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title: Discussion on the agrarian situation in the country (Discussion not concluded).

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The House shall now take up Item No. 29 – Discussion under Rule 193. Shri P. Karunakaran.

SHRI P. KARUNAKARAN (KASARGOD): Sir, can we take it up tomorrow?

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is not that. We have got time up to 6.00 p.m. You can speak.

SHRI P. KARUNAKARAN: Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir; I am happy to initiate the discussion with regard to the Agrarian Situation in the country under Rule 193. I am speaking when most of the Ministers are absent and the gallery is empty. ...(*Interruptions*)

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Ministers are here. Agriculture Minister is here; Mines Minister is here; our Law Minister is here; Shri Rudy is also here.

...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI P. KARUNAKARAN: Sir, India is considered as a nation of lakhs and lakhs of villages. India is an agricultural country. It is the backbone of our economy. So, the farmers and agriculture workers constitute a major force in the productive sector, that is, agriculture. So, agriculture has to be given the utmost importance with regard to many of the policy decisions that the Government has taken. There is a serious crisis in agricultural sector now which may be due to various reasons like policy decisions and internal and external forces. It is unbelievable that in India 1.5 lakh farmers committed suicide between 1997 and 2005. It is alarming to note that one farmer committed suicide every 32 minutes in India between 1999 and 2005. Due to lack of confidence, our farmers are not in a position to stay put in their lands. Farmers' suicides are continuing even in this era. This pathetic situation is a result of the policies followed by various Governments and other factors. It is a fact that political parties, farmers' organisations and many other forces are taking up this issue, but the situation in agricultural sector has not improved in any way.

Agrarian conditions in rural areas have further worsened for the broad masses of poor peasants and the rural agricultural workers in the last three years especially. The long-term slowdown in agricultural growth is due to lack of public investment and capital formation in this sector. As we have seen in the recent Budget also, investment in agriculture is declining every year. As a result, farmers' suicides are continuing in almost all the States.

According to a National Crime Records Bureau report, 11,772 persons committed suicide in 2013 alone. It is generally agreed that the main reason for this is that farming is increasingly becoming uneconomical. Another reason is the sharp rise in input costs and a lack of proportionate rise in the output prices. It is true that the prices of seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, power and fuel have sharply gone up after 2012 due to the policies of the Government.

Research and development is an essential step that has to be taken by the Government. Not only in agricultural sector but in industry and other sectors also R&D should receive highest importance. I am sorry to say that agricultural sector has been taken over by multinational companies, domestic corporate houses as far as seed production and distribution are concerned. They do things suited to their convenience and not for the sake of lakhs and lakhs of poor and marginal peasants in the country.

Control of corporate houses on farm inputs is growing nowadays. The sharp rise in the cost of different agricultural inputs has been left uncontrolled and farmers are not compensated by a corresponding increase in output prices. Prices of agricultural commodities in international markets have also adversely affected farmers. In such a situation, public procurement system is one relief for the farmers. But the Government is not giving due importance to this. They are inviting multinational corporations into retail sector and to the farm gates.

We know that sugarcane farmers are affected because of failure of the state to ensure payment of their dues to the tune of 110 billion from sugar mills. How can sugarcane farmers survive if they are not in a position to get back their dues? Here it is for the big sugar mills, not for the farmers. So, State Governments as well as the Central Government have to take up this type of issues which are most important as far as farmers are concerned.

Sir, agricultural credit is another thing which comes to the assistance of farmers. But in practice, it also goes to the big corporations, agriculture houses and big farmers. Small and marginal farmers are unable to get the loans at a cheaper interest rate and they are forced to depend on the money-lenders. As a result, the indebtedness among the peasants is growing. We had discussed in the House that the earlier Government appointed Swaminathan Commission which gave many suggestions in its report. One among them was the provision of free loans or loans at cheaper interest rate that is 4 per cent as far as farmers are concerned. In the Budget the Government says, we are raising Farm Credit Target to Rs 8.5 lakh crore. But what is the interest rate? It is 12 to 14 per cent. As far as the farmers are concerned, the most important issue is whether the Government is ready to reduce the interest rate of loans given to farmers.

The Cooperative Societies have been giving assistance to farmers in the states like Kerala. There is a well established cooperative system covering all villages of the State of Kerala. They are really assisting and protecting the farmers especially in my State but the new policy on Cooperative Credit Societies have created much difficulties for them in giving loans to farmers. The Cooperative Societies and Banks are not allowed to accept deposits, thereby being unable to lend money to farmers. This has become an issue in the State.

There are more than 1,000 Primary Cooperative Societies, 14 District Cooperative Banks and a large number of other Cooperative Societies. But at the same time, they were really the protector of the villagers as far as Kerala is concerned, because the farmers were getting loans and they could also make deposits. But as per the new decision taken by the Government, the Cooperative Societies are not able to get the deposits. Because of the new decision of the RBI and the Government, the cooperative sector in Kerala is facing great difficulties. This will affect the farmers also because they will not be able to get the loans. They will have to go to the money-lenders. Why is the Government disallowing the Cooperative

Societies from receiving the deposits and why have they to go to the private banks? It means that they are diverting the farmers and also other persons to go to private Banks instead of Cooperative Banks.

The cooperative sector is really the sector of the people. So, I request the Government to apply their mind as far as the State is concerned because unlike other States, the cooperative sector is well established and well networked in Kerala. In every village, we can see such Cooperative Societies and Cooperative Banks. Irrespective of political parties, we placed these issues before the Finance Minister and the Prime Minister, but I am sorry to say that they have not taken any decision. At least the Minister of Agriculture can take up this issue for the sake of farmers.

The Government has decided to change the pattern of the MGNREGA Act. The total number of the blocks converted by the Act is limited and the labour component is also changed. Earlier it was 60:40 but now it is 51:49. Due to these changes, on both sides the employment opportunities for the workers are reduced. The earlier Government had passed this not only as a scheme, but as an Act. So, it is on the issue of the demand that the work has to be given by the Panchayats, Blocks or Districts. As a result, lakhs and lakhs or crores and crores of people were getting employment.

When we talk about the agriculture sector, it is in a difficult position. How is it possible for the workers to get work if you are taking up such legislation or such a change in the existing MGNREGA scheme? So we strongly urge the Government that there should not be any change with respect to the blocks. The Government says that there is no change. There are 6,000 or more blocks in India but now the number is confined to 2,500.

I know that. In my State, there are 102 blocks but now it is applicable only in 50 blocks. In my district, there are six blocks but it is applicable only in four blocks. The Government says it has not made any changes. Who has given these directions? How has the decision to change taken place? The number of blocks has come down, as a result of which employment opportunities are coming down. Another major decision relates to 60:40; sixty per cent means the wages of the workers and the other portion is the materials. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI MALLIKARJUN KHARGE (GULBARGA) : This is slow poisoning. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI P. KARUNAKARAN: This is really contributing to the slackening of the agriculture sector. That also has to be taken into account.

The Government has passed the changes in the Land Acquisition Act. There was a strong protest in this House. There were about 104 votes that we got. Maybe, this is a first as far as the Opposition is concerned. I am sure that even on the side of the Treasury Benches, many of the hon. Members were thinking that it was not desirable. Though many of them were not able to vote against it, they had abstained and gone out of the House. It means, a large number of Members and a large number of parties were not in favour of passing this Bill. ...(*Interruptions*)

THE MINISTER OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT, MINISTER OF HOUSING AND URBAN POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (SHRI M. VENKAIAH NAIDU): Why have they passed it? If a number of Members and a number of parties do not want to pass it, has god come and made them to pass it? It is a democracy with open voting in the House. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI NINONG ERING (ARUNACHAL EAST): Sheer numbers.

SHRI M. VENKAIAH NAIDU: Democracy means numbers also; it is about numbers and Members. Otherwise, you would have been here; we would have been there; and they would have been somewhere else. It is simply a decision of the people. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI MALLIKARJUN KHARGE: It is also a question of everybody's acceptance. When you get power, you must act judiciously; you should not bulldoze. That is the only request. â€œ! (*Interruptions*) You should not feel that you can do anything you want. It is also about how will you act. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI M. VENKAIAH NAIDU: We have learnt from your experience of Emergency and we are products of the anti-Emergency movement. ...(*Interruptions*) We have learnt from that. You have set so many precedents. We are fortunate to have those precedents. ...(*Interruptions*) We are learning from you.

This is a new interpretation that 450 people do not count but 40 people will decide. Shri Karunakaran, I am sorry to stop you. You have got every right to express your views but do not cast aspersions on Members who have voted for the Bill. â€œ! (*Interruptions*) You may have a difference of opinion. It is not only the majority but an overwhelming majority of two-thirds against one-third who have voted. So, how can you say that? ...(*Interruptions*) It is wrong to say that all Members are opposed to it. That is not fair. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI MALLIKARJUN KHARGE : We are not deriding; we are only dissenting. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI P. KARUNAKARAN : I am happy to hear your intervention because I do not want to disgrace all your Members who were not here at the time of the voting. I do not want to tell the names. ...(*Interruptions*)

Shiv Sena is a constituent of your Government. Is that not a fact? What was their position? ...(*Interruptions*) Was it imposed by us? They knew that this Bill was not in the interest of the country.

The BJD did not participate in the voting because they knew that it was not in the interest of the people. ...(*Interruptions*) Many of the other parties were also there.

It is true that in a democracy, the majority decision is the main decision but why did they not support you?

SHRI N.K. PREMACHANDRAN (KOLLAM): Can we have a conscience vote in respect of the Land Acquisition Bill in this House? ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI P. KARUNAKARAN : If you go for the conscience vote, it would be against the Government. The people who are supporting BJP will vote against it.

SHRI M. VENKAIAH NAIDU: If you go for that, the RSP which used to be on the Left will go with the Right, that is, the Congress Party.

SHRI P. KARUNAKARAN: We have witnessed at the time of the voting as to how many parties were there and how many Members were there and how many had gone out. Many Members abstained. It shows that there was a strong opposition in their conscience with regard to the adverse effect of the Bill. That is what they had expressed. ...(*Interruptions*)

I think, you have to understand and realise that in your own party and in your own Government there are disagreements with this. I would like to quote from the autobiography of Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister.

18.00 hrs

He made it clear that it is true that the majority rules, that is the decision, but at the same time the majority has to think how the minority feels. Here, it is not only the minority, the persons who have assembled before you are also not in a position to support you.

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Shri Karunakaran, you may continue tomorrow.

The House stands adjourned to meet again tomorrow at 11 a.m.

18.01 hrs

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock

on Thursday, March 19, 2015/Phalgun 21, 1921 (Saka).

* The sign + marked above the name of a Member indicates that the Question was actually asked on the floor of the House by that Member.

* Not recorded.

* English translation of the speech originally delivered in Malayalam.

* English translation of the speech originally delivered in Tamil.