

VIEWPOINT: India's repeal of farm laws : A win to celebrate the power of peoples' voices

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By Geeta Sinha*

The recent repeal of the farm laws by the central government sets an example that reassures the power in people's voices entrusted in democratic values, processes, and practices. It is a win to celebrate and remember that such authoritarian governance and policies can be overthrown with people's solidarity, vision, perseverance, and resilience. In India, the farmers and their families protested for more than a year. The protests and demonstrations were against the government's new farm laws that they perceived would ruin their vital source of livelihood and living. These new farm laws inflicted unhappiness, insecurity, the scope for land grabs by big business giants, and fear of indebtedness amongst farmers and families. Moreover, the government did not fail to accuse and label the movement with foreign infiltrations, police complaints, income tax raids, arrests, internet blockage, inscribed them as anti-nationals, and so on. This does not end here—around 800 farmers sacrificed their lives during this protest.

The farmers' ability to decode the new farm laws which they believed were the result of neoliberal policies of an authoritarian government was central to their protest that demanded the repeal of the farm laws. This reminds me of the books written by Robert Chambers like 'Farmer First' and 'Whose Reality Counts'. The author argues that personal, professional, and institutional change is essential if the realities of the poor (in this case farmers) are to receive greater recognition and should explore the new high ground of participation and empowerment. However, the government's negligence and arrogance to disrespect peoples' voices and their refusal to repeal the farm laws adds to their form of authoritarian governance. As a result, the farmers camped out in Delhi, carried demonstrations, displayed, and attracted solidarity from across the globe and from different sections of the society. The protest by the farmers exhibited a clear message that they would not step back without the repeal of the farm laws by the government.

Very recently the central government announced the repeal of all the three controversial farm laws. This clearly depicts the power and win of peoples' voices rooted in democratic principles/values over an authoritarian government and its policies. The simplest explanation of the democratic process entrusts itself in citizens' active participation in the decision-making including policy formulation of the government. Defiance in any form shall lead to such protests and demonstrations to repeal the laws as in the case of new farm laws. This sends a clear message for the government and political leadership that policy formulation and its implementation requires to be pro-people exhibiting democratic processes by ensuring their involvement in consultations, discussions, and active participation.

The process of dismantling the different pillars of democracy using coercive forces, influencing and controlling media, lop-sided decision-making processes, and development has exposed the government's failure to reach out and serve the common people. Though, India has the precedence of curbing civil liberties, closing down media, and imprisonment of political opponents during the Congress regime but, according to Gyan Prakash, a professor of history at Princeton University, 'the B.J.P. onslaught is also very different and even more damaging to whatever remains of democracy in India,'. This is something that should draw peoples' attention. To sum up, the prolonged farmers' protest to get the farm laws repealed is one such example that instills faith and confidence in democratic values and processes, and any attempt to defy it can be refuted with peoples' power. A win to remember and rejoice!

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