

Food Sovereignty, Struggles Against GMOs, Climate Change and Small versus Large Farms in the South Indian Context

What is happening to world agriculture
and what kind of an example has the
US set for developing nations such as
India and China?

Eminent Domain and the destruction of excellent, double and triple cropped farm land or the cementing over Farm Land

- The relationship between the increased power of elites and their corporations to destroy the very land used to grow food for most people.
- Often the government will attempt to claim that the land is simply waste land, even though it might be used for grazing, as part of rotational fallows, routes through which cattle are moved, or places kept for the landless poor to grow something to eat.

Food Sovereignty-Food Security Brief Definitions for Discussion

- Food security [is] a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.(FAO 2001 cited in FAO 2003)
- Food Sovereignty as a concept has engendered much discussion but for this talk will simply rely on the one first promulgated by La Via Campesina:

Definitions continued:

- Food sovereignty is the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to food security. (Via Campesina 1996).
- This means the right to secure land rights which even the State cannot take away in the name of “Economic Development.”

Change in Focus of my talk

- Not only talking about south India, but also India as a whole, its relationship to the global economy
- And the role of the US both officially and through the influence of middle class and well-to-do Indians living in the US in influencing Indian elites thinking about food and agriculture.
- All in face of growing protests by small farmers all over the country.

GMO Brinjal and wider issues

- Currently hold on authorizing BT Brinjal
- Wide range of diverse experimental and research based reports relevant to GMOs as well as wider issues affecting world agriculture and climate change including:
 - Report by UN Special rapporteur for Food Security Issues
 - A Report by the Norwegian Govt.'s Aid Agency
 - A Report by the Oakland Institute dealing with Land grabs
- And numerous other reports.

India in mid-20th century vs. India today

- In mid 20th century (when I first went to India) despite farm crises there was a strong commitment to social justice, and to self sufficiency in basic food grains and to meaningful land reform (though both were strongly fought by well-to-do elites)
- A commitment on the part of even the Congress Party to work on poverty elimination directly and to set up grain banks and rations shops for the poor to make purchases for day-to-day foodstuffs

What changed this?!

- Green revolution (at least in irrigated areas of the country) sparked by a strong US influence
- A switch to neoliberalism by the ruling classes instead of an earlier commitment to a just society and land reform
- A growing admiration of US agriculture by middle-classes (who want their food in plastic wrap), along with signing of Knowledge Agreement between Pres. Bush and Manmohan Singh (India's Prime Minister) which allowed multinational corporations into India including Monsanto and Walmart.

“Being Modern” and “Economic Growth”

- Buying up of especially fertile farm land for 8 lane highways, potential factories, enormous residential complexes for well-to-do, upper-middle classes, and politicians, pushing the poor farmers off their land and urban poor far from their places of work, etc.
- On local level, destroying rivers and streams by removing all the sand to make concrete, or removing the soil itself to make bricks for luxury homes.

Continued

- Why India like China needs farm land in Africa, in India's case in Ethiopia and its relationship with land confiscation throughout India, land that has been being used to grow basic foods to feed Indians of all classes!!
- India and China lead the land grabbing by “developing countries”. 80 Indian companies are also involved in this. According to Third World Res. India's total investment in Ethiopia by now is 4.3 billion, a country with severe malnourishment where the biggest greenhouse farming operation is kept hidden from hungry eyes. (ref. TWR, ww2.mcleans.ca/2010/08/19/out-of-africa)

What good have the protests done so-far in both India and China?

- Sharma's quote of a Chinese small farmer in Guangxi whose payment for his land was not even enough to buy an apartment: The government cheated away our land and now I have little confidence but a lot of anger and resentment." Sharma goes on to state that much of China and India, the two giants, is being rendered landless.
- The profits the rich get is considered "economic growth."

- Rural NGOs, working with small farmers and like-minded people are slowly organizing to fight for the poor, the middle classes, for a truly secure food system that can provide enough food for everyone (though not for the export of exotic fruits etc. to Europe and the Middle East). When this will grow into a large scale movement or if it ever will remains to be seen?

Major tension growing between Corporations and Corporate Agriculture and Family Farming, especially smaller farms

- On one side: Most of the corporate and Business Community World wide, the US, Multinational Corporations, some of the EU, other Corporate owners in “developing countries and states such as China, World Bank and its affiliates and IMF and its affiliates, and G20.
- On the other side: Rest of UN including the Human Rights Commission, UN Rapporteur on Food Security and General Assembly, Scand. Countries, Holland (though it is in the middle), a vast body of non-establishment scientific data (which is replicable) and small communities the world-over. Organizations in the global Food Movement like Via Campesina, Slow Food and many smaller or more regional organizations.

Alternative New Technologies (1)

- For example SRI rice production and related production schemes for other grains
- Crop diversification, intercropping, crop rotations, combining field and tree crops
- Return to traditional crops that use less water and are very nutritious
- Tools to help with direct marketing including CSAs, Farmer's markets in local areas, marketing directly to schools, factories, government Institutions, marketing within local areas through other small businesses, etc.

2. What Else?

- A revived interest in land reform and the “Right to Land that is secure against government seizure”
- Tying small scale farming with the maintenance of bio-diversity and the use of the wide range of traditional seeds as well as local farmer crosses.
- Getting boosts from the growing food movement
- Some local experiments by state governments in India focusing on organic foods, range of water conservation methods, for ex. India’s first aquifer project involving 29 villages in a dry part of Maharashtra working with the Dept. of Geology and using rural appraisal by talking with farmers of all sizes, that has led to villagers harvesting 3 crops a year instead of going dry.

Question Corporations always Raise: How can the World Feed the 9 billion people projected for 2050?

- Norwegian AID report : meat consumption in USA: 120 kg/year/person, world average: 43 kg and India 5 kg. Corporate agriculture is talking about producing grain to feed animals, not humans. (Do humans need that much to keep healthy?) “Agribusiness corporations, backed by massive subsidies and government support, have ramped up global industrial meat production . . . With devastating consequences for people, animals, and the environment.

Continued

- . . . In the South. . . A rising group of home-grown transnational corporations (TNCs) is joining ranks with . . . firms from the North to push Big Meat into every corner of the planet including China, Thailand and Brazil, and in India they are the ones who are building chicken CAFOs as I saw outside of Hyderabad in the south.

Pre and Post-harvest losses, and other forms of waste

- Studies show enormous pre and post harvest losses: ETC groups has shown food waste in US 28% of total food supply in 1974, 40% in 2009 – an average of 1400 kcal/day. More than half the calories needed for an adult. Yet, we face significant hunger and malnutrition even in the US.
- How much food will be needed depends on how much waste can be avoided. But, remember waste can be profitable for companies.

Concepts of food Sovereignty and ecologically based production systems vs. large corporate farms

- Altieri notes:
 - Smallest two hectare farms in US produced \$15,104/hectare and netted \$2,901/hectare
 - Largest farms averaging 15,581 hectares yielded \$249 / hectare and netted \$52/hectare.

Small farmers have less environmental impact. Inverse relationship between farm size and output to more efficient use of land, water, biodiversity and other agricultural resources.

Land Reform in India

- Even in Kerala, land reform which was passed with great fanfare when I was working in villages ended up meaning land to the tenant, not land to the tiller.
- Clearly land reform has gone the way of land to the elite, and elite definitions of economic growth. In one village I lived in in 1967 and have worked in with assistant recently, some incredibly good triple cropped paddy land is now being dug up to make bricks for movie stars' houses.

Sustainable Agriculture, Structural Changes, Definitions of Economic Growth:

- Increasing the scope and extent of sustainable agriculture, food security for all (including the rural and urban poor) along with their sense of human dignity and meeting their basic human needs which I have spelled out elsewhere clearly depends on social movements, both in India and the rest of the world.

continued

- When I first started to work in India, I was more hopeful that the poor would be able to get their basic needs met, along with electricity, running water, etc. And still have a place with some dignity in their villages and a sense of independence related to their way of work. Yet, the way people were moved around, lost their homes for the Asian games and things like that leaves me distressed.

What happens in the US and its implications for India

- India's Fascination with US and US Life
- If somehow a strong movement developed here that supports the majority of people in their quest for a better life with more security, etc. then it might have a better chance in India. The two are intertwined in very complex ways with a long history.
- But, certainly these are important issues for Anthropologists to study.

What do the global peasant movements mean?

- That the right to food must also include the right to determine how food is produced.
- Presently as noted by Third World Resurgence, the power to determine food production resides with large agribusiness or with governments. As they state both are focused on growing “more food”, one for profit and the other for political power.
- TWR suggests that along with laws that govern food distribution, we need laws that prevent profiteering from food and land and from vesting all food-related decisions with corporations.

- And there is a strong need to legally and enforceably remove food from bank and hedge fund speculation so that their gambling cannot raise fears of one after another global food crisis.