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WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal provide dedicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

HARVESTING RIGHTS: BRIDGING FARMER PROTECTION AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN INDIA'S AGRICULTURAL POLICY

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Abstract

Nearly half of India's population depends on the agricultural industry, which is currently experiencing a severe crisis characterised by falling incomes, mounting debt, climate stress, and unclear policies. A sizable fraction of farmers, particularly small and marginal ones, continue to face economic vulnerability and political marginalisation in spite of several measures targeted at rural development.¹ Using a socio-legal perspective, this essay explores the twin ideas of food sovereignty and farmer protection, emphasising their importance in creating a robust and equitable agricultural system in India. The institutional and legal safeguards that guarantee farmers' access to resources including land, seeds, financing, and markets are referred to as farmer protection.² On the other side, food sovereignty, which is based on sustainability, equity, and local autonomy, highlights the rights of individuals and communities to establish their own food and agricultural systems. The right to livelihood under Article 21, the Directive Principles, and pertinent agricultural statutes are among the legal and constitutional provisions of India that are critically assessed in this paper. It also explores the ramifications of the 2020 Farm Laws and their repeal for democratic government, federalism, and farmer autonomy. UNDROP and other international human rights instruments are used to explore issues such as seed sovereignty, agroecology, land rights, and climate change. Based on policy analysis, case law, and grassroots initiatives, the report provides practical suggestions

¹ Jock R. Anderson, Risk in Rural Development: Challenges for Managers and Policy Makers, 75 *Agric. Sys.* 161 (2003).

² Stephen B. Brush, Farmers' Rights and Protection of Traditional Agricultural Knowledge, 35 *World Dev.* 1499 (2007).

for bridging the gap between food sovereignty and food security.³ The research concludes that unless farmer-centric, rights-based policies are institutionalized, the vision of a sovereign and sustainable food system in India will remain unfulfilled.

Keywords: Farmer Rights, Food Sovereignty, Agroecology, Legal Framework, Agrarian Justice

1. INTRODUCTION

In terms of creating jobs, as well as serving as a pillar of cultural identity and food security, agriculture has long been the backbone of the Indian economy. More than 50% of Indians still make their living either directly or indirectly from agriculture, despite the country's economic diversification since liberalisation in the 1990s.⁴ Ironically, however, Indian farmers are among the most disadvantaged groups in society, often facing debt traps, market exploitation, land dispossession, income volatility, and climate uncertainty. This paradox raises serious concerns about the efficacy of India's socio-legal frameworks and agrarian policies, which are intended to safeguard the nation's farmers. In India's agricultural discourse, the ideas of food sovereignty and farmer protection are becoming more and more important. In general, the term "farmer protection" refers to legislative, financial, and regulatory measures meant to preserve farmers' rights and well-being. This includes safeguards against market and corporate exploitation, guaranteed fair agricultural prices, and access to productive resources including land, seeds, water, and loans.⁵ But these protections are frequently insufficient or poorly implemented, making farmers susceptible to structural injustices. By highlighting people's rights to manage their own food systems, the idea of "food sovereignty," which has its roots in the worldwide opposition to neoliberal agriculture policy, broadens the definition of "food security." Food sovereignty, a term coined by the global peasant movement La Vía Campesina, holds that local communities ought to have the power to determine what should be grown, how it should be grown, and how it should be distributed. Food sovereignty includes the political, ecological, and cultural aspects of agriculture, in contrast to food security⁶, which is mainly concerned with the availability and accessibility of food. It encourages agroecological methods,

³ Christophe Golay, *The Role of Human Rights Mechanisms in Monitoring the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants* (2020).

⁴ Andrew D. Foster & Mark R. Rosenzweig, Agricultural Productivity Growth, Rural Economic Diversity, and Economic Reforms: India, 1970–2000, 52 *Econ. Dev. & Cultural Change* 509 (2004).

⁵ Patrick Mulvany, *Corporate Control Over Seeds: Limiting Access and Farmers' Rights* (ETC Grp. 2005).

⁶ Lucy Jarosz, Comparing Food Security and Food Sovereignty Discourses, 4 *Dialogues Hum. Geogr.* 168 (2014).

sustainable livelihoods, and community resilience while opposing corporate domination in food systems. Given the variety of agricultural patterns, regional culinary customs, and the importance of smallholder farming in India, food sovereignty assumes a special significance in this setting.⁷ However, these grassroots realities are frequently ignored by modern agricultural reforms, particularly those that lean towards market liberalisation and privatisation. The conflicts between market-oriented reforms and the ideals of farmer autonomy and democratic policymaking are highlighted by the recent approval and repeal of the three Farm Laws passed in 2020. Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and other states participated in the major year-long farmers' protest, which was a larger assertion of rights over land, livelihoods, and regional food systems rather than just a response to certain legislative provisions. With an emphasis on how institutional processes, constitutional guarantees, and legal frameworks might be reoriented to empower farming communities, this study aims to provide a socio-legal analysis of farmer protection and food sovereignty in India. It examines laws like the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001, and the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, as well as constitutional clauses like Article 21 (Right to Life), Article 39(b) (Equitable distribution of resources), and Article 48 (Promotion of agriculture on scientific lines). It also takes into account how India's internal legal system is impacted by its international commitments,⁸ such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP).⁹ In addition, the article places important topics like land rights, contract farming, agroecological sustainability, seed sovereignty, and climate justice into the larger discussion of agrarian reform. To comprehend the multi-level interventions required to achieve food sovereignty, the roles of the courts, grassroots movements, and decentralised government are evaluated. The study's ultimate goal is to promote a paradigm change away from one that is profit-driven and productivity-centric and towards one that is focused on autonomy, justice, and ecological sustainability. India can only create an inclusive, resilient, and independent food system that respects the rights and dignity of its farmers by accepting such a change.

⁷ Miguel A. Altieri, Fernando R. Funes-Monzote & Paulo Petersen, Agroecologically Efficient Agricultural Systems for Smallholder Farmers: Contributions to Food Sovereignty, 32 *Agron. Sustain. Dev.* 1 (2012).

⁸ Himanshu Prasad & Astha Jain, Indian Constitution: An Analysis of the Fundamental Rights and Guiding Principles of the Indian Constitution, 5 *Indian JL & Legal Rsch.* 1 (2022).

⁹ Priscilla Claeys & Marc Edelman, The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, 47 *J. Peasant Stud.* 1 (2020).

2. UNDERSTANDING FARMER PROTECTION AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Particularly in nations like India, where agriculture provides the socioeconomic foundation for millions of people, the ideas of food sovereignty and farmer protection are becoming more and more important in today's agricultural discourse. Despite their connections, these concepts come from different sociopolitical contexts and come together to provide a thorough framework for agricultural justice. A multifaceted framework known as "farmer protection" aims to safeguard the rights, well-being, and sustainability of those who work in agriculture, especially small and marginal farmers who make up more than 85% of India's farming population. Protection encompasses more than just financial and physical security; it also includes institutional safeguards that guarantee equitable access to resources like arable land, high-quality crops, irrigation systems, reasonably priced credit, and safe marketplaces. The assurance of a fair price for agricultural products is a crucial component of farmer protection since it protects farmers from corporate exploitation and market volatility. Beyond financial concerns, farmer protection also includes disaster assistance, crop insurance, social security programs, legal assistance in land alienation issues, and extension services that give farmers access to new, sustainable farming methods and training. Even though India has a number of such programs, such as the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) and the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), their impact on the reality on the ground is sometimes lessened by implementation issues and bureaucratic inefficiencies.¹⁰ Food sovereignty, on the other hand, is a more expansive and revolutionary idea. Food sovereignty is a concept that goes beyond food security, which only guarantees the availability and accessibility of food. It was created and promoted by the global peasant movement La Via Campesina. The concept of "food sovereignty" highlights the freedom of peoples, groups, and countries to establish their own labour, food, land, fishery, and agricultural policies.¹¹ It promotes indigenous customs, regional food cultures, ecologically friendly farming, and decentralised management of food systems. This idea challenges the prevailing, industrialised agricultural model that has been pushed by globalisation, which puts corporate profit, export-oriented policies, and yield maximisation ahead of ecological balance and community rights. Food sovereignty opposes these top-down strategies and promotes people-centered food

¹⁰ KHAN, BAHAMANI MOHAMMED KHIZAR. "GOVERNMENT SCHEMES FOR BASIC INCOME ASSURANCES: A STUDY OF KADAPA DISTRICT OF ANDHRA PRADESH."

¹¹ Priscilla Claeys, From Food Sovereignty to Peasants' Rights: An Overview of La Via Campesina's Rights-Based Claims Over the Last 20 Years, in *Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue* 1 (2013).

systems that put local economies, sustainability, and nutrition first. Food sovereignty and farmer protection are closely related in the Indian setting. Smallholder farming, which is primarily dependent on regional resources, customary knowledge, and culturally imprinted cropping patterns, is the foundation of India's agrarian system. However, policies that support genetically modified crops, corporatisation, and monoculture frequently marginalise these methods and endanger biodiversity and farmer autonomy. Strong instances of how food sovereignty and farmer protection coexist are seen in grassroots movements throughout India, such as those supporting zero-budget natural farming (ZBNF)¹², community-supported agriculture (CSA), and seed sovereignty. These movements support community-owned seed banks, oppose corporate control over seeds and inputs, and support ecological farming methods that lessen reliance on outside organisations.¹³ Furthermore, the discussion of food sovereignty gives more voice to women farmers, who perform an important but frequently unseen role in agriculture. Gender-sensitive strategies that acknowledge women's authority over land, seeds, and agricultural knowledge have been made possible by the movement for food sovereignty. In conclusion, food sovereignty offers the strategic and philosophical guidance towards agrarian self-determination, while farmer protection offers the legislative and policy framework to sustain agricultural livelihoods. When taken as a whole, they offer a comprehensive framework for resolving India's agricultural problem and creating resilient, just, and sustainable food systems that respect human dignity and natural boundaries.

3. CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR FARMERS' RIGHTS

Despite without specifically referring to "farmers' rights" or "food sovereignty," the Indian Constitution provides a strong framework for defending and advancing farmers' rights through its fundamental rights, guiding principles, and governmental obligations. Together, these constitutional provisions, together with other laws and welfare programs, serve as the cornerstone of the legal framework that oversees India's agricultural industry.

Article 21 The right to livelihood and dignity have been construed by courts as part of the Constitution's guarantee of the right to life and personal liberty.¹⁴ The Supreme Court has

¹² Poonam Pandey & Lidia Cabral, Transformational Agroecology: The Making and Unmaking of Zero Budget Natural Farming in India, 30 *Sci., Tech. & Soc.* 259 (2025).

¹³ Cathy Farnworth & Jessica Hutchings, Organic Agriculture and Women's Empowerment (IFOAM 2009).

¹⁴ Neepa Jani, Article 21 of Constitution of India and Right to Livelihood, 2 *Voice of Research* 61 (2013)

acknowledged in a number of important instances that the right to life is meaningless without the ability to support oneself. This right entails having access to seeds, water, productive land, and a steady income for farmers. The government is required by the constitution to guarantee agrarian security, and the state's inability to preserve these necessities has been seen as a breach of Article 21.

Articles 39(b) and 39(c) The state is required by the Directive Principles of State Policy to make sure that economic activities do not lead to the concentration of wealth and that ownership and control of material resources, especially land, water, and forests, are distributed for the benefit of all. In light of land reforms, water rights, and the fair distribution of resources in rural areas, these clauses are essential.¹⁵ They function as guiding principles for the creation of policies and the interpretation of the law, even though they are not legally binding.

Article 48 affirms the state's obligation to arrange agricultural and animal husbandry in a way that is both modern and scientific.¹⁶ This clause indirectly supports innovations that are socially and environmentally inclusive while also promoting the adoption of progressive farming practices. The preservation of indigenous and traditional farming knowledge, which is sometimes disregarded in favour of corporately driven, high-input methods, must be balanced with this, though.

Several statutory frameworks also contribute to the legal protection of farmers in India: The **Minimum Support Price (MSP)** policy, though not legally binding, functions as a crucial price safety net for farmers. It illustrates how the government steps in to protect farmers from being compelled to sell their produce at uncompetitive prices. However, for many commodities and locations, the MSP system is inefficient due to the absence of a statutory guarantee.

The **Essential Commodities Act, 1955** It gives the government the authority to control the pricing and supply of specific agricultural products, avoiding hoarding and guaranteeing food availability.¹⁷ Although it was created to safeguard both producers and consumers, its function has been contested, particularly in light of the 2020 Farm Laws' attempt to restrict it.

¹⁵ Bertus De Villiers, *Directive Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Rights: The Indian Experience*, 8 *S. Afr. J. Hum. Rts.* 29 (1992).

¹⁶ Neil D. Hamilton, *Feeding Our Future: Six Philosophical Issues Shaping Agricultural Law*, 72 *Neb. L. Rev.* 210 (1993).

¹⁷ Reenu Dutt & Shaurya Dutt, *Construing the Essential Commodities Act, 1955*, 5 *Indian JL & Legal Rsch.* 1 (2022).

The **Seeds Act, 1966**, and the **Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPVFR) Act, 2001**, discuss important topics such as certification, seed quality, and farmers' rights to exchange, conserve, and use seeds.¹⁸ The PPVFR Act is noteworthy because it acknowledges farmers as breeders and conservers in addition to beneficiaries, supporting traditional agrobiodiversity and seed sovereignty.

The **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005**, Despite being essentially a program for rural employment, it indirectly promotes agriculture by stabilising earnings during the off-season, enhancing rural infrastructure like irrigation, and supplying labour resources.¹⁹

When taken as a whole, these legislative documents and constitutional clauses create a framework that, when applied fairly and successfully, may protect farmers' rights and forward India's goal of food sovereignty. However, because of insufficient enforcement, gaps in policy, and systemic injustices, the actualisation of these rights frequently stays elusive.

4. THE FARM LAWS CONTROVERSY AND REPEAL (2020–2021)

In June 2020, the Government of India introduced three ordinances that were later enacted into laws in September 2020, collectively referred to as the **Farm Laws**. These were:

- 1. The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020** – aimed to allow farmers to sell their produce outside the Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs) without any state taxes or restrictions.
- 2. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020** – sought to promote contract farming by enabling farmers to enter into agreements with agri-business firms, processors, or large retailers.
- 3. The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020** – removed cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onions, and potatoes from the list of essential commodities, thereby easing stock limits for traders and encouraging private investment in storage and warehousing.

These reforms were presented by the central government as pro-farmer liberalisation policies that would give farmers more options, draw in private capital, and boost their income by giving

¹⁸ Michael Blakeney, Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights, 24 *Eur. Intell. Prop. Rev.* 9 (2001).

¹⁹ Poulomi Dasgupta, Employment Generation Programs and Long Term Development: The Case of India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of Mo.-Kansas City 2012).

them access to competitive markets.²⁰ However, many members of the farming community, particularly those from Western Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Haryana, saw these rules as a danger to their independence and financial stability.

From a **constitutional and legal standpoint**, several significant issues were raised:

Federalism: In the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution, agriculture is specifically included under Entry 14 of the State List (List II).²¹ By passing legislation on a state topic without sufficient state-government consultation, critics claimed that the federal government had overreached its constitutional authority. This was seen to be a significant violation of cooperative federalism.

Lack of Consultative Legislative Process: The laws' hurried approval in Parliament with little discussion after they were first submitted as ordinances during the pandemic drew harsh criticism. Opposition parties and farmer unions charged the administration with avoiding democratic processes and not communicating with interested parties.

Absence of MSP Guarantee: A legislative guarantee of MSP, which would ensure that no transaction could occur below a threshold price set by the government, was one of the most important requests made during the protests.²² MSP was not included in the farm laws, which increased farmer mistrust. For more than a year, hundreds of farmers camp in difficult conditions on Delhi's borders as part of the nationwide protests. The movement became one of the biggest peasant movements in recent history after gaining national and international attention. Finally, in November 2021, the central government acknowledged the criticism and turmoil created by the three farm regulations and announced their repeal. Deep fault points in India's agrarian policy framework were exposed by the Farm Laws event. It emphasised how important it is to base agricultural changes on social fairness rather than market-driven demands, how inclusive policymaking is necessary, and how federal structures should be respected.

²⁰ Gideon Onumah et al., *Empowering Smallholder Farmers in Markets: Changing Agricultural Marketing Systems and Innovative Responses by Producer Organizations* (2007).

²¹ Amitabh Gawale, *Constitutional Validity of Farm Act 2020: A Study Vis-à-Vis Federalism*

²² Rajinder Minhas, *Minimum Support Price: A Dilemma or an Advent With a Context of India*, in *Globalization, Global Security, and New International Realities for Modern Democracies* 381 (IGI Global Scientific Publishing 2025).

5. CHALLENGES TO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN INDIA

India's food sovereignty faces a number of interconnected issues that have an immediate effect on community autonomy, sustainability, and farmers' rights. The achievement of true food sovereignty is nevertheless hampered by a number of structural and policy-driven problems, even in the face of constitutional protections and rising recognition of the significance of regional, ecologically sound food systems.

1. Seed Monopoly and Loss of Seed Sovereignty

Corporate control over seeds is one of the biggest challenges to India's food sovereignty. Large agribusiness companies have taken control of the seed market in recent decades by creating proprietary and hybrid seed varieties that need to be bought every season.²³ Long essential to Indian farming culture, traditional methods of saving, trading, and replacing seeds have been drastically reduced. Farmers' rights to save and utilise seeds are legally protected by the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPV&FR) Act, 2001, yet market forces are forcing farmers to rely more and more on commercial seeds. This reliance makes agriculture less robust and more input-intensive while endangering biodiversity and local knowledge systems.

2. Genetically Modified (GM) Crops and Bio-Piracy

Serious worries about bio-piracy, the extinction of traditional seed types, and ecological imbalance have been raised by the introduction and spread of genetically modified (GM) crops.²⁴ Examples like the debate surrounding Bt cotton show how the high expense of genetically modified seeds and related chemical inputs can trap farmers in debt cycles. Farmers' control over what and how they plant is sometimes restricted by the tight licensing agreements that accompany genetically modified crops. The sustainability objectives at the heart of food sovereignty are also threatened by environmental hazards such long-term soil deterioration and cross-pollination with native plants.²⁵

²³ Bina Agarwal, Food Sovereignty, Food Security and Democratic Choice: Critical Contradictions, Difficult Conciliations, 41 *J. Peasant Stud.* 1247 (2014).

²⁴ Katy Rotzin, Today's Pirates: Biopiracy, Biotech, and the International Frameworks That Are Not Up to the Challenge, 15 *UC L. Sci. & Tech. J.* 1 (2024).

²⁵ Úrsula Oswald Spring, Genetically Modified Organisms: A Threat for Food Security and Risk for Food Sovereignty and Survival, in *Coping with Global Environmental Change*

3. Land Acquisition and Displacement

Despite being designed to guarantee equitable compensation and rehabilitation, the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement Act of 2013 has frequently come under fire for enabling land grabs in the name of development.²⁶ Fertile, agriculturally productive lands have been taken away from farmers and Adivasi populations for mining, industrial, and infrastructure developments. This displacement weakens traditional food systems, breaks up community relationships, and decreases the amount of land that can be used for food production. Additionally, it shows a tilt in policy towards urban-industrial growth at the expense of food autonomy and rural livelihoods.

4. Water Inequity and Irrigation Imbalances

Access to water resources for agriculture is still incredibly unequal. While large areas depend on diminishing groundwater supplies, communities with access to canal irrigation or government-sponsored programs do better.²⁷ Due to unpredictable rainfall patterns and unsustainable water extraction, many small and marginal farmers are now at risk of water scarcity. Water injustice is exacerbated by large-scale agribusinesses' frequent disproportionate use of water resources. In addition to impeding productivity, this mismatch goes against the fundamental tenet of food sovereignty, which calls for fair access to the resources needed for food production.

5. Climate Change and Agrarian Vulnerability

Indian agriculture faces an existential threat from climate change. Droughts, floods, heat waves, and unseasonal rainfall are examples of extreme weather occurrences that have become more frequent, which has upset cropping patterns and resulted in large output losses. Industrial farming patterns that are less able to withstand climatic shocks are putting pressure on traditional farming systems, which are more biodiverse and adaptive.²⁸ Local adaptation is emphasised by food sovereignty, but Indian farmers continue to face an escalating problem in the absence of robust policy support for agroecology and climate-resilient agriculture.

²⁶ M. Rajivlochan, *Land Acquisition and Dispossession: Private Interest and Public Good* 88 (Oxford Univ. Press 2015).

²⁷ Tushaar Shah, *Groundwater Governance and Irrigated Agriculture* 42 (Int'l Water Mgmt. Inst. 2009).

²⁸ Ravi Chopra, *Water and the Laws in India* (Centre for Science and Environment 2007)

6. The Role of Judiciary in Farmer Protection

The interpretation of fundamental rights by the Indian judiciary has gradually broadened to encompass safeguards that directly or indirectly assist farmers, particularly when it comes to issues pertaining to land rights, livelihood, dignity, and environmental sustainability.

1. **M.C. Mehta v. Union of India (1997)**²⁹ petitions about the effects of industrial pollution on the environment and public health. The Supreme Court acknowledged that the health of rural people and agricultural productivity are significantly impacted by environmental degradation. The Court ruled that farmers whose livelihoods depend on ecological balance are protected since the right to life under Article 21 implicitly protects the right to a clean and healthy environment.
2. **State of Karnataka v. Shri Ranganatha Reddy (1989)**³⁰ The Court maintained land reform policies intended to redistribute land to marginal and landless farmers. The Court underlined the Directive Principles' embodiment of the constitutional goal of social justice, emphasising that empowering vulnerable rural communities and eradicating poverty need equitable land distribution.
3. **K.T. Plantation Pvt. Ltd. v. State of Karnataka (2011)**³¹ addressed issues around land acquisition for non-agricultural purposes. The Court struck down arbitrary acquisitions that ignored the rights and welfare of farmers, underscoring that economic development must balance industrial growth with the protection of agrarian livelihoods.
4. **Samatha v. State of Andhra Pradesh (1997)**³² A historic decision defending indigenous land rights was made in this case. The Court ruled that non-tribal corporations cannot be granted land that has been set aside for tribal groups. In order to preserve their traditional farming methods, cultural identity, and food sovereignty, indigenous farmers must have this protection.
5. **Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation (1985)**³³ The Court decided that one essential element of Article 21 is the right to livelihood. By preventing arbitrary evictions of agricultural labourers and informal workers, this case guarantees that farmers and farm labourers won't be denied the opportunity to make a living without following the proper procedures and receiving rehabilitation.

²⁹ M.C. Mehta v. Union of India, (1997) 2 SCC 411.

³⁰ State of Karnataka v. Shri Ranganatha Reddy, (1977) 4 SCC 471.

³¹ K.T. Plantation Pvt. Ltd. v. State of Karnataka, (2011) 9 SCC 146.

³² Samatha v. State of Andhra Pradesh, (1997) 8 SCC 191

³³ Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation, (1985) SCC (3) 545; AIR 1986 180

6. **Narmada Bachao Andolan v. Union of India (2000)**³⁴ In one instance, massive dam projects caused thousands of people to be displaced. The Court emphasised respect for human rights throughout development interventions and the government's duty to offer displaced farmers with equitable rehabilitation and relocation.
7. **Ashok Kumar v. Union of India (2005)**³⁵ upheld the state's responsibility to assist farmers, concluding that protection laws, lending facilities, and subsidies are necessary to maintain the agrarian economy, particularly for smallholder farmers.
8. **Krishna Kumar Singh v. State of Bihar (2017)**³⁶In accordance with the Right to Fair pay and Transparency in Land Acquisition Act, the Supreme Court rendered a decision about equitable pay. The ruling underlined that acquisitions must be fair, open, and shield farmers from abuse by guaranteeing sufficient monetary recompense.
9. **Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala (1986)**³⁷ Despite being a landmark case on the freedom of religion and education, it has been mentioned to support farmers' cultural rights by preserving customs and group identities that are essential to rural life and agricultural heritage. When taken as a whole, these decisions show how the judiciary has strengthened legal protections for farmers, demonstrating the importance of agrarian rights in India's constitutional democracy.

6. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Suggestions

1. **Legal Right to Minimum Support Price (MSP):** The adoption of a legislative framework that formally ensures MSP for all important crops is a first step towards safeguarding farmers. Although MSP is being used as a tool for policy, its non-binding character breeds uncertainty and exposes farmers to market exploitation and price swings. By providing farmers with a fair minimum price, a legislative guarantee would promote economic stability and lessen distressed transactions.
2. **Revival and Strengthening of Farmer Cooperatives:** To empower farmers collectively, farmer producer organisations (FPOs) and cooperatives must be strengthened. These organisations give farmers more negotiating leverage, make it possible to buy inputs in bulk for less money, and facilitate easier access to markets and

³⁴ Narmada Bachao Andolan v. Union of India, *AIR 2000 SC 3751*

³⁵ Ashok Kumar v. Union of India, (1986) 1 SCC 541; (1986) 2 SCR 800

³⁶ Krishna Kumar Singh v. State of Bihar, (2017) 3 SCC 1

³⁷ Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala, (1986) 3 SCC 615; AIR 1987 SC 748; (1986) 2 SCR 518

financing options. Cooperatives that have been revitalised can lessen reliance on middlemen and big agribusinesses, encouraging fair market participation and increased farmer income retention.

- 3. Promotion of Agroecological Practices:** Agroecology, which includes regenerative agriculture, organic farming, and zero budget natural farming (ZBNF), should be aggressively promoted by policy efforts. In order to maintain soil health, boost biodiversity, and develop climate change resilience, it will be beneficial to support these sustainable practices with subsidies, technical training, and certification programs. Promoting ecological agricultural practices promotes environmentally responsible and culturally relevant agriculture, which is consistent with the ideas of food sovereignty.
- 4. Seed Sovereignty and Protection of Indigenous Seeds:** Farmers' long-standing rights to preserve, trade, and enhance seeds are in danger due to corporate domination in seed markets. Governments ought to assist community-run seed banks and make open-source seed variants more accessible. By empowering farmers to preserve crops suited to regional ecological circumstances and preserving genetic diversity, seed sovereignty helps to prevent biopiracy and lessen dependency on pricey commercial seeds.
- 5. Comprehensive Land Reforms and Secure Tenure:** For marginal and tenant farmers, including women, to be economically and socially empowered, they must possess land and have solid tenure rights. Farmers can invest in their land with confidence and obtain institutional funding by putting land reforms into place that formally establish ownership and long-term tenancy. Gender inequality will be addressed and inclusive rural development will be encouraged by acknowledging women's land rights.
- 6. Decentralized Procurement and Strengthening Local Food Systems:** The Food Corporation of India (FCI) and other centralised organisations will be less dependent if strong decentralised procurement systems are established. By strengthening local control over food production and distribution, supporting regional food procurement and local markets can shorten supply chains, diversify cropping patterns, and advance food sovereignty.
- 7. Gender Inclusion and Women's Empowerment:** Despite their vital role in Indian agriculture, women are frequently excluded from decision-making and land ownership. Women's rights to land, loans, and agricultural inputs must be expressly acknowledged and safeguarded by legal reforms. In rural communities, empowering women farmers fosters social justice and improves food security.

Conclusion

In India, protecting farmers represents a larger effort to regain control over food systems, natural resources, and livelihoods than just the immediate issue of economic survival. The difficulties faced by farmers in a nation where almost half of the population is employed in agriculture are a reflection of structural injustices ingrained in the agrarian system as well as sectoral hardship. A crucial alternative paradigm to the traditional food security approach is food sovereignty. Instead of concentrating only on the amount of food produced or purchased, it highlights the right of communities to establish their own agricultural policy, protect traditional knowledge, and promote ecological sustainability.

In India, protecting farmers represents a larger effort to regain control over food systems, natural resources, and livelihoods than just the immediate issue of economic survival. The difficulties faced by farmers in a nation where almost half of the population is employed in agriculture are a reflection of structural injustices ingrained in the agrarian system as well as sectoral hardship. A crucial alternative paradigm to the traditional food security approach is food sovereignty. Instead of concentrating only on the amount of food produced or purchased, it highlights the right of communities to establish their own agricultural policy, protect traditional knowledge, and promote ecological sustainability.

This episode emphasised how important it is to have inclusive governance systems that preserve democratic ideals, respect the constitutional balance between the federal and state governments, and safeguard the socioeconomic rights of rural people. In addition, India's ecological and social variety necessitates agricultural policies that are adapted to gender parity, local customs, and regional realities. A robust food system must be built on the foundation of secure land tenure, seed sovereignty protection, and sustainable agroecological practices. The empowerment of female farmers, who make up a sizable but frequently under-represented portion of the agricultural workforce, is equally crucial. For rural development and wider social justice to be achieved, their inclusion in resource access and legal reforms is essential. Ad hoc policy measures must give way to full legislative protections as India's institutional and legal structure develops to cement farmer-centric rights. For the nation's food sovereignty, ensuring MSP, reviving cooperatives, decentralising procurement, and encouraging climate-resilient agriculture are not just policy alternatives; they are necessities. Furthermore, the protection of farmers' collective rights can be strengthened by bringing national legislation into compliance with international human rights documents like the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants.

In the end, the idea of food sovereignty necessitates a paradigm change, moving away from considering farmers as commodities in international markets and towards acknowledging them as stewards of culture, biodiversity, and sustainable livelihoods. In order to achieve this goal, India will need political will, inclusive policies, and a dedication to agricultural justice that upholds the rights and dignity of its farming people. India can only ensure a fair, sustainable, and independent food future for future generations by taking such an all-encompassing and inclusive strategy.

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