

**Protecting the Regulatory and Legal Infrastructure for  
Food Sovereign, Food Self Reliant India (Atma Nirbhar Bharat)**  
*(Briefing Paper on the Dismantling of India's Food Sovereignty and  
Food Security framework through 3 Ordinances)*

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Peasants have fed India over thousands of years through ecologically sophisticated agriculture which has inspired the global organic and agroecology movements of today.

The British colonial rule destroyed our Food Sovereignty through a system of extraction taxes from the peasantry.

The extraction of Lagaan created famine for the peasants, but wealth for the colonisers. \$45 trillion of wealth was extracted from the farmers of India through Lagaan. 60 million Indians died due the resulting famines created by the British Empire.

1942 the Great Bengal famine killed 2 million people.

That is why in 1955, independent India passed the Essential Commodities Act, to prevent traders from profiteering from food while people died.

Laws like the Essential Commodities Act and APMC Act are laws made by a sovereign country for food self reliance. These laws regulate Corporate Greed. Such regulations are the duty of government.

It was the Essential Commodity Act which allowed us to introduce the Seed Price Control order which regulated Bt Cotton Seed Prices, and stopped Monsanto from extracting superprofits from cotton farmers .Farmers were being driven to debt , and to suicide because of Monsanto's monopoly and high prices. Dismantling the Essential Commodity Act is giving up the only instrument which we have to stop predatory corporations from drining farmers to suicide, and the country into a famine trap.

With the slogan of Atma Nirbhar Bharat, the government has introduced 3 ordinances to dismantle the regulatory framework that secures our food sovereignty and promotes Self Reliance.

On May 16th, 2020 , the Finance Minister , Nirmala Sitharaman announced agricultural reforms as part of the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan , which is supposed to be a stimulus package to deal with the economic fallout of the Corona lockdown .

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/agriculture/essential-commodities-act-tweak-to-free-up-farmers/articleshow/75767855.cms?from=mdr>

On 3rd of June, the cabinet approved approved ordinances to dismantle our national food security framework. On 5th of June, Gazette notifications were issued

The three ordinances are

The **Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020** which dismantles the Essential Commodities Act

**Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020** which dismantles the framework that regulates traders from exploiting farmers

**The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020** which opens the door for global e commerce and food processing corporations to lock farmers into new corporate slavery

The justification of the Ordinances introduced during the Emergency related to the Covid pandemic on 5th June, 2020 is full of untruths, half truths and double speak.

The first False claim is that it a bold new decision for an Atma Nirbhar Bharat

Since 1991, global corporations and the World Bank have been trying to dismantle the regulatory framework that protects Food Security and makes India truly Atma Nirbahar. For 3 decades, parliament and farmers movements have prevented the global corporate interests from achieving their goal of destroying our food sovereignty and Self Reliance.

What she offered was what World Bank had imposed in its 1991 agricultural reforms as part of the Structural Adjustment package and what corporations have been attempting since then.

- Liberalising fertilizer imports, and deregulating domestic manufacturing and the distribution of fertilisers.
- Removing land ceiling regulation.
- Removing subsidies on irrigating electricity and credit thereby creating conditions to facilitate the trading to canal irrigation water rights.
- **Deregulating the wheat, rice sugarcane, cotton, edible oil and oilseed industries.**
- **Dismantling the food security system.**
- **Removing controls on markets, traders, and processors, and subsidies to cooperatives.**
- **Abolishing the Essential Commodities Act.**
- Abolishing the general ban on future trading.
- **Abolishing inventory controls.**
- Abolishing selective credit controls on inventory financing.
- Treating farmers' cooperatives on an equal footing with the private sector.

The second false claim is that this is a landmark decision that would benefit Indian farmers and double farmers income. Removing regulatory protections that protect our farmers implies that farmers will be even more vulnerable to exploitation by predatory corporations. The Essential Commodity Act applies to trade, not to farmers. Today's traders are giant corporations like Bayer and Monsanto, Cargill and Pepsico, Amazon and Walmart - who are emerging as the new Zamindars controlling not just our food and land use, but also water use and seeds. They trap farmers in buying costly inputs, locking farmers into growing monocultures of commodities as raw materials which they buy cheap, process and package, and sell at high cost to consumers. Corporate control over food and agriculture through reregulation of commerce.

Since 1997 when Quantitative Restrictions, and import tariffs removed, a polarisation was created between falling farmers prices, and increasing consumer prices. The polarisation of prices becomes a source of super profits for global corporations. The higher the integration of the supply chain, the lower are the prices farmers receive. This pattern is global. Farmers receive as little as 1 to 4 % of what the consumer pays when corporations control the food system through deregulated commerce, and governments stop playing their role as guardians of the public good.

Potato farmers are committing suicide with falling potato prices and rising costs of production. Meantime Pepsi is walking away with superprofits. For a Rs 20 packet of Lays potato chips, a farmer receive a mere Rs 0.04. These falling farm prices are the reason for agrarian distress. The three ordinances will make the Pepsi model the model for Agriculture, destroying and displacing farmers, workers, small processors, small business and industry which make the decentralised food economy of India.

The policies of globalization and trade liberalization have already created the food and farm crisis at 3 levels:

1. A shift from "food first" to "trade first", and "farmer first" to "corporation first" policies.
2. A shift from diversity and multi- functionality of agriculture to monocultures and standardization, chemical and capital intensification of production, and deregulation of the input sector, especially seeds leading to rising costs of production.
3. Deregulation of markets and withdrawal of state from effective price regulation leading to collapse in prices of farm commodities.

The Ordinances will deepen the agrarian and food crisis. Every fourth Indian is hungry. India is 100th among 119 countries in the Hunger index. The Covid Crisis aggravated the hunger crisis. The government was in a position to distribute 10kg rice or wheat because we had a food security system whose pillars are the Acts that the Ordinances are dismantling.