



P.Sainath's take on farmer suicides

Description



P.Sainath addressing a capacity crowd at J.N. Auditorium, Pondicherry University

P. Sainath's lecture on ongoing crises of Indian farmers brings stark reality to PU campus

Delivering the key note address at the international seminar conducted by Department of Sociology on "Farmer Suicides in India", P. Sainath, Magsaysay award winning Journalist and the Rural Affairs Editor of The Hindu, opined that the phenomenon called farmer suicides in some states of the country is not the origin or the cause of the agrarian crisis the country is facing, but only an outcome of the entire crisis which has so many faces.

Unlike those so-called journalists who, in his own words, are having sleeping peacefully in press conferences without any confrontation, P. Sainath has been a journalist who has been reporting the stark realities of the country with in-depth research and challenging the official versions on the issue. He has lived for months with farmers in the remote villages of the country where the farmers, the food producers of the country were finding no ways to continue their life.

No one can disagree with points he has made in his speech in which he said that the current mass suicides of Indian farmers is nothing but a policy driven assault and farmers are the group worst affected by government policies.

India is now witnessing the largest wave of human suicide in recorded history. What forces them to create history? What makes the world's biggest democracy -home to 53 dollar billionaires- witness 47 farmers dying each day, and 300 others attempting to do the same?

Recently in Aurangabad, Sainath said, 150 Mercedes Benz cars were sold to a group of merchants. 440 million rupees out of that huge trade of 630 million rupees were given by a public sector bank. SBI put the interest rate at 7% for those who are buying Mercedes Benz. The same SBI puts the interest rate in the same Aurangabad at 12 to 14% for the poor farmers who are to buy trucks for daily life.

The country's 83% population still live under the daily wage of Rs. 20, meaning even after 60 years of Independence, the disturbing number of these men could not effectively be reduced.

Since 2007, three committees were formed by the government of India to look at the rural poverty. Each committee concluded their reports pointing their fingers at the rural India facing bleak realities. But, Sainath says, "The government keeps forming committees until it gets the report it wants."

Recalling his personal experiences when he was part of one of these three committees, he said the committee, BPL Expert group and headed by Prof. Saxena, was told to decrease the number of the BPL households before it began the enquiry. The government, he said, wanted only below 28% rural households to be listed under BPL category. But findings of the committee were different from what government wanted.

The first committee in this "series"- National Commission for the Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector- tells in the very first page of its report that 836 million Indians live under the expenditure of less than Rs. 20 per day, and 88% of Dalits and Adivasis of the country, whose population counts 150 and 70 million respectively, fall into this number.

The grass root of the issue.

In his speech that lasted around 80 minutes, Sainath also recounted some of his more personal experiences.

In a farmer village he visited as part of his journey through the crisis-hit areas in Maharashtra, he was faced with the strange request of a school teacher. He was asked to use his influence with the district authorities to bring the students "double meals" on Mondays. It was then explained to the confused journalist that the children had no way to fill their stomachs for three days, once they left the school on Friday.

In Telangana he was told, this time by a group of mothers, that they wanted to send their children to school in the summer holidays too despite of the burning weather that touched 40^o Celsius. The logic of those uneducated mothers was quite clear: the children would anyhow suffer whether they were at school or at home. But if they went to school, at least they would get the school meals.

Recalling another shocking experience with another Indian family, Sainath reminded the audience, gathered in the air-conditioned J. N. Auditorium, that there are people who are rotting the hunger. The family, consisting of ten members, was fighting with poverty in a way that many of our leaders in Delhi and state capitals do not know or do not want to know.

Sainath, inspiration for many budding journalists, left the campus with a promise to return.

Read more: <http://www.indiatogether.in/2011/dec/psa-suidata.htm>

Category

1. Communication for Social Change

Date Created

March 5, 2011

Author

admin

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