

Introduction to Special Issue on Farmer Agitation: A Momentous *Morcha*

Shinder Singh Thandi

University of California, Santa Barbara, USA

The publication of this Special Issue of the *Journal of Sikh and Punjab Studies* coincides with the first anniversary of the largest, widest and longest peaceful farmers' *morcha* (protest) in India with its roots firmly in Punjab and with Punjabi farmers acting as the vanguard of the movement. As thousands of farmer started converging towards Delhi's borders to mark the first anniversary, still totally united on their goals to get the three farm laws revoked and seek legal guarantee on Minimum Support Prices, Prime Minister Modi did a totally unexpected and humiliating U-Turn on November 19, 2021 and announced the revoking of the three controversial farm laws in the coming winter session of Parliament. This announcement demonstrated the power, strength and tenacity of this year-long movement, despite the loss of around 700 farmers' lives.

In preparing for this special issue, back in February 2021, we approached the most eminent academic experts with extensive research experience on Punjab, to write papers on the ongoing farmer protests and almost all of them responded positively and sent their submissions in a timely manner. Most of these papers were written during summer 2021 when there was an impasse in negotiations between the farmers and government. It was the wish of many contributors to visit the camp sites and undertake personal interviews with various stakeholders to enrich their analysis but the ongoing public health crisis and travel restrictions meant only some were able to do so. Most of the papers also do not include the violent incident at Lakhimpur Kheri and certainly not the stunning announcement on 19th November (Guru Nanak's *gurpurab*, 2021) on cancelling the laws. Irrespective of these events, this collection of papers provide multi-disciplinary approaches in understanding and critically examining the historical, sociological, political, economic, cultural and diasporic dimensions of the movement. The agitation reaffirmed Punjab's long tradition of being the cauldron of resistance - fighting *against* oppression, tyranny and authoritarianism and standing firmly *for* social justice, dignity, freedom and sovereignty.

Indian Development Trajectory – Urban Bias with a Vengeance

Not to underplay or dismiss the enduring legacies of colonialism or the size and demographic complexity of India, it has become clear to many over the past few years that the political economy development model utilized by Indian policy-makers in its 74 year post-independent period has failed to deliver welfare for the majority of its people. This is clearly reflected in India's comparatively low

position in leading indices used to measure different dimensions of human development. India is ranked 131 out of 189 countries in UNDP's *Human Development Index* (2021); ranked 101 out of 116 in the *Global Hunger Index* (2021); ranked 62 out of 74 emerging countries in the World Economic Forum's *Inclusive Development Index* (2021); ranked 111 out of 162 in the *Human Freedom Index* (2020); ranked 40 out of 40 in the Center for Global Development's *Commitment to Development Index* (2021) and ranked 168 out of 180 countries in Yale's *Environmental Performance Index* (2020). Further, according to the World Bank, India's per capita income is only US\$1,900, much lower than the global average of US\$10,909 and its neighbour China's at US\$10,500 and some 33 times lower than America's \$63,543. Any independent observer looking at these statistics would term the Indian experience as that of a failed model in terms of development.

Yet, this dismal performance has not stopped successive Indian governments from presenting a different image to the outside world. In fact the gap between the 'Brand India' that governments like to present to the world - Shining India, Incredible India, Global India, Make in India etc. - and the 'Reality', as reflected in major indicators given above, has continued to widen. Whilst there can be no doubt some sectors of the economy or parts of it (e.g. IT and Health Services, Trade and Tourism), and some classes of people (Middle and Upper) in India have prospered but many sectors and classes have not - just look at the detailed statistics behind the indicies. How do we make sense of all this? Whilst there are many explanations, the Urban Bias Thesis (as developed by Michael Lipton in his influential but under-rated 1977 book, *Why the Poor Stay Poor*)¹ is helpful in providing the overarching framework for understanding the major thrust of Indian development policies - whether in the form of Nehruvian Socialism, Neo-Liberalism - both in its soft and hard forms from the mid-1980s - or its current variant with strong Corporatist leanings.² All the underlying growth or development models, whether considered at macro level or in dual economy form, are underpinned by notion of Urban Bias, that is, on the understanding that in the process of economic development, resource allocation decisions have to prioritize industrialisation and urbanisation with the rural sector serving the needs of business and urban classes. In these models, it is taken for granted that as industrialisation and urbanisation proceed, employment is generated which raises urban incomes and creates even more rural to urban migration. The accompanying process of *Trickle Down* supposedly improves income inequalities and raises living standards and welfare of all. The only critical decision policymakers need to make is, who is to act as *the* agent of development - the State, the Market or some Mix of the two? Indian policymakers started with total belief in the ability of the State to transform India, moved towards a Mix when it became clear Statist policies of centralisation and development planning were not working and introduced various social safety nets to alleviate rising poverty and hunger. The Green Revolution strategy was introduced in the 1960s to stop 'ship-to-mouth' food imports and focused on incentivising farmers in already well-developed agrarian regions such as Punjab, to produce food surpluses which would then provide food security to the nation. The Public

Distribution System that developed was reliant on procuring foodgrains, at guaranteed minimum support prices, from food surplus states such as Punjab and Haryana and distributing them to poor people at subsidized rates in food-deficit states. It became the cornerstone safety net that prevented acute forms of hunger and malnutrition but not totally eradicate them. Of course, a food surplus state such as Punjab undoubtedly benefited from this system of having an assured market for its produce and farmers producing food experienced a relatively higher standard of living than rural people in food deficit states or poor people in urban areas. But as it became clear after a period of about three decades, this relative prosperity could not be sustained as there were serious limitations of this form of rural extraction system. Punjab's agriculture not only began to stagnate but was also becoming unsustainable due to its environmental and ecological consequences. This agrarian crisis is clearly reflected in the continuing downward slide in Punjab's ranking in the league table of Indian states based on per capita income.³

The global ideological shift towards Neo-liberalism (also known as the Washington Consensus) from the early 1980s, with its twin beliefs in 'magic of the market' and 'State as the problem, *not* the solution' to development, began to permeate economic policies around the world. India's policymakers also eventually succumbed - some say they had no alternative given the economic crisis and mandatory conditionality imposed by IMF and World Bank structural adjustment loans - and aligned their policies to the Washington Consensus. Over time, almost all sectors of the Indian economy have been subjected to market fundamentalism - with the State *facilitating* through liberalisation, privatisation, deregulation, and opening up to global trade and competition - but only with varying degrees of success. Although there was an initial spurt in economic growth, it could not be sustained and in fact, there was growing evidence of 'jobless growth' and the economy, perhaps, even entering into premature de-industrialisation with the services sector outstripping manufacturing. The Modi government's response to the slowdown in economic growth was to double down on neo-liberal policies despite growing evidence of income, regional and spatial inequalities, rising unemployment and growing agrarian distress. The more visible symptoms of this rapidly mounting rural and agrarian distress, in the form of rising farmer suicides and farmer indebtedness, were either denied or 'resolved' through putting a sticking-plaster of farm loan waivers or slowly raising wages on work guaranteed for only 100 days of the year.⁴ This was Urban Bias in action with a vengeance because the rural sector was crying out for massive public sector development which was denied.

Although ideas on agrarian reforms were also floated, the agricultural sector had been spared radical reform until 2020, due primarily to its importance in providing national food security and the sheer number of people who could potentially be impacted by such reform. There are, of course, alternative ways of dealing with the agrarian crisis and reforms - through massive public sector investment in rural areas, as mentioned above, to cover all aspects of food production, procurement and distribution, crop diversification, incentivising modernisation of agricultural practices and greater focus on both agricultural

employment and non-farm rural employment – *or* choosing to open up the sector to free market forces with all its intended and unintended consequences. Ruling out the former option, the Modi government, indebted to a few powerful corporates who had bank-rolled the RSS-BJP combine into power and who had indicated their intent on entering the ‘protected’ agricultural sector in a big way, hastily and in a callous manner, perhaps calculating that opposition will be muted given the country was suffering from an acute public health crisis created by the Covid pandemic, decided to bypass the usual legislative and democratic norms to radically reform existing arrangements for procuring, storing, distributing and marketing foodgrains which would undoubtedly favour a small number of corporates at the expense of millions of producers - the farmers. Most of the promised income benefits to individual farmers who would now be ‘liberated’ to sell their produce to anyone and anywhere, were based on pure neo-classical fantasyland economics because buying power of a very small number of Indian or global corporates would drive down farm prices to a level below the production costs of farmers, destroying farmer livelihoods. Overwhelming evidence from around the world confirms this impact and this also explains why governments, both in rich and poor countries, have farm price support policies.⁵ The manner in which farm laws were introduced is also indicative of Prime Minister Modi’s authoritarian style of governance and RSS-BJP combine’s larger political project of building Hindutva which necessarily requires greater centralization in decision-making and weakening of federalism, a trend which some have described as moving from ‘co-operative federalism’ to ‘coercive federalism’.

Reflecting on what Galbraith argued back in 1952, in the context of rise in American agro-business, unless the farmers quickly develop *effective* counter-vailing power through producer, consumer and citizen organisations, their future would be pretty bleak.⁶ The farmers’ movements in colonial and post-colonial India were all attempts at building counter-vailing power but unfortunately only had limited or temporary impact. The current farmer agitation is learning from past struggles by strengthening counter-vailing power through building unity in the face of great hostility from the Indian government, the pro-government media, urban elites whose orientation is focused more towards their global interests and assets than on happenings in their rural hinterlands and urban based apologist academics and opinion makers who find it difficult to de-colonize their minds from euro-centric ideological thinking. These apologists have nothing better to offer than colonial tropes about ‘irrational peasants’ who don’t know what is good for them or patronizing tropes about a pampered ‘lakhpati’ and ‘crorepati’ rural elite whose only interest is in getting more subsidies.

Thus, although the current farmers’ protests are a direct response to these three farm laws - laws that finally broke the camel’s back - we also need to understand them as a sharp *reaction* to decades of urban bias and rural neglect. With hindsight, it is also worth reflecting on whether Modi had already, in 2016, set the scene for introducing radical farm reforms when he attempted to embrace and sweeten farmers by promising to double their incomes by 2022. This ploy became even more apparent after the three farm laws were passed - the entire

government case for bringing in the new laws was justified in terms of ‘saving’ and ‘enriching’ the farmers by offering them more ‘choices’ – all helping to miraculously double farmer incomes. But the farmers were not fooled by this yet another Modi *jumla* and began their resistance.

Agrarian Protests of 2020-2021

As stated earlier, the undue haste, callousness and sense of total indifference shown by the Modi government in passing the three Farm Acts, generated a lot of anger amongst farmers and their organisations. In fact, mobilisation against the Ordinances, especially in Punjab, started soon after the farmers gained information about the nature of these Ordinances and their likely impact on them. Calls for their withdrawal, albeit with support from ineffectual Opposition Parties in Parliament, fell on deaf ears. The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), historically perceiving itself as guardian of farmers’ interest and fearing loss of electoral support of farmers in the forthcoming Assembly elections, disassociated itself from the BJP government. Most significant and perhaps historically for the first time, Harsimrat Kaur Badal, sole SAD MP in the Union Cabinet as Minister for Food Processing, resigned from the government in September 2020, prompting the break-up of a long-standing SAD-BJP alliance. But the damage to SAD’s integrity had already been done.

Beginning with targeted protests in Chandigarh, capital of Punjab, and also replicating earlier protests around ‘rail roko’ to isolate Punjab, these protests began to cause economic and political havoc, enough to make the Punjab Congress govt. respond by opposing central laws and bringing its own legislation to preserve the status quo as agriculture was considered a state subject in India’s federal constitution. A further round of talks among the splintered farmers’ organisations led to a unanimous decision to take the protest directly to the center of power in New Delhi. A call by all organisations to ‘*Dilli Chalo*’ lead to the movement of thousands of protesting farmer on their tractor-trolleys towards Delhi via Haryana. The BJP govt. in Haryana, with help from central agencies, tried everything - water cannons, tear gas, shells, concrete barricades, *lathi*-charges, mass arrests - to stop the march but this did not succeed and if anything these repressive acts only riled up more farmers in Punjab, Haryana and western UP, Rajasthan and Uttarkhand and join the protest movement. These marchers, unable to proceed further into Delhi due to erection of massive steel and concrete barricades on the main highways, eventually decided to camp at three Delhi borders – Singhu, Tikri and Ghazibad.

The farmer camps grew larger as more and more farmers, encouraged by their organisations in different parts of India, began to join the protest movement. In addition to farmers, other sympathetic individuals, citizen groups and NGOs also joined in, not only socially widening the movement but also prolonging it to the annoyance of central government and its supporters in the print, audio and visual media. All attempts to demean the protestors and their leaders with various labels - Khalistanis, Marxist/Maoists, Naxalites, anti-Nationals, ‘*tukde-tukde*’ gangs, pro-Pakistan agents, Chinese or other foreign

agents – did not have much success. This attempt at ‘Othering’ the movement by Modi government’s compliant and lap-dog media (*Godi* media) totally backfired as protestors developed their alternative social media channels to present a counter narrative on their grievances and in the process, also succeeding in globalising the movement.

It is quite remarkable that 32 Punjab based kisan unions and hundreds of kisan unions from other states were able to unite and agree to work under an umbrella body - the *Samyukt Kisan Morcha* (SKM) – and be represented by 40 union leaders. The SKM emerged as the lead agency in organising the movement and negotiating with the government. There were 11 unsuccessful rounds of talks between the SKM and representatives of the ministry of agriculture and the government. Although the government offered concessions on making some amendments to the three laws, they never agreed to SKM’s main demands of withdrawing the three laws and providing a legal guarantee on Minimum Support Prices. In a significant move on January 10, 2021, the government, acting on behalf of business lobbyists, and learning that the SKM had made a call to have their own alternative march in Delhi to coincide with the Republic Day parade, approached the Supreme Court (SC) to halt it, fearing chaos and disorder. The SC, however, unexpectedly went a step further and suspended implementation of the three laws until further orders. With a view to assisting resolution of the agitation, the Court also decided to set up a committee of ‘four eminent persons’ to gather further evidence on the farmer agitation and to make recommendations.⁷ Although one of the four nominated members decided to recuse himself, the three others held wide ranging discussions with many stakeholders, gathered evidence and submitted its report in a sealed envelope to the SC on March 19, 2021. It is surprising, however, even though nine months have elapsed, the report still has not been put into the public domain. Neither did suspension of laws by the SC lead to any government urgency in re-starting negotiations, with the government just accepting the SC judgement and suspending implementation for 18 months, perhaps hoping this time period would divide and weaken the movement.

Contributors to this Special Issue

The year-long kisan resistance to the ‘black laws’ has generated so much public and academic debate on its causes, its different characteristics and dimensions and reasons for its resilience and sustainability, so it would be impossible to cover them all. In this special issue, consisting of 14 papers including this introduction, we introduce our readers to what our eminent contributors consider as the main issues in their specific area of expertise. In the opening paper, Ronki Ram provides the historical context for understanding the ongoing farmer agitation. In a comprehensive and detailed analysis, Ram discusses several farmer agitations in the colonial as well as the post-colonial period, and draws out attention to striking parallels and similarities between past struggles and the present one. In the second paper, historian Sukhdev S. Sohal provides a comparative assessment of, arguably, the two most important farmer struggles

witnessed in Punjab, the 1907 '*Pagri Sambhal Jatta*' agitation and the current struggle which began in 2020. He examines how Punjab's agrarian character and structure determine power equations both at the local and national levels and how changes in these, especially through the State introducing new laws, contribute to farmer grievance and agitation. The third paper by Pramod Kumar, argues that although there are continuities in farmer struggles in Punjab, agitations since the 1990s are qualitatively different in terms of their economic demands, politico-cultural stakes and identity overtones. For instance, earlier protests had threatened to stop the supply of food grains to other states, this time, however, the protest is directed against the privatisation of agricultural operations and food grain markets. The fourth paper by Sucha S. Gill, focuses on the history of farmer organisations in Punjab, their changing nature, different stages of mobilisation strategies during the present movement and its achievements. He discusses reasons behind the splintering of Punjab's *Bhartiya Kisan Union* in the 1980s and 1990s and explains why they united in 2020 to fight against the new farm laws. The fifth paper by Virginia Van Dyke complements the previous one and analyses response of farmers' movements to government's embracement of neo-liberalism and globalization since the 1980s and how these in turn impacted class alliances and ideological shifts among leaders of farmers' unions, and nature of their engagement with the political party system. Van Dyke argues that contemporary protests opened up space for cross-class, cross-caste and cross-gender struggles of smaller farmers and laborers against a threat to their very livelihood. The sixth paper is jointly written by Parmar and Kaur who draw our attention to the literary lineage of farmer protests, starting with the 1907 agitation to the present day. Through a close and contextualised reading of the creative literature produced, mainly poetry, the authors show how and why writers record and make social history of resistance, resilience, and solidarity, which is then made available for mass consumption.

The next set of papers consider the more contemporary dimensions of the ongoing farmer agitation. The seventh paper is by Surinder S. Jodkha who starts by examining reasons behind the surprisingly massive positive response in support of the farmers. He then goes on to remind us the need for a critical engagement with entrenched ideas about the inevitability of the decline of agriculture and demise of agrarian cultures. He presents a compelling argument for a context specific historical and sociological understanding of agrarian cultures rather than a pre-scripted teleology that takes the end of agriculture for granted. The eighth paper by Ranjit S. Ghuman asks us to take a step back to consider legacies of the Green Revolution, the emergence and dominance of the wheat-paddy-energy nexus and its lethal environmental and ecological consequences for Punjab. Rice cultivation (and rice export), given that rice is a water-guzzling cash crop, is seen as the main villain, primarily responsible for increasing the rate of depletion of the water table in Punjab. Ghuman provides lots of data to show the absurdity of rice cultivation in Punjab and argues that contribution of rice to government's central pool is akin to Punjab exporting virtual water to the rest of India. He makes a strong case for severely cutting back on rice production and replacing it with less water guzzling crops and

generally for a more balanced cropping pattern. He argues that even if farmer protests are successful in revoking the farm laws and this simply results in 'business as usual', the future economic viability and sustainability of Punjab agriculture is questionable. Policymakers and farmers' unions need to take heed of this advice. The ninth paper by Sukhpal Singh takes the example of one of the most controversial farm laws - the Contract Farming Act, 2020 - which raised the most fears among farmers about potential loss of their land due to corporatisation, to discuss experiences of Punjab with regard to contract farming. Drawing on his vast knowledge gained through studying contract farming in Punjab, he highlights the potential negative implications of the new Act in terms of its impact on farmer welfare, especially the alleged benefits to small farmers, on aiding crop diversification and in seeking redress from unequal contractual obligations. The tenth paper by Pritam Singh interrogates the actual functioning of Indian federalism and how the hasty passing of the new farm laws by the BJP government, without giving due consideration to views of farmers or states, demonstrate the growing power of the Centre despite agriculture being a state subject under the Indian constitution. Using a number of examples to illustrate Centre's role in actively weakening main nodes of resistance, he provides a strong case for developing new perspectives in order to strengthen federalism, decentralisation, diversity, democracy, localised small scale farming, cooperative farming and ecological sustainability.

The eleventh paper by Shinder S. Thandi provides a discussion on the multi-faceted but sometimes distorted role of Sikh/Punjabi diaspora in supporting the farmer agitation. He points to the changing nature and extent of diaspora's homeland orientation under globalization, motives behind diaspora support and how diaspora support – both financial and material – played an important role in aiding sustainability and resilience in the movement. The author also provides a critical discussion of diaspora's increasing participation in hostland domestic politics and how, along with the help of gurdwaras, Sikh NGOs and advocacy groups, Sikh diaspora communities used social media extensively to mobilise support, to organise rallies and raise funding in support of farmers back home. The twelfth paper by Swaroopa Lahiri takes up the issue of gender inclusiveness during the farmer movement and examines the critical and unprecedented role played by women during protest marches, by joining the rallies, in enlisting volunteers to join camp sites and helping with the *seva* there, and in sustaining households and farm operations in the absence of men. The author examines the motives for their involvement and speculates on what the implications of their increased visibility maybe on future patriarchal relations in Punjab. The final paper by Tejpal Baniwal returns to the theme of diaspora support to the farmer agitation. Baniwal focuses on the nature of communication strategies and contrasts the strategies used during the Ghadar agitation and in some earlier agitations, against those used in the current agitation. His focus is on the critical role played by social media, firstly, in countering and exposing the official Indian government narrative and secondly, in being instrumental in engaging with the whole spectrum of Sikhs, including young people who had hitherto shown little interest in matters relating to Punjab.

We hope this set of papers provides readers with interesting and stimulating perspectives that highlight different dimensions of the farmer struggle, their forms of resistance and ways of building resilience. Some of the papers also provide new insights into resolving the agrarian crisis and these will require serious consideration by policymakers in Punjab for the sake of future sustainability and prosperity. The Editor is very thankful to the contributors for making this issue possible. Finally, the Editor would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Ronki Ram, Amarjit Chandan and Gurinder S. Mann for their encouragement and advice in putting this issue together.

Notes

¹ Michael Lipton's thesis on Urban Bias has been criticised by several scholars for its alleged over-simplification of differences between rural and urban interests and its universality, but I still think it provides a useful framework for critically examining the Indian experience. Lipton explained his thesis as follows:

‘The most important class conflict in the poor countries of the world today is not between labour and capital...nor is it between foreign and national interests. It is between the rural classes and urban classes..... rural sector contains most of the poverty, and most of the low-cost sources of potential advance; but the urban sector contains most of the articulateness, organization and power. So the urban classes have been able to 'win' most of the rounds of the struggle with the countryside.....but in so doing they have made the development process needlessly slow and unfair.’ (Lipton, 1977: 62).

² Given this special issue is concerned with livelihoods of farming communities and sustainability of small scale farming, it is worth recalling that Chaudhari Charan Singh, a Jat political leader in UP and briefly India's Prime Minister, was a strong advocate for prioritising agriculture over industry. He offered an alternative model for India based on ‘Rural Bias’, arguing the country needed policies that would strengthen peasant agriculture and provide jobs in rural areas for the landless. Needless to say Charan Singh's intellectual arguments, very similar and appropriate to debates about agriculture today, did not go far and were forgotten in the pursuit of modernisation.

Charan Singh was also leader of a strong peasant movement in western UP which later gave rise to the BKU and spread to other states. It is interesting that at one of the largest peasant rallies he helped to organise in December 1978, government officials and intellectuals in Delhi, painted the protesters as an ‘abstraction, not a reality’. Since they represented backwardness, old tradition and uncouthness, they were kept out of sight while the nation ‘modernises’. It seems nothing has changed 43 years later. For a critical appreciation of Charan Singh see Paul R. Brass ‘Chaudhuri Charan Singh: An Indian Political Life’,

Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 28, No. 39 (Sep. 25, 1993), pp. 2087-2090 and Terence J Byres, 'Charan Singh, 1902-87: An Assessment', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol XV, No 2 (January 1988), pp 139-89.

³ Punjab's ranking has fallen steadily from number one state in terms of income per capita in the 1980s to about 12 today. This relative decline is attributed to other Indian states experiencing faster rate of economic growth than Punjab. Punjab's growth is still driven largely by the agricultural sector which has been stagnating with no compensatory contribution from other sectors. For recent attempts to explain causes and offer remedies see Lakhwinder Singh and Nirvikar Singh (edited) *Economic Transformation of a Developing Economy: The Experience of Punjab*, (Springer, 2016) and Autar S. Dhesi and Gurmail Singh (edited) *Rural Development in Punjab: A Success Story Going Astray*, (Routledge, 2008).

⁴ This relates to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA) which was passed in 2005 by the Manmohan Singh government. The purpose of the Act is to provide *at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment* in a financial year to adult workers of a household who are prepared to do unskilled manual work. What these rural households really need are permanent full-time jobs all year round.

⁵ First year economics textbooks tell us perfect markets do not exist in the real world, they are an ideal or aspirational form. In reality, most markets are imperfect and prone to failure as they do not take into account presence of externalities, information failures and existence of monopsonistic buyers, as industrialists Ambani and Adani were feared of becoming in procuring farm produce and this means state intervention is necessary to deal with them. Agricultural markets are particularly prone to failures as they can suffer from acute price fluctuations as described in various cobweb models and therefore need state intervention to provide price stability.

⁶ John Kenneth Galbraith in his 1952 book, *American Capitalism*, discussed the importance of having counter-vailing power in a free market economy given its in-built bias in favour of large businesses, making free and fair bargaining impossible. Due to this bias 'counter-vailing' powers emerge in different sectors, including agriculture to offset business's excessive market power.

⁷ The four members of the Supreme Court appointed committee were Anil J Ghanwat, President of Shetkari Sanghatana (Maharashtra's largest farmer union founded by Sharad Joshi), Pramod Kumar Joshi (Director South Asia international Food Policy), and agriculture-economist and former Chairman of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) Ashok Gulati. The fourth member, ex-Bhartiya Kisan Union President and Rajya Sabha member, Bhupinder Singh Mann had recused himself due to conflict of interest.