

English translation from original

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Narendra Modi
Prime Minister, India
New Delhi

March 17, 2015

Subject: what is in a farmer's heart (For the 22nd March 'heart-to-heart talk with farmers')

Respected Modi ji

Greetings

Here in the mountains, the climate is far from fine. We are shivering in the month of *Chaita*. Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamnotri, along with other hills, are covered with an unseasonal snow. Agriculture and farming is far from fine. While in some places the rabi sowing could not take place because of the drought right after the monsoons. Now there is heavy rainfall and snow. On 15th august last year many places could not celebrate the Independence Day because of the cloudburst that caused heavy destruction in form of landslides, floods and damage to life and property. Ourselves and our governments have forgotten so quickly the destruction in Uttarakhand in September 2012 and then in 2013 on 15,16 and 17 June when suddenly Badrinath, Kedarnath and other Upper Himalayan regions had unseasonal and terrible rainfall, cloudbursts and over 10000 persons were buried alive in Kedarnath itself. An incident that shook the whole country. For intensifying this destruction, the role of hydroelectric power projects has been similar of that of fuel to fire.

The destruction caused by the past monsoon in Jammu and Kashmir part of the Himalaya has also been something to be noted in our history. In the last 2-2.5 decades the wind, water and weather conditions have become upside-down. Now the heart is in constant fear, wondering where the next destruction is going to come, in the next few days. There is a fear that *saavan* might go dry. It is all becoming unfathomable. As if *nirbhaagi* weather has decided to plague farmers. *Maar-de-lagaan* on farmers is a business. Meanwhile we hope that development is going well in Delhi, America, Japan and other developed countries. Keep giving momentum to that development. For here perhaps god only worries..

Honourable sir, as a small farmer and someone associated for the past 25-30 years with agricultural issues as a '*karyakarta*' of Beej Bachao Andolan, I felt very heartened upon hearing that our Prime Minister wants to engage in conversation for the first time and is seeking suggestions. This has given me courage to write this letter. The phrase '*mann ki baat*' touched my heart. In my heart I started remembering old days. But today heart fills with sadness looking at the state of agriculture and farming.

I am remembering how 25-30 years ago our country used to have six seasons *vasant*, *grisham*, *varshat*, *shishir*, *hemant* and *sharad*, in a pre-determined sequence. Farmer used to sow seeds at a fixed time, do *nirai-gudai* and harvest at a fixed time. Wind,water, weather was not an obstruction. The courtyard used to be filled with livestock (cow, calf, ox, buffalo). Our water sources (*chaal*, *khaal*,*talab*, *bawadiyaan*) were brimming with water. The sweet sound of ringing bells on livestock used to echo in villages. The village forests used to provide sufficient fodder

for livestock as well as wood for farming implements. Munshi Premchand's Heera, Moti and Hori. Aah. The farms, barns and house were filled with cereals, pulses, *tilhan*, vegetables and greens, eating all of these used to keep people happy and healthy. Disease used to stay away. This is why nation's father, mahatma Gandhi, used to speak about taking Gram Swaraj forward.

But today bad news is coming from our villages. Neither farm-saved seed remains, nor manure, nor oxen nor diversity in food crops. Instead of the bells of livestock we hear the cacophony of tractors. Instead of manure and compost we have chemical fertilizers and oil, making our eyes water. Even apart from the increased weather unpredictability, there is a cascade of troubles on the farmer. You must have heard how more than 3 lakh farmers have committed suicides. Only remembered during the political elections..

Honourable Modi ji, you say our country hasn't developed enough, to complete which you are working night and day. But the truth is that the small clerk has become an officer, the small shopkeeper an industrialist, the small town has become a city, now increasingly having high-technology. But why are the villages going barren? Why are farmers committing suicide? And why is the new generation leaving agriculture and migrating to cities to work as labourers. There was a green revolution for farmer's development. Initially the *chamatkari* (magical) seeds of wheat varieties from Mexico came, along with that came chemical fertilizers, and we got bumper crop. Farmers were happy. The nation's granaries were full. But after sometime diseases in crops started spreading. Toxic pesticides were presented as medicine, and started getting liberally sprayed. In the beginning, in the name of demonstration the seeds, fertilizers and pesticides were distributed for free. But when the farmer stopped having farm saved seed he felt compelled to buy seed and fertilizer. With new seeds came new weeds, and then came weedicides. Instead of bullocks, we now had tractors that would feed on oil instead of grass and give out pollution instead of manure. farmers tried to save these new seeds for next sowing season, as was their tradition, but the seeds started getting damaged and the yield started declining. In every crop there were now new varieties but the diverse traditional varieties and home-based resources started declining. When did they start vanishing? Nobody knew. Farming which was once our own, started becoming increasingly somebody else's. Inputs in farming steadily increased. Now the profits also dipped. Much like the saying of *aamdani atthanni, kharcha rupaiyah*. And a time came when farmers started committing suicide, a trend that has continuously grown. Now the farmer has fallen into the debt trap. When there is no money in the pocket where would they turn to if not towards the banks and the moneylenders.

Honourable PM, a few days after becoming the PM you visited the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (Pusa institute) in Delhi. We thought you would demand an answer out of the scientists about why lakhs of poor farmers are committing suicide. Who is responsible? It is a matter of sadness that there also you gave the slogan 'From the lab to the field'. It is this slogan itself that has destroyed us. Despite the name having 'Indian' in it, the research there has been more for promotion of American and western agriculture and the profit of MNCs.

Honourable PM, if you want to understand about Indian agriculture then you will have to leave the American farming model. USA only has 1.5-2% farmers and here the base of livelihood for more than 70% of Indians is farming even as farmers are standing at death's doorstep and abandoning agriculture today because of the American Green Revolution model.

The present American culture is a mere 3-400 years old but our farming and animal husbandry culture and tradition is thousands of years old. By grazing cattle, lord Krishna increased the honour of our livestock. By forsaking the kingdom of Ayodhya and accepting the kingdom of

forests, eating its diverse tubers, flowers, vegetables and other food, Lord Rama increased the honour of the forest dwellers and their uncultured culture. And even you, for lord Rama..

Our planners chose the western model of industrial, urban development. By choosing the American agricultural model and increasing the yield of wheat and rice, it did steal praises, but in turn we lost the diversity from our biodiversity. We also lost our food biodiversity, as a consequence of which common man is surrounded by ill nutrition and dangerous diseases. How clever are these multinational companies? First they bring chemical fertilizers, pesticides and weedicides. When chemicals make us sick with toxic food, they speak about keeping good health with life protecting medicines. In the name of development, government is strengthening their business.

Honourable sir, it has been the misfortune of us farmers that instead of placing our trust in traditional knowledge and biodiversity, we trusted the knowledge and words of persons from outside. Farming is a way of life and a culture. Farmer is the one who grows diverse food to satisfy hunger for his family but is simultaneously also a food provider. It is also his responsibility to satisfy hunger of those who don't grow food.

Diversity is a natural character of our environment. Agriculture has always been biodiverse. Much like how a forest can not be composed of a single species, the tongue tires of constant exposure to a single taste and heart wants variety.

But the greed of mono-cropping, business and cash cropping has made the life-source of farmers barren. Sometimes it feels like it has been a deliberate trick in the name of agricultural development, for industry to take over farming. The farmer suicides are a consequence.

Soil and land worth farming

Soil is a foundational element of creation. We use the term 'Mother earth' often but our development programmes have not given a priority to soil. Soil is the basic asset of a farmer but the modern progressive agriculture, through intensified use of chemical fertilizers, has squeezed out the soil like a lemon. The blind use of deadly chemicals and toxics with mother earth or soil is no less from unjustified tampering or rape.

If the soil could speak it would certainly have said 'O unfortunate ones, don't do this!'. By ruining the health of our soil, we are producing poisonous food and the common man's health is worsening with new deadly diseases cropping up. This despite the fact that traditional, organic, natural farming with a small scientific push can provide everyone with delicious and nutritious food.

The bill on Land Acquisition Rights and rehabilitation announced by the present Indian government is even more dangerous than the law that has been continuing since British rule. You often repeat that this law is for the welfare of farmers. But tell us when did farmers ask for such a law? Yes it is true that public services like roads, school, railway lines and hospitals require land. Tell us, when have farmers not given land for such purposes. They always have and always will. But diversion of fertile land linked directly to farmers' livelihoods for huge malls, high-tech cities like Lavasa, FDA and SEZ of national and foreign Multi National Companies is not simply an injustice, but a grave one. People from government argue that farmers will get good compensation. This exchange of land for money reminds one of the saying from the mountains about 'selling the boat for buying a nose-ring'. Fertile land is an immovable property. How many days will the money be good for. Our next generation...

Seed:

Seed is an important element of creation. It hasn't been made by a scientist or an entrepreneur in a laboratory. Thousands of years ago ancestors of farmers collected seeds from the forests

by picking and choosing, and like their own heirs, propagated different crop varieties. The same seeds are the ones that scientists have researched on to create new seeds. But scientists and MNCs have treated farmers like *Bhasmasur* would (the demon who destroyed everyone he touched).

At one time, despite being economically poor, farmers were rich in biodiversity. There were different varieties corresponding to the specific characters of different geographical areas. This is why India was called *sone-ki-chidiya* (the sparrow of gold). It is said that there were lakhs of varieties of rice and if even one grain from each variety was put in an earthen pot, the pot would fill up to the top. Wheat, barley, pulses, tilhan, jowar, bajra, madua and greens, vegetables were also present in thousands of varieties but today traditional seeds are hard to find. Today everywhere MNC seeds are visible. This doesn't mean that our seeds didn't provide a good yield. Some traditional varieties grown in manure are even today giving a yield equivalent to that of so-called progressive seeds. During your heart-to-heart talks with farmers will you advise them to do such a farming for which they can't save the seed? How unfair is it that farming is done by farmer but the seed has to be bought from MNCs. This is a huge betrayal towards the farmer.

The success or failure of the Green Revolution should be investigated by an independent agency because farmers have dried up and companies are green.

In the name of a second green revolution your government now wants to make a law for introducing GM seeds. The BRAI bill which your party had quite opposed during the time of being in opposition party, it is now eager to pass or introduce without seeking parliament's approval. Many countries of the world which feel compassion for environment and human health have been cautious about GM and not allowed these. But the Indian government, under pressure from American companies, is going to introduce GM seeds.

As per presently available information, GM technology will be detrimental to the traditional seed and cause contamination of traditional varieties. It will also negatively impact the health of consumers. What is your opinion about this?

Coarse grain or nutritious grain?

What is called coarse grain is in fact smaller than the grain size of wheat and rice. But being the primary food of rural population it is considered as coarse. Amongst these are jowar, bajra, ragi/madua, saanwa (jhangora), Kangni, cheena, kodo and kutki. In terms of nutrition these grains are most nutrition and rich in calcium, protein, fibre, iron and many vitamins and minerals. Because of this it is called nutritious grain. Nutritious grain or millets protect people from many diseases and serve as medicines for many other diseases. But in government programmes these grains have been a victim of neglect. The previous government had included the promotion of such grains in their INSIMP (Initiative for Nutritional Security through Intensive Millets Promotion) programme but this was later discontinued. What is your position on these nutritious grains? These grains are called the farming of the future because these don't need irrigation and can withstand the dangers of drought, flood and other environmental uncertainties. These are also great in mixed farming.

Environmental and climate change: An unprecedented challenge for farmers

Honourable minister, with regard to unseasonal rainfall, drought, excessive rain, floods, our belief was that it is a natural calamity signaling the onset of 'Kalyug' but scientific research has opened our eyes. Its real reason is the excessive development or consumeristic culture. The devastation caused by environmental and climate change doesn't impact the lives of professional and city person. He will still get his salary. Business of businessmen will also

continue. Yes the city people do feel hot but their solution is refrigerator, AC and cooler. When they feel cold, they switch in heating systems. By using electricity intensively they make the environment correspond to their wishes.

In the name of environment or the wrath of gods, the unprecedented assault of climate change is directly hitting poor farmers. Sometimes the crop is destroyed in drought, other times excessive rainfall, cloudbursts, or unseasonal rainfall pours water over their labour. No season or weather follows defined pattern anymore. The entire balance of seasons has gotten disrupted. The rich developed countries or the people in big cities of our country disrupt the climate and the negative impacts are borne by poor farmers. Can there be a graver injustice? What court should we go to?

Because of this it is important that an end is put to such destructive development and consumeristic culture which is affecting environment and climate. The UN defined regulations on this must be followed by all countries.

Small and marginal farmers during the harvest of kharif and rabi should get adequately compensated in accordance to the land under cultivation during every harvest.

Millet farming and mixed cropping which reduces environmental threats to agriculture should be given a higher compensation.

Green bonus for farmers of Uttarakhand

The central government started green bonus last time because the land has 65% forests. But this forest has not been preserved due to government efforts but it is a heritage of the farmers of the region. In 1970 during Chipko Andolan farmers here had given out this world famous slogan: "soil water and air: the gifts of the earth, the basis of life".

Despite facing government oppression, people protected their forests from logging. Even today people from thousands of villages using their resources have conserved community-based mixed forest patches of their surrounding reserved forest or van panchayat. This is why it is these village communities, not the state government, that should hold a right over the green bonus.

Honourable sir, despite the verdant beautiful forests, today the melting glaciers, the increased frequency of destruction by cloud bursts and the decline of snow fall are causes of great concern. Some of these actions of destructive development will have to be stopped even by you, understood even by you.

Challenges faced by farmers due to wild animals

If any crops survive the challenge of seasonal unpredictability, then during the day, groups of monkeys, and at night, boar and blue bull raid fields and destroy crops. We can't kill them because not only it is illegal (under Wildlife Act) but they are also a part of the environment. But why can't the Forest Department that has been created for their protection look after their dietary needs. In the past few years the population of these wild animals has also increased. Government has been unable to keep their numbers in check or to provision for their food from the forests. This has now become a huge issue for us. Because of no solution in sight, farmers are getting discouraged to continue farming.

How will the farmer suicides stop?

Farmers are called the food providers for a country where farmers are committing suicide, it is difficult to know what is in the heart of those farmers but we can try to understand their situation. It is those farmers that are committing suicide who have left the biodiverse farming for

monocultural commercial farming and who because of increased inputs in farming have fallen into a debt trap and the burden of debt and interest just keeps on increasing.

Previous prime minister Dr. Manmohan Singh had provided a large package of Rs. 71000 crores for waiving farmers' debt. Even then the farmer suicides didn't stop. How could they? The debtwaiver money went into the pockets of bank, money lender and businesses working on fertilizers, seeds, pesticides and oil-machinery and some went to corrupt bank officers and fake farmers. Farmer had to grow the next crop. There was no money in the village which meant that yet again more loans were easily got for seeds, pesticides and fertilizers and again the vicious cycle of interest and recovery and then increase in the number of suicides.

Neither the government nor the opposition got worried by farmer suicides. Your Akashwani (All India Radio) was *bakwaaswani* (voice of nonsense) for farmers, while news channels belittled the graveness of the issue. Perhaps it was because they didn't want to villainize the national, foreign, multinational companies and the government that sells seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and modern technology to the farmer. In any case, these companies give big cash for dissemination and communication through advertisement in the name of agricultural development, while the farmer doesn't even give a *dhela* (a penny).

The psychology of a farmer's suicide can be hard to understand but a straight and true reason is that those farmers commit suicide for whom the way of life and culture of farming has been snatched by modern agricultural development. For whom the practice of family based diversity rich farming has been replaced by an input-intensive monocultural commercial farming, pushing him into a debt trap.

For putting a stop to suicides it is important that first the farmer is returned to his way of living and culture. The farmer should produce for himself and his family diversity rich food, pulses, *tilhan*, and vegetables and greens. Today money is also needed so he should sell a bit of his diversity-rich agri-produce and also grow commercial crops in one section of his land.

Even today if we look at those portions of many states of our country where farmers are doing diversity-rich farming, the farmers there are healthy. You will not see there the trend that is in Punjab of spreading cancer. In those portions, farmers are not committing suicide.

The *barahnaja* element of mixed cropping in Uttarakhand is a good example of rich agriculture. Various pulses, *tilhan* and vegetables, along with madua keep the farmers and the mother earth healthy. This is the reason why Uttarakhand doesn't have the blotch of farmer suicides.

Animal husbandry

At one time, rivers of milk and ghee used to flow through our country. It seems like an exaggeration but the truth is that the daily diet of each farmer used to include milk-ghee. I am sorry but the popularity of tea has increased after 1960- earlier guests used to be welcome with curd-buttermilk. But that taste of buttermilk and that smell of ghee still lingers inside the head. Just like how the taste and nutrition of food has been stolen by hybrid seeds, in a similar fashion, the taste of milk ghee has faded as the traditional varieties disappeared. Where is sindhi, gir, tharparkar, sahiwal and the dark pahadi cow? Where are the farmer's oxen. Now in government programmes for use as tractor in mountains subsidies are being given for a power tiller, but no subsidies for oxen, nor for buffaloes and cows.

Instead of traditional cattle breeds, we now have Jersey, Friesian and who knows which all foreign breeds. Instead of natural fertilization for cattle there is artificial insemination using

foreign sperm. The traditional breeds of our cattle are disappearing like the traditional seeds. Who will save these breeds?

Honourable Modi sir, I am sorry that this letter is a little long. I remembered old things so I wrote. The new that I have lived through, I have written my experiences. But Honourable sir, remember one thing, please understand that one day the traditional knowledge and traditional biodiversity will be of value to the farmer one day. We are hopeful about sustainable farming, nutritious food, clean air and water but worried about the destructive urban development and the oppressive culture which has threatened our old world of dark monsoon clouds and a verdant earth. We hope that you will understand the feelings of farmers.

With warm regards,
Vijay Jardhari
On behalf of farmers of Uttarakhand and the country

For translation related information for this letter, please contact Shiba at desor.shiba@gmail.com. Some words and statements have not been perfectly translated.