

A PLAIN-ENGLISH DEEP DIVE

Kissan Andolan

The Complete Story

India's Farmers' Movement, 2020-2024 and beyond
— every side of the story, told in the simplest words,
after months of research.

PART 1 OF 12 • THE SETUP

Written & researched by Lovepreet Singh

Author's Note

WHY I WROTE THIS, AND HOW TO READ IT

For four years I watched the farmers' protest fill our news, our phones, and our arguments at the dinner table. Everyone had a strong opinion. Almost nobody had the full story.

One side said the farmers were heroes saving the nation. The other side said they were spoiled, misled, or even dangerous. People shouted past each other. Big words were thrown around — "MSP", "APMC", "Khalistan", "corporate loot" — and most of us never really understood what any of them meant. I did not either. So I decided to find out properly.

I spent months reading the actual laws, government papers, court orders, farm-economics studies, and news reports from every side — left, right, and centre. I did not want to pick a team. I wanted to understand. This book is what I found, written the way I wish someone had explained it to me on day one.

Here is my promise to you:

MY FOUR PROMISES TO YOU

- 1. Simple words.** If a class-6 student can't follow it, I've written it wrong. No jargon without a plain explanation.
- 2. Every side gets a fair turn.** Government, farmers, supporters, critics — I give each one its strongest case, in its own voice.
- 3. Fact and opinion kept separate.** I tell you what is proven, what is claimed, and who is claiming it.
- 4. No hiding the hard parts.** The uncomfortable truths on every side stay in.

I am not here to tell you who is right. That is your job, and you are smart enough to do it. I am only here to hand you the full picture — clean, complete, and honest — so you can make up your own mind.

The story is big, so I have split it into **12 short parts**. Read them in order if you can; each one builds on the last. This is Part 1. It has no politics and no laws yet — it is just the ground the whole story grows from.

How to read this book — the coloured boxes

Throughout the book you will see small coloured boxes. They are your friends. Each one does a simple job:

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

Takes a hard idea and says it again in the easiest possible way.

KEY WORD

Explains an important term the moment it appears — so you never feel lost.

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS

Pulls out one important figure and shows why it matters.

REMEMBER THIS

Flags a point that will come back and matter a lot later in the story.

You need *no* background at all. I explain everything from zero. Take your time. Let's begin where the story truly begins — not in Delhi in 2020, but in the fields of Punjab, sixty years ago.

The Setup: Farming, Punjab, and Why Land Is Life

Before you can understand a fight, you have to understand what people are fighting over. This whole story is about one thing: **farming** — and the people whose entire lives hang on it.

1 The whole story in one breath

Let me give you the entire story in a single paragraph. Then we will slow down and understand it piece by piece.

THE WHOLE THING, IN ONE BREATH

In 2020, India's government passed three new farming laws. Millions of farmers — most of them from Punjab and nearby states — believed these laws would slowly kill the safety net that keeps them alive and hand farming over to big companies. So they marched to the capital, Delhi, and sat at its borders for more than a year, through winter, heat, and a pandemic. It became one of the largest and longest protests in human history. In late 2021 the government finally cancelled the laws. But the farmers' deeper problems were never solved — so the protests returned in 2024, and still simmer today.

That is the skeleton. Now let's put flesh on it — starting with the most important character in the whole story: the farmer.

2 First, meet the Indian farmer

When you hear "farmer", you might picture a businessman who owns huge fields. For a tiny few, that's true. But the typical Indian farmer is **small, and often struggling**.

Think about this strange fact: almost **half of all Indians** work in farming, yet farming produces only about **one-sixth** of the country's total income. Picture a giant dinner table where half the guests are crowded around one small plate, while

the other half share a huge feast. That's Indian farming. Too many people, sharing too little.

How much land does a typical farmer own? On average, only about **1.1 hectares** — and millions own far less than that.

KEY WORD: HECTARE / ACRE

A **hectare** is a unit of land, roughly the size of a large sports field (about 2.5 **acres**). So the average Indian farmer works a plot smaller than two-and-a-half football fields — to feed an entire family.

And here is the cruel part: the farmer controls almost nothing that decides whether the year goes well. Not the rain. Not the price of diesel. Not the price their crop will sell for. One bad monsoon, one price crash, one sick season — and a family can be broken. This helplessness is the emotional engine of the entire story. Hold on to it.

3 Why does this story begin in Punjab?

Farmers protested from many states. But the heart, the muscle, and the fiercest anger came from one state above all: **Punjab**. To understand why, you have to know a story most people have forgotten — the story of how Punjab once saved India from starving.

Rewind to the 1960s. India was young, poor, and desperately short of food. Then came two terrible droughts, in 1965 and 1966. The crops failed. India simply did not grow enough to feed its people, and it survived only on wheat shipped in from the United States.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

In the 1960s, India could not grow enough food for itself. It had to depend on grain sent by ship from America. People bitterly called it a "**ship-to-mouth**" life — the grain went straight from the ship into hungry mouths, with nothing spare. For a proud new nation, this was humiliating.

4 The Green Revolution — the miracle that changed everything

Then came a transformation so big it has its own name: the **Green Revolution**.

An Indian scientist named **M.S. Swaminathan** teamed up with an American scientist, **Norman Borlaug**. Together they brought special new wheat seeds (first developed in Mexico) that could grow far more grain from the same field.

KEY WORD: HIGH-YIELD SEEDS (HYV)

High-yield variety seeds are specially bred to give a much bigger harvest than ordinary seeds. The catch: they are hungry. To perform, they need plenty of water, chemical fertiliser, and pesticides. Remember this catch — it comes back to haunt Punjab later.

In 1966, India imported 18,000 tonnes of these seeds. It needed a place to try them — a state with flat land, hard-working farmers, and good canals for water. That state was **Punjab**.

The result was almost unbelievable. Look at how fast India's wheat harvest grew:

1943	The Bengal famine kills millions. India's fear of hunger runs deep.
1965–66	Two droughts in a row. India survives on American wheat — the "ship-to-mouth" years.
1966	India imports 18,000 tonnes of high-yield Mexican wheat seed. Punjab is chosen as the testing ground.
1966–67	The Green Revolution is formally launched. Punjab's farmers take to the new seeds like no one else.
1970	Wheat harvest leaps from about 12 million tonnes (1964) to about 20 million tonnes.
1971	India declares itself self-sufficient in grain. No more begging for food.

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS

12 → 20 million tonnes

India's wheat harvest in just six years (1964 to 1970). Punjab was the beating heart of that jump. In a single generation, a hungry nation learned to feed itself.

5 How Punjab became India's food bowl

But there was a clever deal behind the miracle. To convince farmers to grow all this extra grain — and to protect them from price crashes — the government made a promise:

“Grow wheat and rice, and we will buy it from you, at a fixed and guaranteed price.”

That guaranteed price has a name: **MSP** (Minimum Support Price). And the government built special official markets, called **mandis**, where farmers could reliably sell. Don't worry about the details yet — the entire next part (Part 2) is devoted to exactly how this machine works, because the whole 2020 fight comes down to it.

KEY WORD: MSP AND MANDI

MSP = a "floor price" the government promises to pay for certain crops, so farmers are protected from selling at a loss.

Mandi = a government-regulated wholesale market where crops are sold. Think of it as an official marketplace with rules to protect the farmer.

The deal worked spectacularly. Punjab farmers grew wheat and rice like no one else on earth. And here is the astonishing result that still shapes Punjab's pride today:

Punjab's share of the grain the central government buys for the whole nation (recent years)

Fact	Roughly	Why it's stunning
Punjab's size	About 1.5% of India's land	A tiny state on the map
Wheat given to the national pool	Often a third — sometimes nearly half	One small state feeding the country
Rice given to the national pool	Close to a third	Punjab isn't even a natural rice region

KEY WORD: THE "CENTRAL POOL"

The **central pool** is the giant national stock of grain the government buys and stores. It uses this grain to run ration shops and feed hundreds of millions of poor people. When Punjab fills that pool, Punjab is quite literally feeding India's poor.

REMEMBER THIS

Punjab fed the nation. So Punjab's farmers feel — with real justification — that they carry the country on their backs. This **pride** is not a small thing. When the 2020 laws came, farmers didn't just feel threatened; they felt *disrespected* by the very country they had fed. Keep this feeling in mind for every part that follows.

6 The hidden price of the miracle

The Green Revolution saved millions from hunger. That is a fact worth celebrating. But over fifty years, it also quietly built up a bill — and that bill is now coming due. (We will dig into this fully in Part 11; here is the short version.)

The water is running out

Rice is a thirsty crop. Punjab is not a naturally wet state. To grow so much rice, farmers pumped water out of the ground, year after year, faster than the rain could refill it. The underground water level has been crashing.

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS

10 feet → 200+ feet

In many parts of Punjab, farmers once found water just 10 feet down. Today they must drill past 200 feet — and it drops further every year. Punjab is draining its own future.

The soil is tired, and full of chemicals

Decades of heavy fertiliser and pesticide have left much of Punjab's soil exhausted and, in places, poisoned. By some estimates, this one small state uses close to a fifth of all the pesticide in India.

The trap that farmers can't escape

Here is the cruel twist. The same wheat-then-rice cycle now covers more than 80% of Punjab's fields. Farmers *know* it is draining the water and wrecking the soil. But the guaranteed price (MSP) really only works well for wheat and rice — so switching to other crops means risking ruin. They are trapped by the very system that once made them prosperous.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

Punjab's farmers are stuck in a cage. The wheat-rice system is slowly harming their land and water — but it is also the only thing that reliably pays. They can't afford to stay, and they can't afford to leave.

7 Debt — the quiet weight on every shoulder

Modern farming is expensive. Seeds, fertiliser, diesel, water pumps, tractors — the costs keep climbing. But what farmers *earn* has not climbed nearly as fast. So most of them borrow money just to keep farming. And once you borrow, one bad year can bury you.

Farmer debt in India and Punjab (government surveys)

Who	How many are in debt	How much they owe
India (farming households)	More than half	Average around Rs 74,000 each (2018)
Punjab (farming households)	About 54%	Among the highest in India — roughly Rs 2 lakh each on average

When the crop fails or the price falls, that debt can turn into a mountain. Banks often turn small farmers away, so many go to private moneylenders who charge brutal interest. The hole gets deeper. And for too many families, it becomes impossible to climb out.

8 The heartbreak behind the numbers

I write this section carefully, because it is about real lives lost, not statistics on a page.

For decades, India has lived with a quiet tragedy: farmers dying by suicide, very often crushed by debt they could not repay. Official national records counted over **10,000** such deaths among farmers and farm labourers in the year 2020 alone. In Punjab, the numbers rose sharply after 2015. And researchers who count carefully on the ground believe the real figures are much higher than the official ones — by some studies, several times higher.

REMEMBER THIS

I don't share this to shock you. I share it because you **cannot understand the farmers' fierce reaction** to the 2020 laws without it. When people are already standing on thin ice, they will panic at anything that might crack it. To a farmer, the fear was simple: "If this safety net goes, that thin ice is all I have left."

9 Why land is not just land

Now the part outsiders miss most often. To a Punjabi farming family, land is not a business asset you buy and sell. It is **izzat** — honour. It is the family's name, its history, its place in the world, handed down across generations.

KEY WORD: IZZAT & LANGAR

Izzat means honour or dignity — a value at the very centre of Punjabi life.

Langar is the free community kitchen in every Sikh temple, where anyone, of any religion or status, is fed for free. Feeding people is sacred here. (This is why the protest camps later became giant open kitchens — it flowed straight from the culture.)

Many of these farmers are Sikh, and in Sikh tradition, working the land, feeding others, and standing firm against injustice are matters of faith and identity. So the thought of losing the land — or worse, becoming a mere hired hand on a big company's field — was never only about money. It struck at who they *are*.

"You are not just touching my income. You are touching my grandfather's soil and my grandson's future."

That single feeling explains why, when the laws arrived, the response was not a polite letter of complaint. It was a fight for survival *and* identity — the two things people defend most fiercely of all.

10 So here is where the story begins

Let's gather everything from Part 1 into one clear picture, because this is the soil the entire story grows from.

EVERYTHING SO FAR, IN ONE BOX

Punjab's farmers are **proud** (they saved India from hunger), **trapped** (by vanishing water, tired soil, and a wheat-rice system they can't escape), **afraid** (of debt and ruin, with tragedy never far away), and **deeply attached** (to land as honour, not just income). And above all, they lean on one lifeline: the government's guaranteed price and its protected markets.

Now imagine someone stands up and announces three brand-new laws that seem to shake that very lifeline. You can already feel it, can't you? The field was dry grass. The laws were a spark.

In **Part 2**, we walk right into that lifeline. I'll show you exactly how a farmer sells a crop — MSP, mandis, the middlemen called arhtiyas, and the giant government buyer called the FCI. Once you see how that machine works, the entire war of 2020 will suddenly make complete sense.

Part 1 — the five things to carry forward

- **The typical Indian farmer is small and squeezed** — little land, big risks, no control over prices.
- **Punjab saved India from starvation** through the 1960s Green Revolution — and has fed the nation ever since. That earns deep pride.
- **The miracle has a hidden bill**: crashing groundwater, sick soil, and a wheat-rice trap farmers can't escape.
- **Debt and its tragedies** mean farmers already live on thin ice — so any threat to their safety net triggers real fear.
- **Land is honour, not just income**. That's why the coming fight was never only about money.

Sources & further reading for Part 1

1. Britannica — M.S. Swaminathan and the Green Revolution in India. [britannica.com/biography/M-S-Swaminathan](https://www.britannica.com/biography/M-S-Swaminathan)
2. Drishti IAS — "Green Revolution" overview. [drishtiias.com/to-the-points/paper3/green-revolution-1](https://www.drishtiias.com/to-the-points/paper3/green-revolution-1)
3. Hindustan Times / Tribune India — Punjab's share of the central pool of wheat and rice.
4. NSSO 77th Round, Situation Assessment Survey of Agricultural Households (2019); NABARD NAFIS — farm household debt and income.

5. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India; Punjab Agricultural University field studies on farmer suicides.
6. The Print — "Punjab's farmers can't break free of Green Revolution chakravyuh"; Undark — "The Downstream Effects of India's Green Revolution" (groundwater, soil, pesticides).
7. Springer / Performance of Agriculture in Punjab — landholding sizes and farmer categories.

Figures are rounded for readability and drawn from government surveys and reputable reporting. Where counts are disputed (for example, farmer-suicide totals), I have said so plainly rather than pick a single number.

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PART 2 OF 12 • THE SYSTEM

Written & researched by Lovepreet Singh

The System: MSP, Mandi, Arhtiya & FCI, Made Simple

Here is the secret to understanding the whole Kissan Andolan: the entire fight of 2020 is really a fight about **one machine** — the system by which a farmer sells a crop. Learn this machine, and everything else in the story will suddenly make sense.

In Part 1 we met the farmer and his world. Now we open the hood and look at the engine. Don't worry — I'll build it one bolt at a time, and I promise to keep it simple. By the end of this part you'll understand four words that get thrown around on the news but are almost never explained: **MSP, mandi, arhtiya**, and **FCI**.

1 Let's follow one bag of wheat

The easiest way to understand the machine is to follow the grain. So imagine a farmer — let's call him Baldev. He has just harvested his wheat. Where does it go, and how does he get paid? Follow the journey:

1 **Harvest.** Baldev cuts his wheat and loads the golden grain onto a tractor-trolley.



2 **The Mandi.** He drives it to the nearest government-run market, called a **mandi**.



3 **The Arhtiya.** His trusted middleman, the **arhtiya**, cleans, weighs and bags the grain and puts it up for sale.



4 **The Buyer.** The government's giant grain-buyer, the **FCI**, buys it at the promised price — the **MSP**.



5 The Nation's Plate. The grain enters the national pool and travels out to ration shops that feed hundreds of millions of poor Indians.

That is the whole machine in one picture. Now let's meet each of the four players properly, because every one of them became a battlefield in 2020.

2 Player 1: MSP — the promised floor price

MSP stands for **Minimum Support Price**. It is the single most important idea in this entire book, so let's be crystal clear about it.

KEY WORD: MSP (MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE)

MSP is a **floor price** the government promises for certain crops. It says: "If the market price falls too low, don't worry — we will buy your crop at this guaranteed minimum." It protects the farmer from selling at a ruinous loss.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

MSP is like a **safety floor** under the farmer's feet. The market price can rise as high as it likes above the floor — but the government promises it won't be allowed to crash through the floor. It is the farmer's protection against a bad year.

Who decides the MSP? A government body called the **CACP** (Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices) studies the costs and recommends a price. The central government then announces it, usually twice a year — once for summer (kharif) crops and once for winter (rabi) crops. Today MSP is announced for around two dozen crops (commonly listed as **23**), such as wheat, rice, cotton, pulses and oilseeds. (Sugarcane has its own separate guaranteed price.)

REMEMBER THIS — IT IS HUGE

MSP is only a **promise, not a law**. The government announces it, but no law forces the government to actually buy every farmer's crop at that price, and no law stops private traders from paying less. This single gap — "promise" versus "legal guarantee" — is the beating heart of the entire farmers' movement, in 2020 and again today.

3 The formula fight: "A2+FL" versus "C2+50%"

You will hear farmers shout one demand more than any other: **"Give us C2 plus 50 percent!"** It sounds like maths homework. It is actually simple, and it is worth ten minutes of your life, because this one disagreement is the core of the whole MSP argument.

The question is: *when the government sets the price, how should it count what the crop cost the farmer to grow?* There are three ways to count, from stingy to generous:

The three ways to count a farmer's cost — think of running your own small tea stall

Name	What it counts	The tea-stall version
A2	Only the cash actually spent: seeds, fertiliser, diesel, hired workers.	"Just the money out of my pocket."
A2 + FL	A2 <i>plus</i> the value of the farmer's own family's unpaid labour.	"My pocket <i>plus</i> my family's sweat."
C2	A2+FL <i>plus</i> rent for his own land and interest on his own money tied up in the farm.	"Everything — including what my shop and my savings are worth."

Now here is the fight, in one line:

THE DISAGREEMENT IN ONE LINE

Farmers want C2 + 50%. Government pays A2+FL + 50%.

The famous **Swaminathan Commission** (2004-06) recommended MSP = the *full* cost (C2) plus 50% profit. The government instead uses the *smaller* cost (A2+FL) plus 50%. Because A2+FL is a smaller number than C2, the government's price comes out lower — and farmers say they are being shortchanged.

Let's make it real with pretend numbers (just to show the idea):

An illustration only — made-up numbers to show why the gap matters

Cost counted	Say the cost is	Add 50% → the price
Government's base (A2+FL)	Rs 1,000	Rs 1,500 (what the government pays)
Full cost (C2)	Rs 1,400	Rs 2,100 (what farmers demand)
The gap in the farmer's pocket	Rs 600 per unit — year after year, that is a fortune	

REMEMBER THIS

Whenever you hear "**Swaminathan formula**" or "**C2+50%**," it simply means: *pay us based on our full, true cost — including our land and our labour — plus a fair 50% profit.* The government has never agreed to this. That refusal is a wound that never healed.

4 Player 2: The Mandi (the government market)

A crop is worth nothing until it is sold. So *where* does the farmer sell? For decades, the answer has been the **mandi**.

KEY WORD: APMC / MANDI

A **mandi** is an official wholesale market, run under a state law called the **APMC Act** (Agricultural Produce Market Committee). Buyers must be licensed, the crop is sold by open auction, weighing is checked, and payment is recorded. It was built to *protect* the farmer from being cheated by private traders in a lawless open market.

The mandi has a good side and a bad side, and both matter for the story:

The good side of the mandi	The bad side of the mandi
Open auction — farmers can see the price.	Only so many mandis exist; many farmers must travel far.
Assured, recorded payment.	Traders can quietly form cartels and fix low prices.
A fixed place where the government's FCI shows up to buy at MSP.	Mandi fees and taxes (in Punjab, several percent) add cost.

Hold on to that bad side. In 2020 the government will point straight at it and say, "See? The mandi traps the farmer — we're setting him free." Whether that was rescue or wrecking ball is the argument of Parts 4 and 5.

5 Player 3: The Arhtiya (the middleman everyone argues about)

Standing between the farmer and the buyer is the **arhtiya** — the commission agent. He is one of the most misunderstood characters in this whole story, because he is two people in one.

KEY WORD: ARHTIYA (COMMISSION AGENT)

The **arhtiya** is a licensed middleman in the mandi. When Baldev's grain arrives, the arhtiya cleans it, weighs it, bags it, gets it auctioned, and arranges the loading — for a fixed commission of **2.5%**.

His first job is that handling work in the mandi. But **his second job** is the one that binds the farmer to him: the arhtiya is also the village's **moneylender**. When a farmer needs cash — for seeds, a wedding, a hospital bill, a sudden emergency — the bank is slow and full of paperwork, but the arhtiya hands over cash the same day, no forms asked. In return, the farmer owes him, and sells only through him.

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS

23,600 arhtiyas • Rs 20,000+ crore owed

Punjab has more than 23,600 registered arhtiyas. Farmers there owe them over Rs 20,000 crore — often at interest rates of 18% to 37% a year. He is friend, financier, and, his critics say, a debt-trap, all at once.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

The arhtiya is like a next-door uncle who lends you money instantly when you're desperate — but charges heavy interest and expects you to sell all your grain through him. Farmers depend on him and resent him at the same time.

Why does this matter so much? Because in 2020 the government said its new laws would "free farmers from the shackles of the arhtiyas." You might expect farmers to cheer that. Many did the opposite — they defended their arhtiyas. Understanding *why* (trust, instant cash, a lifetime relationship) is the key to understanding the whole surprising shape of the protest.

6 Player 4: The FCI (the giant government buyer)

An MSP promise means nothing unless someone actually shows up with money to pay it. That someone is the **FCI**.

KEY WORD: FCI & BUFFER STOCK

The **Food Corporation of India** (set up in 1965) is the government's giant grain-buyer and storekeeper. It buys wheat and rice at MSP, and stores it in huge warehouses. That stored grain is called the **buffer stock** — a national emergency reserve, so the country never runs short in a drought, war, or crisis.

The FCI is the reason MSP is real and not just a nice announcement. In states where the FCI actively buys — above all Punjab and Haryana — the MSP floor genuinely holds. Keep that fact warm; in two sections it will explain the whole conflict.

7 Where it all goes: feeding two-thirds of India

So the FCI's warehouses fill up with Baldev's wheat. Then what? The grain flows out through the **ration shop** system (the Public Distribution System, or PDS) to the poor.

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS

About 81 crore people — two-thirds of India

Under the National Food Security Act of 2013, roughly 810 million Indians are entitled to cheap grain from these government stocks. The same system also runs school mid-day meals and child-nutrition programmes.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

Baldev's wheat does not just feed his family. Through the FCI and the ration shops, it becomes the food safety net for hundreds of millions of India's poorest people. The farmer's crop *is* the nation's food security. This is why farmers feel they are guardians of the country, not just businessmen.

8 The catch that explains the entire war

Now for the twist that powers both sides of the whole story. Read this section twice.

That beautiful machine — MSP, mandi, arhtiya, FCI — works well in only a few places. The government mostly buys grain in Punjab, Haryana, and a few other pockets. In most of India, it barely shows up.

Who actually gets the safety net? (Shanta Kumar Committee & government data)

Place	Does the government really buy at MSP?	What it means for the farmer
Punjab & Haryana	Yes, heavily — about 85% of rice and 74% of wheat is bought at MSP.	MSP is a real, working lifeline.
Bihar, Bengal, Odisha, Assam & most of India	Barely — little or no government buying nearby.	Farmers often sell to private traders <i>below</i> MSP.

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS

Only about 6% of farmers

A government committee (the Shanta Kumar Committee, 2015) estimated that just **6% of India's farmers** actually sell at MSP and truly benefit from it. The other 94% mostly don't.

Now watch how this single fact loads the gun for *both* sides:

What the farmers hear in it	What the government hears in it
"MSP is our lifeline, and Punjab depends on it most of all. Don't you dare weaken the one thing that keeps us alive."	"This system only helps a small elite in two states. The other 94% of farmers are left out. That is exactly why we must reform it."

REMEMBER THIS — IT IS THE SEED OF EVERYTHING

Because MSP mainly protects Punjab and Haryana, those farmers had the **most to lose** from any change — which is why they fought the hardest. And because MSP reaches so few farmers overall, the government had a genuine-sounding reason to say the system was broken and needed reform. Both things are true at once. Hold them both, and Parts 3 to 5 will make perfect sense.

9 So why hug a flawed system?

Let's be honest, as this book always will be: this old machine has real flaws. Middlemen who charge heavy interest. Mandis that don't reach everyone. A huge bill for the government. And, as we saw in Part 1, a wheat-rice habit that is draining Punjab's water. Even many farmers admit all of this.

So why did they fight so fiercely to protect it? Because for them, **it works, and it is certain**. When you are poor, and one bad season can destroy your family, a sure thing in your hand beats a shiny promise in the distance. The old system, warts and all, was the ground under their feet. The new laws felt like someone yanking that ground away and telling them to trust that they'd land safely.

“A known, flawed safety net feels far safer than an unknown, promised freedom.”

10 Where we go next

You now understand the machine better than most people who argue about it online. You know the four players — MSP, mandi, arhtiya, FCI — and the two great tensions: the **"promise vs. legal guarantee"** gap, and the **"only 6% benefit"** gap.

In **Part 3**, we finally reach 2020. The government passes three brand-new laws that reach straight into this machine — loosening the mandi, inviting big private buyers, changing the storage rules. I'll lay out exactly what each of the three laws said, in the plainest words possible, and show you precisely which screws they turned. Only then, in Parts 4 and 5, will we hear each side's full argument for and against.

Part 2 — the six things to carry forward

- **MSP** is a promised floor price for about 23 crops — a safety net, not a ceiling.
- MSP is a **promise, not a law** — the "legal guarantee" gap is the core demand of the whole movement.
- **"C2+50%"** (the Swaminathan formula) means: pay us on our full true cost plus 50% profit. The government pays on a smaller cost base (A2+FL).
- The **mandi** is the protected market; the **arhtiya** is the middleman-and-moneylender farmers both depend on and resent.
- The **FCI** buys the grain and stores it to feed **two-thirds of India** through ration shops.
- The killer catch: MSP truly works for only about **6% of farmers**, mostly in Punjab & Haryana — which is why they had the most to lose and fought hardest.

Sources & further reading for Part 2

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3. The Print — "Modi govt insists its bills will free farmers from shackles of arhatiyas. Who are they?"; The Tribune — arhtiya numbers, 2.5% commission, and lending.
4. Shanta Kumar Committee Report (2015) — estimate that only ~6% of farmers benefit from MSP; ~85% rice and ~74% wheat procured in Punjab & Haryana.
5. Food Corporation of India / PIB — FCI role, buffer stock, and the Public Distribution System.
6. National Food Security Act, 2013 — roughly 81 crore beneficiaries of subsidised foodgrain.

Percentages are rounded for readability and drawn from official committees and government data. The pretend rupee figures in Section 3 are clearly labelled as an illustration, used only to show how the two formulas differ.

A PLAIN-ENGLISH DEEP DIVE

Kissan Andolan

The Complete Story

India's Farmers' Movement, 2020-2024 and beyond
— every side of the story, told in the simplest words,
after months of research.

PART 3 OF 12 • THE THREE LAWS

Written & researched by Lovepreet Singh

The Three Laws: What the Government Actually Wrote

In September 2020, the Indian government passed three new farming laws. For the next year, the whole country argued about them — yet very few people ever read them. In this part, I'll tell you exactly what each law said, in the plainest words, with no spin.

BEFORE WE START — A FAIR-PLAY PROMISE

This part is the "**what**": what the laws actually said and how they were passed. I'll note each side's basic hope and fear so you're not left hanging — but the *full* argument **for** the laws is Part 4, and the full argument **against** is Part 5. Here, I'm just handing you the facts, cleanly.

1 The strange timing: a pandemic and a shortcut

To understand the anger, you first have to understand *when* and *how* these laws appeared — because the timing and the method upset people almost as much as the content.

It was 2020. India was under a strict COVID-19 lockdown. People could not gather; protest was nearly impossible. In the middle of this, on **5 June 2020**, the government brought in the three farm measures — not as normal laws debated in Parliament, but as **ordinances**.

KEY WORD: ORDINANCE

An **ordinance** is an emergency law the government can issue on its own when Parliament is not in session. It becomes effective at once, but must later be approved by Parliament to survive. In short: it lets the government act first and get Parliament's approval afterwards.

To farmers, launching a huge change to their lives through an emergency shortcut — during a pandemic, when they couldn't even step out to object — felt like being handed a decision, not asked about one. That feeling of "you didn't ask us" runs through this entire story.

2 How they were passed: the voice-vote storm

In September 2020, the government turned the ordinances into permanent laws by pushing the bills through Parliament. The lower house (Lok Sabha) passed them. Then came the upper house (the Rajya Sabha) on **20 September 2020** — and it turned into chaos.

KEY WORD: "VOICE VOTE" VS "DIVISION"

A **voice vote** is when the presiding officer simply listens to who shouts louder — "Aye" or "No" — and declares the result by ear. A **division** is a proper counted vote, where each member is recorded. When a result is close or disputed, members can demand a division so the numbers are counted exactly.

The opposition demanded a division — a proper head-count — because they believed the government might not truly have the numbers that day. The Deputy Chairman, **Harivansh**, instead declared the bills passed by voice vote, amid uproar, torn papers, and MPs rushing the well of the House. The opposition said the rules had been broken. The next day, **eight MPs were suspended**. On **27 September 2020**, the President signed the bills, and all three became law.

How the three farm laws became law — the key dates of 2020

When	What happened
5 June	The three measures are issued as emergency ordinances during the COVID lockdown.
Mid-Sept	The bills are introduced and passed by the Lok Sabha (lower house).
20 Sept	The Rajya Sabha (upper house) passes them by a disputed voice vote ; opposition uproar.
21 Sept	Eight opposition MPs are suspended over the ruckus.
27 Sept	The President gives assent. All three become law.

Remember: nobody had yet blocked a single road. The protest hadn't started. But the *way* these laws were passed had already convinced many farmers that they were being steamrolled. Now, the laws themselves.

3 Law 1: The Trade Law — "sell anywhere"

FULL NAME The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020.

Recall from Part 2 that farmers mostly sold inside the government **mandi**. This first law opened a second option. It said: farmers may now sell their crop **anywhere** — to any buyer, at the farm gate, at a warehouse, at a cold store, even online — and across state borders. These new zones outside the mandi were called "trade areas."

The crucial detail: inside the mandi, the state charges a fee/tax on each sale. In these new outside zones, the law said **no such fee could be charged**. So selling outside the mandi would be cheaper for buyers.

THE GOVERNMENT'S AIM (FULL CASE IN PART 4)

Give the farmer *freedom* and more buyers to choose from. Break the mandi's monopoly, create "one nation, one market," and let farmers get better prices by selling to whoever pays most.

THE WORRY IN ONE LINE (FULL CASE IN PART 5)

If the outside zone is tax-free and the mandi is taxed, buyers will desert the mandi. The mandi slowly dies — and since MSP buying happens *through* the mandi, farmers feared MSP would quietly die with it.

4 Law 2: The Contract Farming Law — "deal before you sow"

FULL NAME The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020.

This second law created national rules for **contract farming**. The idea: a farmer and a buyer (a big retailer, food processor, exporter, or company) sign an agreement *before* the crop is even planted, fixing the price in advance. Whatever happens to the market later, the buyer must pay the agreed price.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

It's like a company promising, before you plant, "Grow me 100 quintals of wheat and I'll buy it all at this fixed price." If market prices crash later, that's the company's problem, not yours. That's the promise, at least.

If a dispute arose, the law did *not* send it to a normal court. Instead it set up a three-step ladder: first a **Conciliation Board**, then the **SDM** (a local government officer, the Sub-Divisional Magistrate), then an **Appellate Authority** (a senior officer). One protection people often forget: the law clearly said a farmer's **land could not be taken, sold, or mortgaged** under these contracts.

THE GOVERNMENT'S AIM (FULL CASE IN PART 4)

Give the farmer a guaranteed buyer and a guaranteed price before sowing, shifting the market risk to the company — plus investment, new technology, and access to big markets.

THE WORRY IN ONE LINE (FULL CASE IN PART 5)

A small, poor farmer versus a giant company is not an equal fight. And with disputes decided by a local officer (the SDM) rather than a court, farmers feared they'd never win against corporate lawyers.

5 Law 3: The Stockpiling Law — "hoarding rules loosened"

FULL NAME The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

To understand this one, you need the old rule. For decades, the government kept staple foods — cereals, pulses, edible oils, onion, potato — on a special "essential" list. Being on that list meant no trader could store more than a set limit, to stop hoarding and price-gouging.

This third law **took those staples off the routine list**. Now traders and companies could store almost unlimited quantities. The government could step back in and impose limits only in **extraordinary times** — war, famine, a severe natural disaster, or a huge price spike (retail prices rising 100% for perishables like onions, or 50% for grains).

KEY WORD: STOCK LIMIT & HOARDING

A **stock limit** caps how much of a good anyone can store at once. **Hoarding** is stockpiling huge amounts to create artificial shortage, then selling dear. Stock limits exist to prevent exactly that.

THE GOVERNMENT'S AIM (FULL CASE IN PART 4)

Attract big private investment in cold storage, warehouses, and food processing; cut the massive waste of rotting crops; and modernise the supply chain.

THE WORRY IN ONE LINE (FULL CASE IN PART 5)

If big corporates can now legally store unlimited staples, they could buy cheap from farmers at harvest, hoard, and later control prices — hurting both farmers and ordinary shoppers.

6 The thread that tied them together — and the silence in the middle

Read one by one, each law sounds reasonable. But farmers did not read them one by one. They read all three *together*, as a single connected plan — and this is the key to the whole protest:

1 Law 1 weakens the mandi — the safe, MSP-linked market the farmer trusted.



2 Law 2 steers the farmer toward dealing directly with big private companies instead.



3 Law 3 frees those same companies to stockpile as much as they like.

Chained like this, the fear becomes clear: push farmers out of the safe mandi, into the arms of powerful corporates, who are now also free to hoard. And through all three laws ran one deafening silence — **not one word offered a legal guarantee of MSP.**

REMEMBER THIS

To the government, the three laws were three separate reforms. To the farmer, they were one machine with one likely result: the slow death of the guaranteed-price safety net, and the rise of corporate power over food. Whether that fear was right or wrong is Parts 4 and 5. But that fear — not the fine print — is what put millions on the road.

7 The forgotten twist: whose job is farming, anyway?

Here is a layer most people never mention. India is a union of states, and its Constitution splits jobs between the central government and the states. And "agriculture" and "markets" sit mainly on the **states'** list — meaning these rules are traditionally for state governments to make.

KEY WORD: A "STATE SUBJECT"

A **State subject** is an area the Constitution reserves for state governments to legislate, not the centre. Agriculture and its markets are largely State subjects. The central government defended its move by pointing to its power over "trade and commerce," which crosses state lines.

So opposition-ruled states protested that the central government had reached into *their* kitchen without asking. This "who has the right to decide?" question — called **federalism** — became a serious legal and political grievance, and it's one reason several states later passed their own counter-laws. Keep it in your back pocket; it returns in the story.

8 So what had changed by 27 September 2020?

Let's freeze the frame. By the end of September 2020, three things were true at once:

THE SITUATION, IN ONE BOX

1. Three farm laws were now in force — loosening the mandi, inviting corporate contracts, and freeing up stockpiling.
2. They had arrived by an emergency shortcut during a pandemic and passed in a bitter, disputed vote.
3. Millions of farmers — especially in Punjab, who (remember Part 2) had the most to lose — felt the ground shifting under them, and felt they'd never been asked.

The spark had met the dry grass. Within weeks, Punjab would erupt, and by November the farmers would be marching on Delhi. But before we watch it burn, we owe both sides a fair hearing. In **Part 4**, I'll give the government its strongest, most honest case — the real reasons many smart people believed these laws would truly help farmers. Then, in **Part 5**, the farmers answer, point for point.

Part 3 — the six things to carry forward

- The laws first appeared as **emergency ordinances on 5 June 2020**, during the COVID lockdown — then were rushed into law by **27 September**.
- The **Rajya Sabha voice vote** of 20 September, with a division refused and 8 MPs suspended, made the *manner* of passing a scandal in itself.
- **Law 1 (Trade)**: sell anywhere outside the mandi, tax-free — hope: freedom and more buyers; fear: the mandi (and MSP) withers.
- **Law 2 (Contract farming)**: fix a price with a company before sowing — hope: assured buyer; fear: small farmer vs giant firm, disputes settled by an officer, not a court.
- **Law 3 (Stockpiling)**: staples freed from stock limits — hope: investment and less waste; fear: corporate hoarding and price control.
- Farmers read all three as **one connected plan**, and noticed the **silence on a legal MSP guarantee**. Also brewing: a **federalism** fight over whether the centre could even do this.

Sources & further reading for Part 3

1. PRS Legislative Research — legislative briefs and full texts of the three farm Acts, 2020 (trade areas, contract-farming framework, dispute mechanism, stock-limit triggers).
2. Wikipedia — "2020 Indian agriculture acts"; and the individual Act pages (Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce Act; Farmers' Agreement on Price Assurance Act; Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020).
3. The Wire / Scroll.in — reporting on the Rajya Sabha voice vote of 20 September 2020, the denied division, and the suspension of eight MPs.
4. Press Information Bureau (PIB) — official statements on the passage and aims of the bills.
5. Drishti IAS / ForumIAS — explainers on the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act price triggers (50% / 100%) and "extraordinary circumstances."
6. BYJU'S / Legistify — summaries of arguments for and against the farm laws.

Dates and provisions are drawn from the official Act texts and parliamentary records. The one-line "aim" and "worry" boxes are short previews; the detailed cases are argued fully in Parts 4 and 5.

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PART 4 OF 12 • THE GOVERNMENT'S CASE

Written & researched by Lovepreet Singh

The Government's Case: Why They Said the Laws Would Help

Now I'm going to do something that may surprise you. I'm going to argue *for* the farm laws — as strongly and honestly as the government and its supporters did. Not because I'm taking a side, but because you cannot judge a fight fairly until you've heard the best version of each side.

A FAIR-PLAY PROMISE

This part is the government's **strongest, most honest case**, argued the way its smartest supporters argued it. It is *their* case, not my verdict. Every point here has a powerful answer from the farmers — and that answer is **Part 5**. Read both before you decide anything.

1 The big picture: a system stuck in the past

Start with how reformers see Indian farming. To them, it is a sector frozen in time: over-regulated, starved of investment, and choked by middlemen. Half the country works in it, yet it produces less than a fifth of the nation's income (remember Part 1). Something is clearly broken.

Their diagnosis: the old mandi system, built in the 1960s, has become a cage. It ties the farmer to one local market and a handful of licensed traders. It blocks big investment. And — this is their killer point — it actually helps only a small, lucky minority. The three laws, they said, were the key to the cage.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

Supporters compared it to 1991, the year India freed its industries from suffocating red tape and the economy boomed. They said: agriculture never got its "1991 moment." These laws were meant to be exactly that — freedom for the farmer.

2 Argument 1: Freedom to sell anywhere

Under the old rule, a farmer basically had to sell in his local government mandi. If the traders there quietly agreed to keep prices low (a cartel), he was stuck — he couldn't just walk his crop to a better buyer two districts away.

THE ARGUMENT

Let farmers sell to **anyone, anywhere** — a food company, an exporter, a buyer in the next state, an online platform. More buyers competing for the same crop should push the price *up*. Why should a farmer be forced to sell only in one government-approved shed?

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

Imagine you could only ever sell your goods in one government market in your town — and now, suddenly, you're allowed to sell in *any* market in the whole country. That new freedom is "One Nation, One Market."

3 Argument 2: Cut out the middleman

Recall the arhtiya from Part 2 — the commission agent who takes 2.5% of every sale and often locks the farmer into high-interest debt. Reformers saw him as a barnacle on the farmer's back.

THE ARGUMENT

Let the farmer deal **directly** with the buyer and keep the middleman's cut for himself. As the government put it, the laws would "free farmers from the shackles of the arhtiyas." Fewer hands in the chain means more money in the farmer's pocket.

And here, supporters made a sharp political point: who benefits most from keeping the old system? The middlemen. So of course, they argued, the arhtiyas would fight hardest against reform — and would try to bring farmers out with them.

4 Argument 3: The old system only helps a lucky few

This was the government's single strongest argument, and it is worth sitting with, because it is backed by hard data from Part 2.

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS

Only ~6% benefit. So what about the other 94%?

A government committee found only about 6% of farmers actually sell at MSP — mostly in Punjab and Haryana. The economist Ashok Gulati pointed out that more than 90% of India's farmers already sell to private buyers *outside* the mandi — often below MSP, with no protection at all.

THE ARGUMENT

"We are not taking anything away from the lucky 6%. We are finally giving new options to the forgotten 94% — the small farmers and the poorer states that the mandi system never reached. The old system is a privilege for a few; our reform is for the many."

It's a genuinely powerful point. A farmer in Bihar or Bengal, with no working mandi nearby, was already at the mercy of private traders. For him, "protecting the mandi system" protected something he never had.

5 Argument 4: A guaranteed buyer before you even plant

Now the contract-farming law. Its promise: a farmer and a company agree a price *before* sowing. If the market later crashes, the company still pays the agreed price — the risk shifts from the poor farmer to the deep-pocketed buyer.

THE ARGUMENT

Contract farming can bring the small farmer what he never had: a **guaranteed buyer, a locked-in price, better seeds, new technology, credit, and a path to big national and global markets** — all arranged by a company that has every reason to help him grow a good crop.

REAL EXAMPLES SUPPORTERS POINTED TO

PepsiCo potatoes: for years, tens of thousands of Punjab farmers have grown potatoes for its chips under contract, getting company seed, crop insurance, and expert advice. **Amul dairy:** the famous cooperative model returns roughly 75-80% of the final price to the farmer. Supporters said: give this model room to grow.

6 Argument 5: Money to fix the rot

India grows enormous amounts of food — and then wastes a heartbreaking share of it for lack of cold storage, warehouses, and processing plants. Fruit rots. Onions and potatoes spoil. Grain is eaten by rats.

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS

Roughly a third lost after harvest

By some estimates, post-harvest losses run to around 37% of certain produce — food grown but never eaten, worth tens of thousands of crores every year. Fixing this needs massive private investment in cold chains and storage.

THE ARGUMENT

The old stock-limit rules scared investors away: why build a giant cold store if the government can suddenly cap how much you're allowed to keep in it? Freeing up stock limits (the third law) invites big money into storage and food processing — which means less waste, and steadier prices for farmers.

7 Argument 6: "We're only adding a choice — MSP and mandis stay"

This was the government's answer to the biggest fear. Farmers worried the mandi and MSP would die. The government insisted, again and again, that it was doing no such thing.

THE ARGUMENT

"The laws take nothing away. The mandi stays. MSP stays. We're only **adding a new option** on top. If the mandi pays you better, keep using it. If a private buyer pays more, now you can choose him. How can more choice hurt the farmer?"

The Prime Minister said it plainly in Parliament: MSP "*hai, tha, aur rahega*" — it is here, it was here, and it will remain. The government also noted it had kept raising MSP and buying record amounts of grain — paying out over Rs 8 lakh crore in MSP between 2014 and 2020, well above the previous years.

BEING HONEST HERE (THE CRACK THE FARMERS DROVE A TRUCK THROUGH)

This promise was spoken, but it was **never written into the laws**. There was no legal line guaranteeing MSP. So farmers replied: "If you truly mean it, why won't you put it in writing?" That single question became the heart of the whole movement — we'll follow it into Part 5.

8 Argument 7: This wasn't sudden, or even one party's idea

Reformers pushed back hard on the idea that this was a secret BJP plot. Freeing up farm trade, they noted, had been recommended by economists and committees for *decades*.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

A model law to loosen the mandi system was sent to the states as far back as 2003, under a different government. Many farm economists had begged for these changes for years. Even rival parties had promised similar reforms in their own manifestos. So supporters said: "Don't call it a plot. It's an old, cross-party idea that everyone agreed was needed — we finally did it."

9 The government's read on the protest

If the laws were so good, why were people so angry? The government had an answer, and it's part of its case, so here it is plainly:

Who the government blamed for the anger	Their reasoning
The middlemen (arhtiyas)	They stood to lose their commissions and their grip, so they stirred up farmers to protect their own business.
A rich-farmer elite	The protest was strongest among larger Punjab & Haryana landowners — the very 6% who benefit most from the old system.
The opposition parties	They spread what economist Ashok Gulati called a "fear psychosis" — scaring farmers that MSP would end, when (the government said) it never would.

In short, the government argued that ordinary *small* farmers across India would gain, and that the protest was driven by those with the most to lose from change, plus political opponents happy to see it fail.

10 An honest scorecard

Because this book plays fair, let me not pretend every government claim was equally solid. Some were strong; some never came true. Here is my honest scorecard on the government's own case:

What the government claimed	The honest check
The old system helps only ~6%.	Strong & true. The data really does show MSP reaches very few farmers.
India wastes huge amounts of food for lack of storage.	True. Post-harvest waste is real and enormous.
Serious economists backed these reforms.	True. Many did — this was not a fringe idea.
"MSP will remain."	Unproven & unwritten. It stayed a spoken promise, never a law — the fatal gap.
Farmers' income would double by 2022.	Did not happen. Incomes rose only modestly, nowhere near double.

11 Where we go next

So there it is — the government's case, at full strength. And notice: it is *not* stupid. Freedom to sell anywhere, cutting middlemen, helping the forgotten 94%, guaranteed contract prices, investment to stop waste — many thoughtful, well-meaning people found this genuinely convincing.

Which raises the real puzzle of this whole story: if the case for the laws was this reasonable, why did millions of farmers reject it so completely, and sit on a cold highway for a year rather than accept it? The answer is not that they were fooled. It's that they had a powerful, specific reply to *every single one* of these arguments.

"A good argument on paper can still terrify the person whose life is the experiment."

In **Part 5**, the farmers take the stand and answer the government point for point — and you'll see why, to them, every one of these bright promises hid a trap.

Part 4 — the government's case in seven lines

- **Freedom to sell anywhere** ("One Nation, One Market") means more buyers and better prices.
- **Cut out the middleman** so more money reaches the farmer.
- **The old system helps only ~6%** — reform is for the forgotten 94%.
- **Contract farming** gives a guaranteed buyer, price, and technology before sowing.
- **Freeing stock limits** attracts investment and cuts massive food waste.
- **"We only added a choice"** — MSP and mandis were promised to stay (though never in writing).
- **This was an old, cross-party reform idea**, backed by many economists — not a sudden plot.

Sources & further reading for Part 4

1. Ashok Gulati (agricultural economist) — interviews and columns in The Wire, OpIndia and elsewhere arguing for the reforms, the "fear psychosis" remark, and that 90%+ of farmers already sell outside mandis.
2. Press Information Bureau (PIB) and government statements — "One Nation, One Market," the additive nature of the laws, and MSP continuation ("MSP hai, tha, rahega").
3. Business Standard / Outlook — ministers (e.g., Anurag Thakur, Amit Shah) linking the laws to the goal of doubling farmers' income; MSP payout figures 2014–2020.
4. FAO / Springer case studies — PepsiCo potato contract farming in Punjab; Amul cooperative dairy model and farmer price share.
5. Government / NABARD estimates — post-harvest losses (~37% of certain produce) and the case for investment in cold storage; Operation Greens.
6. Shanta Kumar Committee (2015) — the ~6% MSP-benefit figure underpinning the "forgotten 94%" argument.

This part deliberately presents the pro-reform case at its strongest, in the words its supporters used. Where a claim did not hold up (doubling income; the unwritten MSP promise), I've said so in the scorecard. The farmers' full rebuttal is Part 5.

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PART 5 OF 12 • THE FARMERS' CASE

Written & researched by Lovepreet Singh

The Farmers' Case: Why They Refused

In Part 4 the government made a strong case. If you read it and thought, "these laws sound reasonable," you were meant to. Now the farmers take the stand — and here is the thing that shocks most people: they had a sharp, specific answer to *every single argument* the government made. They were not confused. They were afraid, and they could tell you exactly why.

A FAIR-PLAY PROMISE

This part is the farmers' case at full strength, just as Part 4 was the government's. Watch how their whole position turns on one deep idea — and how their scariest predictions were not guesses, but things that had **already happened**.

1 The whole rebuttal at a glance

Before we go deep, here is the entire argument on one page — the government's seven points from Part 4, and the farmers' reply to each. We'll unpack them one by one after this.

The government said (Part 4)	The farmers answered
"Freedom to sell anywhere means better prices."	Freedom without bargaining power just means freedom to be squeezed by giant buyers.
"We only added a choice; the mandi and MSP stay."	A tax-free outside market will slowly starve the mandi to death — and MSP dies with it.
"Trust us, MSP will remain."	Then why refuse to write it into law? A promise you won't sign isn't a promise.
"Contract farming gives a guaranteed buyer."	A small farmer can't fight a corporation. Ask the farmers PepsiCo dragged to court.
"Freeing stock limits brings investment."	It also lets big companies hoard staples and control prices.
"The old system helps only 6%."	Then extend the lifeboat to the other 94% — don't sink it for everyone.
"This is an old, well-meant reform."	Then why rush it through in a pandemic without asking a single farmer?

2 The one idea behind every fear: freedom without power is a trap

If you understand nothing else about the farmers' side, understand this. The government kept using the beautiful word "freedom." The farmers heard a warning in it.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

Imagine a lone, poor seller standing in front of two or three enormous buyers who can simply wait him out. Telling him he is now "free" to sell to anyone doesn't help him — because he has no power to walk away. For the weak, "freedom" to deal with the strong often just means freedom to be crushed.

The mandi's rules — the licensed traders, the minimum price, the recorded payment — were not a cage the farmer wanted out of. They were a **shield**. Imperfect, yes. But a shield. And the farmers believed the three laws quietly took the shield away and called it a gift.

“The rules you call my cage are the only wall between me and men far more powerful than I am.”

3 Answer to "we only added a choice": the trap that kills the mandi

This was the government's most soothing line: "We're not removing the mandi. We're only adding an option next to it." The farmers said: that is exactly how you kill it — not with an axe, but with slow starvation. Here is the mechanism, step by step:

1 **Two markets appear.** Inside the mandi, sales are taxed. In the new outside zone, they are tax-free.



2 **Buyers desert the mandi.** Naturally, they go where there's no tax. Business drains out of the mandi.



3 **The mandi withers.** With less trade and less fee income, mandis slowly collapse.



4 **MSP dies quietly.** Government MSP buying happens *at the mandi*. No mandi, no procurement — so the "promise" of MSP becomes meaningless.

REMEMBER THIS

The farmers never claimed the government would *ban* MSP with a law. Their fear was subtler and smarter: that MSP would be left to **die of neglect** as the mandi around it crumbled. You don't need to shoot a fish. You only need to drain the pond.

4 "This isn't fear — it's Bihar"

Here is where the farmers turned from worry to hard proof. Because this experiment had already been run — in the Indian state of Bihar.

Back in 2006, Bihar scrapped its APMC mandi system, using almost the exact same promises the central government was now making: more freedom, more private investment, better prices for farmers. So what actually happened?

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS

Rs 900–1,000 vs MSP of Rs 1,868

After Bihar killed its mandis, farmers there ended up selling paddy for as little as Rs 900–1,000 per quintal — around **half** the official MSP of Rs 1,868. With no mandi and no storage, they were forced into distress sales to private traders who named their own low price.

Study after study (including by the respected NCAER) found the same: after 2006, Bihar saw more price swings, weaker infrastructure, and *more* middlemen, not fewer. As one analysis summed it up: "It is easier to dismantle institutions than to build them."

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

The farmers were saying: "Don't tell us this is just a scary theory. Look at Bihar. You already ran this test on real people, and it failed them. Now you want to run it on the whole country — and on us."

5 Answer to "trust us on MSP": then put it in writing

The government swore MSP would continue. The farmers had a devastatingly simple reply: *if you truly mean it, sign it into law.*

THE GOVERNMENT SAID

"MSP is here, was here, and will remain. You don't need it in writing — you have our word."

THE FARMERS ANSWERED

"A word costs nothing and can be taken back after any election. If MSP is really safe, a single line of law would prove it. You rushed three whole laws through in days — but you won't write *one line* guaranteeing our price? That refusal **is** your real answer."

To the farmers, the government's unwillingness to legally guarantee MSP was the loudest thing in the entire debate. It turned "trust us" into "why won't you let us hold you to it?"

6 Answer to "a guaranteed buyer": you can't sue a giant

The contract-farming law promised the small farmer a powerful partner. The farmers saw a powerful *opponent*.

THE FARMERS ANSWERED

"When a company with a hundred lawyers signs a paper with a farmer who can barely read it, that is not a partnership — it's a mismatch. If there's a dispute, it goes to a local officer (the SDM), not a real court, and we don't trust that officer to rule against a giant. The company can reject our crop on some 'quality' excuse and walk away, leaving us ruined."

And then the farmers played their sharpest card — using the government's *own* favourite example against it. In Part 4, remember, the government praised PepsiCo's potato contract farming as a model success.

THE PEPSICO CASE — THE MODEL THAT BIT BACK

In 2019, that very company, PepsiCo, **sued nine small potato farmers in Gujarat**, claiming they had grown a potato variety it owned — and reportedly demanded enormous damages from each. Only after a public outcry and pressure from farmer groups did PepsiCo back down and withdraw the cases. Farmers asked: "This is your shining model? A global giant hauling poor farmers into court over potatoes? Now imagine that power over our whole harvest."

7 Answer to "investment and less waste": you legalised hoarding

Nobody denied India needs more cold stores and less waste. But the farmers said the third law solved that problem in the most dangerous way possible.

THE FARMERS ANSWERED

"Removing stock limits doesn't just invite good warehouses — it lets a few giant companies legally hoard unlimited amounts of food. They can buy cheap from a desperate farmer at harvest, sit on mountains of grain, and release it later at high prices. We get squeezed when we sell; the poor get gouged when they buy. Build storage, yes — but don't hand a handful of billionaires the keys to the nation's food."

8 Answer to "it only helps 6%": don't sink the boat — build more

This was the government's strongest punch (Part 4): the old system protects only about 6% of farmers, so why defend it? The farmers turned that punch right back around.

THE FARMERS ANSWERED

"You're right that only 6% of us get real MSP protection — and that *is* a scandal. But the fix for 'too few people have a lifeboat' is to **build more lifeboats**, not to sink the one that works. Give the other 94% a legal MSP too. Build them mandis. The fact that they're forced to sell below MSP proves they need protection — not that we should throw ours away."

"If only a few are safe, lift everyone up to safety. Don't drag the safe ones down."

9 The question underneath everything: who is this really for?

Strip away the details, and the farmers had one burning suspicion: that these laws were written not for *them*, but for a few enormous companies close to those in power.

KEY WORD: "CRONY CAPITALISM"

Crony capitalism is when government policy seems designed to enrich a small circle of favoured big businesses rather than help ordinary people. Farmers accused the government of exactly this — they used the taunt "suit-boot ki sarkar" (a government of the well-suited rich).

Two names became lightning rods: **Mukesh Ambani (Reliance)** and **Gautam Adani**, India's two richest men, both seen as close to the government. Farmers came to believe the laws were meant to hand these giants control of farming. In protest, they boycotted Reliance's Jio SIM cards and fuel pumps; more than 1,500 Jio phone towers in Punjab were damaged; and Adani's grain silos were targeted.

IN FAIRNESS: THE COMPANIES DENIED IT

Both groups publicly rejected the accusation. Reliance said it had never done contract farming, owned no farmland, had no such plans, and would insist its suppliers pay farmers the government's minimum prices. Adani said it does not buy food grains from farmers or set their prices. Whether or not the suspicion was fair, the *belief* that the laws served big business — not farmers — poured fuel on the fire.

10 It wasn't just the "what" — it was the "how"

Even a farmer who wasn't sure about the fine print was insulted by the way it all happened (remember Part 3). Reform is one thing. Being handed a life-changing decision without being asked is another.

THE GRIEVANCE IN ONE LINE

A set of laws about farmers' lives — drafted during a pandemic, rushed out as emergency ordinances, and pushed through Parliament in a disputed voice vote — **without consulting a single farmer union or state government**. To farmers, that wasn't a gift. It was a decision made behind their backs.

On top of this sat the **federalism** wound from Part 3: farming is mostly a state subject, so many argued the central government hadn't even had the clean right to make these laws in the first place. It felt less like help, and more like a takeover.

11 And underneath it all: survival and honour

Return, finally, to Part 1. For a Punjabi farming family, land is not a spreadsheet. It is **izzat** — honour, identity, the family's name across generations. And that is the deepest reason the farmers would not gamble.

They looked at contract farming and corporate buyers and saw the first step down a road with only one ending: becoming hired hands on land their own ancestors had owned. And they knew a hard truth — that once you give up your bargaining system and your independence, you can never buy them back. A safety net, once gone, is gone.

REMEMBER THIS

This is why the fight was so fierce and so unwilling to compromise. It was never only about the price of wheat. It was about whether a farmer would remain his own master — or slowly become someone else's servant. People will risk almost anything rather than lose that.

12 What the farmers actually wanted (not just "No")

It's easy to paint the movement as pure refusal. It wasn't. The farmers had clear, positive demands:

The demand	What it meant
Repeal all three laws	Take them fully off the books, not just pause them.
A legal guarantee of MSP	Make MSP a written law, ideally at the Swaminathan "C2+50%" level (see Part 2).
Strengthen, don't scrap, the mandis	Build more markets and more procurement, so protection reaches everyone.
Address debt and dignity	Relief from crushing debt, and a seat at the table when decisions are made.

13 Where we go next

So now both cases sit before you, at full strength. The government's (Part 4) was not stupid. The farmers' (Part 5) was not blind. Two reasonable sides, reading the same facts, arrived at opposite conclusions — because they were standing in very different places, with very different amounts to lose.

But arguments in Parliament and op-eds don't move a nation. *People* do. In **Part 6**, we leave the debate hall and step onto the cold highway: how Punjab first erupted, how the farmers marched on Delhi, and how the borders of the capital became home to one of the largest and longest protests in human history.

Part 5 — the farmers' case in seven lines

- **Freedom without power is a trap** — the mandi's rules were a shield, not a cage.
- **The two-market trap** would starve the mandi, and MSP would die of neglect.
- **Bihar is the proof**: it scrapped mandis in 2006 and farmers ended up selling at half the MSP.
- **"Put MSP in writing"** — a promise the government won't sign isn't a promise.
- **Contract farming is David vs Goliath** — and PepsiCo suing farmers proved the danger.
- **Freeing stock limits legalises corporate hoarding** and price control.
- **Don't sink the 6%'s lifeboat — build more**. Plus deep distrust of who the laws really served, and how they were passed.

Sources & further reading for Part 5

1. Down To Earth / Ideas for India / NCAER — Bihar's 2006 APMC repeal and its outcomes (distress sales, paddy at ~half of MSP, price volatility, weak procurement).
2. CNN / Business Standard / The Patent Lawyer — PepsiCo's 2019 lawsuit against Gujarat potato farmers over the FC-5 (FL-2027) variety, and its withdrawal after protest.
3. Al Jazeera / The Print / Fortune — farmers' allegations of "crony capitalism," the Ambani (Reliance) and Adani boycotts, damaged Jio towers, and the companies' public denials.
4. Swaminathan Commission (National Commission on Farmers) — the "C2+50%" MSP benchmark the farmers demanded (see Part 2).
5. PRS Legislative Research — the contract-farming dispute mechanism (Conciliation Board / SDM / Appellate Authority) and the stock-limit changes underlying the hoarding fear.
6. Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) statements — the farmers' formal demands: repeal plus a legal MSP guarantee.

This part presents the farmers' case at its strongest, in their own logic. Bihar and the PepsiCo lawsuit are documented facts; the "crony capitalism" charge is a widely held belief, and I've included the companies' denials so you can weigh it yourself. The government's replies to these points are in Part 4.

A PLAIN-ENGLISH DEEP DIVE

Kissan Andolan

The Complete Story

India's Farmers' Movement, 2020-2024 and beyond
— every side of the story, told in the simplest words,
after months of research.

PART 6 OF 12 • THE UPRISING

Written & researched by Lovepreet Singh

The Uprising: Dilli Chalo and Life at the Borders

For five parts we have argued in words. Now the words run out, and the people move. This is where the story leaves paper and hits the cold tarmac of a highway — where a disagreement over three laws became one of the largest and longest protests the world has ever seen.

1 Why Punjab lit the match first

Farmers from many states joined in. But the first, fiercest fire was lit in **Punjab** — and by now you already know why. Three reasons from earlier parts come together here.

WHY PUNJAB, IN THREE LINES

- 1. The most to lose.** Remember Part 2: the government buys roughly 85% of Punjab's rice and 74% of its wheat at MSP. No state leans on the mandi-MSP system more — so no state was more frightened to see it touched.
- 2. The deepest dependence.** The Green Revolution (Part 1) built Punjab's whole economy around wheat and paddy sold through that system.
- 3. The strongest unions.** Punjab has a long, organised tradition of farm unions — more than 30 of them — and a Sikh culture of *seva* (selfless service) and standing firm against injustice.

Put simply: Punjab had the most to lose, the deepest roots in the old system, and the best-organised people to fight for it. That is why the match was struck there.

2 The spark: Punjab erupts, summer to autumn 2020

Long before anyone reached Delhi, Punjab was already ablaze. The protest did not begin at the capital — by the time it got there, it was months old. Follow how it built:

5 Jun 2020	The three farm measures appear as emergency ordinances. Punjab's unions begin to stir.
14 Sep 2020	The bills are introduced in Parliament. ¹ Farmers hold sit-ins (dharnas) across Punjab.
23–24 Sep 2020	All 31 Punjab farm unions announce a "rail roko" (stop the trains) from 1 October; some begin squatting on tracks at Amritsar and Ferozepur. ²
25 Sep 2020	A nationwide "Bharat Bandh" (general shutdown) is called by a wide farmer coalition.
27 Sep 2020	The bills become law. Punjab's farmers block railway tracks across the state — a blockade that lasts about two months.
20 Oct 2020	Punjab's state assembly unanimously passes its own counter-laws, even making the purchase of wheat or paddy below MSP punishable with jail. ³

KEY WORD: RAIL ROKO & MORCHA

Rail roko means "stop the trains" — sitting on railway tracks to halt them as a protest. A **morcha** is an organised, sustained protest or agitation — a word that will define this whole story.

3 One voice: the birth of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha

Dozens of unions, dozens of leaders, dozens of egos — a movement can splinter on such things. To avoid that, on **7 November 2020** the unions joined into a single umbrella body: the **Samyukt Kisan Morcha** (SKM), the "United Farmers' Front," coordinating around 40 major unions and, through them, hundreds of local groups.⁴

REMEMBER THIS — A MOVEMENT WITH NO SINGLE FACE

The SKM deliberately had **no single supreme leader**. Decisions were taken collectively by a committee. This was a strength (no one person could be bought, jailed, or discredited to end it) and later a difficulty (it was slow to agree and hard to negotiate with). Keep it in mind — it shapes everything that follows.

Some of the major unions and leaders behind the movement (a partial list)

Leader	Union	Base
Joginder Singh Ugrahan	BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) — Punjab's largest	Punjab (Malwa)
Balbir Singh Rajewal	BKU (Rajewal) — key spokesperson	Punjab
Dr Darshan Pal	Krantikari Kisan Union; SKM secretariat	Punjab
Gurnam Singh Chaduni	BKU (Charuni)	Haryana
Rakesh Tikait	BKU (Tikait) — pivotal at Ghazipur (Part 7)	Western Uttar Pradesh
Hannan Mollah / others	All India Kisan Sabha & many more	Nationwide

4 "Dilli Chalo": the call to march

Blocking Punjab's trains had made noise, but not change. So the SKM raised a bigger, bolder call: **Dilli Chalo** — "March to Delhi" — for **26-27 November 2020**.⁵ The plan was direct: take the demand to the doorstep of national power and refuse to leave until it was heard.

And crucially, they did not pack for a day trip. Tractor-trolleys were loaded with months of rations, firewood, diesel, quilts, and bedding. This was the tell that Delhi missed at first: these farmers had come to *stay*.

IN THEIR WORDS (AS WIDELY REPORTED)

"We have brought enough rations to last six months. We are not going back until the laws go back." — a sentiment repeated by countless farmers to reporters along the route.

5 The road to Delhi: barricades, water cannons and trenches

The government did not want a farmers' army camped in the capital. So as the trolleys rolled south, the BJP-run Haryana government tried to physically stop them from crossing the state on the way to Delhi.

1. Bills introduced in the Lok Sabha, 14 Sept 2020; enacted 27 Sept 2020. PRS Legislative Research; PIB.

The roads became a battlefield of obstacles. Police used **water cannons** and **tear gas**; highways were **dug up with trenches**; lanes were choked with boulders, sand piles, concrete blocks, and layer upon layer of steel barricades.⁶ On a freezing late-November day, elderly farmers were hosed with cold water.

But the farmers came through. They filled the trenches with their own tractors, hauled the barricades aside, and pushed on. One moment became the movement's first great image:

THE IMAGE THAT WENT AROUND THE WORLD

A young farmer climbed onto a moving police water-cannon truck and reached down to switch off its jet, even as it blasted the crowd. The photograph — one young man against the machine — became an instant symbol of the whole movement's spirit.

6 The refusal at Burari

When the farmers reached the edge of Delhi, the police made an offer: go to the **Nirankari ground at Burari**, a fixed spot inside the city set aside for protests. Many expected the farmers to accept. They refused.

WHY THE REFUSAL MATTERED SO MUCH

The farmers saw Burari as a trap — a fenced field, away from the seat of power, where a protest could be quietly ignored until it faded. Some called it an "open jail." Instead, they sat down exactly where they had been stopped: on the great highways at the **gates of the capital**. That single decision turned a march into a year-long siege.

7 The three gates: Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur

The farmers dug in at the border points where the highways enter Delhi. Three became legendary, and a couple more mattered too:

The main protest sites at Delhi's borders

2. "Rail roko: Punjab farmers' protest against new farm laws continues," Business Standard, Oct 2020. 31 unions; Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee on tracks from 24 Sept.

Border	Where	Who mainly gathered
Singhu	North, Delhi-Haryana on National Highway 44	The main camp; huge numbers from Punjab. The movement's "capital."
Tikri	West, Delhi-Haryana (towards Bahadurgarh)	Vast camp stretching for kilometres; Punjab & Haryana unions.
Ghazipur	East, Delhi-Uttar Pradesh	Western-UP farmers under Rakesh Tikait — the site that saves the movement in Part 7.
Shahjahanpur / others	South, Rajasthan-Haryana; and Palwal	Farmers from Rajasthan and beyond.

Notice the shape of it: farmers ringed Delhi from several sides at once. The capital was, in a real sense, encircled by its own countryside.

8 From sit-in to city: the protest becomes semi-permanent

Here is the part that stunned the world. A sit-in usually lasts days. This one built a **civilisation**. The farmers turned the highways into long villages — a "pind" (village) on tarmac.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

They didn't just protest at the border. They *moved in* and built a working town on the road — kitchens, homes, clinics, schools, and all.

What grew there, over the months, is almost hard to believe:

3. "Punjab Assembly unanimously passes 3 Bills to counter Centre's farm laws," The Tribune, 20 Oct 2020. The bills required the President's assent, which never came — so they stayed largely symbolic.

What appeared on the highway	Detail
Langars (free kitchens) every 100 metres	Running 24 hours a day; one alone claimed to serve over 10,000 meals daily — free to anyone, protester or police. ⁷
Homes on wheels — then brick houses	Tractor-trolleys became bedrooms with fans and beds; as summer neared, some built actual brick ("pucca") houses on the road. ⁸
Libraries, schools and a newspaper	Small libraries and tent-classrooms appeared; farmers even started their own newsletter, <i>Trolley Times</i> , from December 2020.
Clinics, gyms, laundry, solar power	Free medical and dental camps, a "gym ka langar," washing machines, foot-massage machines, and solar panels for electricity.

REMEMBER THIS

This mattered beyond comfort. A protest that can **feed, house, heal, and teach itself** cannot simply be waited out. By building a self-sufficient town, the farmers made their most powerful statement without a word: *we can stay here longer than you can ignore us*.

9 How big was it, really?

Because this book is honest about numbers, let me be careful here. Crowds this large, spread across many sites for many months, are almost impossible to count exactly — and both sides had reasons to inflate or shrink the figure.

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS — WITH HONESTY

Hundreds of thousands at the gates

At their peak, the border camps together held **hundreds of thousands** of people. Separately, on 26 November 2020, India's central trade unions held a nationwide general strike that they claimed drew up to **250 million** workers — often described as one of the largest organised protests in human history. That giant figure was the *broader* strike (workers of all kinds), which the farmers' march coincided with and fed into — not a headcount of farmers alone.⁹

4. Samyukt Kisan Morcha formed 7 Nov 2020; an umbrella of ~40 unions coordinating 400+ organisations. Wikipedia, "Samyukt Kisan Morcha"; SKM statements.

The honest summary: the farmers' camps were enormous and sustained for over a year, and they sat inside the biggest wave of protest India had seen in decades. Exact totals, though, deserve a pinch of caution from every direction.

10 Two ways to see the very same scene

Staying neutral, as promised, the same protest city looked completely different depending on where you stood:

How supporters saw it	How the government and critics saw it
A peaceful, disciplined, self-organised democratic uprising — feeding even the police through langar.	A months-long blockade choking highways and a whole region's rail and road, hurting ordinary people and businesses.
Citizens being fenced out of their own capital with trenches and water cannon.	A movement heavily concentrated in Punjab & Haryana, not truly all of India's farmers.
Ordinary farmers funding it themselves through village collections and seva.	Questions about how such vast, well-run logistics were organised and paid for.

Both readings contain truth. The sharper accusations that flew soon after — the "Khalistan" charge, the "toolkit," the claims of a foreign hand — are so important, and so contested, that they get a whole part to themselves: Part 8.

11 Where we go next

By December 2020, the camps were dug in against a brutal winter. Rounds of talks between the SKM and the government began — and, one after another, failed. The two sides were talking past each other, exactly as Parts 4 and 5 predicted they would.

And then the movement hit its most dangerous moment — the day it nearly shattered. A tractor parade on Republic Day. A flag on the Red Fort. A death, a hundred accusations, and one night of tears that brought it all roaring back to life. That is **Part 7**.

5. "Dilli Chalo" march called for 26–27 Nov 2020 over the three farm laws. Outlook India; PIB.

Part 6 — the seven things to carry forward

- **Punjab lit the match first** — most to lose, deepest dependence, strongest unions.
- The uprising began in Punjab months early — **dharnas, a rail roko from October 2020**, and state counter-laws.
- On **7 November 2020** the unions united as the **Samyukt Kisan Morcha**, deliberately with no single leader.
- The "**Dilli Chalo**" **march (26-27 Nov 2020)** broke through Haryana's water cannons, tear gas and trenches.
- Farmers **refused the Burari ground** and instead sat at Delhi's gates — turning a march into a siege.
- Three great camps — **Singhu, Tikri, Ghazipur** — grew into self-sufficient protest cities with langars, homes, clinics and schools.
- It sat inside the largest wave of protest India had seen in decades — though exact numbers deserve honest caution.

Sources & further reading for Part 6

1. Business Standard / Deccan Herald / The Tribune — Punjab's rail roko (31 unions; tracks blocked from late Sept-Oct 2020) and the state's October 2020 counter-laws.
2. Wikipedia — "2020-2021 Indian farmers' protest" and "Samyukt Kisan Morcha" (formation on 7 Nov 2020; ~40 unions; leaders).
3. Outlook India / PIB — the "Dilli Chalo" call for 26-27 Nov 2020.
4. The Tribune / Deccan Herald — Haryana's barricades, dug-up roads, water cannon and tear gas; multi-layer fortifications at Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur.
5. ThePrint / Deccan Herald / Foundation for Agrarian Studies — life at the camps: langars, tractor-trolley homes, brick houses, gyms, clinics, and the scale of the sit-ins.
6. Reuters / Al Jazeera — the 26 Nov 2020 nationwide general strike and its reported scale.

Dates and named unions/leaders are drawn from contemporary reporting and public records; footnotes mark the key sourced facts. Crowd figures are given as ranges with explicit caution, since large multi-site protests cannot be counted precisely.

6. Haryana used barricades, dug-up roads, boulders, sand, water cannon and tear gas to stop the march; multi-layer barricades, concrete blocks and container walls at Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur. The Tribune; Deccan Herald, Nov 2020.

7. "Langar, ration, tractors and cards — how farmers are ready for the long haul at Singhu," ThePrint; a langar every ~100m, one serving 10,000+ daily.

8. "After massage centres and gyms, farmers construct brick houses at Singhu border," Deccan Herald, 2021.

9. The 26 Nov 2020 general strike called by central trade unions was reported at up to ~250 million participants nationwide; it overlapped with, but was broader than, the farmers' march. Contemporary reporting (Reuters; Al Jazeera).

A PLAIN-ENGLISH DEEP DIVE

Kissan Andolan

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PART 7 OF 12 • THE FLASHPOINTS

Written & researched by Lovepreet Singh

The Flashpoints: Republic Day, the Red Fort & Lakhimpur

Every long struggle has a day it nearly dies, and a day it nearly loses its soul. This part holds both. In just a few dramatic weeks — and then one terrible October afternoon — the movement was almost destroyed, almost broken from within, and then, against the odds, saved by a single man's tears.

A FAIR-PLAY PROMISE (THIS PART ESPECIALLY)

These are the most **disputed** events in the whole story. For every one, the two sides tell almost opposite tales. So for each flashpoint I'll lay out both accounts as fairly as I can, mark clearly what is proven and what is contested, and let you weigh it yourself.

1 The backdrop: stalled talks and a cold, tense January

By January 2021, the camps had survived two months of brutal winter. Talks had gone nowhere — eleven rounds between the government and the SKM, ending in deadlock. The government's biggest offer was to *suspend* the laws for a year and a half; the farmers refused anything short of full repeal.¹

On 12 January 2021, the Supreme Court stepped in, put the three laws on hold, and set up a committee to study them. But the farmers refused to appear before it, saying its members had already publicly supported the laws.² Into this frozen, frustrated moment came the plan for a grand show of strength: a tractor parade through Delhi on Republic Day.

2 26 January 2021: the parade that spiralled

Republic Day is India's proudest national ceremony. The SKM negotiated with Delhi Police for a tractor parade on *agreed routes* on the city's outskirts, to begin *after* the official parade. The idea was a peaceful, disciplined display of numbers. It did not stay that way.

Morning	Tens of thousands of tractors set off. Some groups move earlier than agreed and turn onto prohibited routes toward central Delhi. ³
Midday	Barricades are broken; clashes erupt with police; tear gas and lathi (baton) charges follow at several points across the city.
Afternoon	A section of the crowd reaches the Red Fort . Some climb the ramparts and hoist flags. The images flash around the world.
Evening	The SKM disowns the violence and blames "anti-social elements." The movement is suddenly on the defensive as never before.

3 The Red Fort flag: what happened, and the war over its meaning

This is the single most argued-about moment in the entire movement. The bare facts: a group broke into the Red Fort complex, and someone climbed a flagpole and hoisted the **Nishan Sahib** (a Sikh religious flag) along with a farmers' union flag.

KEY WORD: NISHAN SAHIB

The **Nishan Sahib** is the triangular saffron flag that flies at every Sikh gurdwara. It is a *religious* symbol of the Sikh faith — not, as some claimed, a separatist or "Khalistan" flag. That distinction sits at the very heart of the argument that followed.

What did it *mean*? Here the two sides split completely:

How the government & critics saw it	How the farmers & the SKM saw it
Protesters stormed a national monument on Republic Day and planted a religious flag — an insult to the nation that revealed the movement's "real face."	The national tricolour was never taken down; the Nishan Sahib went up on a separate, empty flagpole. It was a religious flag, not an anti-national one.
The violence proved the protest was not as peaceful or disciplined as it claimed.	The act was by a fringe — and the SKM immediately disowned it. The vast parade on the agreed routes stayed peaceful.
Leaders who organised a Republic Day march must own what it became.	The chaos was the work of provocateurs — and possibly plants — who deliberately steered a crowd off-route to discredit the movement.

Two names became central: actor-activist **Deep Sidhu** and his associate **Lakha Sidhana**, both seen at the Red Fort and later charged with instigating the crowd. The SKM accused Deep Sidhu of being a saboteur; he insisted he had only made speeches and had not called for any flag or violence. He was arrested on 9 February 2021.⁴

4 The death of Navreet Singh

Amid the chaos, one protester died — **Navreet Singh**, a 25-year-old farmer from Uttar Pradesh, near the ITO junction. As with everything that day, how he died is fiercely contested.

The police account	The family & eyewitness account
His tractor overturned after hitting a barricade; he died in the accident.	He was shot; eyewitnesses and family alleged police firing, and one expert said the wounds looked consistent with a bullet injury. ⁵

The government also reported that **more than 300 police personnel were injured** in the day's clashes.⁶ Whichever way you read the day, real people on both sides were hurt, and one young man did not go home.

². On 12 Jan 2021 the Supreme Court stayed the three farm laws and formed a four-member committee; the SKM boycotted it, calling the members pro-reform. Supreme Court order; contemporary reporting.

5 The backlash and the crackdown

For about 48 hours, it looked as if Republic Day had killed the movement. Public sympathy drained away. Television replayed the Red Fort images on a loop. Two unions quit the protest. Police filed cases (FIRs) against dozens of farmer leaders. And the state moved hard on the camps:

The crackdown that followed Republic Day (late January–February 2021)

Measure	What happened
Internet shutdowns	Mobile internet was suspended at the Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur camps. ⁷
Fortress borders	Roads were dug up and sealed with concrete blocks, multi-layer barricades, trenches, and iron spikes embedded in the tarmac — images that drew international criticism.
Online clampdown	The government ordered social-media platforms to block hundreds of accounts linked to the protest.
Cases on journalists	Sedition and other FIRs were filed against several journalists and a politician over their posts about Navreet Singh's death; one reporter was briefly detained at Singhu.

The message was clear: the movement was to be squeezed until it collapsed. At Ghazipur, on the night of 28 January, it very nearly did.

6 The night that saved everything: Rakesh Tikait's tears

At the Ghazipur camp (Delhi-UP border), the local administration cut the water and power and served an eviction notice. Police massed to clear the site. This was the end — until farmer leader **Rakesh Tikait** stepped to a microphone and broke down in tears on live television.

IN HIS WORDS (AS WIDELY REPORTED, 28 JAN 2021)

He vowed he would take his own life before he would end the protest — and swore he would not drink a drop of water until a farmer brought it to him from his own village. The tears of a tough Jat farmer leader, live on camera, did what no speech had.

³ Farmers began the rally earlier than the allotted time and drove on prohibited routes; barricades were broken. "2021 Indian farmers' Republic Day protest," Wikipedia; CNN, 26 Jan 2021.

The effect was almost instant. Within hours, thousands of farmers poured out of Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Shamli, Baghpat and Hapur and raced toward Ghazipur.⁸ Village councils — **mahapanchayats** — erupted across western Uttar Pradesh in support. By morning, the crackdown had reversed, and the movement was not just saved but bigger than before.

KEY WORD: MAHAPANCHAYAT

A **mahapanchayat** is a huge open-air gathering of a rural community to take a collective stand. After Tikait's tears, these mass meetings spread the movement deep into a new region.

REMEMBER THIS — WHY THE TEARS MATTERED SO MUCH

Before this night, the protest was seen as mainly a **Punjab** and Sikh movement — which made the "Red Fort / religious flag" attack easier to land. Tikait's tears pulled the **Hindu Jat farmers of western UP** in massively. It even began to heal the bitter Hindu-Muslim split left by the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, as Jats and Muslims stood together under one farmer identity. Overnight, the movement became broader, and much harder to brand.

7 The long, grinding middle — then Lakhimpur

Through the spring and summer of 2021, the movement settled back into a patient siege. Mahapanchayats rolled across UP, Haryana and Rajasthan. The government stopped talking. Both sides dug in for the long haul. And then came the movement's darkest single day.

8 Lakhimpur Kheri: 3 October 2021

In the Lakhimpur Kheri district of Uttar Pradesh, farmers were protesting a visit by senior BJP leaders — including Union Minister of State for Home **Ajay Mishra Teni** — and had shown black flags. As a group of protesting farmers walked along a road at Tikunia, a convoy of vehicles drove into them from behind.⁹

Eight people died that day. It is important to be exact about who, because both sides count the dead:

The eight who died at Lakhimpur Kheri, 3 October 2021

¹. Eleven rounds of talks (Oct 2020–Jan 2021) failed; the government's offer to suspend the laws for ~18 months (20–21 Jan 2021) was rejected by the SKM, which demanded full repeal. Contemporary reporting.

Who	Number	How they died
Protesting farmers	4	Run over by the convoy of vehicles.
A local journalist (Raman Kashyap)	1	Killed while covering the protest.
BJP workers & a driver	3	Killed in the mob violence that erupted afterward.
Total	8	

At the centre of the case was **Ashish Mishra**, the minister's son, whom farmers accused of being in — even driving — the vehicle that mowed them down. Once again, the accounts clashed head-on:

The accused's / BJP side	The farmers' side
The driver lost control, or the vehicle was attacked by a mob; Ashish Mishra was not present, and BJP workers were themselves killed.	A minister's son deliberately drove into peaceful, retreating protesters — a cold act of political revenge for the black flags.

Under public fury and Supreme Court pressure, Ashish Mishra was arrested on 9 October 2021.¹⁰ The investigating team later called the killing "well-planned" and sought the most serious charges; a court framed charges against him and a dozen others. His long back-and-forth through bail, cancelled bail, and re-arrest continued for years.

REMEMBER THIS

Lakhimpur Kheri gave the movement its most painful rallying cry. The four farmers became martyrs, mourned across the country. And the fact that a *Union minister's son* stood accused turned a farming dispute into a raw question of power, justice, and impunity — one that hardened the farmers' resolve just as the government was quietly reconsidering its whole position.

9 What these flashpoints did to the movement

Step back, and you can see three hammer-blows that reshaped everything:

⁴. Deep Sidhu and Lakha Sidhana were charged over the Red Fort events; the SKM disavowed them. Deep Sidhu was arrested on 9 Feb 2021 and denied instigating violence. (He later died in a road accident on 15 Feb 2022.) Wikipedia; CNN.

THE THREE BLOWS, IN ONE BOX

Republic Day (26 Jan) nearly destroyed the movement from the outside — and handed its enemies their sharpest weapon: the "Khalistan" and "toolkit" narratives (all of Part 8).

Tikait's tears (28 Jan) saved it from the inside — and broadened it far beyond Punjab.

Lakhimpur Kheri (3 Oct) hardened it into something no amount of pressure could now shake — a movement with martyrs.

By the end of 2021, the farmers had endured cold, disease, a public-relations disaster, a near-eviction, a crackdown, and the deaths of their own. They were still there. And that stubborn, grieving endurance was about to force one of the most stunning reversals in modern Indian politics.

10 Where we go next

Two roads open from here. One leads into the ugliest fight of all — the war of narratives that exploded after the Red Fort: Khalistan, the "toolkit," Greta and Rihanna, foreign hands, and the left-versus-right blame game. That is **Part 8**. The other leads to the astonishing morning in November 2021 when the Prime Minister appeared on television and gave up. That is **Part 9**.

5. Navreet Singh, 25, died near ITO on 26 Jan 2021. Police said his tractor overturned; family and some eyewitnesses alleged firing, and an expert cited possible bullet injury. The Caravan; Scroll.in.

Part 7 — the seven things to carry forward

- Talks had collapsed by January 2021; the SC stayed the laws and formed a committee the farmers **boycotted**.
- The **26 January tractor parade** spiralled: broken routes, clashes, and the **Red Fort flag** incident.
- The flag was the **Nishan Sahib** (a religious, not separatist, symbol); whether the tricolour was "displaced" is exactly what the two sides dispute.
- **Navreet Singh** died at ITO (police say accident, family says firing); **300+ police** were reported injured.
- A harsh crackdown followed — **internet shutdowns, fortress barricades, FIRs** — and the movement nearly collapsed.
- **Rakesh Tikait's tears (28 Jan)** revived it overnight and pulled in western UP's Hindu Jat farmers.
- **Lakhimpur Kheri (3 Oct)**: eight dead (four farmers, a journalist, three others); minister's son **Ashish Mishra** arrested on 9 Oct.

Sources & further reading for Part 7

1. Wikipedia — "2021 Indian farmers' Republic Day protest" and "2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence" (timelines, casualties, charges).
2. CNN / NBC News — contemporaneous coverage of the Red Fort tractor rally, 26 Jan 2021.
3. The Caravan / Scroll.in — the death of Navreet Singh and the dispute over its cause.
4. Deccan Herald / The Tribune — police injury figures; Deep Sidhu's arrest (9 Feb 2021); charges in the Red Fort case.
5. National Herald / Hindustan Times — the Ghazipur near-eviction and Rakesh Tikait's emotional turn (28 Jan 2021) and the western-UP mahapanchayats.
6. India TV / Deccan Herald — the SIT's "well-planned" finding, charges framed against Ashish Mishra, and his arrest and bail history.

These events remain legally and politically contested. Where accounts conflict — the Red Fort flag, Navreet Singh's death, and Lakhimpur Kheri — I have set both versions side by side and noted what investigators and courts have found, rather than declaring a single winner. The Khalistan and "toolkit" narratives that erupted from Republic Day are examined in full in Part 8.

6. More than 300 police personnel were reported injured in the 26 Jan 2021 violence. Deccan Herald; contemporary reporting.

7. Mobile internet was suspended at the Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur protest sites in late Jan-Feb 2021; roads were fortified with concrete, multi-layer barricades, trenches and iron spikes. Reporting by The Hindu, Reuters and others.

8. On the night of 28 Jan 2021, facing eviction, Rakesh Tikait's emotional appeal drew thousands from western UP within hours and revived the protest; mahapanchayats spread across the region. National Herald; Hindustan Times.

9. On 3 Oct 2021 at Tikunia, Lakhimpur Kheri, a convoy ran into protesting farmers. Eight people died in total. "2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence," Wikipedia.

10. Ashish Mishra, son of Union minister Ajay Mishra Teni, was arrested on 9 Oct 2021. The SIT later called the incident "well-planned" and sought attempt-to-murder charges; charges were framed against him and others. He has since moved through bail, its cancellation, and interim bail. The Tribune; Deccan Herald; India TV.

A PLAIN-ENGLISH DEEP DIVE

Kissan Andolan

The Complete Story

India's Farmers' Movement, 2020-2024 and beyond
— every side of the story, told in the simplest words,
after months of research.

PART 8 OF 12 • THE BLAME WARS

Written & researched by Lovepreet Singh

The Blame Wars: Khalistan, the Toolkit & the Battle of Narratives

This part is not about the farm laws at all. It is about something just as powerful: the fight over the *story*. What was this movement "really" about? Heroes or traitors? Farmers or foreign agents? Because whoever won that story would win the public — and, in the end, the politics.

A FAIR-PLAY PROMISE (READ THIS FIRST)

This is the most politically charged part of the book, so here is exactly how I'll handle it. For each accusation I will (1) give the **strongest version of the claim**, (2) give the **strongest rebuttal**, and (3) add a short "**weighing it fairly**" box that sticks only to what the evidence, agencies, and courts actually showed. I am not here to tell you who was right. These are other people's arguments, laid side by side, so you can judge.

1 Why the war over the story mattered so much

A protest lives or dies on public sympathy. Sympathy moves votes; votes move governments. So both sides fought ferociously not just over the laws, but over how the movement would be *seen*. Was it India's food-growers standing up for their rights — or a dangerous mob steered by separatists, opponents, and foreigners? After the Red Fort chaos of 26 January (Part 7), that battle exploded into the open.

2 Claim 1: "This is a Khalistani movement"

The sharpest accusation was that the protest was secretly a **separatist** one — a front for the demand for "Khalistan," a separate Sikh nation.

KEY WORDS: KHALISTAN & SIKHS FOR JUSTICE

Khalistan is the idea of a separate Sikh homeland — a fringe separatist demand tied to a violent period in 1980s–90s Punjab. **Sikhs for Justice (SFJ)** is a banned overseas group, led by Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, that campaigns for it.

The case for the claim	The rebuttal
The Nishan Sahib flag at the Red Fort (Part 7) was read as a separatist statement.	The Nishan Sahib is a <i>religious</i> flag on every gurdwara — not a Khalistan flag. No separate "Khalistan" state flag was raised.
The banned SFJ loudly backed the protest and even offered cash rewards to protesters. ¹	A banned group trying to <i>attach itself</i> to a movement is not the same as the movement being separatist. The SKM repeatedly disowned it.
The protest was heavily Sikh and Punjabi in character.	After Rakesh Tikait's tears (Part 7), it spread massively to <i>Hindu</i> Jat farmers of UP and Haryana — hard to square with a "Sikh separatist" plot.

WEIGHING IT FAIRLY

Fringe separatist voices and the banned SFJ certainly *tried* to ride the movement, and a few provocative images existed. But no government agency ever produced evidence that the protest was **led by, or aimed at**, separatism — and its huge spread among non-Sikh farmers cut against the charge. In practice, "Khalistani" worked mostly as a **label to discredit**, not a proven description.

3 Claim 2: The "toolkit" and the foreign-celebrity storm

In early February 2021, the fight went global — in about three weeks.

2 Feb 2021 Pop star Rihanna tweets a news link — "why aren't we talking about this? #FarmersProtest" — to her ~100 million followers.²

3 Feb 2021 Climate activist Greta Thunberg tweets support and shares a "toolkit." India's foreign ministry issues a rare statement against "vested interest groups"; Indian celebrities and ministers reply with #IndiaTogether and #IndiaAgainstPropaganda.³

4 Feb 2021 Delhi Police file an FIR over the toolkit, invoking sedition and criminal conspiracy, and link it to a "pro-Khalistani" group, the Poetic Justice Foundation.

13 Feb 2021 A 22-year-old Bengaluru climate activist, Disha Ravi, is arrested for helping edit and share the toolkit.⁴

23 Feb 2021 A Delhi court grants her bail, calling the evidence "scanty and sketchy."

KEY WORD: A "TOOLKIT"

A protest **toolkit** is just a shared guide for supporters — sample tweets, hashtags, petition links, dates of solidarity events. Activists use them for every kind of cause worldwide.

How the government saw the toolkit

Proof of an *organised international conspiracy* to defame India and to help incite the 26 January violence — with alleged "pro-Khalistani" links.

How critics saw it

An ordinary, harmless activist support-document. Arresting a 22-year-old for editing a Google doc was seen as criminalising peaceful dissent.

The judge's bail order became one of the most quoted documents of the whole movement:

IN THE COURT'S WORDS (BAIL ORDER, 23 FEB 2021)

*"Citizens are conscience keepers of government in any democratic nation. They cannot be put behind the bars simply because they choose to disagree with the State policies... The offence of sedition cannot be invoked to minister to the wounded vanity of the governments."*⁵

1. Sikhs for Justice (SFJ), a banned group, publicly backed the protest and announced cash rewards (e.g., for hoisting a flag at the Red Fort). Contemporary reporting; MHA notifications on SFJ ban.

WEIGHING IT FAIRLY

The toolkit itself, once public, looked mundane — hashtags, petitions, protest dates. The *criminal-conspiracy* framing did not survive first contact with a courtroom ("scanty and sketchy"). At the same time, the episode *did* show real international coordination of support. The fair reading: genuine global solidarity, met by a state response many judged as heavy-handed overreach.

4 Claim 3: The "foreign hand" and NRI money

Alongside the toolkit came a broader charge: that the whole movement was funded and steered from abroad — an "international conspiracy" against India.

The case for the claim	The rebuttal
The Sikh diaspora in Canada, the UK and the US held big rallies, raised money, and even bought billboards and ad slots. Foreign politicians commented.	Diaspora solidarity and donations are normal, legal, and happen for <i>every</i> major cause. Interest from abroad is not the same as <i>control</i> from abroad.
Canada's PM Justin Trudeau publicly supported the right to protest — which India called "unacceptable interference." ⁶	A foreign leader defending peaceful protest does not make a home-grown farmers' movement a foreign plot.

WEIGHING IT FAIRLY

Diaspora support was real, visible, and sometimes loud. But no evidence was produced that the movement was *funded into existence* or *run* from abroad — its money came overwhelmingly from village collections and its people were Indian farmers. "The world is watching" is not the same as "the world is behind it."

5 Claim 4: "The laws are for Ambani and Adani"

To be scrupulously even-handed, the biggest accusation ran the *other* way too — from the farmers at the government. We met it in Part 5; here is where it sits in the narrative war.

2. Rihanna's tweet, 2 Feb 2021, sharing a CNN article with #FarmersProtest. Al Jazeera; NBC News.

The farmers' / critics' claim	The rebuttal (and the companies' denials)
The laws were written to hand farming to two favoured billionaires, Ambani and Adani — "suit-boot ki sarkar," crony capitalism.	Both companies publicly denied any interest: Reliance said it had never done contract farming and had no plans to; Adani said it does not buy grain from farmers or set prices.

WEIGHING IT FAIRLY

No document ever surfaced proving the laws were drafted for two named firms, and both denied it. But the government's close ties to big business, and the laws' clear opening for large private buyers, made the charge *believable* to millions — and belief, in a narrative war, is its own kind of power. I apply the same rule here as everywhere: potent perception, unproven as literal fact.

6 The labels: "andolanjeevi," "parjeevi" and "FDI"

On 8 February 2021, the Prime Minister addressed Parliament and gave the narrative war three memorable new words.

IN THE PM'S WORDS (RAJYA SABHA, 8 FEB 2021)

*He warned of a breed of "andolanjeevi" (people who live off agitations — professional protesters) and "parjeevi" (parasites), and of a new "FDI — Foreign Destructive Ideology."*³

How supporters read the labels	How the farmers read them
A fair jab at habitual agitators and opportunists — and at foreign meddlers — riding on top of a real issue.	A sneer that mocked genuine grievance and insulted the country's <i>annadata</i> (food-givers), reducing farmers to parasites and pawns.

The farmers' reply was tart: an *andolan* (movement), they noted, is exactly what won India its freedom in the first place.

³ Greta Thunberg shared a protest "toolkit" on 3 Feb 2021 (later deleted); India's MEA statement urged that "facts be ascertained" and warned of "vested interest groups." Ministers and celebrities amplified #IndiaAgainstPropaganda. Dawn; Deccan Herald.

7 The media war: "godi media," alternative media, and hashtags

Underneath every claim ran a fight about the messengers themselves.

KEY WORD: "GODI MEDIA"

"**Godi media**" (roughly, "lapdog media") is a mocking term — popularised by journalist Ravish Kumar — for news channels accused of acting as cheerleaders for the government. Farmers used it to accuse big TV channels of smearing them with the Khalistan angle or ignoring them.

The farmers' / critics' view of the media

Much of big TV ("godi media") smeared the protest as Khalistani or downplayed its size, so farmers built their *own* media — the *Trolley Times* paper, and busy social-media handles.

The government's / supporters' view

Much of the English-language press, and a flood of social-media accounts, were biased *for* the farmers and against the government — amplifying "propaganda," some of it from hostile foreign sources.

This spilled into a real clash over the platforms. In February 2021, the government ordered Twitter to block well over a thousand accounts it said were spreading misinformation or Khalistani/foreign content; Twitter blocked some, restored others on free-speech grounds, and the government threatened its staff with penal action.⁴ And the hashtags lined up like armies:

The hashtag battle lines

Pro-farmer

#FarmersProtest • #IStandWithFarmers •
#NoFarmersNoFood

Pro-government

#IndiaTogether •
#IndiaAgainstPropaganda

8 The left-vs-right blame game

Zoom all the way out, and every single claim above snapped neatly onto India's larger political divide. Each side had a complete, self-contained story — and each accused the other of hijacking the whole thing.

⁴. Disha Ravi, 22, arrested 13 Feb 2021 as an alleged "key conspirator" in the toolkit case. Two others (Nikita Jacob, Shantanu Muluk) were also sought. Time; BBC.

The right's story of the movement	The left's story of the movement
A genuine but small farmer concern was hijacked by Khalistanis, Pakistan, opposition parties, "urban naxals," rich landowners, arhtiyas, and foreign money — turning it anti-national.	A genuine mass movement was met by an authoritarian state — crony capitalism, "godia media" propaganda, misuse of sedition and anti-terror law, and an IT-cell disinformation machine.
The media and celebrities were doing the bidding of India's enemies.	The government was crushing dissent and calling every critic a traitor.

REMEMBER THIS

The tragedy of the blame war is that it made it almost impossible to see the farmers as simply **farmers**. To one side they had to be heroes of democracy; to the other, tools of a plot. The ordinary man on the trolley — worried about the price of his wheat — kept disappearing behind the shouting.

9 So what does the evidence actually show?

Let me end this part by doing the one thing the blame war never did: separating what was *shown* from what was merely *shouted*.

A neutral scorecard of the biggest claims

5. Additional Sessions Judge Dharmender Rana, granting bail to Disha Ravi, 23 Feb 2021; the court called the evidence "scanty and sketchy." Newslandry; The Tribune; Boom.

Claim	What the evidence showed
The movement was separatist / Khalistani-led	Unproven. Fringe groups tried to attach themselves; no agency showed separatist leadership or aim.
The toolkit was criminal sedition	Collapsed in court. A judge called the evidence "scanty and sketchy" and granted bail.
The movement was foreign-funded / foreign-run	Unproven. Diaspora solidarity was real; foreign <i>control</i> was never shown.
The laws were written for Ambani & Adani	Unproven & denied. No document surfaced; both firms denied any role.
There was real international attention & solidarity	True. Celebrities, diaspora and foreign politicians did weigh in.
The state response was heavy-handed	Substantially true. Sedition FIRs, account blocks, and the Disha Ravi case drew wide criticism.

“In a blame war, the loudest claim usually travels furthest — and the truth travels last.”

10 Where we go next

For a whole year, neither story landed a knockout. The government could not brand the movement out of existence; the farmers could not shame the government into surrender. Something else broke the deadlock — not a better narrative, but cold political arithmetic and sheer, stubborn endurance. In **Part 9**, the morning that stunned India: the repeal.

6. In Dec 2020 Canadian PM Justin Trudeau backed the right to peaceful protest; India summoned Canada's envoy and called the remarks interference in internal affairs. Reuters; The Hindu.

Part 8 — the seven things to carry forward

- The fight over the **story** mattered as much as the fight over the laws — and exploded after 26 January.
- The "**Khalistani**" charge was never proven; it worked mainly as a label to discredit, and the movement's spread to Hindu Jats undercut it.
- The **toolkit** case (Rihanna, Greta, Disha Ravi's arrest) collapsed in court as "scanty and sketchy," and became a symbol of the free-speech fight.
- The "**foreign hand**" claim rested on real diaspora solidarity, but foreign *control* was never shown.
- The farmers' own big claim — laws written for **Ambani & Adani** — was potent but also unproven, and denied by both firms.
- "**Andolanjeevi**," "**parjeevi**," "**FDI**" and "godhi media" were the war's memorable weapons; a Twitter standoff was its battleground.
- Every claim mapped onto **left-vs-right** — and the real farmer kept vanishing behind the noise.

Sources & further reading for Part 8

1. Time / BBC / Al Jazeera / Newslaundry — the Disha Ravi "toolkit" arrest (13 Feb 2021), the FIR, and the bail order (23 Feb 2021) with Judge Dharmender Rana's remarks.
2. Dawn / Al Jazeera / NBC News — Rihanna's tweet (2 Feb 2021), Greta Thunberg's toolkit, and the MEA statement plus #IndiaAgainstPropaganda celebrity response.
3. Business Standard / Deccan Herald — PM Modi's "andolanjeevi" and "FDI — Foreign Destructive Ideology" remarks in the Rajya Sabha (8 Feb 2021).
4. Reuters / The Hindu — the government-Twitter standoff over 1,100+ accounts (Feb 2021); PM Trudeau's December 2020 remarks and India's response.
5. Reporting on Sikhs for Justice (a banned organisation), its cash-reward announcements, and the debate over the Nishan Sahib flag at the Red Fort.
6. Commentary on "godhi media" (Ravish Kumar) and the movement's own outlets, including *Trolley Times* and the Kisan Ekta Morcha social-media handles.

Quotes here are from documented public statements and court orders. On every contested claim I have separated what agencies and courts actually established from what remained assertion — and have applied the same standard of proof to accusations made by each side.

7. PM Narendra Modi, Rajya Sabha, 8 Feb 2021, coined "andolanjeevi" and punned "FDI = Foreign Destructive Ideology," while appealing to farmers to end the stir and assuring MSP would continue. Business Standard; Deccan Herald.

8. In Feb 2021 the government ordered Twitter to block 1,100+ accounts/handles it linked to misinformation and Khalistani/foreign content; Twitter partially complied, restored some accounts, and faced government threats of penal action. Reuters; The Hindu.

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PART 9 OF 12 • THE REPEAL

Written & researched by Lovepreet Singh

The Repeal: How the Laws Died

After a full year of deadlock, the break did not come on a highway or in a negotiating room. It came at dawn, on a television screen, on a Sikh holy day — when one of the most powerful governments in India's modern history did something almost no one expected. It blinked.

1 The morning that stunned India

On the morning of **19 November 2021** — **Guru Nanak Jayanti**, the birthday of the founder of Sikhism — Prime Minister Narendra Modi appeared in a surprise televised address and announced that the government would **repeal all three farm laws**.¹

KEY WORD: GURU NANAK JAYANTI (GURPURAB)

Guru Nanak Jayanti, also called Gurpurab, marks the birth of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith — one of the holiest days in the Sikh calendar. Choosing this day, to speak to a movement led largely by Sikh farmers, was a deliberate and pointed gesture.

But listen carefully to *how* he said it, because the words themselves became a fight. He did not say the laws were wrong. He said the government had failed to explain them.

IN THE PM'S WORDS (19 NOV 2021)

*"The decision was taken with a pure heart... Yet, there must have been some shortcoming in our tapasya (devotion) that we could not convince a section of farmers." He urged the protesters to return home and make "a new beginning."*²

How critics & farmers heard the apology

Not a real apology. He still called the laws good and only "regretted" failing to *convince* farmers — as if the fault was their failure to understand.

How supporters heard it

A rare, graceful, humble step by a powerful leader — an olive branch offered with dignity on a sacred day.

The farmers' own reaction was telling: joy, but caution. Leaders like Rakesh Tikait said at once that they would **not leave** until the repeal was actually passed in Parliament *and* their other demands — above all a legal MSP guarantee — were met. They had learned not to trust a promise until it was law.

2 From words to law

A televised promise is not a law. That step came ten days later.

19 Nov 2021 Modi announces the repeal on television.

29 Nov 2021 On day one of Parliament's winter session, the **Farm Laws Repeal Bill, 2021** is passed by both houses — with no debate, amid opposition demands for a discussion.³

30 Nov 2021 The President signs it. The three farm laws are officially dead.

REMEMBER THIS — A BITTER SYMMETRY

Recall Part 3: the three laws were rushed into being through a disputed vote with little debate. Now they were rushed *out* of being the very same way — passed in minutes, without discussion. Both sides had wanted a debate at some point; neither time did Parliament truly get one.

3 Why did he really do it? Two honest readings

This is the question everyone asked, and it has two serious answers. Both are true, and — this is the key — they feed each other.

¹. PM Narendra Modi announced the repeal of the three farm laws in a televised address on the morning of Guru Nanak Jayanti, 19 Nov 2021. Deccan Herald; Outlook; Business Standard.

Reading A: cold electoral arithmetic

Crucial state elections in **Uttar Pradesh and Punjab** were barely three months away (early 2022).⁴

Western UP's Jat farmers had turned hostile after Tikait's revival (Part 7); Punjab was already lost. The laws had become a vote-loser.

Repeal removed the single biggest weapon the opposition could use in the campaign.

Reading B: the movement's sheer endurance

The farmers had held the borders for a **full year** — through winter, a pandemic, and blazing heat — and could not be dislodged.

Around **700 farmers** had died over the year. The moral and reputational cost, at home and abroad, kept climbing.

A government that prized its strong image could not be seen losing — but also could not win. Endurance made retreat the only exit.

WEIGHING IT FAIRLY

You don't have to choose. The truest reading is that the two answers are **one answer**: the movement's endurance is precisely what turned the laws into an *electoral* liability. Without the year-long sit-in, there would have been no election threat; without the elections, the sit-in might have been ignored longer. Persistence created the political price — and then the calendar came to collect it.

4 The 700: a death toll the government would not count

Victory came wrapped in grief. Over the year, by the farmers' own careful count, around **700 people** had died at or because of the protest — from the biting cold, the summer heat, COVID-19, road accidents, and, in some cases, suicide.

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS

A list of 702 names

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha compiled and submitted a list of **702 farmers** said to have died during the agitation, to press for compensation.⁵

² Modi maintained the laws were for farmers' benefit but apologised for failing to "convince a section of farmers," citing a shortcoming in the government's "tapasya." *Business Standard*; *Outlook*, 19 Nov 2021.

The farmers' position

Around 700 gave their lives; their families deserve compensation and their names deserve to be remembered as martyrs.

The central government's position

The government told Parliament it had "*no record*" of any farmer deaths during the protest — so, it said, no question of compensation arose.

Some states, including Punjab, announced their own compensation for the families. But the central government's "no record" answer — for deaths the whole country had watched unfold — struck many as the coldest note of the entire episode.

5 What the farmers won

Set the grief beside the achievement, and the scale of what happened becomes clear.

THE VICTORY, PLAINLY

A year-long, leaderless, largely self-funded farmers' movement forced one of the most powerful governments in India's history to **completely reverse** its flagship reform. That almost never happens. Whatever else is true, this was a genuine, historic win for the people who sat on those cold roads.

6 What the farmers did *not* win

But — and this is the hinge of the entire remaining story — the farmers had **six** demands, not one. Repeal was only the first. On 9 December 2021 the government sent a written letter of assurances on the rest. Here is exactly what was won, promised, or left hanging:

The farmers' demands and where each one stood at the end of 2021

3. The Farm Laws Repeal Bill, 2021 was introduced by Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar and passed by both houses on 29 Nov 2021 without discussion, amid opposition protests. PRS Legislative Research; Deccan Herald.

Demand	What happened	Status
1. Repeal the three farm laws	Done — repealed in Parliament, signed into law.	WON
2. Legal guarantee of MSP	Only a promise to form a <i>committee</i> to study it — not a written guarantee.	UNMET
3. Withdraw police cases against farmers	The Centre and states promised to withdraw them.	PROMISE
4. Compensation for those who died	Some states agreed; the Centre claimed "no record."	PARTIAL
5. Drop the Electricity Amendment Bill	Promised not to table it without consulting farmers.	PROMISE
6. Decriminalise stubble-burning penalties	Farmers to be spared the criminal penalty.	PROMISE

REMEMBER THIS — THE SEED OF ROUND TWO

Look at that table. Only **one** demand was truly, legally won. The biggest of the rest — a **written legal guarantee of MSP** — was fobbed off to a committee. Everything else was a *promise*. And promises, the farmers already knew, are exactly what you cannot take to the bank. This unfinished business is why the story does not end here.

7 Suspended, not ended: 9 December 2021

Notice the exact word the farmers chose. On **9 December 2021**, after receiving the government's written assurances, the SKM did not "end" or "withdraw" the movement. It **suspended** it.⁶

9 Dec 2021 Government sends a letter of assurances; the SKM **suspends** the agitation — deliberately keeping its structure alive.

11 Dec 2021 Farmers begin vacating Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur, rolling home in triumphant "fateh" (victory) marches.

15 Jan 2022 The SKM sets a date to *review* whether the government keeps its promises.

⁴ Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur were due in Feb–March 2022; the repeal came roughly three months earlier. Widely analysed as electorally timed. Reuters; The Hindu.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

The farmers didn't disband their army. They sent it home on standby. Their message was clear: "We are pausing, not surrendering. Keep your promises — or we come back."

8 Two ways to see the whole thing

What, in the end, did the repeal *mean*? Even that is contested — and there are more than two views.

A people's victory

Democracy worked: ordinary farmers, with no money or power, out-last-ed the mighty and forced a reversal. A proud moment for peaceful protest.

A retreat — and, to some, a loss

To the government's supporters, a magnanimous step for peace on a holy day. To some reform-minded economists, a sad day — a needed reform killed not by argument but by politics and the streets.

WEIGHING IT FAIRLY

All three can be true at once. It *was* a remarkable democratic victory for the farmers. It *was* a shrewd political retreat before an election. And it *did* leave a real question hanging: whether India's farm sector, which nearly everyone agrees needs *some* reform, is now simply harder to change at all. History rarely hands out clean wins.

9 Where we go next

The borders emptied. The trolleys rolled home to celebration, garlands, and grief for the 700. It looked, for a moment, like the end of the story.

It wasn't. The ink on the government's promises was barely dry — and most of them, above all the legal MSP guarantee, would quietly go unkept. Within two years, that broken faith would put farmers back on the very same roads, at borders like Shambhu and Khanauri, facing tear gas once more. In **Part 10**: Round Two.

5. The SKM submitted a list of 702 farmers who died during the protest. The central government (Agriculture Minister) told Parliament it had "no record" of such deaths, so the question of compensation did not arise; Punjab and some states announced their own compensation. Deccan Herald; The Conversation.

Part 9 — the seven things to carry forward

- On **19 Nov 2021** (Guru Nanak Jayanti), Modi announced the repeal on TV, with a carefully worded "we couldn't convince some farmers" apology.
- Parliament passed the **Repeal Bill on 29 Nov 2021** without debate — a bitter mirror of how the laws were first passed.
- **Why it happened is one answer, not two:** the movement's year-long endurance turned the laws into an election liability before the 2022 UP & Punjab polls.
- Around **700 farmers died** (the SKM listed 702); the central government told Parliament it had "no record."
- The farmers **won** a historic, near-unheard-of reversal — the laws were gone.
- But of **six demands, only one was truly won**; the legal MSP guarantee was fobbed off to a committee, the rest left as promises.
- On **9 Dec 2021** the SKM **suspended — not ended —** the movement, and went home on standby.

Sources & further reading for Part 9

1. Business Standard / Outlook / Deccan Herald — Modi's 19 Nov 2021 repeal announcement, the "tapasya" apology, and reactions.
2. PRS Legislative Research; The Farm Laws Repeal Act, 2021 (No. 40 of 2021) — the bill passed on 29 Nov 2021 without debate; President's assent 30 Nov.
3. Reuters / The Hindu — analysis linking the repeal to the Feb–March 2022 assembly elections (UP, Punjab and others).
4. Deccan Herald / The Conversation — the SKM's list of 702 deceased farmers and the central government's "no record" reply in Parliament.
5. Business Standard / The Tribune — the government's 9 Dec 2021 letter of assurances, the SKM's suspension of the stir, the vacating of borders (11 Dec) and the 15 Jan 2022 review.
6. PRS / official records — the six SKM demands and the promised MSP committee.

Dates, quotes and the demand-by-demand status are drawn from official records and contemporary reporting. Where meaning is contested — the apology, the reason for repeal, and its legacy — both (and sometimes three) readings are set side by side. This part touches deaths, including some by suicide, and is written with care and respect.

6. On 9 Dec 2021 the SKM suspended (not withdrew) the agitation after a government letter of assurances; farmers began vacating the Delhi borders on 11 Dec 2021, holding victory ("fateh") marches, and set 15 Jan 2022 to review progress. Business Standard; The Tribune.

A PLAIN-ENGLISH DEEP DIVE

Kissan Andolan

The Complete Story

India's Farmers' Movement, 2020-2024 and beyond
— every side of the story, told in the simplest words,
after months of research.

PART 10 OF 12 • ROUND TWO

Written & researched by Lovepreet Singh

Round Two: Shambhu, Khanauri & Dallewal (2024–25)

Part 9 ended with a movement "suspended, not ended," and a stack of promises the government had not kept. Two years later, the bill came due. The farmers returned to the road — but this time weaker, more divided, stopped far short of Delhi, and met with even harsher force. This is the round that did *not* end in victory.

1 Why the fire relit: promises that turned to ash

Remember the six demands from Part 9. After the celebration faded, the farmers waited for the promises to be kept. Most never were.

The promises of December 2021, and where they stood by 2024

Promise	What actually happened
Legal guarantee of MSP	A committee was formed in July 2022 (under former farm secretary Sanjay Agrawal). Farmers called it packed with pro-law members and boycotted it; its report was not made public for years. ¹
Withdraw cases; compensation; Lakhimpur justice	Only partly done and slow; the accused minister in Lakhimpur Kheri (Part 7) was never dismissed.
A written MSP law	Still nothing. The single biggest demand remained exactly where it began.

By late 2023, the farmers concluded what Part 9 had warned: a promise you cannot take to the bank is not payment. So they prepared to march again.

2 A movement divided

Here is the single most important difference from 2020–21, and the reason Round Two was weaker. In the first movement, 40-odd unions stood as *one* Samyukt Kisan Morcha. By 2024, that unity had cracked.

KEY WORDS: WHO LED ROUND TWO

The 2024 march was led by two allied forums — the **Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political)**, or SKM (NP), and the **Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM)** — under leaders **Jagjit Singh Dallewal** and **Sarwan Singh Pandher**. The *original* SKM (of Tikait, Rajewal and others that won Round One) largely stood apart.²

One way to read the split

An honest difference over tactics — some wanted to march again now; others thought the timing and method were wrong.

Another way to read it

A fracture of egos and politics that fatally weakened the movement, letting the government face a divided, easier opponent.

REMEMBER THIS

Round One's superpower was **unity**. Round Two's fatal flaw was **division**. A split movement is simply easier to stop — and this one was stopped before it ever reached Delhi.

3 Delhi Chalo 2.0 and the fortress at Shambhu

On **13 February 2024**, thousands of farmers set off from Punjab toward Delhi. They never got close. The BJP-run Haryana government had turned its border into a fortress — and this time, the tools were harsher and more high-tech.

¹ The post-repeal MSP committee under former Agriculture Secretary Sanjay Agrawal was set up in July 2022; the SKM criticised its composition and largely stayed away. Its report remained unpublished long after. Deccan Herald; PRS.

THE FORTRESS — AND A NEW WEAPON IN THE SKY

The Shambhu and Khanauri crossings were sealed with multi-layer cement barricades, iron spikes and nails set in the road, barbed wire, water cannons and tear gas. Most strikingly, **drones dropped tear-gas shells** from above — a first for such protests. Farmers fought back with kites, wet jute sacks and slingshots to bring the drones down, and internet was suspended across parts of Haryana.³

Blocked from marching, the farmers dug in at the two border points — and there they would stay, not for weeks, but for more than a year.

4 The demands, and the government's counter-offer

The demands had grown broader than in Round One. The heart of them was still the same: a written, legal MSP at the Swaminathan "C2+50%" level (Part 2). Around it sat a full debt waiver, pensions for farmers and labourers, no rise in electricity rates, justice for Lakhimpur Kheri, and India's exit from the WTO.

In talks in mid-February 2024, a panel of three Union ministers made a concrete offer:

The government's offer (18 Feb 2024)	Why the farmers rejected it (19 Feb)
Government agencies would buy five crops — three pulses (tur, urad, masoor), maize and cotton — at MSP for five years , under contract, through cooperatives. ⁴	It covered only five crops, not all; it tied farmers to contracts; and it was still <i>not a legal guarantee</i> . Farmers said it sought to "divert and dilute" the real demand.

WEIGHING IT FAIRLY

This was a genuine, substantive disagreement — not just noise. The government's plan would have *also* nudged Punjab away from thirsty paddy toward pulses and maize (recall Part 1's water crisis), which many economists liked. But to farmers it looked like a small, conditional bribe offered in place of the durable legal right they had marched for. Both had a real point.

2. Delhi Chalo 2.0 (2024) was led by SKM (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha under Jagjit Singh Dallewal and Sarwan Singh Pandher; the larger original SKM stayed separate. Business Standard; Wikipedia, "2024–2025 Indian farmers' protest."

5 The death of Shubhakaran Singh

On **21 February 2024**, as farmers tried again to push past the Khanauri barricade, clashes broke out — and a 21-year-old farmer, **Shubhakaran Singh**, of Ballo village in Bathinda, was killed.⁵

The farmers' account	The Haryana police account
He was shot; doctors at Patiala and the autopsy pointed to a fatal injury to the back of his head. His father's police complaint said he was struck down while ahead of the crowd. A murder case was registered.	Haryana police denied firing lethal rounds, and said the farmers had turned violent, pelting stones and attacking security personnel.

Punjab's Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann promised action against those responsible, plus compensation and a government job for the family. His body was not cremated for days, as the family and unions pressed for an FIR and justice first. His death — the movement's first martyr of Round Two — briefly paused the march and hardened the sit-in into a long, grim vigil at the borders.

6 The fast unto death: Dallewal and the Supreme Court

Through 2024 the farmers held the two borders. But a static sit-in far from Delhi could be ignored in a way the 2020–21 siege never was. So one leader chose to put his own body on the line.

On **26 November 2024** — four years to the month after the first Dilli Chalo — **Jagjit Singh Dallewal**, a farmer leader in his seventies and a cancer patient, began an indefinite **hunger strike** ("fast unto death") at Khanauri, for the one demand above all others: a legal guarantee of MSP.

KEY WORD: "FAST UNTO DEATH"

A **fast unto death** is a hunger strike with no end date — the person refuses food until either the demand is met or they die. It is a moral weapon with deep roots in India's freedom struggle. It turns the protester's own body into the pressure.

3. From 13 Feb 2024, Haryana sealed the Shambhu and Khanauri borders with barricades, spikes, water cannon and tear gas — including drone-dropped tear-gas shells; internet was suspended in parts of Haryana. Deccan Herald; India TV; Euronews.

As Dallewal's health collapsed, the **Supreme Court** stepped in — not to judge MSP, but over his life. Through December 2024 and January 2025 it pressed the Punjab government to ensure he received medical care, weighing his survival against his own refusal of treatment. A court-appointed high-powered committee, under a retired judge, engaged the farmers.⁶

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS

131 days without food

Dallewal finally ended his fast on **6 April 2025** — after 131 days — taking a single sip of water, once the government agreed to resume talks and farmer supporters urged him to live.⁷

IN HIS WORDS (6 APRIL 2025)

"On the request of farmer supporters from Punjab and across the country, I have decided to end my fast unto death... The struggle will continue — the method may change, but the movement is not over."

7 The borders cleared — and by whom

The end of Round Two came with a bitter twist. It was not Haryana or the central government that finally cleared the camps. It was **Punjab's own police** — under the AAP state government that had once posed as the farmers' friend.

On **19 March 2025**, just after a round of talks in Chandigarh with the Union Agriculture Minister, Punjab Police detained Dallewal, Pandher and other leaders, dismantled the stages and trolleys, and reopened the Shambhu and Khanauri highways after **13 months**.⁸

The Punjab government's case	The farmers' case
The highways had been blocked for over a year, badly hurting Punjab's own traders, industry and commuters. Sooner or later, the roads had to reopen.	A government that had claimed to stand with farmers had turned on them, doing the Centre's dirty work and breaking a movement from behind.

The leaders were later released. But the 13-month sit-in was over — cleared not by the opponent, but by a supposed ally.

4. On 18 Feb 2024 a panel of three Union ministers offered a five-year MSP procurement of pulses, maize and cotton via cooperatives; farmers rejected it on 19 Feb as diluting the demand, insisting on C2+50% for all crops. Outlook; Business Standard.

8 Round One vs Round Two, at a glance

Place the two movements side by side and the whole difference becomes clear in one look.

	Round One (2020–21)	Round Two (2024–25)
Leadership	United — 40+ unions, one SKM	Split — SKM (NP) + KMM; original SKM apart
How far it reached	Delhi's own borders	Stuck at Punjab–Haryana borders; never reached Delhi
The trigger	Three new laws	Broken promises — above all, no MSP law
Force faced	Barricades, water cannon, tear gas	The same, <i>plus</i> drone-dropped tear gas and road spikes
National sympathy	Huge and broad (the Jat belt joined)	Narrower, largely confined to Punjab
Outcome	Laws repealed — a clear win	No clear win; camp cleared, core demand unmet

9 Where things stand

Let me be plain and current. As of 2025, and continuing as this book is written in 2026, the acute standoff is over — but nothing at its heart is resolved.

THE HONEST STATUS

The hunger strike ended (April 2025). The borders were cleared (March 2025). Talks between the farmers and the Centre resumed — but produced **no breakthrough**, and **no legal MSP guarantee has been enacted**. The post-repeal MSP committee's work drew little trust. The Supreme Court has stayed involved, at times pressing the Centre to engage the farmers seriously. The core question of this entire book — will India put a floor price into law? — remains exactly where it was.

5. Shubhkaran Singh, 21, of Ballo village (Bathinda), died at the Khanauri border on 21 Feb 2024. Patiala doctors and the autopsy pointed to a fatal injury to the back of the head; a murder FIR was registered. Farmers alleged police action; Haryana police denied lethal firing. The Tribune; The Quint; Deccan Herald.

“Round One ended a set of laws. Round Two ended in exhaustion — with the real question still unanswered.”

10 Where we go next

Two rounds, one unhealed wound. Before I offer any final verdict, there is a layer of this story we have only glimpsed — the deeper, uncomfortable truths that almost no one on either side likes to discuss out loud. Punjab's dying water. The landless labourers and tenant farmers the MSP debate forgets. The arhtiya's own quiet stake. The global trade rules in the background. And the hardest question of all: can India even *afford* what the farmers are asking for? That is **Part 11: The Hidden Layers**.

Part 10 — the seven things to carry forward

- Round Two was lit by **broken promises** from the repeal — above all, the still-missing legal MSP law.
- The movement was **divided**: led by SKM (Non-Political) and KMM under Dallewal and Pandher, with the original SKM apart.
- **Delhi Chalo 2.0 (13 Feb 2024)** was stopped at Shambhu and Khanauri by a high-tech fortress — including **drone-dropped tear gas**.
- The government's **five-crop, five-year MSP offer** was rejected as a dilution of the C2+50% demand.
- **Shubhkaran Singh (21)** was killed at Khanauri on 21 Feb 2024 — the farmers alleging police action, Haryana police denying lethal firing.
- **Dallewal's 131-day hunger strike** (from 26 Nov 2024) drew in the Supreme Court and ended on 6 April 2025.
- In a bitter twist, **Punjab's own police cleared the borders on 19 March 2025**. As of 2026, the MSP law still does not exist.

Sources & further reading for Part 10

1. Wikipedia — “2024–2025 Indian farmers' protest” (timeline, leadership, demands, casualties).

6. Dallewal began his fast on 26 Nov 2024 at Khanauri; his health drew Supreme Court intervention (Dec 2024–Jan 2025) pressing Punjab to ensure medical care, and a court-appointed committee under Justice Nawab Singh engaged the protesters. The Print; National Herald.

2. Deccan Herald / India TV / Euronews — the Delhi Chalo 2.0 march, the Shambhu-Khanauri fortifications, and the use of drones to drop tear gas.
3. Outlook / Business Standard — the government's five-crop, five-year MSP proposal (18 Feb 2024) and the farmers' rejection.
4. The Tribune / The Quint / Deccan Herald — the death of Shubhkaran Singh (21 Feb 2024), the autopsy, the FIR, and Punjab's response.
5. The Print / ETV Bharat / National Herald — Jagjit Singh Dallewal's hunger strike (from 26 Nov 2024), the Supreme Court's involvement, and its end on 6 April 2025 after 131 days.
6. Business Standard / India TV / Deccan Herald — Punjab Police clearing the Shambhu and Khanauri borders and detaining leaders on 19 March 2025; and the continuing absence of a legal MSP guarantee into 2025-26.

This part covers very recent events; dates and figures are from contemporary reporting and public records. Contested points — the union split, the MSP offer, Shubhkaran Singh's death, and the clearing of the borders — are given from both sides. The death of Shubhkaran Singh, and Dallewal's fast, are treated as the grave matters they are.

7. Dallewal ended his 131-day hunger strike on 6 April 2025 with a sip of water, after the government agreed to resume talks. The Print; ETV Bharat; Deccan Herald.

8. On 19 Mar 2025, Punjab Police detained Dallewal, Pandher and others returning from Chandigarh talks and cleared the Shambhu and Khanauri sites, reopening the highways after 13 months. Punjab told the Supreme Court the borders were cleared. Business Standard; India TV; Deccan Herald.

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PART 11 OF 12 • THE HIDDEN LAYERS

Written & researched by Lovepreet Singh

The Hidden Layers: What Almost Nobody Talks About

Both sides told simple stories. The truth is messier — and more interesting. Under the shouting lie a set of uncomfortable facts that fit *neither* side's slogans, which is exactly why you rarely hear them. This part drags nine of them into the light. Not to attack anyone, but to finish the picture.

A FAIR-PLAY PROMISE

Some of what follows may sound like it undercuts the farmers; some may sound like it undercuts the government. It does both, on purpose. These are the parts of the story that are **true but inconvenient** — and you deserve them.

1 Layer 1: The water that is running out

Start with the deepest irony of the whole story. The MSP-and-paddy system the farmers fight to protect is quietly **draining Punjab dry**.

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS

76% of Punjab's blocks are "over-exploited"

Around three-quarters of Punjab's groundwater blocks are officially over-exploited, and the state pumps out roughly **150-165% of what nature puts back** — the worst rate in India. Where farmers once found water at 10 feet, they now drill past 200.

Why? Because growing rice in a dry-ish state needs enormous water — and MSP makes rice the safe crop to grow. The safety net and the water crisis are the *same* system.¹

What the critics say

MSP-backed paddy in Punjab is ecological suicide. Farmers must switch to less thirsty crops.

What the farmers say

"We *want* to switch — give us guaranteed prices for pulses, maize and millets, and we will. Don't blame us for a system the government built and rewards."

2 Layer 2: The smoke over Delhi

Every autumn, Delhi chokes, and every autumn the finger points north to Punjab's **stubble burning**. Punjab produces around **20 million tonnes** of paddy straw a year, and with barely two or three weeks to clear the fields before sowing wheat, many farmers simply burn it.²

What gets said

Farmers are poisoning the capital's air.

What farmers answer — and the honest caveat

Give us cheap machines and incentives, and a longer window, and we'll stop. And be fair: stubble is a seasonal *spike* — vehicles, industry and power plants pollute Delhi all year round.

Once again, the root is the same wheat-paddy trap from Part 1 — a system problem wearing a farmer's face.

3 Layer 3: The people the MSP debate forgets

Here is the fault line almost no headline touched. The whole fight is about MSP — a price for people who *own land and grow a surplus to sell*. But a huge share of rural Punjab owns no land at all.

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS

32% of people, 3% of the land

Dalits make up about 32% of Punjab's population — the highest share of any Indian state — yet own barely 3% of its farmland. Most are landless labourers who live on farm *wages*, not crop prices.

KEY WORD: LANDLESS LABOURER

A **landless labourer** owns no field and survives by working on others' land for daily wages. MSP — a price for selling crops — does almost nothing for them directly. They needed higher *wages*, land, and housing, not a better crop price.

The movement was led largely by *landowning* castes.³ So did the landless walk away? Mostly, no — and that itself is a remarkable story. Landless Dalit groups

¹. CGWB: ~76% of Punjab's blocks over-exploited; extraction ~150–165% of recharge, highest in India. The Tribune; Mongabay.

(many of them women-led) marched alongside, reasoning that if the landowners fell to corporate power, the labourers who depend on them would fall too.

The hard reading	The generous reading
At heart, it was a <i>landowners'</i> movement; its central prize barely touched the poorest of the rural poor.	Across an old caste divide, landless and landed stood together against a shared threat — "we are one" — even while their own deeper conflict simmered underneath.

4 Layer 4: The tiller who isn't a "farmer"

Now a legal trick that quietly decides who gets helped. In India, "farmer" is usually defined by the **land title** — the name on the ownership papers. But across the country, roughly **17%** of cultivated land is worked by **tenant farmers** and sharecroppers who rent the land and often have no papers at all.⁴

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

The person who actually sweats in the field is often *not* the person the government counts as the "farmer." So MSP money, cash schemes, insurance and compensation go to the landlord whose name is on the paper — while the real cultivator, who took all the risk, gets nothing.

5 Layer 5: The invisible majority — women

Look at any photo of the fields and you'll see women everywhere. Look at any list of "farmers" and they nearly vanish.

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS

73% of the work, 13% of the land

About 73% of rural women workers labour in farming, but women own only around 13% of the land and are barely 14% of official "operational holders." Because schemes follow the land title, most women are locked out of credit, insurance, and cash support — only about 23% of PM-KISAN beneficiaries are women.

And yet women were the *backbone* of the protest.⁵ They ran the langars, leading the landless-labour marches, filling the front rows. When the Supreme Court suggested

in early 2021 that women and the elderly should "go home," the women pointedly refused. The word "farmer" hid them; the movement could not have survived without them.

6 Layer 6: The middleman's quiet stake

An honest book notes this too. Recall the arhtiya from Part 2 — the commission agent who takes a cut of every mandi sale. If the mandis had withered, the arhtiyas stood to lose a fortune. So they had their own, very real reason to fund and fuel the protest.

WEIGHING IT FAIRLY

This does not make the movement fake — the small farmer's fear was genuine. But it's true that not every interest riding along was purely the poor farmer's. The arhtiya's fate and the farmer's fate were tangled together, for better and for worse — which is exactly why the two so often stood on the same side.

7 Layer 7: Can India even afford it?

Now the question that decides everything, and that both sides tiptoe around: what would a **legal MSP for all crops** actually cost?

A NUMBER THAT MATTERS

Perhaps Rs 10 lakh crore a year

Estimates for guaranteeing MSP across all crops run from around Rs 7.5 lakh crore to well over Rs 10 lakh crore a year — by some counts **40-50% of the entire Union Budget**.

There are only two ways to make MSP a law, and both are hard:

Method	The problem
Government buys everything at MSP	Fiscally near-impossible, and it would create mountains of grain no one can store or use.
Force private buyers to pay MSP by law	Very hard to enforce; buyers might simply stop buying, pushing trade underground and hurting farmers more.

3. Dalits ~32% of Punjab's population (highest in India) but own ~3% of farmland. The Wire; The Caravan.

The critics' case	The farmers' / defenders' case
A universal legal MSP is unaffordable and would distort the whole economy.	The scary numbers are inflated — you only <i>backstop</i> prices, not buy everything. And the government finds lakhs of crores for other things; farmer survival and food security are worth it too.

8 Layer 8: The world's rulebook (WTO)

There is also a referee most people forget: the **World Trade Organization**.

KEY WORDS: WTO, "AMBER BOX" & THE PEACE CLAUSE

Under WTO rules, price support like MSP counts as trade-distorting help (the "**Amber Box**"), capped at about **10%** of a crop's value. India is already near or over that line for rice. A "**Peace Clause**" agreed at Bali in 2013 temporarily shields India's food-stockholding from challenge — but it is provisional, and a fight.

The constraint	The farmers' retort
A legal MSP-for-all could breach India's WTO limits and trigger trade disputes.	The rules are hypocritical: rich nations subsidise their own farmers far more, per head. Why should India starve its farmers to satisfy them?

9 Layer 9: The rich-farmer paradox

Finally, the most counter-intuitive truth of all. A higher MSP mostly helps farmers who grow a big *surplus to sell* — the larger, better-off ones. But most of India's farmers are tiny, and many are **net buyers** of food: they buy more grain than they sell. For them, higher food prices can actually *hurt*.

4. About 17.3% of India's operational holdings are cultivated by tenant farmers, whose tenancy is often unregistered — so MSP procurement benefits, PM-KISAN cash, crop insurance and compensation flow to the landowner, not the actual tiller. World Bank; The Wire.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

MSP is not a simple "help the poor farmer" tool. It mainly rewards the farmer with surplus to sell — concentrated in a few states like Punjab and Haryana — while the poorest, who buy more food than they grow, can be squeezed by the higher prices it encourages. The safety net has a shape, and that shape is uneven.

10 So what do all these layers mean?

Lay the nine layers together and a hard, honest picture appears — one that indicts the easy stories on *both* sides.

THE UNCOMFORTABLE SYNTHESIS

The hard truth: the movement's central prize — a legal MSP — mostly serves landowning farmers in a few states, defends a model that is draining Punjab's water, forgets the landless, the tenants and the women who do the work, and may be close to fiscally and legally impossible in its full form.

The fair counter: none of that makes the farmers' fear false or their grievance fake. It means the real answer was never "old laws, good" or "old laws, bad." It was *deeper reform* — widen who counts as a farmer, fix land and tenancy rights, guarantee prices *and* reward water-saving crops, and design a smart, affordable backstop — the hard, boring work that neither a protest slogan nor a rushed law can do.

"The farmers were right that they were in danger. The danger was just bigger, and older, than the three laws."

11 Where we go next

You have now seen all of it — every side, every event, every buried layer. Only one thing remains: to add it all up. In **Part 12**, my honest final reckoning — who really won, what this whole story means, the assumptions each side got right and wrong, and where it leaves India's farmers now.

5. ~73% of rural women work in farming; women own ~13% of land; ~23% of PM-KISAN beneficiaries are women. IndiaSpend; ThePrint.

Part 11 — the nine hidden layers

- **Water:** ~76% of Punjab's blocks are over-exploited — the MSP-paddy system is draining the state dry.
- **Stubble smoke:** ~20 million tonnes of straw burnt yearly — a system problem blamed on farmers.
- **The landless:** Dalits are 32% of Punjab but own ~3% of land; MSP barely touches them.
- **Tenants:** ~17% of land is tilled by renters who, lacking papers, get none of the benefits.
- **Women:** 73% of rural women farm, but own ~13% of land and are locked out of most support.
- **The arhtiya's stake** and the **rich-farmer paradox** (MSP mainly helps surplus-sellers; many poor farmers are net food buyers).
- **Cost & WTO:** a full legal MSP could cost ~Rs 10 lakh crore/year and breach global trade limits — real constraints, and a real debate about whether they're fair.

Sources & further reading for Part 11

1. The Tribune / Mongabay India — Central Ground Water Board data on Punjab's over-exploited blocks and ~150-165% extraction rate.
2. Down To Earth / PIB / StudyIQ — Punjab paddy-straw volumes (~20 MT) and stubble burning's seasonal share of Delhi's PM2.5.
3. The Wire / The Caravan / Down To Earth — Punjab's Dalit population share (~32%) versus land ownership (~3%), and the landless-labour movements (e.g., Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee).
4. World Bank / The Wire — tenant farmers (~17% of holdings) and their exclusion from land-title-based schemes.
5. IndiaSpend / ScienceDirect / ThePrint — women's share of farm work (~73%) versus land ownership (~13%) and scheme access.
6. Drishti IAS / ICRIER / Down To Earth / ForumIAS — fiscal-cost estimates for a legal MSP (~Rs 7.5-17 lakh crore) and the WTO "Amber Box" / Bali Peace Clause constraints.

These layers are structural and data-heavy; figures are rounded and drawn from official boards, research institutes and reputable reporting. Each is presented with both its hard edge and the fair reply — because inconvenient facts belong to everyone, not to one side.

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2. Punjab generates ~20 million tonnes of paddy straw yearly; open burning in Oct-Nov contributes an estimated ~13-14% of Delhi's PM2.5 at the seasonal peak (a spike, not the year-round bulk). Down To Earth; PIB; StudyIQ.

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PART 12 OF 12 • THE VERDICT

Written & researched by Lovepreet Singh

The Verdict: Who Won, What It Means, Where It Leaves Us

Twelve parts. Four years. Hundreds of pages, thousands of lives, and one question that still has no answer. We have walked every inch of this story, heard every side, and lifted every hidden stone. Now, at the end, I owe you the hardest thing of all: an honest reckoning.

1 The whole journey, in twelve steps

Before the verdict, let's see the road we travelled, all at once.

Part 1	Farming, Punjab, and why land is honour — the ground the story grows from.
Part 2	The machine: MSP, mandi, arhtiya, FCI — and the catch that only ~6% truly benefit.
Part 3	The three laws of 2020 — what they said, and how they were rushed through.
Part 4	The government's case — freedom, choice, and reform for the forgotten 94%.
Part 5	The farmers' case — a shield removed, and the danger of "freedom" without power.
Part 6	The uprising — Dilli Chalo and the year-long cities at Delhi's gates.
Part 7	The flashpoints — Republic Day, the Red Fort, Tikait's tears, Lakhimpur Kheri.
Part 8	The blame wars — Khalistan, the toolkit, and the fight over the story itself.
Part 9	The repeal — the surprise victory, and the promises that went unkept.
Part 10	Round Two — a divided movement, Shambhu, Khanauri, and Dallewal's fast.

Part 11 The hidden layers — water, caste, tenants, women, cost, and the WTO.

Part 12 This reckoning — who won, what it means, and where it leaves us.

2 The balanced ledger: what each side got *right*

An honest verdict starts by admitting that *both* sides were partly right. This is not fence-sitting; it is simply true.

What the government got right	What the farmers got right
The old system really does help only a minority — about 6%, mostly in two states.	Their fear was rational, not hysterical — Bihar had already shown what dismantling mandis can do.
Post-harvest waste is real and huge; farming genuinely needs investment.	A spoken promise on MSP is not a legal one — and only a law can be trusted across elections.
Serious, non-partisan economists had urged marketing reform for decades.	A lone small farmer versus a giant corporation is not a fair contract.
Some reform of Indian agriculture is genuinely overdue.	People whose livelihood is at stake deserve to be <i>consulted</i> , not handed a decision.

3 ...and what each side got *wrong*

Where the government went wrong	Where the farmers' movement fell short
It rammed the laws through — ordinance, no consultation, a disputed voice vote. Process poisoned everything.	It defended a model that is draining Punjab's water and helping mainly a landowning minority.
It refused the one thing that would have built trust: writing MSP into law.	It largely forgot the landless, the tenants, and the women who do the work (Part 11).
It badly misjudged the depth of farmers' fear and mistrust.	Its certainty that the laws were "for Adani and Ambani" was potent but never proven.
Telling Parliament it had "no record" of ~700 deaths was its coldest hour.	A C2+50% legal guarantee for <i>all</i> crops may be close to fiscally and legally impossible.

THE UNCOMFORTABLE MIDDLE

Read both tables together and a quiet truth appears: this was never a simple fight between good and evil. It was a fight between a **real problem** (a broken, narrow farm system) and a **real fear** (that "fixing" it would sweep away the poor's only shield) — handled, by both sides, with too little trust and too much politics.

4 So who actually won?

Everyone wants a scoreboard. Here is the honest one.

Round	Who "won"
Round One (2020-21)	The farmers won the <i>battle</i> — the laws were repealed. But nobody won the <i>war</i> : no MSP law came.
Round Two (2024-25)	No one won. It ended in exhaustion — the borders cleared, the core demand still unmet.
The deeper contest	A stalemate. The laws are gone; reform is now harder; and the real crises remain untouched.

"The farmers stopped a law. The government stopped a guarantee. And the farm crisis stopped for no one."

That is the truest verdict I can give. The most-watched farmers' movement in the history of the world ended not with a treaty, but with a wound left open — and the deepest problems of Indian farming exactly where they started.

5 What it means for India

For democracy

Something remarkable did happen. Ordinary people — with no money, no party, and no single leader — peacefully out-last-ed one of the most powerful governments in the democratic world and forced it to reverse course. That is a genuine, historic demonstration that people still count. But the cost was steep: hundreds of deaths, a poisoned public conversation, sedition cases, and a country that learned to shout past itself.

For farming

Here is the sad irony. Because the reform was done so badly and beaten so completely, the *word* "reform" is now almost radioactive in Indian agriculture. Yet the underlying crises — vanishing water, crushing debt, farms too tiny to live on, a safety net that reaches too few — did not pause to watch the drama. They are still growing.

For trust

Perhaps the greatest casualty was trust. The farmers trust the government less; the government fears the farmers more. And the next time real change is needed, both will remember this — which may make the change India actually needs even harder to achieve.

6 The question still hanging

Strip away every event, and this entire four-year saga balances on a single, still-unanswered question: **will India put a floor price for crops into law — and can it?**

As this book is written in 2026, the answer is still no, and still unresolved. The government has not legislated MSP, citing cost, inflation, exports and global trade rules. The Supreme Court has kept nudging the Centre to engage the farmers seriously.¹ The farmers have not dropped the demand. The committee that was supposed to settle it never earned their trust. And so the question simply waits — the way it has waited, in truth, since the Swaminathan Commission first raised it two decades ago.

REMEMBER THIS — THE REAL AXIS OF THE WHOLE STORY

Everything — the laws, the marches, the deaths, the repeal, Round Two — orbits this one question. Until India answers it (yes with a workable design, or no with an honest alternative), the andolan is not truly over. It is only resting.

7 What a real answer might look like

I promised at the start not to tell you what to think, and I will keep that promise. But after all this research, I can at least describe the *shape* of an answer that the

whole story seems to point toward — the kind of thing thoughtful people on many sides quietly agree on, even as the loud ones fight:

The shape of a real solution	Why the story points here
Reform <i>with</i> farmers, not at them	The process wound (Part 3) shows change imposed in secret will be rejected, however good.
Widen who counts as a "farmer"	The landless, tenants and women (Part 11) must be inside any fix, not outside it.
Guarantee <i>and</i> diversify	Back prices for pulses, millets and maize to break the paddy-water trap (Parts 1 & 11).
A smart, affordable price backstop	Not "buy everything" and not "buy nothing" — a targeted floor the budget can bear (Part 11).
Rebuild trust, patiently	Because trust, not economics, is what actually broke here.

None of that fits on a placard, and none of it wins an election. Which is precisely why it is so hard — and precisely why it matters.

8 Author's closing note

I began this book (Part 1) by promising you four things: simple words, every side, fact kept apart from opinion, and no hiding the hard parts. I have tried to keep all four, even when it meant writing sentences that would annoy people I agree with.

WHAT I LEARNED WRITING THIS

When I started, I quietly expected to find a villain. I did not find one. I found a government that saw a real problem and reached for it clumsily, arrogantly, and without asking. I found farmers who saw a real danger and defended themselves with extraordinary courage — while looking past their own blind spots. I found a media and a politics that turned living people into symbols in a war that was never really about them.

Mostly, I found the farmer himself — the one on the trolley, worried about the price of his wheat, the water under his field, and the debt on his shoulders — who kept disappearing behind everyone else's slogans. If this book does one

1. As of 2026 no legal MSP guarantee has been enacted; the Supreme Court has urged the Centre to engage protesting farmers on a fresh plea seeking a legal MSP. MSP is still announced for ~22-23 notified crops via the CACP. Drishti IAS; Wikipedia, "2024-2025 Indian farmers' protest."

thing, I hope it puts him back at the centre, as a human being rather than a hashtag.

I am not going to tell you whose side to take. You have the whole picture now — the laws, the fears, the facts, the hidden layers — and you are more than capable of deciding for yourself. That was always the point. Not to win you over, but to hand you the truth, whole and honest, and trust you with it.

Thank you for walking all twelve parts with me.

— *Lovepreet Singh*

*For the farmers who set out for Delhi and did not come home —
whatever side you stand on, they deserved to be understood.*

Sources & a note for Part 12

1. This finale draws together the sourced material of Parts 1–11; see each part's own references for the underlying facts.
2. Drishti IAS / PMFIAS — the continuing debate on legalising MSP (cost, inflation, exports, WTO) and the ~22–23 CACP-notified crops.
3. Wikipedia — "2020–2021" and "2024–2025 Indian farmers' protest" for the overall timeline and the 2026 status of the MSP demand.
4. M.S. Swaminathan / National Commission on Farmers — the "C2+50%" benchmark first raised two decades ago.

The judgements in this part — the ledgers, the "who won," and the shape of a solution — are my honest analysis as the author, built on the evidence in the preceding eleven parts. Reasonable readers may weigh the same facts differently, and that is exactly as it should be.