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### IMPACT OF THREE FARM BILLS ON AGRICULTURE DURING COVID-19 IN INDIA

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The effect of COVID-19 has significantly affected every citizen of every country across the globe in one way or the other. India is a country where the main population depends on agriculture sector. India might face a complicated situation because along with other sectors like tourism, education, hospitality, etc, even this sector will be affected. India announced Lockdown -Phase1 in the month of March 2020 where certain limitations were levied by the the government. In addition to this in the same period three farmer bills'2020 were introduced which led to further aggravation of crisis situation. There are both pros and cons of all things. Similarly, the farms bills introduced might not really work well in future. In case if pandemic situation arises in future also then there will not be any stock yields left with govt in their mandi boards and the private sectors will play its own selfish role leading to high prices of the produces leading to increase in demand and less supply. This study aims to study the necessity for making arrangements for drafting of strategies and policies for the food safety during post-COVID-19 pandemic such offering grants and aids for agriculturalist and supervisory the rise of arrest of food and other essential commodities. Also, long-term plans like strengthening of the food supply chain is also the need of the hour. Every citizen should contribute his bit by joining hands together to make policy execution and every relief program across the country a success in times of need.

### INTRODUCTION:

The first few samples of the new coronavirus were identified in the city of Wuhan in China where few unbiased samples of the pneumatic patients where the lungs of the patient were affected and the virus was given the name of known as SARSCoV-2. It is identified as the seventh member of the coronavirus family which is different from MERS-CoV and Sars- CoV that infect the human body. This novel coronavirus virus directly affects the lungs and is known as Covid-19. (Zhu et al., 2020). The first case was announced in India on January 30'2020 which started from China, identified in Dec 2019. As per the recent updates till 17th Jan'2021 the total number of confirmed cases resulted from COVID-19 pandemic till date ie first week Jan 2021 were 93,194,922 and deaths across the globe accounted to 2,014,729. (Source: World Health Organization).

**Figure 1** displaying Top 15 countries with the highest number of Reported Cases and Deaths across the globe.

	All	Europe	North America	Asia	South America	Africa	Oceania								
#	Country, Other	Total Cases	New Cases	Total Deaths	New Deaths	Total Recovered	Active Cases	Serious, Critical	Tot Cases/ 1M pop	Deaths/ 1M pop	Total Tests	Tests/ 1M pop	Population		
	World	88,861,368	+368,205	1,913,395	+7,516	63,805,830	23,142,143	108,669	11,400	245.5					
1	USA	22,190,492	+53,483	374,988	+791	13,149,475	8,666,029	29,024	66,836	1,129	265,741,003	800,393	332,013,304		
2	India	10,430,330	+16,286	150,800	+194	10,053,270	226,260	8,944	7,520	109	179,336,364	129,293	1,387,049,203		
3	Brazil	7,961,673		200,498		7,096,931	664,244	8,318	37,318	940	28,600,000	134,055	213,345,480		
4	Russia	3,355,794	+23,652	60,911	+454	2,731,129	563,754	2,300	22,990	417	92,900,000	636,445	145,967,164		
5	UK	2,957,472	+68,053	79,833	+1,325	1,364,821	1,512,818	2,929	43,446	1,173	58,860,706	864,686	68,071,770		
6	France	2,727,321		66,841		198,756	2,461,724	2,616	41,735	1,023	36,890,043	564,509	65,348,904		
7	Turkey	2,307,581	+11,479	22,450	+186	2,182,145	102,986	3,094	27,209	265	25,865,406	304,981	84,809,974		
8	Italy	2,237,890	+17,533	77,911	+620	1,589,590	570,389	2,587	37,042	1,290	27,579,516	456,499	60,415,307		
9	Spain	2,024,904		51,675		N/A	N/A	2,307	43,300	1,105	27,839,319	595,312	46,764,242		
10	Germany	1,880,737	+11,409	39,704	+446	1,494,100	346,933	5,569	22,410	473	35,118,592	418,459	83,923,689		
11	Colombia	1,737,347		45,067		1,580,285	111,995	3,482	33,956	881	8,489,080	165,918	51,164,327		
12	Argentina	1,690,006		44,122		1,484,794	161,090	3,559	37,216	972	5,099,516	112,296	45,411,216		
13	Mexico	1,493,569	+13,734	131,031	+1,044	1,127,471	235,067	3,913	11,521	1,011	3,781,625	29,171	129,635,780		
14	Poland	1,365,645	+8,790	30,574	+332	1,104,599	230,472	1,616	36,104	808	7,540,513	199,353	37,824,927		
15	Iran	1,274,514	+6,251	56,018	+85	1,058,654	159,842	4,729	15,074	663	7,993,502	94,542	84,549,961		

(Source: - [www.worldometers.info](http://www.worldometers.info))

The highest number of the cases were reported in United States of America followed by India in the second place across the globe placing Brazil at third position. Figure 1 depicts the top 15 countries of the world having the highest number of reported cases and deaths placing USA at the top and Iran at the fifteen position.

This pandemic has resulted in uncertainties of Economic instability, mental depressions, closure of schools, unemployment, psychological imbalances among all age groups. It has completely changed the lifestyle of ones living. Migration restrictions, maintaining social distancing and isolating oneself have led to a condensed labour force in almost all economic segments. The world had come to halt for a while. The people have reduced their requirements due to less financial security. In contrast, the only sector which is rising substantially is the medical sector finding the curing the affected patients and

taking precautions safeguarding oneself from the contagious disease. Another segment which rose for a while initially due to panic-buying and stockpiling was the essential commodities sector buying of household groceries, etc. In addition to this the issues related to farm bills and effect of the Covid-19 pandemic the response on livelihood, economy and education, tourism is likely to be hit severely. The only sector which was rising was the medicine sector and hospitals were full of rush. Various isolations centres were made for quarantine infected patients so that the contagious disease is not communicated. In all aspects the online culture started and also increase was witnessed in the IT sector due to social distancing everything went online, work from home culture took its pace. India will be facing the economic shock on two fronts. Firstly, pre-COVID-19, the compounding existing problems of unemployment, low incomes, economy was decelerating down already, distress, starvation, and extensive disparity and the second front is that the ninety percent of India's workers are from the informal sector which will be affected badly leading to huge disparity and increase in poverty at large. The introduction of agricultural reform bills during the pandemic played a crucial role. The farmers are the heart of the country. Their psychological insecurity due to the farm bills further worsened the situation which led to a big agitation across the country. The lockdown situation created unavailability of seeds and migrant labour problem added to their problems. This study focuses on the impact of the three agriculture reform bills making farmers vulnerable as the centre government gave an edge to corporate and agri-business companies.

### ***Review of literature***

Dwivedi et.al (2020) suggested that India had leverage over curbing the possible spread of Covid-19 early in the lockdown and could have avoided as many as five times as many cases in April in a scenario without lockdown. John and Seshadri (2020) analysed that long before the first case of Pneumonia was identified, the epidemic in China had begun. The novel Coronavirus was described after several months of study and later renamed as SARS-CoV-2. It was expected that India's peak was sometime in Aug, about five months after the first import. Guru (2021) examined the strength of the protest of the farmers is to reveal the link between state formal power and the corporates real power. Rinkoo et. al (2020) analysed that the public health system is insufficient in states and has failed to meet the health needs of people, even in times of relative normalcy, before Covid-19 pandemic. Kumar et.al (2020) studied that the COVID-19 crisis has revealed the weakness of the India's agri-food systems and highlighted the need for reforms in the agricultural market and technological solutions to connect farmers to markets directly, build safety nets and ensure fair working conditions and decentralise the agri-food system to increase their resilience and innovations in agriculture sector. Henry (2020) studied that many research facilities have been closed and many international conferences have been cancelled during this pandemic deleting the connect between the contact and the researcher. Researchers have welcomed working in online mode at large and also the number of research scholars working in the laboratory working environments have reduced as per the unit area space of research laboratory. The diversion of researchers towards Covid-19 research projects has been of the short-term impact of

Covid-19. Torero (2020) briefed that the people have changed their food consumption habits altogether and now are more inclined towards homemade food instead of eating in restaurants due to virus fear and hygiene factors. Yuvraj and Varta (2020) reflects upon the Challenges in the field of the agriculture in Covid-19 like there are various disruptions in the procurement of good quality food grains by government organizations. It was also concluded that there are various disruptions in the collection of the crop yield from the farms by the private dealers. There is a lack of labour to collect the rabi crop and further adding to the problem the shortage of the drivers in the transportation areas, restricting the APMC mandis from being effectively functional. The retails farming markets are closing down. All these factors have provoked emergency situation for the crop produce on the fields like wheat, grapes, watermelons, bananas, muskmelon, chana, cotton, chilies, turmeric, cumin, coriander, onion, and potato. Timilsina et.al (2020) analysed that business of farmers has been badly hit by Covid-19 global pandemic. He has primarily featured the association of worldwide pandemic with rural and food frameworks. He highlighted that the impact from pandemic to lockdown has changed the values of people. Few of them have changed over through business to the regular produce crops which are consumed essentially by all to earn their livelihood. All the activities have come to stand still. It is the need of the hour that priority should be given to the agriculturist as well who always toil hard so that the dream of good yield comes true and the entire world depends upon them to satisfy their hunger and make the world proper saw whole. They are equally important like health and police workers. Various vital initiatives should be adopted by the government to facilitate farmers like sowing and harvesting by robots and various other electronic equipment's using high technology for improving the quality of the produce. Ramakumar (2020) examined that the Covid-19 pandemic made the world realise and the actual worth of the migrant labour. After the lockdown began, the movement of migrant workers was strictly limited and statistics reveal that there was huge return of migrant labourers to their respective home towns. Agriculture sector was intensely affected; labour shortages were witnessed across the world suffered from the impacts of global pandemic. Sarma (2020) highlights that in India, large numbers of people lost their jobs, and supply chains across industries and agriculture have been disrupted. At the same time, environmental indicators notably air and freshwater quality showed improvements following the long period of a nationwide lockdown. Narayanan (2020) helps us understand the grounds of the farmers' fears and added that these bills were passed in parliament during lockdown without considering the needs and preferences of the states. She further added that Agri-stack is a database that would include profiles of farmers, their identities, bank accounts and Government benefits as well geographically explicit information on their farms enabling public-private partnership for the use of such data and allowing private players to build on and monetize these data stacks. Many ag-tech players are already developing sophisticated tracking and scoring systems, data analytic tools and algorithms are being developed to identify the credit and insurance-worthy farmers from the marginal ones. Bhattacharya and Patel (2021) reviewed that the recently enacted farm bills would not only contribute to the destruction of land and the loss of farmers' livelihoods. These farm bills create a fear affecting the psychological minds of

farmers and arising them with Questions such as what if corporate houses refuse to purchase crops or farm production from them. Farmers are stripped of social welfare measures, like most Indian people. Dev (2021) analysed that Covid-19's effect on agriculture is much less than in urban areas. Indeed, the only saving grace for this year's Indian economy is the success of the agriculture sector. Beriya (2021) stated that there is a strong rationale behind these reforms and believe that these reforms are a step in the right direction for the future of Indian farmers. The Indian government maintains that these changes have long been underway and would greatly benefit Indian farmers, the govt mandates that These reforms are aimed at paving the way for revolutionizing Indian agriculture. Deodhar (2021) reviewed and favoured the reform bills stating that by implementing such new reforms where farmers can sell their goods anywhere at any desired prices without intermediary interference, the lacunas in the existing systems can be fixed. The interstate trade being a centre subject the centre government had full authority for the law implications and the COVID-19 crisis period played a very important role as these announcements were made during such pandemic. De Boef et.al (2021) studied that reduced mobility has been the root cause of many disturbances in the supply of, in particular, approved seeds and other inputs to farmers, including low labour availability, reduced production performance and delays in delivery, resulting in reduced capability for seeds and related industries. It was observed that the reports of the increased cost of transactions and doing business during these times will raise the scarcity and price of inputs beyond what either producers or farmers can recover. Dev (2021) analysed the effect on income of farmers after the reform bills. The study argued that the farmers will have full freedom to sell the produce as per their desire and will. the need for diversification urged the shift from wheat and rice to non-cereal focused strategies like millets, pulses, fruits and vegetables, livestock and fisheries. Agricultural reforms aimed at strengthening supply-side causes, such as subsidy rationalization, land reforms, technological use as well. Kumar et. al (2021) studied the effect of Covid-19 on Farming disrupting the economic activities. The migrant labour affects the April harvest leading to decline in agricultural wages and loss of produces. He argued that in reaction not only to future pandemics, but also to the sustainable growth of agricultural systems in India and in developing countries in general, the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 crisis could fuel the development of new sustainable Agri-policies and decision-making. Adhikari et.al (2021) analysed the impact of Covid-19 on agriculture. The study revealed that Family-based subsistence farming systems have been less influenced than commercial farming systems based on the market. Owing to the restriction of food exports from other nations, the need for greater food self-sufficiency has been realized. The lack of food development and food security support policies during emergencies has been realised as the need of the hour. Varshney et. al (2021) observed that the Indian government had implemented many emergency laws to provide employees and households with direct and indirect aid. India's COVID-19 social assistance package Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana or PM-GKY, announced in March 2020, was planned to provide the vulnerable population with immediate relief. Cash direct benefit transfers (DBT) and in-kind assistance (IKS) by existing schemes were supported by the PM-GKY for procurement of agricultural inputs for the upcoming farming season. Cariappa

et.al (2021) reflects upon the effects of COVID-19 on the Indian agricultural environment, production, marketing and consumption, accompanied by a number of plausible strategies for recovery and development after the pandemic. He proposed a 10-point strategy for strengthening the sector against the crisis and sustainability issues. He analysed that 90% of customers have altered their shopping behaviour across all regions. The role of the state is becoming much more relevant as the pandemic continues to threaten the global food system. In order to protect and safeguard the livelihoods of millions of people associated with the agricultural system, spending on social safety nets should be increased immediately by the state and other short- and medium-term strategies should be adopted. The top priority for the post-pandemic reconstruction of the economy should be to collect revenue through the discharge of surplus buffer stocks and increased credit to the agricultural sector.

### ***Significance of the study***

The study focuses on the impact of the three agriculture reform bills making farmers vulnerable as the centre government gave an edge to corporate and agri-business companies. The introduction of these bills during the pandemic further worsened the situation. These bills will affect not only the farmers but every individual of the country in one way or the other. So, the objective of study is to review the impact of three new farm bills on agriculture sector in India during Covid-19 pandemic. The focus of the study is that the lacunae's in the bills in its current form may definitely not be fruit bearing.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on the secondary data collected from various newsletters, periodicals, articles, reports, books, journals, and literatures, on the subject for the aim of gathering the most recent updated information's on the topic was gathered from the e-sources available online.

### ***Impact of COVID-19 on agriculture sector in India: -***

There is a two-fold effect witnessed in this scenario, firstly the buying limit of the consumers have been reduced due to decrease in salaries etc and on the other hand the retailers are storing the nourishments which thusly has influenced the food accessibility and cost. Due to paucity of transport the yield was not delivered to the last stop resulting in shortage of food crops and hike in prices. The focus on automation has increased in the industry with reference to harvesting etc in the chain of production and making the products contamination free eliminating the risks of contamination of the food during production done on manual basis. The research in Agricultural Research has taken its pace. Agricultural researchers with appropriate skills have been tasked with supporting research such as development of vaccines, etc improving the quality and production of high-quality seeds and manure, etc which was affected due to lockdown during COVID-19 pandemic.

Initiatives adopted by the government in Agriculture sector in India during COVID-19 pandemic.

Various schemes were introduced by the Government in agriculture sector to help the needy. Few examples are stated below: -

- State-run activities assured the purchase of more pulses and oil-rich seeds from farmers at lowest buying prices as decided by the government.
- The Government released guidelines allowing the industries and agriculturists to resume their operations who were outside the virus hotspots from April 21'2020.
- The government assured that 800 million underprivileged people will be given every month during April to June about one kg pulses and five kgs of rice and wheat and 80 million people will be able to cook for free to survive the crisis.
- During the pandemic there was interstate migration of labourers in India who were forced to go back to their hometowns due to loss of jobs and various limitations implied in lockdown. The source of income had become zero which made them return to their home town. Some walked 1000 of kilometres who should be given nutritious food and money in hand from purchasing of essential commodities to survive.
- During the lockdown the demand for home delivery of groceries rose to great extent. This was out of fear and precautions undertaken but ideally, we should make efforts to promote and increase Ecommerce.
- Post COVID situation might be tough for farmers and researchers, so productive investment on research and development would be helpful for them from the agricultural point of view.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic trade across the globe faced lot of turbulence, cultivators are struggling hard to overcome difficulties like acute shortages of fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, and seeds. The highest producer and biggest supplier of fertilizer in the world. Therefore, Lockdown has affected the international trade of manures and fertilizers at large. Adding further the cultivation of the spring season crops such as barley, sunflower, maize, and open field foods/vegetables has been also affected severely by this pandemic. After the migration of labourers resulting in high increase of transmission rate there has been acute shortages of healthy workers and labourers which are the determinants for the produce in the agriculture sector. About the high transmission rate of COVID-19, healthy workers and shortages of labour have become the major problems in agriculture sector.

The three farm bills have adversely affected the farmers impacting the agricultural sector in various aspects. These three legislative acts comprise of the following: -

1. The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020

- The new law would create an environment where farmers and traders will appreciate the right to choose between selling and buying agricultural products.
- It would also facilitate inter-state and intra-state barrier free trade and trade beyond the physical premises of markets notified under the Marketing Laws of State Agricultural Produce.
- No fee will be levied will be charged from the farmers for the sale of their produce and they will not have to bear transport costs.
- The Bill also proposes an electronic trading in transaction platform for ensuring a seamless trade electronically.
- Farmers will be given farmers free exchange at the farm gate, cold storage, factory processing units, etc in addition to mandis.
- Farmers would be able to participate in direct marketing, thereby removing the intermediaries contributing to full price realisation.

## 2. Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020

- The new enactment will enable the farmers for participating in with processors, wholesalers, aggregators, wholesalers, huge retailers, exporters and so forth, on the same battleground. Price guarantee will be given to farmers even prior to planting of harvests. In the event of higher market price, farmers will be authorized for a higher price well beyond the base cost.
- The risk of market unpredictability will be passed from the farmer to the sponsors.
- Farmers would be protected from the rise or fall of market prices due to previous price determinants.
- Farmers will have access to technology, innovation, improved seeds and other inputs resulting in increase in revenue to the farmers and resulting in Motivation to research and new technology in agriculture sector.
- With clear time lines for redress, an efficient dispute resolution process has been established.

## 3. Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020

- To exclude foodstuffs such as cereals, pulses, potatoes, onions, edible oilseeds and oils from the list of essential commodities, except in 'extraordinary circumstances' from the list of essential commodities, to remove stock limits on such products.
- Demands that any stock cap on agricultural goods will be imposed on the basis of price increases.

### ***Impact of three Farm Bills on Agriculture during Covid-19 crisis: -***

In the opinion of the Centre government the farm Bills will result in increasing the income of the agriculturists. In a country where farmers are not very educated fail to have a clear understanding and are not aware about the legislations will not be able to sell their yield without the pan card, etc. therefore there is a possibility of a midway for smooth trading. The Crop Minimum Support Price [MSP] is feared by the farmers followed by the

centralisation and hands-on control of big corporates. Agriculturists presume that these bills will weaken them. They believe that all larger corporates may declare the value of crop and earn profit out of it further leading the decline in farmers connect with their guarantors. In case of pandemic if such situation arises then the transport restrictions will lead to decrease in food arrivals to mandis resulting in farmer suicides resulting in major food security challenges, The Centre government has confirmed that Bills began to develop a framework for all farmers just like traders to trade their harvests outside Mandis. On the contrary the agriculturists are concerned about their interests and they are apprehensive that they will face big losses if they operate outside the mandis as the Minimum Support Price Scheme functions exclusively in all controlled mandis. Trade fee is also a source of fear for farmers. If the empowered authorities do not make judicious judgment, then the farms will fall prey in the hands of big corporates with no hearing anywhere. The farmers have a distress that the ownership of the land will also be transferred to the big traders and corporates. During COVID-19 the protest done by farmers created a fear of spreading of coronavirus resulting in loss of lives at large at the majority of farmers sitting at protests belong to the old age segment which can be affected easily by the virus.

#### **CONCLUSION: -**

From the above discussion it is concluded that the various reforms which are being introduced by the Centre Government like New Education Policy, making Hindi language supreme over the regional languages, propagation of agriculture reforms, scraping constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir's and its statehood, depict that key agenda and prime motive of the Govt is centralisation agenda. The government is increasing its dominance over states subjects weakening their freedom. In the period of lockdown rather a knockdown in real terms the farm bills instead of strengthening the agricultural reforms rather they are weakening the system creating more disparities. States will suffer the revenue losses earned from taxes levied on mandis. The farmers do not have the capacity or the required awareness to bargain with corporates which will lead them to be more vulnerable. Covid-19 made the situation worse as it posed a serious threat due to large number of farmer gatherings. The migrant labourer made the shift of Covid-19 from urban to rural areas as well which affected the agriculture sector directly. The start of the interstate migration made the number of affected patients increased drastically. Initiative should be adopted for strengthening the agriculture making reform where citizens of the country confide in their government and States have the power to define rules for the own subjects as levied in the Constitution of India. The slogan of making India "Atam Nirbhar" should be implemented in real and not in words only. The policies should be legislated where the MSP exist and farmers are given their credit of the hard toil invested by them reaping the fruits of what they sowed. To conclude, this is for sure that consequently every individual of the country will be affected by these farm bills.

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