



Gujarat Polls: Farmers Stopped from Participating in Movement; MSP Lower Than Market Rate

While thousands of farmers from across the country registered their protest against the farm laws at the national capital last year, those from Gujarat struggled to do so – owing to the pressure from the state police.

Farmers protesting against the price hike and low earnings Pal (middle) was detained several times for protesting

Banaskantha: “The more we fall into our problems, the more the government has added to them. It is not just the level of groundwater that has been drying up in Banaskantha, it is also the help that we have received from the government,” says Shankar, a farmer from Banaskantha’s Dhanera area.

In North Gujarat’s Mahesana district, the Bharatiya Janata Party had won five seats out of a total of seven in the last election. However, this year, with no solution to the farmers’ problems, Mahesana is likely to see a shift to an Independent or an Indian National Congress MLA. The farmers suggest that in the absence of groundwater, they have not been able to make use of the drip irrigation subsidy that was introduced and heavily advertised by the party.

“How do I get the subsidy? If you know, please tell me,” said Mohan, a resident of Mahesana. He added, “When I cannot even afford to install a borewell in my farm, how do I even make use of the subsidy? Earlier, they at least gave a subsidy for the seeds; this year, we did not receive even that.” Getting a borewell installed on land where there is no water until the depth of 1,000 ft is very challenging for the farmers who have less than five bighas of land.

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“Although the government provides MSP for multiple crops, for us, since there is no farming in three seasons owing to the water conditions here, we get it only for two crops: groundnut, and mustard. Even for these, the rates are so low that we fail to sell our crops,” said Shankar. Not just this, the farmers allege that the government has been procuring less than ever. This year, they say, the government procured less than 20% of the total produce.

elderly farmer who earlier sowed in all three seasons; now grows only groundnut and mustard

In May 2020, Pal Ambaliya, a lanky 44-year-old farmer leader from Devbhoomi Dwarka who has been fighting for farmers’ rights since 2014, went to the Rajkot district collector’s office with two other farmers and three cotton sacks to demand better rates for their harvest. However, he was taken to a deserted land, tied to a tree, and beaten up for doing so.

In addition, hundreds of farmers planned on joining the January 26 tractor march by the farmers in Delhi but were stopped by the state police. Shankar, along with at least 50 other farmer friends, had decided to leave for Delhi 10 days before the march. “I had posted on social media that I would be leaving to join the protest soon, but the police became a hurdle,” he said. Early in the morning, as Shankar prepared to lead the way for all farmers to Gandhinagar first and then to Delhi, police arrived at his place. He was allegedly taken to the local police station and detained for several hours. The other farmers, owing to Shankar’s detention, could not leave and several others who attempted were reportedly stopped at the check posts.

“Such is the curb on dissent in Gujarat. We, as farmers, cannot even protest,” said Pal. However, he adopted a different strategy to be able to participate in the protest. “When I heard of Shankar and others being detained and house arrested, I decided to go ahead with a different plan. I left the house after shaving my hair and beard,” narrated Pal.

“I took my tractor towards the Ambaji temple, from where I had to travel within the villages seeking help from the locals. I then had to enter Rajasthan via Aravali,” he said. Once inside Rajasthan, the journey became much easier for Pal and he smoothly reached the Shahjahanpur border. Other farmers who eventually participated in the Delhi protests had to take a train and could not take their tractors.

Farmers also alleged that since the rollout of GST in 2017, it has been easier for people who sell seeds to fool the small-scale farmers with little land and less money. Since the smaller farmers do not understand the tax system and are unaware of how it works on different products, the private parties have been able to fool them with the amount they need to pay – leading to more expense for the farmers.

Shankar (65) may have to end farming altogether with no government aid and subsidies

As the elections approach, the farmers are staring at a bleak future in absence of the double income that the regime had promised, the benefits of drip irrigation it advertised, and the MSPs that are of no use to them.

Source: <https://www.newsclick.in/Gujarat-Polls-Farmers-Stopped-Participating-Farmers-Movement-MSP-Lower-Market-Rate>