But it helped the private insurance companies to see a windfall profit, that is more than 11 thousand crores, they have made profits, whereas farmers were not adequately compensated. So these are all the issues together farmers raise.

Rakesh: A couple more things that I wanted to ask from this eighteen point agenda that you've put out. Is, you know, the demand for free electricity for farmers for irrigation were tube-wells. I know some States are already doing this, but you are looking at you know, the whole country, the farmers are all, all the other States to also get benefited by this scheme. But isn't that a problem in terms of you know, the decreasing groundwater resources that are happening every year? Or, you know, shouldn't we be promoting something like a Kusum scheme where you know, there's net metering that is happening, and just out of curiosity, I want to understand, you know, why there's been more demand for free electricity rather than like, I would say, electricity you know, which could also be an additional income through solar. Is that something that was thought about or what's the thoughts on that?

Kannaiyan: See, I'm from Tamil Nadu. And there was bloody struggle in the past that farmers' lives were taken by the police-firing government is the raise of the electricity price in Tamil Nadu. Historically, Tamil Nadu farmers' movement were oppressed by the state like that. And, here, it is the electricity is totally free. And in Karnataka also, electricity is provided free of cost for the farmers. And, I am in agreement with you that over-exploitation of water might happen. In, when you were providing power. But look at what is that government is investing in re-charging the groundwater and what is the amount of budgetary allocations in each State to improve the water storing capacity of the soil. It is not. And only those farmers, for example, I want to give you an example. In the delta region of Tamil Nadu, where the water is leased from Cauvery farmers are using delta water. So, those farmers do not have a bore-well or a pump-set or a well to take the water from the ground and irrigating. They are just using the channel irrigation. If you look at the western parts of Tamil Nadu, for example, Coimbatore, Erode district, farmers are investing huge capital in digging the bore-wells or the local wells, and they are investing lot of money in installing the pump-sets and irrigating their lands. Water is a key resource in agriculture. And to take the water from the ground level is very expensive for the farmers. If their meters are fixed, the farmers, the money is collected from the farmer. Farmers cannot anymore afford this. You can think of any other remedies but not charging the farmers, which is what farmers unions' stance is. The solar power production, I welcome this. No problem. In Tamil Nadu also we are facing a problem of getting a new connection, it takes years-- even more than one decade for the farmers for a new connection. Now, not much, free installation is made. They have made it under the self-finance scheme. Farmers are paying up to 4 lakhs per pump set to get a connection from the Tamil Nadu government. So that is also expensive and exploring other ideas are welcome. But the solar system also for 12 hours continues water is pumped out. Solar is also blamed. But all such kind of blames are coming to the smaller, marginal farmers, whereas the big polluters like Tiruppur where the water of the river tributary to Cauvery river Noyyal, is completely is the first dead river in the country. So that water quality is contaminated. It not usable for, either for drinking water or for agriculture. So we are not putting the blames, we are not pressurising the

industries to function responsibly or sustainably. When some demands come from farmers, all the corners, they are coming in and asking the farmers, but this is not sustainable. This is really unfortunate in this country. We are strongly supporting heavily subsidised power supply to the pump-sets for the farmers.

Rakesh: you talk about you know, insuring minimum income for farmers, that is 10,000 rupees per acre per farmer to all farming sectors in the country. And you know, another thing that I thought was the MNREGA scheme, that it should be linked to agriculture. But there have been studies done on the amount of you know, expenditure, I mean, I'm completely in agreement that there needs to be a support that is done to the farmers, but when you are asking for, for example, let's say, implementation of something like the Swaminathan Committee Report and also the same report we're talking about you know, giving 10,000 rupees per acre per year, per farmer. Little contradicting, right? Is it like, you wish at least one of it happens or you know, what was the reason behind, I'm too...a little contradicting once. Just trying to understand.

Kannaiyan: So being a farmer a myself, and see, it is not all the farmers unions raised this that the direct income should be made available to the farmers in that meeting. But largely, I'm in agreement. Now Modi ji has started sending 6000 rupees per year for the farmers. It is taken from Modi ji's scheme incentivising the farmers. Ashok Gulati, the eminent economist, he's supporting this. And they are calling this a big, great incentive scheme, like that. But I'm bit disagreement with the small peanut money given to the farmers. But anything like Telangana government which is implementing based on per acre basis, supporting the farmers. So that kind of support in a rainfed farm would be a great support to that family. So a farmer who is in crisis, multiple crises, will look for any sort of bail out, so in that way only we are saying this. But imagine this demand of this remunerative price, even before Swaminathan Committee, for many decades, farmers are demanding. It is a very distant reality. We do not whether it would happen tomorrow or day after tomorrow. Until then, some direct income support if comes to a farmer, farmer's family, that would be a great help. Your question to the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act, in Tamil Nadu there was a meeting. I think Aruna Roy was also there by that time. And we had a meeting with a very high level officials in Tamil Nadu. They have issued a government order to link these to agriculture. I mean, farm pond creation kind of things. The different method they are using to implement scheme, the neighbouring Karnataka State where machines are used, contractors are there, and ghost-workers are working. In Tamil Nadu, also the same thing happening. The way it is being implemented defeats the very purpose of Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and this has to be effectively implemented. Modi ji was criticising NREGA and some of the economists like Chidambaram and Alluhwalia were criticising NREGA during UPA regime but no one is opposing NREGA now. But they, no one is paying attention to effectively implement the NREGA. So the spirit of NREGA, the very purpose of creating durable assets and also inhering employment in the rural India and also supporting the farm sector is not happening. So that should happen. Our simple demand is, this has to bring to agriculture, so both agriculture, farmers who are participating in agriculture schemes should grow together. This is what our demand is.

One other thing I was also there at the Farmers' March that happened last year in Delhi. One thing that's been talked by the farmers I felt was about the special session in Parliament. Everyone said that there should be a special session in Parliament on agriculture issues. But the government skipped it this year, and why is it such a big issue for the government to not to do, and to the farmers, why do they need this special session?

In a sovereign country, Parliament plays a key role in bringing legislation and framing policies for its citizens. So it would be appropriate for this country, which is predominantly an agriculture country that the parliamentarian should convene a special session of the Parliament and discuss, debate all

the issues facing the farmers. That should be the beginning of the Parliament-- to pay more attention towards resolving the farm, farming crisis. Unfortunately, it is not happening. If you look at the composition of the Parliament members, and their parties, even though many people who are coming from the rural India, they are by heart representing the industrial sector, not the farming sector. So they have to realise that there is deeper crisis because of the ill-engineered policies which we are following in this country. Neglecting the farm sector for decades, not giving its due importance to the farming sector, and that is the reason for the crisis of the farming sector. It needs to be debated and discussed in the Parliament. So some way forward might come in the Parliament. In that [unclear] we are demanding the sovereign country, Parliament, the world's largest democracy, to discuss its largest farm sector and its problems.. It is up to the Parliament to discuss and debate and find a solution to the farmers. Try to find a solution.

But then why is that government not agreeing to it? I mean, how difficult would it be for the government to do a session on agriculture in the Parliament?

So the, as a farmers' representative myself, as a political, politically, political activist for a long time, and my understand is, the parties who were coming to the power, either UPA or NDA, so their ideological commitment is not towards the farm sector. And the second thing, ideologically, they do not know the answer, how to resolve the crisis in the rural area. This is the problem. The policies of the pro-industrial, pro-capitalistic centralised production and de-centralised distribution, liberalised economy, inviting foreign companies to invest in all the sectors, irrespective of its bad impacts, without review, free trade, this kind of policies are responsible to the crisis. They whole-heartedly believe that those policies are beneficial to India. SO that is the reason. If they convene a special session of the Parliament, and they are not confident that they can resolve the problems of the farmers. For example, Modi ji is inviting Israeli companies to invest in India. He is very much fascinated by the Israeli corporations, the Israeli Kibbutz Cooperative, which is producing milk. Is it not that Indian cooperatives who are producing milk, how made India is the largest producer of milk? By the backyard milk production? By 150 million farmers' families who are contributing to the cooperative milk sector and the private milk sector. Together, we have made India is largest milk producer. And the 20 per cent of the GDP of agriculture is coming from the milk sector? Modi ji is believing in industrial model milk production. So through the national schemes like Horticulture Mission and other schemes, they have invited Israeli government to participate by establishing the centres of excellences in India to follow the Israeli model in India. Is that, is Israel the model for us? And also, Dutch companies are here. They have also created with government money, centres of excellence for piggery, for dairy, and if we followed them. The model which is followed in other lands in India, will it cater the, will it generate employment? We already by participation of the masses of this country, we have made India big in milk production. So, they are travelling in opposite directions. They believe that something in the West they want to make India like European Union or United States of America. That will bring disaster to India. India is a country where you need the horizontally spread policies like de-centralised model. Small and medium and marginal level in industries, agro-based industries should be there in India. But their travel is in the other direction. That is the reason they are scared of convening the Parliament. And also the macroeconomists who are advising those governments are also convinced of the same capitalistic free trade and liberalised economy. So I mean, if we agree to the fact that the central government does not have interest in the farmer issues, I mean, one thing that I felt was contradicting in the eighteen point agenda was about you know, the land acquisition being completely transferred to the Centre from the State government. Wouldn't, I mean, I feel like it would be a bigger problem if that happens. I mean, correct me if I'm wrong...

I'm in complete agreement with you. This point was not well-discussed in the meeting. And I mean, this, actually we convened that press-meet to give importance to the RCEP issues because that was the meeting which we held. So this point cropped up and I was not really, it was not very discussed in

the meeting that later we realised this went to the media again. But we are reviewing this. All the eighteen points, Indian Coordination Committee is going to sit again in the month of May and we will completely review all those points, but this point is little bit controversial point. Even myself is not in agreement with this. And somehow this cropped up in the press-meet.

Rakesh: And regarding the negotiations, I see that there's been you know, specific mention about you know, that all the free trade agreement should be, I mean it should go through the Parliament, right?

Yudhvir: So, in a democracy, it is not impossible to discuss the free trade agreements before committing in the detailed agreement through Parliament. I think this is happening in the member countries of European Union. But look at WTO. WTO, the executive, the government was negotiating WTO. GAT agreement, General agreement on Trade and Tariff. Which was agreed. But there were many points which required constitutional amendment in India to comply with the GAT agreement. The WTO agreement. And similarly the free trade agreements, we do not know. Unlike WTO agreement, the Bilateral Free Trade agreements are the RCEP kind of partnership agreements, they are negotiating in complete secrecy. The citizen of this country is not informed, what it is that they're negotiating. While they are making commitments to support farmers, farmers are not taken into account. They might be having some informal consultation with industries and others because they are safeguarding their interests. Whenever they are negotiating free trade agreements, they tend to give up the interest of the farmers in order to get some services or other benefits. So this is so dangerous thing. And for a political community it is important to have all the free trade agreements before signing to the scrutiny of the Parliament. This is what our demand is. Otherwise the executives, I mean the trade ministry people, the others who are negotiating, they do some mistake, and after many years, like this public procurement issue, because of the India's mistake, by the time of negotiation and signing it, now we are suffering. So it should be the subject matter of the sovereign country's Parliament to scrutinise all the free trade agreements before they commit in the agreement

We also spoke to Mr Yudhvir Singh who is the national head for Bharatiya Kisan Union about their demands>

Yudhvir: Abhi jo 2000 rupaye inhone ko kiya hai ki 6000 rupaye saal mein kisaan ko support, additional support denge. Usmein, uska koi maayene hai nahin. Pehli baat toh hamari basic demand additional support pe thi nahi. Hamari cost ki thi. Aur agar humko profitable cost mil jaati hai, hamari input pe profit theek se lagake milta hai, toh humko koi kuchh nahi chahiye sarkar se. Yeh sab cheezein isliye maangi jaati hain, sarkar humko betray karti hai, humko theek hamari prices nahin deti hai, mandi mein hamara exploitation hota hai. Hamne sarkar se yeh jo sarkar ne rakha hai, yeh sab chunauvi agenda hai, chunauvi ghoshna patra mein rakh ke ise kisaano ko so jaane ke 6000 rupaye milein. Kisaan yeh samajhta hai ki yeh 6000 rupaye koi maayane rahkte nahin hai, 500 rupaye maheene yeh additional support se kuchh hone wala nahin hai. Humko toh keematein chahiye. Aur agar inko additional support kuchh deni thi toh jo Telangana border hai, usmein jis tarah se vo dete hain, unhone 2 achhe [unclear] kisaan ko. Irrigated mein 20,000 rupaye hote hain, aur unirrigated mein 10,000 rupaye hain. Kyunki voh help karte hain, toh us se toh phir bhi thoda bohot kisaan ko yeh hota hai ki chalo, vo survive kar lega. Yeh toh kuchh bhi isse hoga kya, 6000 rupaye ka, koi maayene hi nahin hai.

Rakesh: Sir, do point ke baare mein main aapse specifically poochhna chahta hoon. Ek hai aapne bola hai NJT jo ban karta hai diesel vehicles ke upar, uspe aap relaxation chahte hain. Aur doosra ek aur point tha ki free electricity dena chahiye taaki tube-well se paani nikal sakein. Yeh dono thode I mean, yeh dono jo aap poochh rahe hain, usmein ek hai groundwater table kam hota hai, which is again difficult for farmers only in future, agar free mein electricity diya jaaye. Doosra, jaise Telangana mein already de rahe hain, that I know. Agar solar se aisa aapne kuchh poochha nahin. Ki solar pumps ka jo Kusum programme hai, uske baare mein aapne kuchh poochha nahin. Aur NJT ka ban ke upar already

Delhi mein aap toh jaante hain ki saans lene se bhi problem hota hai. Toh, yeh poochhna mein thoda, I mean, instead, agar aap koi aur green vehicles ke liye, ya zyada subsidy ke liye, aisa poochh sakte the.

Yudhvir: Dekhiye, kya hai, electricity ke maamle mein, Tamil Nadu mein, Karnataka mein bijli free hai kisaan ko. Punjab mein free hai. Aise Haryana mein nominal charges lete hain, matlab na ke barabar lete hain. Vahin agar aap Uttar Pradesh aur Rajasthan mein jaayein, toh bohot hi zyada charges hain, kisaan de hi nahin pata. [unclear] ko fix charges hain. Fix charges ke upar vo lagta rehta hai, kisaan chalaaye ya na chalaaye meter se. Aur jo meter se bhi hain, per unit inhone charge kar rakha hai. Toh vo itna zyada hai ki kisaan, sambhav hi nahin hai kisaan ke liye. Hamara kehna hai ki kisaan desh ke utpaadan ke liye, ham zabardasti light nahin maang rahe hain jo hum kalyug barsein. Yeh production jo agriculture production hai national growth ke liye karte hain aur government ki policy hai. Industry mein 100 tareeke ki relaxation deti hai vo, industry ko usi tarah se agriculture pe bhi is tarah ki relaxation maang rahe hain agriculture production ke liye, toh vo koi buri baat nahin hai. Nahin, NJT ka hamne yeh kaha, yeh hamara NJT ka hamara, NJT ne diya ki 10 saal ismein NCR mein, Delhi ke aaspaas 10 saal puraane jo tractor hain unhe chalne nahin diya jaayega. Toh hamara yeh kehna hai ki jo tractor jo hai, jab hum tractor ko use karte hain, vo commercial vehicle nahin hai. Vo saal mein uski mileage jo hai vo agar total count karein toh vo 1000 kilometer saal mein nahin chalta hai. Commercial vehicle ek saal mein 40 se 50,000 kilometer chal leta hain. Dono ko ek category mein rakh rahe hain. Kisaan ka 10 lakh rupaye ka tractor aata hai. Kisaan ko 10 saal mein agar tractor ko badalna pade, toh vo kahaan se laayega 10 lakh rupaye har 10 saal ke baad. Uska toh, utilisation hi khet mein karta hai vo, aur usmein itna matlab, [unclear] category mein rakh diya. Kisi ne socha hi nahin ki kaun si vehicle kitni chalti hai. Unko categorise karna chahiye tha. Yeh kahin na kahin chook hui hai NJT se is maamle mein, aur reconcile karna chahiye isko. Logical demand hai hamari. Tractor utna nahin chalta.

Rakesh: Aur sir, aur ek aapne insurance ke baari mein bhi poochha tha. Jaise aapne bola insurance jo Prime Minister ka nikla tha, voh it is more for insurance companies than for farmers. Aapne likha hai.

Yudhvir: Hamne bola nahin, vo government ke record bol rahe hain. Government ne jo peechhe kiya saara, usmein government ka apni jo report hai usmein hai ki zyada profit companiyon ko mila, kisaan ko kuchh mila nahin hai. Ab jab tak kisaan ko per, jo khet ko unit nahin maana jaayega, total uska survey mein transparency nahin hogi, companiyaan kya karti hain? Company visible hi nahin hai. Private companiyon ko yeh kaam de diya hai, private company visible hi nahin hai. Kisaan ko pata hi nahin hai ki kis company ka daftar kahaan par hai. Us zille mein koi office nahin, pardes mein koi office nahin. Kisaan kisko intimate kare, kab intimate kare. Unke proper survey nahin hote. Survey mein unka, survey jo hai matlab, vo kisaano ke saath hera pheri karte hain. Unke [unclear] treat nahin karte hain. Toh yeh sab cheezein pe gaur karne ki aavashyakta hai. Jab tak usko farmer friendly nahin banaya jaayega, tab tak uska koi laabh nahin hai. Usmein bohot hi private companiyon ki taraf se humein saare suggestion government ko likh ke de diye hain. Bohot hi lapoone hain, jiski vajah se companiyaan uska istemaal apne phayeda ke liye kar rahi hain.

Rakesh: Yeh aapko lagta hai koi political party saare 18 points aapke lega? Like, Congress ho ya BJP ho ya regional parties ho? Saare 18 points pe aapko lag raha koi party guarantee degi?

Yudhvir: Dekhiye humne, hum toh basic unhe, voh toh unka attitude unke ghoshna patra saamne aayenge tab pata chalega. Ki kisne kitna gambhirta se humko liya hai. Aur baaki hamara jo, hamko apni baat jo pohochaane ka jo prayaas tha vo humne kiya. Unko apni baat pohonchayi hai ki yeh hamare demands hain aur in demands ko apne chunaav ghoshna patra mein daalein taaki aane wale samaye mein jiski sarkar banein vo apne aap ko, baat maanke chale ki humne inse promise kiya tha aur yeh pooraa karna hai.

Some of the demands being made by farmers across the country seem to have found way to leading party manifestos. Both CPI(M) and Congress Manifestos which were released over the last few days had the agrarian crisis prominently placed in their manifestos. CPI (M) promises to enforce the farmers right to sell their produce at a Minimum Support Price, which is at least 50 per cent higher than the total cost of production. They hope that this policy will ensure that farmers get sufficient prices for their produces. The CPI (M) manifesto also promises higher minimum wages of Rs 18000 for workers. It also promises farmer friendly seed legislation. It also promises farmer friendly seed legislation.

Congress party's manifesto has assured that it would put the farmers on the path from "Karz Maafi" to "Karz Mukti". This will be done through remunerative prices, lower input costs, and assured access to institutional credit. The manifesto has promised a separate "Kisan Budget" for the farmers every year. Congress also has promised to establish a permanent National Commission on Agricultural Development apart from redesigning the existing crop insurance schemes. CPI(M) too have said that they will institute a much more comprehensive crop insurance scheme which will cover all risks for crops and cattle & covering all farmers including tenant farmers among others.

While some of their demands have made it through, other farmers are choosing to take matters in their own hands. In Nizamabad Lok Sabha Constituency of Telangana State, over 170 farmers are contesting elections. The farmers had filed their nominations protesting the alleged failure of the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi to ensure minimum support price for turmeric and red jowar (sorghum) produce. Now to see what the ruling party BJP will promise in it's manifesto.

Rakesh: A couple more things that I wanted to ask from this eighteen-point agenda that you've put out. Is, you know, the demand for free electricity for farmers for irrigation were tube-wells. I know some States are already doing this, but you are looking at you know, the whole country, the farmers are all, all the other States to also get benefited by this scheme. But isn't that a problem in terms of you know, the decreasing groundwater resources that are happening every year? Or, you know, shouldn't we be promoting something like a Kusum scheme where you know, there's net metering that is happening, and just out of curiosity, I want to understand, you know, why there's been more demand for free electricity rather than like, I would say, electricity you know, which could also be an additional income through solar. Is that something that was thought about or what's the thoughts on that?

Kannaiyan: See, I'm from Tamil Nadu. And there was bloody struggle in the past that farmers' lives were taken by the police-firing government is the raise of the electricity price in Tamil Nadu. Historically, Tamil Nadu farmers' movement were oppressed by the state like that. And, here, it is the electricity is totally free. And in Karnataka also, electricity is provided free of cost for the farmers. And, I am in agreement with you that over-exploitation of water might happen. In, when you were providing power. But look at what is that government is investing in re-charging the groundwater and what is the amount of budgetary allocations in each State to improve the water storing capacity of the soil. It is not. And only those farmers, for example, I want to give you an example. In the delta region of Tamil Nadu, where the water is leased from Cauvery farmers are using delta water. So, those farmers do not have a bore-well or a pump-set or a well to take the water from the ground and irrigating. They are just using the channel irrigation. If you look at the western parts of Tamil Nadu, for example, Coimbatore, Erode district, farmers are investing huge capital in digging the bore-wells or the local wells, and they are investing lot of money in installing the pump-sets and irrigating their lands. Water is a key resource in agriculture. And to take the water from the ground level is very expensive for the farmers. If their meters are fixed, the farmers, the money is collected from the farmer. Farmers cannot anymore afford this. You can think of any other remedies but not charging the farmers, which is what farmers unions' stance is. The solar power production, I welcome this. No problem. In Tamil Nadu also we are facing a problem of getting a new connection, it takes years-- even

more than one decade for the farmers for a new connection. Now, not much, free installation is made. They have made it under the self-finance scheme. Farmers are paying up to 4 lakhs per pump set to get a connection from the Tamil Nadu government. So that is also expensive and exploring other ideas are welcome. But the solar system also for 12 hours continues water is pumped out. Solar is also blamed. But all such kind of blames are coming to the smaller, marginal farmers, whereas the big polluters like Tiruppur where the water of the river tributary to Cauvery river Noyyal, is completely is the first dead river in the country. So that water quality is contaminated. It not usable for, either for drinking water or for agriculture. So we are not putting the blames, we are not pressurising the industries to function responsibly or sustainably. When some demands come from farmers, all the corners, they are coming in and asking the farmers, but this is not sustainable. This is really unfortunate in this country. We are strongly supporting heavily subsidised power supply to the pump-sets for the farmers.

Rakesh: you talk about you know, insuring minimum income for farmers, that is 10,000 rupees per acre per farmer to all farming sectors in the country. And you know, another thing that I thought was the MNRGA scheme, that it should be linked to agriculture. But there have been studies done on the amount of you know, expenditure, I mean, I'm completely in agreement that there needs to be a support that is done to the farmers, but when you are asking for, for example, let's say, implementation of something like the Swaminathan Committee Report and also the same report we're talking about you know, giving 10,000 rupees per acre per year, per farmer. Little contradicting, right? Is it like, you wish at least one of it happens or you know, what was the reason behind, I'm too...a little contradicting once. Just trying to understand.

Kannaiyan: So being a farmer a myself, and see, it is not all the farmers unions raised this that the direct income should be made available to the farmers in that meeting. But largely, I'm in agreement. Now Modi ji has started sending 6000 rupees per year for the farmers. It is taken from Modi ji's scheme incentivising the farmers. Ashok Gulati, the eminent economist, he's supporting this. And they are calling this a big, great incentive scheme, like that. But I'm bit disagreement with the small peanut money given to the farmers. But anything like Telangana government which is implementing based on per acre basis, supporting the farmers. So that kind of support in a rainfed farm would be a great support to that family. So a farmer who is in crisis, multiple crises, will look for any sort of bail out, so in that way only we are saying this. But imagine this demand of this remunerative price, even before Swaminathan Committee, for many decades, farmers are demanding. It is a very distant reality. We do not whether it would happen tomorrow or day after tomorrow. Until then, some direct income support if comes to a farmer, farmer's family, that would be a great help. Your question to the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act, in Tamil Nadu there was a meeting. I think Aruna Roy was also there by that time. And we had a meeting with a very high level officials in Tamil Nadu. They have issued a government order to link these to agriculture. I mean, farm pond creation kind of things. The different method they are using to implement scheme, the neighbouring Karnataka State where machines are used, contractors are there, and ghost-workers are working. In Tamil Nadu, also the same thing happening. The way it is being implemented defeats the very purpose of Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and this has to be effectively implemented. Modi ji was criticising NREGA and some of the economists like Chidambaram and Alluhwalia were criticising NREGA during UPA regime, but no one is opposing NREGA now. But they, no one is paying attention to effectively implement the NREGA. So the spirit of NREGA, the very purpose of creating durable assets and also inhering employment in the rural India and also supporting the farm sector is not happening. So that should happen. Our simple demand is, this has to bring to agriculture, so both agriculture, farmers who are participating in agriculture schemes should grow together. This is what our demand is.

One other thing I was also there at the Farmers' March that happened last year in Delhi. One thing that's been talked by the farmers I felt was about the special session in Parliament. Everyone said that there should be a special session in Parliament on agriculture issues. But the government skipped it this year, and why is it such a big issue for the government to not to do, and to the farmers, why do they need this special session?

In a sovereign country, Parliament plays a key role in bringing legislation and framing policies for its citizens. So it would be appropriate for this country, which is predominantly an agriculture country that the parliamentarian should convene a special session of the Parliament and discuss, debate all the issues facing the farmers. That should be the beginning of the Parliament-- to pay more attention towards resolving the farm, farming crisis. Unfortunately, it is not happening. If you look at the composition of the Parliament members, and their parties, even though many people who are coming from the rural India, they are by heart representing the industrial sector, not the farming sector. So they have to realise that there is deeper crisis because of the ill-engineered policies which we are following in this country. Neglecting the farm sector for decades, not giving its due importance to the farming sector, and that is the reason for the crisis of the farming sector. It needs to be debated and discussed in the Parliament. So, some way forward might come in the Parliament. In that [unclear] we are demanding the sovereign country, Parliament, the world's largest democracy, to discuss its largest farm sector and its problems. It is up to the Parliament to discuss and debate and find a solution to the farmers. Try to find a solution.

But then why is that government not agreeing to it? I mean, how difficult would it be for the government to do a session on agriculture in the Parliament?

So the, as a farmers' representative myself, as a political, politically, political activist for a long time, and my understand is, the parties who were coming to the power, either UPA or NDA, so their ideological commitment is not towards the farm sector. And the second thing, ideologically, they do not know the answer, how to resolve the crisis in the rural area. This is the problem. The policies of the pro-industrial, pro-capitalistic centralised production and de-centralised distribution, liberalised economy, inviting foreign companies to invest in all the sectors, irrespective of its bad impacts, without review, free trade, this kind of policies are responsible to the crisis. They whole-heartedly believe that those policies are beneficial to India. SO that is the reason. If they convene a special session of the Parliament, and they are not confident that they can resolve the problems of the farmers. For example, Modi ji is inviting Israeli companies to invest in India. He is very much fascinated by the Israeli corporations, the Israeli Kibbutz Cooperative, which is producing milk. Is it not that Indian cooperatives who are producing milk, how made India is the largest producer of milk? By the backyard milk production? By 150 million farmers' families who are contributing to the cooperative milk sector and the private milk sector. Together, we have made India is largest milk producer. And the 20 per cent of the GDP of agriculture is coming from the milk sector? Modi ji is believing in industrial model milk production. So through the national schemes like Horticulture Mission and other schemes, they have invited Israeli government to participate by establishing the centres of excellences in India to follow the Israeli model in India. Is that, is Israel the model for us? And also, Dutch companies are here. They have also created with government money, centres of excellence for piggery, for dairy, and if we followed them. The model which is followed in other lands in India, will it cater the, will it generate employment? We already by participation of the masses of this country, we have made India big in milk production. So, they are travelling in opposite directions. They believe that something in the West they want to make India like European Union or United States of America. That will bring disaster to India. India is a country where you need the horizontally spread policies like de-centralised model. Small and medium and marginal level in industries, agro-based industries should be there in India. But their travel is in the other direction. That is the reason they are scared of convening the Parliament. And also the macroeconomists who are advising those governments are also convinced

of the same capitalistic free trade and liberalised economy. So I mean, if we agree to the fact that the central government does not have interest in the farmer issues, I mean, one thing that I felt was contradicting in the eighteen point agenda was about you know, the land acquisition being completely transferred to the Centre from the State government. Wouldn't, I mean, I feel like it would be a bigger problem if that happens. I mean, correct me if I'm wrong...

I'm in complete agreement with you. This point was not well-discussed in the meeting. And I mean, this, actually we convened that press-meet to give importance to the RCEP issues because that was the meeting which we held. So this point cropped up and I was not really, it was not very discussed in the meeting that later we realised this went to the media again. But we are reviewing this. All the eighteen points, Indian Coordination Committee is going to sit again in the month of May and we will completely review all those points, but this point is little bit controversial point. Even myself is not in agreement with this. And somehow this cropped up in the press-meet.

Rakesh: And regarding the negotiations, I see that there's been you know, specific mention about you know, that all the free trade agreement should be, I mean it should go through the Parliament, right?

Kannaiyan: So, in a democracy, it is not impossible to discuss the free trade agreements before committing in the detailed agreement through Parliament. I think this is happening in the member countries of European Union. But look at WTO. WTO, the executive, the government was negotiating WTO. GAT agreement, General agreement on Trade and Tariff. Which was agreed. But there were many points which required constitutional amendment in India to comply with the GAT agreement. The WTO agreement. And similarly the free trade agreements, we do not know. Unlike WTO agreement, the Bilateral Free Trade agreements are the RCEP kind of partnership agreements, they are negotiating in complete secrecy. The citizen of this country is not informed, what it is that they're negotiating. While they are making commitments to support farmers, farmers are not taken into account. They might be having some informal consultation with industries and others because they are safeguarding their interests. Whenever they are negotiating free trade agreements, they tend to give up the interest of the farmers in order to get some services or other benefits. So this is so dangerous thing. And for a political community it is important to have all the free trade agreements before signing to the scrutiny of the Parliament. This is what our demand is. Otherwise the executives, I mean the trade ministry people, the others who are negotiating, they do some mistake, and after many years, like this public procurement issue, because of the India's mistake, by the time of negotiation and signing it, now we are suffering. So it should be the subject matter of the sovereign country's Parliament to scrutinise all the free trade agreements before they commit in the agreement

We also spoke to Mr Yudhvir Singh who is the national head for Bharatiya Kisan Union about their demands.

Yudhvir: Abhi jo 2000 rupaye inhone ko kiya hai ki 6000 rupaye saal mein kisaan ko support, additional support denge. Usmein, uska koi maayene hai nahin. Pehli baat toh hamari basic demand additional support pe thi nahi. Hamari cost ki thi. Aur agar humko profitable cost mil jaati hai, hamari input pe profit theek se lagake milta hai, toh humko koi kuchh nahi chahiye sarkar se. Yeh sab cheezein isliye maangi jaati hain, sarkar humko betray karti hai, humko theek hamari prices nahin deti hai, mandi mein hamara exploitation hota hai. Hamne sarkar se yeh jo sarkar ne rakha hai, yeh sab chunauvi agenda hai, chunauvi ghoshna patra mein rakh ke ise kisaano ko so jaane ke 6000 rupaye milein. Kisaan yeh samajhta hai ki yeh 6000 rupaye koi maayane rahkte nahin hai, 500 rupaye maheene yeh additional support se kuchh hone wala nahin hai. Humko toh keematein chahiye. Aur agar inko additional support kuchh deni thi toh jo Telangana border hai, usmein jis tarah se vo dete hain, unhone 2 achhe [unclear] kisaan ko. Irrigated mein 20,000 rupaye hote hain, aur unirrigated mein 10,000

rupaye hain. Kyunki woh help karte hain, toh us se toh phir bhi thoda bohot kisaan ko yeh hota hai ki chalo, vo survive kar lega. Yeh toh kuch bhi isse hoga kya, 6000 rupaye ka, koi maayene hi nahin hai.

Rakesh: Sir, do point ke baare mein main aapse specifically poochhna chahta hoon. Ek hai aapne bola hai NJT jo ban karta hai diesel vehicles ke upar, uspe aap relaxation chahte hain. Aur doosra ek aur point tha ki free electricity dena chahiye taaki tube-well se paani nikal sakein. Yeh dono thode I mean, yeh dono jo aap poochh rahe hain, usmein ek hai groundwater table kam hota hai, which is again difficult for farmers only in future, agar free mein electricity diya jaaye. Doosra, jaise Telangana mein already de rahe hain, that I know. Agar solar se aisa aapne kuchh poochha nahin. Ki solar pumps ka jo Kusum programme hai, uske baare mein aapne kuchh poochha nahin. Aur NJT ka ban ke upar already Delhi mein aap toh jaante hain ki saans lene se bhi problem hota hai. Toh, yeh poochhna mein thoda, I mean, instead, agar aap koi aur green vehicles ke liye, ya zyada subsidy ke liye, aisa poochh sakte the.

Yudhvir: Dekhiye, kya hai, electricity ke maamle mein, Tamil Nadu mein, Karnataka mein bijli free hai kisaan ko. Punjab mein free hai. Aise Haryana mein nominal charges lete hain, matlab na ke barabar lete hain. Vahin agar aap Uttar Pradesh aur Rajasthan mein jaayein, toh bohot hi zyada charges hain, kisaan de hi nahin pata. [unclear] ko fix charges hain. Fix charges ke upar vo lagta rehta hai, kisaan chalaaye ya na chalaaye meter se. Aur jo meter se bhi hain, per unit inhone charge kar rakha hai. Toh vo itna zyada hai ki kisaan, sambhav hi nahin hai kisaan ke liye. Hamara kehna hai ki kisaan desh ke utpaadan ke liye, ham zabardasti light nahin maang rahe hain jo hum kalyug barsein. Yeh production jo agriculture production hai national growth ke liye karte hain aur government ki policy hai. Industry mein 100 tareeke ki relaxation deti hai vo, industry ko usi tarah se agriculture pe bhi is tarah ki relaxation maang rahe hain agriculture production ke liye, toh vo koi buri baat nahin hai. Nahin, NJT ka hamne yeh kaha, yeh hamara NJT ka hamara, NJT ne diya ki 10 saal ismein NCR mein, Delhi ke aaspaas 10 saal puraane jo tractor hain unhe chalne nahin diya jaayega. Toh hamara yeh kehna hai ki jo tractor jo hai, jab hum tractor ko use karte hain, vo commercial vehicle nahin hai. Vo saal mein uski mileage jo hai vo agar total count karein toh vo 1000 kilometer saal mein nahin chalta hai. Commercial vehicle ek saal mein 40 se 50,000 kilometer chal leta hain. Dono ko ek category mein rakh rahe hain. Kisaan ka 10 lakh rupaye ka tractor aata hai. Kisaan ko 10 saal mein agar tractor ko badalna pade, toh vo kahaan se laayega 10 lakh rupaye har 10 saal ke baad. Uska toh, utilisation hi khet mein karta hai vo, aur usmein itna matlab, [unclear] category mein rakh diya. Kisi ne socha hi nahin ki kaun si vehicle kitni chalti hai. Unko categorise karna chahiye tha. Yeh kahin na kahin chook hui hai NJT se is maamle mein, aur reconcile karna chahiye isko. Logical demand hai hamari. Tractor utna nahin chalta.

Rakesh: Aur sir, aur ek aapne insurance ke baari mein bhi poochha tha. Jaise aapne bola insurance jo Prime Minister ka nikla tha, woh it is more for insurance companies than for farmers. Aapne likha hai.

Yudhvir: Hamne bola nahin, vo government ke record bol rahe hain. Government ne jo peechhe kiya saara, usmein government ka apni jo report hai usmein hai ki zyada profit companiyon ko mila, kisaan ko kuchh mila nahin hai. Ab jab tak kisaan ko per, jo khet ko unit nahin maana jaayega, total uska survey mein transparency nahin hogi, kompaniyaan kya karti hain? Company visible hi nahin hai. Private companiyon ko yeh kaam de diya hai, private company visible hi nahin hai. Kisaan ko pata hi nahin hai ki kis company ka daftar kahaan par hai. Us zille mein koi office nahin, pardes mein koi office nahin. Kisaan kisko intimate kare, kab intimate kare. Unke proper survey nahin hote. Survey mein unka, survey jo hai matlab, vo kisaano ke saath hera pheri karte hain. Unke [unclear] treat nahin karte hain. Toh yeh sab cheezein pe gaur karne ki aavashyakta hai. Jab tak usko farmer friendly nahin banaya jaayega, tab tak uska koi laabh nahin hai. Usmein bohot hi private companiyon ki taraf se humein saare suggestion government ko likh ke de diye hain. Bohot hi lapoone hain, jiski wajah se kompaniyaan uska istemaal apne phayeda ke liye kar rahi hain.

Rakesh: Yeh aapko lagta hai koi political party saare 18 points aapke lega? Like, Congress ho ya BJP ho ya regional parties ho? Saare 18 points pe aapko lag raha koi party guarantee degi?

Yudhvir: Dekhiye humne, hum toh basic unhe, woh toh unka attitude unke ghoshna patra saamne aayenge tab pata chalega. Ki kisne kitna gambhirta se humko liya hai. Aur baaki hamara jo, hamko apni baat jo pohochaane ka jo prayaas tha vo humne kiya. Unko apni baat pohonchayi hai ki yeh hamare demands hain aur in demands ko apne chunaav ghoshna patra mein daalein taaki aane wale samaye mein jiski sarkar banein vo apne aap ko, baat maanke chale ki humne inse promise kiya tha aur yeh poora karna hai.

Some of the demands being made by farmers across the country seem to have found way to leading party manifestos. Both CPI(M) and Congress Manifestos which were released over the last few days had the agrarian crisis prominently placed in their manifestos. CPI (M) promises to enforce the farmers right to sell their produce at a Minimum Support Price, which is at least 50 per cent higher than the total cost of production. They hope that this policy will ensure that farmers get sufficient prices for their produces. The CPI (M) manifesto also promises higher minimum wages of Rs 18000 for workers. It also promises farmer friendly seed legislation. It also promises farmer friendly seed legislation.

Congress party's manifesto has assured that it would put the farmers on the path from "Karz Maafi" to "Karz Mukti". This will be done through remunerative prices, lower input costs, and assured access to institutional credit. The manifesto has promised a separate "Kisan Budget" for the farmers every year. Congress also has promised to establish a permanent National Commission on Agricultural Development apart from redesigning the existing crop insurance schemes. CPI(M) too have said that they will institute a much more comprehensive crop insurance scheme which will cover all risks for crops and cattle & covering all farmers including tenant farmers among others.

While some of their demands have made it through, other farmers are choosing to take matters in their own hands. In Nizamabad Lok Sabha Constituency of Telangana State, over 170 farmers are contesting elections. The farmers had filed their nominations protesting the alleged failure of the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi to ensure minimum support price for turmeric and red jowar (sorghum) produce. Now to see what the ruling party BJP will promise in it's manifesto.