



## **Transcript for Punjabi Farmers Protests and Historic March to Delhi**

Welcome to the webinar about Punjabi Farmers Protests and Historic March to Delhi. For the Punjabi Farmers, this protest is extremely detrimental to their lives and to their livelihood. As this issue came into the forefront, we asked our panelists to speak on it, and they kindly obliged. Even with the short duration. I sincerely thank them for their willingness to be on this panel and for their time. I also want to thank our partner, South Asian-Americans Leading Together (SALT) for supporting this webinar and for their work around this issue. I would now like to introduce our incredible moderator, Navraaz Kaur Basati. Navraaz is from the Chicagoland area, and has a background in film production and radio, specifically for non-profit organizations and currently works in the field of conservation, food security and regenerative agriculture. Navraaz?

Navraaz: Thank you Kiran and SALDEF for this opportunity for all of us to be able to expand our knowledge on the current situation on the farmers' protest taking place in India. Before we begin, I'd like to set some expectations and parameters for this session. We will be focusing primarily on the topics that each speaker is presenting on. I'd like to ask the audience that they submit their questions to the Q&A box or the chat box and we will do our best to address those questions within our time constraints at the end of the session. We will also be providing contact information for our speakers so that you can direct questions to them in the future. Our speakers today are all professionals that work within academia and policy. They bring a community-based perspective, yet also global perspective to these historic protests. Our speakers today include Dr. Bikram Gill, Manpreet Kaur and Dr. Navyug Gill.

Dr. Navyug Gill is a scholar of Modern South-Asian and Global History. He is Assistant Professor in the Department of History at William Patterson University. Dr. Gill received a PhD from Emory University and a B.A. from the University of Toronto. His research explores questions of agrarian change, political economy, labor history, post-colonial critique, and global capital. Currently he is completing a book manuscript, titled "Labors of Division: Capitalism and the Emergence of the Peasant in Colonial Punjab". His popular and academic writings have appeared in venues such as Journal of Asian Studies, Economic and Political Weekly, Focal Journal of Global and Historical

Anthropology, Radical Teacher, Outlook Magazine, and as recently as yesterday, Dr. Navyug Gill's work was published in AlJazeera.

Dr. Gill we welcome you to this webinar and I'd like to invite you to begin.

Dr. N. Gill: Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh. First thank you to Kiran, Sharan and Gujri for organizing this event and for inviting me to be a part of it. I salute SALDEF for stepping up and standing with our global community at this critical time. Shukriya to Navraaz for moderating and for all of you for attending. Ik majboor hai ke chalo saanoo maaf karo vee saadi gal aj engreji vich hogi, par je kise ne Punjabi vich sawaal puchhna jaroor karo – tusee Gurmukhi de vich vee likh sakde ho chat box de vich (I apologize that we will be discussing this topic in English, but you can ask me questions in Punjabi if you like, even writing in the Gurmukhi font in the chat box.). Is ton baad tusee mere naal Punjabi vich vee gal kar sakde ho (you can speak with me in Punjabi after this conversation as well).

We are living through, as Kiran mentioned, an extraordinary moment in Sikh and Punjabi history that will have profound implications across India and the world. Scenes of unarmed protestors, demanding their rights, being met with riot police, tear gas, and water cannons, to pushing aside barricades and encircling the capitol of the world's so-called largest democracy has captures global attention. Now many of us have been following the protests for months, while others might have just become aware in the last few days or weeks. Some might know kisaans or mazdoors on the front lines; others might not have any personal connection whatsoever. What unites us though, is a common concern for what we are witnessing, a need to make sense of the history and politics of this protest and a desire to figure out our role in it. While earlier we might have only received bits and pieces of news from our Punjab, today we're actually inundated with information from independent and social media to the mainstream news (which is beautifully referred to as the "godi" media). There's an abundance of reporting. Yet that also means there is a greater challenge to sift through these competing accounts to produce our own analyses in their plurality.

So, there's a lot to say on this topic, but for the sake of a larger conversation at the end, I'm going to restrict myself to 3 main themes. The first is discussing the history of the agrarian economy in Punjab. The second is the nature of these 3 new laws. And the third is the significance of this protest. I want to emphasize, though, the point about plurality. There is no single way to view these protests. We can and should have different ways of interpreting the exact same situation. I have faith that mature and self-confident community will be able to handle those differences. So, what I'm going to present is my perspective, and I welcome hearing yours.

The history of the agrarian economy: To understand the present moment, we must first recognize the transformation of agricultural that took place under colonial rule. After the British annexed Punjab in 1849, they implemented a new system of observation, measurement and extraction. There were 3 key features through this project. The first is the creation of caste-based private property. The second is demanding land revenue in cash. The third is inserting Punjab into the global economy. Together this colonial capitalism created an unprecedented structural volatility in the lives of peasants. Great fluctuations in the price of commodities, combined with an inflexible revenue demand, meant that agriculture was driven by a new kind of uncertainty.

This precariousness continued for nearly 100 years, until partition and Independence in 1947. It's at that point that Punjab became a laboratory for a contradictory kind of developmental capitalism. The Indian government sought to rectify national food shortages and reduce uncertainty by introducing a new set of productive technologies, strategies and infrastructure that became known as the Green Revolution. This is based on a heavy investment in hybrid seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, tube-wells and tractors. These were underpinned by setting up government markets, where crops like wheat and rice were purchased at minimum support prices to ensure food security, as well as mitigate risk. The rise in crop yields was so dramatic from the 1960s onward, that Punjab, as 1.5% of the territory of India, and 2% of the population, produced something like 60/70% of the wheat and rice for the entire country.

Now at the same time, the Green Revolution increasingly strained social relations and the environment. This was known almost immediately and there were many voices that wanted a different kind of agrarian policy in Punjab. You had noted economists who noted that such rapid growth was unsustainable. You had environmentalists who warned of the poisoning of the soil and the depletion of the water table. You had social activists who pointed to the tensions over caste hierarchy and gender relations. You even had political parties, like the Shromani Akali Dal, in 1973 putting forth the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, which sought to reconfigure center state relations and seek greater autonomy for Punjab. All of this was ignored and actually maligned by successive Congress governments which is what led us to the current moment.

Now, let's talk about the nature of these new laws. The first thing to note is that the BJP is a right-wing conservative majoritarian party committed to both neo-liberalism and Hindutva. So, these laws, which they did not consult any farmer unions and was rushed to be passed during a pandemic, are designed to deregulate and privatize agricultural procurement and distribution. Corporations will be able to buy crops at market prices, outside of the state mandis (markets), engage in speculative hoarding and contract

farming without legal recourse. They will in a sense create a parallel private system that will gradually weaken and collapse the public system and with that the range of other subsidies, supports, and infrastructure that depend of government control and distribution. Now when that happens, not only will farmers be thrown into the nightmare of market volatility, but there will be a destabilization of the entire economy that will affect everybody across the board; from field laborers, to transporters, to urban workers, students and professionals. Now these laws affect Punjab and Haryana the most because these are the places where the MSP and the mandi (markets) system were intact from the late 60s onward.

Let me emphasize that these are not agricultural reforms – this is the euphemism of the right wing. These laws effectively dismantle a public system without putting in place an equitable or sustainable alternative. Instead, it is a false experiment in economic freedom, and it's false for two main reasons. On the one hand, this experiment has already been tried in other parts of India. In 2006, the government in Bihar allowed private mandis and dismantled the public mandi system. The result was a disaster. It led to the greater impoverishment of Bihari farmers, and increased the number of Biharis that actually leave the state to seek work, many in Punjab. On the other hand, this kind of deregulation is a strategy that is rejected by most countries in the global North, in places like America, in Canada, in Western Europe. There are a range of protections, subsidies and supports for agriculture. So, if deregulation and privatization has not been pushed in places that have the best infrastructure, the most extensive storage facilities and road networks, what hope can we have for their success in a place like India? These laws therefore are nothing more than a corporate handover. Companies like the Ambani and Agani Groups will not bring innovation, will not bring efficiency. It will just mean more speculation, more extraction and more profit. And agriculture is one of the only sectors in the economy that they have not yet sunk their tentacles into. The fact that these laws jeopardize the entire food security for a billion people is why large numbers outside of Punjab and Haryana have come out in support of the farmers.

The farmers therefore are demanding a full repeal of these laws; they're also demanding the implementation of a new agrarian model. Nobody wants to go back to where it was before. This is not a reform; this is back to the nightmare of the market.

Let's discuss the significance of these protests and I'll mention 6 key points that I think are worth bearing in mind. The first is that these protests have generated a broad coalition of support across major social divides; the first is caste. We should acknowledge that there are tensions and conflicts between Jatts and Dalits in terms of discrimination, exclusion but also in terms of land holdings and exploitation. At the same time, in the course of this struggle, important alliances have been forged between these groups, so that the kisaan unions have in the past supported khet mazdoori unions in their effort to get 1/3 shyam lot lands for the Dalits, while khet mazdoor and Dalit groups

have supported the kisaans because they see the BJP and neo-liberal Hindutva as the greatest threat to their wellbeing. I should add that this conflict is perhaps the most pressing issue in the Sikh community that we all have to work to figuring out ways to address, but it is happening on the ground there.

The second is class. These protests have brought together the small land holder, less than 2 acres, with the medium and large land holder, as well as the landless laborer, the urban trader, intellectuals, the students, transporters, professionals, even singers and actors.

Third, there's been a regional coming together – the historic bridging of ties between Punjab and Haryana. This was, as we know, one state until 1966 and there have been tensions in the past in terms of water resources especially. But they've now come together at the blockades and they've actually inspired kisaans and khet mazdoors elsewhere in India to come and support. We should emphasize that these divisions do not evaporate – they are very real, they are longstanding. At the same time, we can't overstate the importance of the unity that has been forged through the protest.

The fourth significant aspect is the prominence of women in this movement. At all levels of mobilization, women have been at the forefront, in terms of strategy and planning, in terms of preparing food and supplies, taking care of homes, sitting out on the streets, singing songs, giving speeches, being at the front of the barricades themselves. Now, this is not surprising to any Sikh or any Punjabi because everyone knows that women have been front and center of every mobilization in the past. But we should note that in the course of this struggle we are witnessing actually a dual struggle. There is a struggle against the Delhi government and there's a struggle against patriarchy within our community. There are actually new writings from the front lines about this; about understanding the role of women not as victims but as revolutionary agents.

The fifth point to bear in mind is that this mobilization is really unprecedented in scale. Across Punjab, thousands of kisaan and khet mazdoor organizers did the thankless, patient, inglorious work of spreading the message about these laws and educated vast numbers of people from May 2020 onwards. If you watch a random clip on YouTube or WhatsApp, very often the person speaking is far more insightful and acute than any of the political commentators that are sitting in some news studio. The fact that tens of thousands of people pushed past police barricades on November 26<sup>th</sup> (2020), and now at the different blockades around Delhi there might be something like two hundred thousand people coming and going. They're able to sustain such numbers because they brought months of their own supplies – food, utensils, bedding, a medical clinic, a

library, a gym...and they're keeping the entire area clean. It is simply remarkable what they've been able to achieve on that scale.

The sixth point is the historic refusal to enter Delhi. The decision not to proceed to the Braarhi Grounds or to the Ram Lila has forever changed the nature of political protest in India. If they had gone to those sights on November 26<sup>th</sup> (2020), they would have been surrounded and corralled and ignored without consequence. Instead, it was grassroots leadership that took the momentous decision to halt at the major arteries of the capitol and put real pressure on the government. In that sense, this has demonstrated to India and the rest of the world, what it means to engage in serious direct action. I think no Gandhian social activist will be able to propose going to Jantar Mantar and sitting on a pokhartaal and keep their credibility from this point onward.

The next point is the creation of a new culture. This protest is adamantly independent, it is apart from all the major political parties in Punjab (the Congress, the Akalis, and the Aam Aadmi) and it has generated all sorts of poetry, art and music with inspirational themes. I think I saw something in the last three months, two hundred new songs have come out. Through those mediums we see a spirit of camaraderie, respect and pride, that had been withered away by years of state violence, economic dysfunction, and cultural malaise and superficiality. It's that spirit that gave people the bravery to confront the most right-wing and chauvinistic, seemingly invincible government in recent history. The larger point here is that massive numbers of people are being politicized to fight for their rights. Whatever happens at these protests, they will not be the same people when they go home. There is a transgressive power for transgression – it is infectious. If you challenge these hierarchies and these types of authority, when you go back to your homes, you will also challenge other types of hierarchy and authority, whether it's caste, gender or class.

The last point is the critical role of Sikhi. This movement was led by farmer and laborer unions in response to a direct economic threat. They have done this organizing for years; they have a membership cadre on the ground that was mobilizing throughout the summer in the middle of a pandemic. But the protest is also implicated in culture and religion because the people at the forefront are Sikh. We should have no insecurity or anxiety in stating this fact. Sikhi has permeated this protest. From the organizational principles of langar and sewa, to the spirit of equality for all, to the incredible heroism that got people to confront the state. Now, in time, the movement has drawn support from Hindus and Muslims in Haryana and elsewhere in India. It has become multi-religious in the sense that people from all faiths are welcome, but we don't have to pit the economic and the religious against each other because it doesn't reflect the reality on the ground nor the way most people live their lives. We should be able to, in a sense, deal with the complexity of their simultaneity.

For all these reasons, I think we have a duty to recognize the enormity of what is happening, maintain our critical disposition, and raise difficult questions, but Rab Dee Meher Naal (with God's blessing), we have to give overwhelming support to our heroic people on the front lines.

Why does this matter to Sikh Americans? I think it matters for 3 reasons. One, whatever we do here makes a difference to the people on the front lines there (hosla vad da) when they see these protests, rallies, marches, writings, songs, petitions – everything that we're doing here that impacts them on the front lines there. Second, it puts pressure on the Indian government. We know what this government has done in the past to our people – they don't like any of this happening; they don't probably like this event. When they keep seeing that increasing pressure, it will make them more amenable to deal with the demands of the kisaans and mazdoors. Third, I think this activism helps make America, Canada or England a slightly more civilized society. By coming out into the streets, by engaging in all the things people have been doing for the last weeks and months, we raise awareness about an issue there but we raise awareness about ourselves here and our place in this society. We draw connections from there to here. I don't think anybody who is saddened or angry when they see a clip of that police officer striking one of our bazurgs (elderly), is not outraged when you see that police officer murder George Floyd.

With that, thank you for listening to me; I look forward to the discussion. Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh.

Navraaz: Dr. Navyug Gill, we've got some time on our hands. I know we were saving questions to the end, but we have time. Can you elaborate on some of the points you bring up in your talk? One question is: Explaining a little bit more about these mandi systems and where else they may exist other than Punjab, Haryana, if they indeed do.

Dr. N. Gill: The mandi system is the place where farmers can go to sell their produce and they know the price they're going to get ahead of time and these are the places where it will be weighed and sorted and stored. This infrastructure of mandis, which has its problems because there aren't enough of them, their facilities are not large enough, but nonetheless exist in Punjab and Haryana. That's the public market. This system was also there in Bihar in 2006. There were far fewer mandis, it was not functioning as well and there were all sorts of middlemen. Nonetheless, people could, through intermediaries, get to the mandi and sell their produce there. In 2006 they were dismantled and it became the open market. This "open market" (it's a euphemism; it

might sound like it's bringing about freedom) was a nightmare in volatility. The way the price of the crops fluctuates, you're never quite sure what price you'll get, corporations can give you one price at one time and can change it later one, if you have to plant something 6 months in advance you never quite know what your outturn will be. That's why every once in a while, you'll see this small vegetables and small farming where farmers throw their produce – they'll throw their carrots, tomatoes, onions out on the street because they've become worthless. What is it about a scene of food becoming worthless that doesn't strike everybody as absurd? That's what the market actually does. The market makes something like a tomato or an onion worthless. That is what these laws are designed to do for things like rice and wheat and that is why people are up in arms and trying to fight back and not let that happen. The last point I'll say is that the horizon for this protest is not just preserving MSP and mandi for Punjab and Haryana. The people that are seriously thinking about this issue are saying that the MSP mandi system should be extended across India. It's not some privileged few in the Northwest of the country that deserve this; this ought to be the case everywhere to ensure a fair and equitable and just food supply for a billion people. That's the direction of the fight – that would be genuine reform, rather than a corporate handover.

Navraaz: Elaborating a little more on that, there have been some questions regarding the Swaminathan Commission. Can you explain that a little bit more?

Dr. N. Gill: The best thing would be for people to read it; it's a public document. It actually proves the lie of the government when they say they're bringing about reforms and this is what the farmers want, and what else do you want us to do? Because that commission addressed so many of the existing problems and dysfunctions of the MSP and mandi and the other infrastructure. Right? It was a very thorough document that proposed a new way of calibrating what MSP is – how do you determine what a minimum support price should be, what are the costs of inputs, how are they rising, what is that equation, what to do about mandi infrastructure, what to do about storage facilities. It's an elaborate document that goes into detail about all of these things and many of the kisaan unions have signed on and wanted this to be implemented and the Congress and BJP ignored it. Bikram or Manpreet might be able to speak more about its specificity or policy, but we should not let anybody say that there were not any other choices or options. People having been raising their voices for decades and the Swaminathan Commission is the clearest example of a way to reform agriculture that doesn't mean privatization and a corporate handover.

Navraaz: Now, you've mentioned the importance of the union's voice within the issues historically and currently. Why are the unions in Punjab and Haryana so successful, in terms of their strength and their arguments being heard?

Dr. N. Gill: As far as their arguments being heard, it's mobilizations like this that will let us see how one comes to be heard. But we should really give credit to the tenacity of their organizational capacity. Some people say there are 31 unions, there are so many, why can't they unite. There are different sectional interests, some of them have different affiliations with political parties, some on the political spectrum are more reformist, some have a lot more revolutionary/radical orientation. In their different areas they've been doing this work. Sometimes I think it's kind of hard for people to understand – like, this protest came out of nowhere, and all of a sudden people were pushing past police barricades. It only occurs, as anyone who's ever done any kind of activism or organizing would know, through that inglorious, away-from-the-headlines work of talking to people in your workplace, in your village, in your neighborhoods, coming together on issues, getting educated and informed. Then, having the determination to do something about it. To take it beyond conversation and discussion. And that's what they did over the summer. It's that kind of grassroots mobilization, that we kind of ignore and only look for the headlines when something dramatic happens, that's what has given this movement the strength and longevity. It's because those people are so politicized, that they're so articulate when they give an interview – it's because of the grassroots mobilization that they have the political acuity not to enter Delhi. All of the decisions that the leaders of the unions will make have to be approved by the population there on the ground. If we're going to put faith in anything, we should put it in the people there in the front lines who are not going to let the leaders cut a bad deal.

Navraaz: You mentioned that several of these unions have political affiliations. One question that has come in is – How do we know that these protests are not being used as a sort of propaganda in political bickering? How do we know that they're not being motivated by an oppositional political party for political gain?

Dr. N. Gill: It's a good question. The contrast with the U.S. is insightful because here the major unions are sort of beholden to the Democratic Party which is why they're so ineffective and no real change comes or happens. There, whatever their affiliations with political parties, once this movement began, they adamantly refused to let any of the leaders from these political parties speak from the platform and kept that distance. So, if any leader of the political party wants to support the movement they're welcome to come and sit amongst the protestors but they're not addressing anyone from the stage; the agenda is resolutely independent. We saw this kind of "drama" in September where the Akalis did this big tractor march, the Congress had their tractor march, the Aam Aadmi got their act together and did some gestures. It all amounted to nothing. Actually, a lot of the supporters of these parties are putting away their party affiliations and coming and joining this movement as kisaans, mazdoors and people who are committed to a better Punjab. It might be some sort of right-wing troll factory

allegation that this is cooked up by this or that party, but there's no affiliation or connection to any political party. From the main stage they have lambasted the Akalis, the Congress and the Aam Aadmi party. I think that is why so many people are drawn to it – it is a breath of fresh air. These people are fully aware of their situation, and how bankrupt and compromised the existing political parties are. I really think that a new leadership will emerge from this struggle, that can take Punjab in a different direction.

Navraaz: We're doing great on time so I'd like go back to one of your points regarding the implications on artistic movements. What kind of broader effect will this movement have? You mentioned that this will go far into when people return home; you mentioned that transgressive power feeds transgression. What kind of movements do you see immediately being impacted by these protests?

Dr. N. Gill: This is an important question. As a historian we try not to speculate into the future. The immediate one that I mentioned earlier was in the space of culture. Go back 6 months and listen to the top 20 songs; you would be repulsed by all the "fukhrapan" (nonsense), the "dikhaava" (showing off) and the utter nonsense. Now if you look at some of these songs that have come out, not only are they talking about camaraderie, solidarity and fighting the State, they're actually denouncing the "fukhrapan" and doing an auto-critique of artists, singers, songwriters – "what was it that we were propagating for these last two decades? What was this nonsense? Saanoo sharam aoni chaheedee hai (we should be ashamed)". Je aseen kehlo vee kise naal mathaa laona (If we're going to argue with someone), then it's not with your petty little "dushmani" (enmity), it's "mathaa laona sarkaar naal"(let's argue with the people in charge). From there I think it informs all sorts of things across the board. It is genuinely hard to predict. People are saying the culture of austentatious "dikhaava" is going to be tamped down. When people posture and act tough, lots of people are going to say "Well, were you there on the front lines when it was time to fight? If you weren't, then we don't need to see this machismo and toughness. From there, we've seen many prominent filmmakers at the protest; they're documenting things and you can expect in the next 6 months/1 year for new films to come out. It's from there, to close, for things like art, poetry, music and film, that the culture undergoes this transformation. How exactly that happens is still under debate and discussion in all sorts of disciplines. But that cultural transformation is happening – we can see it and its' trajectories are still an open question.

Navraaz: Thank you for accommodating our questions and elaborating on your piece. I want to sincerely thank you for your perspective and your expertise on the policy and ramifications of these protests on not only the entire Indian population but also those who belong historically to the population itself. I want to remind our audience members to please continue to submit questions to the chat box or the Q&A box. We will take them as they come in; if time permits, we will continue to elaborate further with our

speakers otherwise we will be returning the questions to the forms at the end of our session.

We are now going to be moving on to our next speaker, Dr. Bikram Gill. He is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Virginia Tech where he is also core faculty in the doctoral program. His research is located at the intersection of International Political Economy, Political Ecology and Critical Race Studies. Within these broad research areas, he has more specific interests in the role of food and agriculture in political economy and in the racialized dimensions of the political economy of ecological crises. He has published on these themes in journals such as, *Environment and Planning A*, *Globalizations*, *Politics*, and elsewhere. He is also exploring some of these themes in his role as co-investigator on an SSHRC funding transnational research project titled "Four Stories About Food Sovereignty: Transnational Crisis and Local Action". Dr. Bikram Gill, I'd like to invite you to share your thoughts.

Dr. B. Gill: Thank you to the organizers of the event for inviting me to offer some thoughts on the issue of the farmers' protests. A lot of what I was going to cover, Dr. Navyug Gill covered nicely, but I'm still going to offer somewhat of a historical and global context to what is happening right now because I think it can help us understand some further dimensions of the significance of the protest.

The story of the Punjabi farmers' protest has largely been one of a popular uprising against the intensifying authoritarianism of the Indian State. Its' popular character is evident in the level of unity with which the Sikh community in Punjab and the diaspora has supported the uprising. While we need to center the political demands of the farmers, we also need to be clear that this is a movement that constitutes one pole of an ongoing historical contestation, and that to understand its' significance is to understand the other pole that it confronts in this contestation. While much of the media coverage has focused on the Indian State and its' farm laws as the target of the farmers' protests, I'm going to begin here by briefly introducing a different character that I believe more clearly embodies the antagonistic force confronting the farmers' movement.

I'm going to begin by bringing out of the shadows the character by the name of Cargill. Now for those with interests in global agriculture, this is probably a familiar character. Cargill is the largest privately traded company in the United States. Yes, it's even larger than the industries owned by the famous Koch brothers (one has died now). Cargill is one of the largest agriculture-based corporations or "agri-businesses" in the world and has its' primary interests in grain trading and processed foods, cattle raising and cattle feed and in a range of agricultural related financial services. If you

have not heard much of Cargill, I can share that last year it was voted the worst company in the world by a range of environmental groups, which is quite an achievement when you think of the competition that exists for potential worst companies; maybe you would have thought of Amazon would have been a prime contender or others last year. But Cargill was awarded this dubious honor of worst company in the world largely for its' role and its complicity in the displacement of indigenous peoples across the global South and its' contributions to deforestation and so forth. Now this is not a new problem associated with Cargill – it has long been involved in many of the coup d'états the U.S. government has pushed in Latin America, especially including most recently the attacks on the workers' party in Brazil, and the election of Bolsinaro as leader of Brazil. Cargill used the election of Bolsinaro to progressively increase its' farming activities in the Amazon, and it played no small role in the deforestation and burning in the Amazon that we witnessed last year (2019).

So, in relation to our story, Cargill has been operating in India since the late 1980s and early 1990s; it entered right at the beginning of India's foray into economic liberalization. It has by now consolidated itself as the second largest grain trader in India. In my view, Cargill looms large in the proposal of the farm bills, and its' role is something I'm going to return to shortly. Dr. Navyug Gill spoke of colonial capitalism. I'm going to suggest that this is an ongoing struggle that has not entirely disappeared. That doesn't also mean that there aren't domestic players like Reliance; I'm going to come back to a discussion of Reliance's role. In particular, the way in which Reliance's recent initiative of geo and its' geo-farming app in collaboration with Facebook, has played in the farm bills. I'll return to both Cargill and Reliance and their role as an antagonistic force in the protests shortly.

I want to emphasize, that by starting with the farmers' movement on the one hand, and Cargill on the other, I want to suggest that these two movements represent what 20<sup>th</sup> century social theorist Carl Polani referred to as the "double movement". For Polani, this referred to how the movement of capital, or colonial capitalism, was motivated to privatize ownership over increasing domains of social and ecological life and organize them on the basis of seeking short-term profits. This movement of capital jeopardizes the long-term sustainability of the earth and society, so for Polani, this one movement of capital is always met and confronted by a second movement that seeks to defend society and the earth against the commodification and commercialization imposed by the movement of capital. The double movement of capital against the self-preservation of society and the earth can be understood as integral to the historical unfolding of something that has been referred to as the agrarian question. The agrarian question is concerned with the role that agricultural transformations have historically played and should play in generating broader economic development. The double movement of the agrarian question as a framework would therefore center the contestation between movements of capital and movements of farmers and laborers in determining who should lead and organize such transformative processes. So I'm starting with this

discussion of the double movement of the agrarian question because this framework is helpful in understanding both the farm bills and the popular uprising against them. It is to suggest that the double movement that we're now seeing, to understand it requires placing it within a longer history and in broader global political context. In placing the current contestation in a broader context, we will see that in fact the existing state of affairs in agriculture, as Dr. Navyug Gill emphasized, the existing state of affairs is not to be celebrated either, particularly when we take into account the relations of caste, gender, and the ecological consequences of the historical context. The proposed reforms only promise to further intensify rather than ameliorate the agrarian crisis that has rooted itself in Punjab since the 1990s.

I want to trace this double movement, this contestation between the efforts of capital, whether its colonial capital or domestic capital that captured the agricultural sector, from the colonial era until now; Dr. Navyug Gill captured nicely the points I was going to make. I would like to emphasize you can trace the historical origins of this double movement to the colonial era. During the colonial era, agricultural sectors and agrarian relations were violently reorganized through the policies and measures that were emphasized in Dr. Navyug Gill's presentation. They were reorganized in order to consolidate an export orientation that was centered upon exporting food and industrial inputs from colonies to the colonial powers. The colonial export regime in India and elsewhere was specifically organized through relations of debt in which the colonials state entrapped peasants and compelled them to pay off their debts by selling export crops for cheap to grain traders. Now, these cheap foods in industrial inputs then provided industrializing European States with the material inputs they needed to consolidate capitalist development and accumulation. British India, of course, was one of the most intensively exploitative colonies in this sense, with India sending tens of millions of tons of grains to Britain even as tens of millions of Indians starved to death during this era. This is what I would call the original era in which colonial capitalists seeking to take hold of the agricultural sector in India. This original movement of colonial capital is confronted by the peasant uprisings – that was a strong basis of the anti-colonial movement. A key demand of the anti-colonial struggle was to overthrow the oppressive landlord system and revenue systems through which colonial powers had entrapped peasants and compelled them into export orientation. This is a broad ongoing contestation that I want us to hold because I'm going to suggest that it is still framing a lot of the struggle that we're seeing today.

So as colonialism was defeated and gave way to the post-colonial era, the agrarian question was reformulated in developmental terms. After independence, the key question that the global self-states confront is how to develop and the agrarian question posed in this era as one that asks what sort of transformations in the agricultural sectors of developing countries can overcome the legacies of colonization, such as poverty, hunger, inequality, low levels of non-agricultural employment, and so on?

Across the global South there were different agricultural paths and potentialities that emerged, as was suggested in the first presentation. One of the paths was an explicitly socialist path. This was the one that was most evidently consolidated in China, and involved the overthrow of the landlord power through violent revolution. This was a path that suggested that by reorganizing the relations of agriculture, by setting in place collective farming or a non-capitalist mode of agriculture, one could increase productivity in an inclusive and egalitarian fashion. India initially wanted to follow the Chinese path, but it could never quite overthrow the legacy of landlord power in the way it happened in China. This is why in India rather than a socialist path, one ended up with the Green Revolution path.

Dr. Navug Gill went over the Green Revolution quite nicely – I would like to emphasize that it was a compromise of the double movement that I've been talking about. In many ways, it was promoted by U.S. Developmental Organizations like the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation. The impetus of the Green Revolution was to consolidate and secure a private capitalist path of agricultural development. But even though it emphasized private land ownership, providing access to inputs, and promoting agricultural development through market competition, it had to provide welfare measures to the farmers and peasants who were subject to the Green Revolution. This should not be viewed as something the State granted through its beneficence to small farmers and peasants, or even larger farmers of the Green Revolution. This was forced out of the State in light of ongoing farmers' and peasants' movements contesting how agriculture should be organized in relation to broader economic development. Some of these welfare measures that were introduced at the time of the Green Revolution had been mentioned, such as the Minimum Support Price (MSP) and the subsidies for inputs. So, if fertilizers, pesticides and hybrid seeds are central to the Green Revolution model, they are promised to be subsidized and the price support will be important to help farmers address the escalating costs that could potentially be associated with such an agricultural model. The Green Revolution should really be understood in some ways as a compromise between the interests of a capitalist-driven agriculture system and the demands of peasant movements at the time for a more egalitarian, inclusive and sustainable model.

There were serious negative consequences with regards to ecology, gender and caste, that Dr. Navug Gill went over earlier. This era of national development of agriculture starts to unravel in the 1980s and 90s. This unraveling, unfortunately, is not spearheaded by what Polani would call the other movement defending society and the earth. This was spearheaded by the forces of colonial capital. Specifically, the national agriculture development model of the Green Revolution, it comes under attack by the US Imperial State in the 1970s, when it adopted under Richard Nixon a strategy of green power. This was motivated to overcome a serious crisis of profitability that was

confronting large agribusinesses in the United States. This crisis of profitability was one in which corporate agriculture in the US was overproducing and didn't have sufficient markets with which to realize a profit because of the overproduction in agriculture in the United States. The US sought to overcome this crisis of profitability by aggressively pushing for the globalization of agriculture. It does this by specifically targeting global South countries. It would push for global South countries to open their protected agricultural sectors through institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF and the World Trade Organization. This push was largely driven by large corporate agribusinesses within the US such as our good friend Cargill, who we started the discussion with. In the leadup to the formation of the World Trade Organization, the chairman of Cargill argued that "it is a mistaken belief that the greatest agricultural need in the developing world is to develop the capacity to grow food for local consumption. This is misguided. Countries should produce what they produce best and trade."

So, the Green Revolution, as flawed as it was, at least it enabled states in the global South to establish some degree of domestic food security and to increase food production and increase food availability with obviously deleterious ecological consequences and other social contradictions. Here, Cargill and the United States sought to reintroduce this model of export-oriented agriculture that had caused so much destruction during the colonial era. This corporate pursuit of neo-liberal agricultural globalization was implemented through social adjustment programs imposed on global South states by the World Bank and so on. Specifically, indebted countries were forced to undertake structural reforms of their agricultural sectors in order to access loans with which they could pay down their debts. Regarding their agricultural sectors, these reforms included the removal of input subsidies and liberalization of agricultural trade so as to expose agricultural sectors to global competition and the dismantlement of state marketing boards that provided support prices to farmers. In effect, this was a dismantling of the very support system that had made the development of national agricultural systems possible. These reforms were most deeply implemented or forced to be implemented on the African continent, with devastating consequences, such as the collapse of the domestic agricultural production and the deepening of hunger.

For firms such as Cargill, the reforms led to increased market shares and profits. Very briefly, on the question of Africa, there's a whole body of literature around the deep agricultural crisis that afflicts Africa from the mid-1980s onwards. Really key to this was the neo-liberal reforms, input subsidies and state by state dismantling of state marketing boards. In India, during the era of initial neo-liberal globalization, while many public supports were removed, such as input subsidies and public credit provisioning (small rural regional banks that would provide farmers with low-interest credit so they wouldn't have to turn to informal markets with high interest), the MSP and mandi system was kept in place due to opposition from farmers' unions in the 1990s. Even though the MSP was kept in place, the supports that were removed (input subsidies and public credit provisioning had the effect of instigating a persistent agrarian crisis in India, which was

centered in Punjab in many ways. It was characterized by the growing indebtedness of farmers due to rising costs of fertilizers and pesticides and the absence of subsidies. The Green Revolution model, which has such negative ecological consequences – year after year you have to use an increasing number of fertilizers and pesticides and now the subsidies have been removed – the farmers have to bear more of the costs on their own. The removal of input subsidies was compounded by the closing down of rural regional banks, which made farmers more dependent of informal money lender who often charged high rates of interest. The resulting agrarian crisis would be most tragically expressed in the epidemic of farmer suicides that has afflicted Punjab since the late 1990s. I should emphasize that this is not only in Punjab, but Maharashtra and elsewhere; it was very much concentrated in Punjab.

While these reforms were set in motion under the Congress government, they were accelerated under the Bhajbhair-led BJP government of 1999-2004. It was this government that, for example, launched the first sustained attack on the mandi system by reducing as far as possible the level of support offered to farmers through the MSP so as to make private grain traders look more attractive. Year after year the Bhajbhair government would offer declining or stagnant price supports through the MSP. Here, the other movement returned powerfully to the stage, as peasant movements and organization proved central to the resounding defeat the BJP suffered in 2004. The role of the peasant movements in the 2004 elections and defeat of the BJP compelled the subsequent UPA government, which was a Congress government supported by a variety of communist parties and other more left-leaning parties, to pass a series of progressive legislations related to the agrarian sector and meant to address the agrarian crisis (such as the Mahatma Gandhi rule employment scheme, the Land Acquisition Act, and the Forest Rights Protection Act).

Agribusiness interests consistently complained about the introduction of such welfare measures from the mid-2000s and into the 2010s. Domestic agribusiness outfits such as Kharatoori and Reliance, and multi-national corporations such as Cargill, raised concerns that these welfare measures were making Indian agriculture uncompetitive on global markets. Whether this was due to the so-called wage and food inflation affected by the Mahatma Gandhi rule employment scheme, or the limits on large industrial agricultural formation that were affected by the other Acts such as the Forest Rights Protection Act and the Land Acquisition Act.

I'm not sure what role these agribusiness interests such as Reliance and Cargill play vis-à-vis the return to power of the BJP. What I do know is that with the BJP's return to power in 2014, the movement of agricultural capitalism, the movement of colonial capital and domestic capital is renewed in 2014. Cargill, for example, enthusiastically embraced the new Modi-led BJP government in 2014, praising it "for creating a more

favorable business climate". As a result, Cargill claimed that they now had a higher interest in investing larger sums of capital in Indian agriculture. At this time, Cargill had established itself primarily in food processing in India, and particularly in the edible oil market. It also emerged as the second largest grain trader in India (the largest being the federal government through the mandi system). Cargill was increasingly making clear its' interest in expanding its' market share in grain procurement. Specifically, Cargill has for the last several years claimed that if the state marketing boards or the APMC Act were to be dismantled, then it would be possible to make Indian grains more competitive on the global market. An increase in export levels would only serve to benefit Indian farmers. What Cargill is saying is that get the mandi system out of the way, get the APMC out of the way, then we can step in and build infrastructure that can allow for greater stockholding capacity and allow Indian farmers to access the broader global market and receive higher prices. This is the claim that Cargill is making.

It is thus necessary to ask: to what extent are the recently passed farm bills more concerned with the profit-seeking and market-capturing interests of Cargill rather than with, as the State claims, small farmers? For those who might ask, why not both? Why can't both Cargill and small farmers benefit from the dismantling of the mandi board? In my view it seems that Cargill's own logic justifying the farm bills demonstrates why this is not possible. You can't both claim that you're going to make Indian grains more competitive (read: cheaper) on the global market AND claim that Indian farmers will experience a dramatic increase in the price level they're receiving for their grain harvest. Furthermore, the experience of the African states that were forced to dismantle their state marketing boards in the 1980s, suggests that the outcome will be one in which grain trading companies like Cargill will corner the grain stocks and the anticipated free market being promoted loudly by the BJP will quickly assume a monopolistic character in which the buyer will have much more leverage in setting the price than the seller.

In addition, the export orientation that Cargill is promoting here recalls in troubling ways the colonial system of agriculture that starved to death tens of millions of people in the colonial era. As Utsav Panaya's work has shown, export oriented agriculture in developing countries is often associated in the neo-liberal era with rising rates of hunger.

In addition to Cargill, there are domestic capitalist forces at play as well. Most important amongst these is Reliance, Inc. The farmers movements have done very well to center Ambani as a sight of target. Reliance, Inc. has been prominent specifically in its' increasing interests of diversifying into the agri-tech sector (the agricultural technology sector) through its' JioKrishi App that explicitly aims to take over India's system from farm to fork. (We know that Reliance has its' Jio mobile network). It is seeking to

develop an app-based system that can come to dominate the entirety of the food system. The digital agricultural market that Reliance is hoping to build and dominate depends, however, on first dismantling the existing mandi board system. Reliance is promising increased efficiency and safety in the era of COVID-19. Customers can simply order their food through the app and have it delivered directly to their homes, and farmers can find the highest bidder for their harvest through the app. It is probably worth mentioning that the Reliance JioKrishi initiative received significant momentum earlier this year when Facebook made a large investment that provided it a 10% ownership stake in Jio. This provides Facebook an opening through which to introduce its' WhatsApp payment into India. Previously Facebook had struggled getting regulatory approval for the WhatsApp payment in India, but soon after making the investment and shortly after the farm bills were passed, the WhatsApp payment received regulatory authorization.

We return, finally, to the farmers' protests. The strength and determination demonstrated by the farmers' movements makes clear that they do not buy the claims of Cargill and Reliance that they will organize a more productive and efficient farm to fork system that will benefit both farmers and consumers. Rather, the farmers rightly anticipate a future in which large grain traders or smart Apps corner the markets and set the low prices at which they will be forced to sell their grains. In a context in which the ecological contradictions of the Green Revolution, such as lowering water table levels, depleting soil fertility, resistant weeds and pests, are constantly increasing input costs for farmers, in the form of fertilizer and pesticide use, a decrease in the output price can only intensify the debt crisis for farmers. This may in fact lead to a mass exit from agriculture that is meant to be the endpoint of modernizing theories of development.

However, by now, nearly 30 years after India began liberalizing, globalizing and privatizing its' agricultural sector, it is clear that there are not post-agricultural jobs that displaced agricultural cultivators can turn towards. India has in fact experienced a sustained jobless growth. Even with its' high GDP growth rates there has been minimal increase in employment in the industrial and service sectors. The future that may await displaced farmers may be that which Mike Davis foresaw in his text "The Planet of the Slums", where he predicted that neo-liberal agricultural policies that were expelling tens of millions from agriculture would lead to a growth in urban slums inhabited by primarily unemployed and underemployed people. In this sense, the struggle of the Punjabi farmer is not theirs alone. This is a fight for survival that is confronting small farmers and peasants across the global South. They are, as such, right to oppose these bills with the ferocity with which they have done so. It is a question of their very survival. While preserving the existing mandi board system in its' current form will not resolve the entrenched agrarian crisis in Punjab, dismantling the system can only further intensify the crisis.

There are promising signs that the form of the protests in Delhi are instigating a political imaginary that is reaching beyond the Minimum Support Price issue. The inspiring scenes of the institution of langar (as a central tenet of Sikhi, that centers communal preparation, service and consumption of food, as an embodied transcendence of unjust relations of caste) at the protests, points to a world in which food is grown, prepared and served in common, in community, for the purposes not of profit, but rather of sustaining community and earth in service of a higher power. We're seeing beautiful scenes of those who normally go hungry in Delhi being able to access food through the langar services that have arisen in association with the protests. The insistence on maintaining kisaan mazdoor ekta (unity) may, one can hope, center the need to complete the land reform project that the Green Revolution interrupted, so that landless laborers who disproportionately are Dalits can finally secure access to land in Punjab. The prominence of women farmers at the protests would hopefully instigate further reforms recognizing and compensating the invisible unpaid agricultural labor performed by women in Punjab.

Thank you everyone for your time, and I look forward to the conversation.

Navraaz: Dr. Bikram Gill, you have opened up a Pandora's Box in terms of some of the companies involved and the lead-up when we talk about sustainable agriculture, we often look at compaction layers within our soil – I think what you've done is started to "dig" through some of those compacted layers and give us very deep insight into everything that has fed the current situation. I would love to push some of those questions to you right now, but I think you've done a perfect lead-up to the next speaker. If it's ok with you, I would like to introduce the next speaker because she will take your endpoint further. Thank you so much for your insight.

What Dr. Bikram Gill had explained at the very end is something our next speaker can elaborate on. Once she has completed her presentation, we will get to some of those amazing questions that everyone has been posting within the chat box and the Q&A box.

Our next speaker is Manpreet Kaur. She is a community organizer and the Director of Communications with the Jakara Movement, a California-based Sikh Grassroots community building organization. It works to empower, educate and organize Sikhs and other marginalized communities to advance their health, education, economic, social & political power. Manpreet looks to her foremothers for himat (strength) and honsla (faith) in building Gurmat-inspired community power. Along with organizing, she is a graduate student in Urban Planning and Public Policy at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

Manpreet, we welcome you to the webinar today and I'd like to ask you for your perspective on this issue.

Manpreet: Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh. Thank you to my fellow presenters as well as to the organizers who continue to bring opportunities for us to dive deeper into the context of the events unfolding at the Delhi border. I'm going to start by sharing my screen (Manpreet now shares a presentation from her computer).

As Bhenji (sister) shared, my name is Manpreet Kaur and I am a community organizer/Director of Communications with the Jakara Movement, an organization based in California for the past approximately 20 years. It has spanned nationwide at times and continues to keep us connected globally to Sikh sangat everywhere. Unlike my fellow speakers, I am not a scholar of the diaspora. My expertise comes from the community – they are my teachers and I learn alongside them. What I'm sharing today is perspectives and knowledge I've gained through the process of being with this organization and by being someone who identifies as living in the diaspora.

The Jakara Movement is the eyes and ears of the Sikh community in California, where Punjabi is the 3<sup>rd</sup> most spoken language up and down the Central Valley, a stretch of land that by no coincidence resembles Punjab in a lot of ways. My days go from speaking to my truck-driver veers (brothers) about regulations to advocating for ethnics studies courses and curriculum and coming up with new ways to engage youth in the age of Queen Coronavirus' reign. We're also leading initiatives around COVID testing and advocacy in community-centered and knowledge attainment around this disease and infection. We're also forming a number of initiatives like youth substance preventative measures and programs. We're really functioning as what I see as a triage center and listening to what's really going on with the community, and how we can be a resource and outlet and just be ears that listen.

Although I'm not a diaspora scholar, I like to think that my own experiences and listening to the community have shaped what I want to base our conversation around today. When I learned the word "diaspora" in undergrad, I thought "yes! Finally, this word that really captures my feeling, sentiments and experience". I used it in every other sentence and it became a part of my daily vocabulary, and I threw it out and thought "I'm going to use this all the time." Over time I've explored what this feeling is of being in a diaspora.

In thinking through what this talk would look like, I couldn't help but reflect on those of us who have traveled to Delhi or Punjab – that feeling when you see a fellow NRI at the airport and you lock eyes, and you're both heading to Punjab or just returning from Punjab, there's some sentiment that you're sharing experiences but you can't quite pinpoint what it is. You didn't both spend time in the same pind (village), but you probably spent time travelling to the same Gurdwara, finding the same type of jootiyaan (shoes) or suits (Punjabi outfits), and then you're leaving or returning from a different desh (land). It connects completely different strangers in a way that we have trouble describing. To me that's a diasporic feeling – when I see a fellow Sikh or Punjabi at the airport right before I'm either leaving or entering Punjab.

This is something we work through even as an organization. The ways that we're trying to engage intergenerationally because it was that departure from our homeland that really caused all of these other problems, whether it's health inequity issues, issues of immigration, things that we deal with day to day and can't help but connect it back to having left the place that we call home.

What we're seeing on a global scale is a community, in this moment, in response to the kisaan and majdoor morche (rules), we're seeing the diaspora meeting a responsibility, a "farz", as we can say. What is the "farz" and which ways are we contributing to our responsibilities that we must uphold and that those back home are probably looking towards us to stand moda-te-moda kharhke (standing shoulder to shoulder). We've also got a lot of questions in follow-up to this rally that we held that I'm going to delve into in a little bit, as to why we saw a lot of youth engagement. The youth is our bread and butter in Jakara, but it was interesting to see that a lot of the engagement, questions around the planning that we received was from youth as the diaspora's response and responsibility. This caravan and rally that we held that spanned California and ended up in the Bay Area was largely attended by youth. Questions around "why is the diasporic youth engagement so much higher even in this one rally event or even at any time?" Our parents are still at work, on their trucks, working their shifts in the nursing homes, at foster farms, so the youth feel that much more of a responsibility and farz to not only keep engaged with what's happening in their ancestral homelands but also to know their parents' and households' feelings in terms of what is really happening and building and acting on that sentiment.

The overwhelming engagement that we're doing, and questions and calls are coming from young truck drivers whose livelihoods are tied to what's happening back home. Their parents are sitting in Delhi and they were the golden ticket sent away from to earn and find ways to navigate the circumstances that have been created for kisaans and majdoors. We've spent hours on the phone with them listening, some of them

breaking down into tears. This is the community sentiment – even while being so far and feeling “majboor” (responsible) a lot of the times.

In this moment, if I share personally what's been inspirational, and as an organization what we're using as points of engagement and furthering content discussion that we're doing, Navyug veerji pointed out that this is a moment to reflect on – its historic in the ways that these societal boundaries that are created are being navigated in new ways, whether across caste-lines, gender lines, class lines. The Jakara Movement for decades has engaged in critical work around discussing these critical notions of caste, gender and class, both in Punjabyat, and how to navigate it from a Gurmat inspired point. I feel like we'll look at this moment for decades to come in content that we reference, whether it's in conferences or in smaller conversations that we're having with our local communities. These images elicit certain emotions. There was a viral video of a Biji (elder woman) from Barnaala (where my daadke (my father's family)), and when I see that video I can't help but think of my own daadiji (my father's mother), and this fierce spirit that I can't help but connect back to her Sikhi and her real inspiration. The images that you predominantly see of the women, they're adorned in their gaatre (a religious symbol), they're proud of the slogans. That connection is what we're looking to analyze and work through in our conversations with our youth in developing those relationships further, even as we sit so far away.

Though my language is not what the academics use, I want to take the time to connect Sikhi to Punjab and to the land that modern day Punjab sits on. This land, fervor and emotion that is coming out from the borders of Delhi, I personally and strongly believe that there is a connection to the Chardikala and kirat kamaayee that Guru Nanak Sahibji has emphasized over and over again to us and has instructed us to follow. This was the land of the Gurus before it was India – how can we appreciate, acknowledge and incorporate this into the conversations that we are having about what's happening around the borders of Delhi. I would definitely like to mention that in the conversation that we're having right now. What's happening in Punjab back home – the diaspora is an extension of that, whether its women at the forefront, whether it's the naare/jakaare that we're hearing, those are sought to be recreated in the rallies and community conversations that are happening even here. The Chardikala spirit, Guru Nanak's langar we're seeing, even the massage machines that we're seeing from Khalsa Aid – I think this is evident of the Sikh spirit that carries both those on the ground and those that are oceans away.

Now I want to take us to this incredibly historic event, even for us, for the California Sikh Sangat, was the Kisaan Majdoor Solidarity Rally we held last weekend where a caravan of trucks, tractors, motorcycles, cars, even a bus headed up through the Bay Area where it congregated in Oakland, then headed over the Bay Bridge bringing it to a

standstill. I think we brought Oakland, the Bay Bridge and parts of San Francisco to a complete standstill. An incredibly unprecedented crowd gathering intergenerationally was a historic moment. This idea came from one of our Kaur staff members, so when we talk about who's at the forefront of organizing and mobilizing, we would be remiss not to mention that the thoughts, actions and call to action, and who's bringing us to these calls for action is something that is worth mentioning in this moment. Our community here in California met this call of action, through hundreds and hundreds of hours spent on the phone, community zoom calls. Our ultimate inspiration came from those sitting at the forefront in Delhi – the importance of mobilizing and organizing and how they work hand in hand. We're hearing examples of incredible logistical organization that's happening at the Delhi border, from there being Pehredaar who are wearing uniforms to signify what their sewa is, to the morche that are happening. The importance of great and effective Unions, as Navyug veerji said, that speak to the power of the people and are the voice of the people. How do we delve deeper into the importance of representation through great, effective Unions? How can I bring that back to engaging with the California Sikh Sangat as we mobilize folks in the thousands and now is when we encourage them to take it a step further – to organize locally, to stay involved because we talk of things that affect our community both locally, statewide and globally. That's where we are now asking the Sangat to meet this challenge – organize with us, because mobilization tends to be a little bit easier than organizing. There is something that ignites a fire in folks. Whatever it may be, brings folks to a call to action whether it's the first time that you participate in a protest or a rally, or its your 20<sup>th</sup> time. There is value in both of those individuals coming together and saying “here we walk together, we walk forward together”, and at Jakara we explore this constantly. We look to organize folks because this is the long game that we're playing.

What is the importance, as the speakers before us have mentioned, of all of our eyes are on Modi? We are watching quite closely what is happening/transpiring. I love seeing photos of aapne (our people) that are reading the news or reading about themselves in the news – what's more powerful than that? There's importance in keeping the international eyes locked on the Delhi border and the Modi government, and continuing to encourage our elected officials, local community or our own households and having those nuanced conversations.

Here is a snapshot of the scenes that emerged in the Bay Area in response to media coverage. I'm incredibly proud of our Sangat that attended continue to still tag the news media platforms in the comments, posts, and say “this was covered by so-and-so, where is your coverage?” The most historic protest is happening and you have not given any nuanced critique, analysis or coverage of it. When we feel that power that this is something that should be covered, I'm incredibly honored when people continue to comment because that's a sewa in and of itself. It's continuing to encourage international eyes to be kept on what's happening and avoid our greatest fear of violence that we know the Indian government is well-equipped of committing. This

tradition of protest is not new to the Sikh community or the Punjab panth. It's in our heredity; we have descended from those who have continuously stood up and voiced when an injustice occurs. You can look at any of the Sikh political prisoners as evidence of this. But you don't have to look too far – there are still rallies that are happening in local communities across California, the United States and the globe. This is the pressure that we can build and use the power of the pen. This is something that we are hosting as an organization – hosting virtual events where we sit together and email our elected officials and penning an op-ed. Everyone has a farz to build and we continue to organize folks into those different buckets, making sure that everybody's doing their part in this. We're also inspired by our Armenian sisters and brothers who are also fighting for their homeland – saariyaan da ghar ona noo pyaara hunda hai (everyone's home is special to them) and nobody leaves home unless home is the mouth of the shark. You still miss it and yearn for it. We stand in solidarity with our Armenian sisters and brothers who led historic protests blocking freeways across California and the nation and showing their dismay for what's happening back in their homelands. When we begin to understand the power of people protesting, that's when we follow suit knowing that no diaspora is unique in this way. There's something to learn from each other. In solidarity is where it begins.

Before I talk about communities beyond our own, I think it's my responsibility to encourage us to not go too far beyond our individual selves. It is time for self-critique – this is a historic moment. How is it historic for each and every one of us individually? If so many farmers (kisaan, majdoors) have given up their rozi roti (daily bread), there are calls that are being met by the organizers of the rallies, saying “send one individual from your house” and folks are meeting this need. Here abroad, will we do a rally and stop there? Or will we go beyond that and really act upon this historic moment. It's time for us abroad to reflect and analyze if we too are capable of fulfilling the sacrifice and bravery that we're so proud of seeing at the Delhi border. How do we individually commit to supporting our brothers and sisters in Punjab? But also, in challenging the inhumane practices that exist in our own homes that are now abroad from homelands? The inhumane treatment of farm laborers and seasonal workers that consist of aapne (our people) but also consistent largely of Indigenous, Mexican and Latino heritage? I challenge my brothers and sisters on this call and beyond – are we doing earnest work and are we fulfilling our honest kirat kamaayee and practicing it daily? How do we individually commit to letting this historic event forever change us on an individual, community, statewide, national and global level? Are working at Facebook and contributing to the awful acts that they engage in? Are we contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline? How do we here indirectly benefit from these horrific draconian 3 laws that are being proposed? Are we aware of Sikh political prisoners? Are they a part of our freedom movement in the same way that the kisaans and majdoors rally for their own freedoms and the way that they have demanded the release of political prisoners, seeing that their freedoms are tied to those imprisoned? Are we harming those who have long practiced kirat kamaayee as instructed to us by Guru Nanak Sahibji?

After challenging those who I see as my Sikh panth, my Punjab panth, what comes next for us? It's the power of the pen, commit to a cause that won't cause unjust harm, join an org, start an organization – it all comes from an idea like the idea of the California kisaan rally. This image was posted not too long ago by Sandeep Singh, a journalist on the ground reporting to us – it says “Tuseen vasde raho pardesiyo, tuhaade naal vase Punjab” (we wish those living abroad prosperity, because Punjab prospers if you do). If that's the spirit they have for us, what is the ardaas and spirit that we hold in solidarity with them? How will we let this moment forever change us?

Dhanvaad Ji, tuhaade saariyaan da (Thank you everyone). Kisaan Majdoor Ekta Zindabaad (Long live farmers and laborers)! Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh.

Navraaz: Thank you, Manpreet, so much for your heartfelt compassionate words towards the community involvement here in the United States and how it links to our identities back in India and beyond, and how we can be hold responsible individually as well as at a community level. Before we open the webinar to questions, we have questions that have accumulated for Dr. Bikram Gill and Manpreet Kaur specifically and I did direct some of the questions to Dr. Navyug Gill earlier. I'd like to remind everyone that we will be staying on topic with the speakers and presentations. We will also be mindful of our time constraints.

Dr. Navyug Gill, there is one question left over for you: Where is the Punjab State Government in all of this? They have not been seen in the forefront.

Dr. Navyug Gill: The State Government has been complicit in these laws in general, in the sense that Congress did nothing when it was in power to address the agrarian crises. But, when the Unions began to mobilize over the summer, all of the political parties in Punjab realized the massive opposition to these bills and they quickly got on board with denouncing the bills. The Congress did it right away because they oppose anything from the BJP. You saw the break of the Shronmani Akaali Daal with the BJP; they were forced to break from it – in actuality they had endorsed the bills when they were first promulgated and then had this hasty denial. Even the Aam Aadmi party denounced the bills. So much so that they convened a special session in the State Assembly in which they - the Congress, with the Akaalis, the Lok Insaaf Party, the Aam Aadmi party, and even the BJP members abstaining - all unanimously passed a resolution against these laws, and yet it did nothing. While agriculture should be a state subject, the BJP circumvented constitutional provisions to further centralizing power in Delhi. That was in part why the smaller Unions along with other groups turned their attention to the capital, because this is not a situation for Chandigarh to solve, but has

to take place with the Central Government. This is part of the struggle for autonomy and center State relations.

Navraaz: This next question ties this to the historical perspective and the current government perspective – local government vs. central government – that you've just brought up, to what Dr. Bikram Gill had presented on. The question was posed in reference to Mussolini/Hitler policies, the Trump efforts to depict fascism to an autocratic government on a scale that begins with these policies and then goes on to broader efforts to bring that mindset into a more central government state. The role that some of the national companies play in these policies – Dr. Bikram Gill mentioned Cargill, we discussed Facebook, someone had asked whether Google was involved – I would like to bring the conversation to Reliance. What kind of influence or role to Reliance play in agro-corporate interests but also in maintaining the state government's power that's being diminished? This can also fall into the aspect of deregulation. Dr. Navyug Gill, you're saying that the states were essentially powerless in all of this so the Unions turned their attention to the central government. How powerful is Reliance right now and how powerful will they be going forward?

Dr. Navyug Gill: I think Bikram might have better insight into this corporate nexus, but quickly, these are giant conglomerates that have vast portfolios extend into all sorts of fields in India and the world. Agriculture is the one area where they've been trying to gain a foothold because in the midst of this pandemic, especially in the recession that India is undergoing and will undergo next year, everyone will still need to eat. This will still be buoyant. They see an angle to make more profit here. The ties between Ambani and Modi, the well-documented corporate relationship – maybe Bikram can elaborate on that.

Dr. Bikram Gill: Yes, the well-documented Ambani-Modi relationship, it's important to remember that with the draconian and authoritarian laws that passed around Kashmir last year, Ambani gives this big press conference promising to usher in this era of development and prosperity. He was really welcoming the settler colonial kind of appropriation of Kashmiri land. There is a deep entanglement between Ambani and the Modi BJP government. The question of the influence of capital, and the expansionary thrust of capital – this is a long historical and structural process. We need to center the farmers' protests. We need to be very clear the forces they are up against. They're not going to go away simply if these bills are removed. Cargill has a long-standing interest, for example, in capturing the Indian grain-trading market. They haven't even hidden it. But that's not often a prominent point of discussion because attention is trained, as it should be, on the state and national government. But in excavating the relationships they have with this kind of logic of capital expansion and accumulation; it makes clear that to really defend and preserve agriculture a constructive alternative system requires

confronting the power of the corporate houses. I'd like to emphasize that what is distinct about this moment of the corporatization of agriculture and its' expansion is the turn to digital agricultural technologies. You have Reliance Jio and Facebook, but even Cargill has put almost all of its' money right now into agri-tech. This does not correspond with the mandi system. They want to shift all buying and selling through these smart apps, similar to what Uber was doing to other parts of our community around taxi drivers and the impacts that had. It's always framed as efficiency and productivity – they're going to come in and more efficiently and productively organize these sectors. What it really is, is a classic case of appropriation. They're taking sectors that have been built up by farmers, taxi drivers, etc. and the value produced, and they're simply going and grabbing that value and putting their hands into it. We have to keep an eye, and excavating and further studying that relationship – this goes to a question asked in the chat around contradictory relationship between hyper Hindu nationalism/ Hindutva fascism of the BJP on the one hand and how committed they are to globalizing capital on the other. It's important to name and highlight this even more so.

Navraaz: One of the questions asked earlier on while you were presenting, was – what would the incoming President-elect Joe Biden's response be to these protests if we were to bring up some of these corporate interests in this deregulation of these independent markets?

Dr. Bikram Gill: This is where it's clarifying. Navyug had mentioned the limits of the Democratic Party in a different context earlier. We have to keep in mind that it was the Clinton Administration that most aggressively promoted in the 1990s the neo-liberalization of global South agriculture. This is not something that the Democratic Party at this historical moment, as appealing it would look coming out of a Trump Administration, has been at the forefront of promoting this neo-liberal cultural globalization. I couldn't imagine that a Biden Administration would take a hard line on Cargill, or that's the way you're going to confront them. Here's how I would approach that question: thinking about Cargill and Facebook – if there's a question of how do people in America, in the settlor/global North colonies, beyond thinking about the really important point Manpreet brought up around reflecting upon our own implication in other places of power, vis-à-vis migrant farm labor here in the United States – the Cargill question really presents a question with which to engage completely. If we can't, then we have to ask why we can't. If we can't test the global reach of power of a company like Cargill, then that's a real limitation of our political landscape and horizon. If the farmers' protests are confronting global sources of power that are centered and supporting the current government, then that needs to be contested on a global scale. We have a global diaspora and relations of solidarity – how do we concretely start to confront agri-business powers like Cargill, which stays in the shadows so very often, of coup-detats in the global South.

Navraaz: You bring up an excellent point when people are asking how do we stay engaged here and how do we vote with our dollars when we are not there? You have opened up several avenues in which people could use their dollars here and use their abilities here to protest some of the companies that would be backing some of this deregulation. When you mention Facebook being a part of this, Manpreet you had talked about how communities can mobilize and organize. Many times, mobilization and organization is happening on these platforms. How do we utilize the very companies that are feeding some of these issues, to speak up and mobilize without giving them the support? How do we make our grievances with them known?

Manpreet: As my colleague Jaspreet says, if we use it then someone works there. I think simply put, how much are we contributing to these global virtual powers like Facebook or Instagram? The photo that Sandeep Singh, the journalist, took in Delhi had a sign saying Ambani and Andani is the new East India Company – I want us to be self-critical. Are we capable of that same level of critique when that same analytical ability is not given to a community? How are we able to challenge those notions and go beyond it? That is my call to action. What does our kirat kamaayee look like? There is a power in using the platforms to mobilize people, but it never ends at mobilization. Virtual engagement is not the only form of engagement that then successfully translates to an organized community. It has to be both. Even throughout the farmer protests we've seen a call to using hashtags on Twitter, but the organization was already done beforehand on the ground. This should be supplemental in the way that it helps a certain movement. It shouldn't by any means be the only way in which we engage and have meaningful connections to folks. I say, use it! Don't work there though. That becomes a responsibility then – what was my role in it? There's a plethora of things you can do and sewas to fulfill. If you're wondering what they are, shoot me an email – we've got plenty of work to do.

Navraaz: We've got more questions coming in – there are 3 specific questions, 1 for each of our speakers. Dr. Navyug Gill, can you speak more about the specific demands of Dalit organizations that are pushing for caste annihilation and the reorganization of caste hierarchies in the socio-economic structure of farming in Punjab.

Dr. Navyug Gill: This is a difficult and broad question. I can try to point to some productive directions. There's lots of initiative on the ground addressing caste hierarchy in different facets of life, whether it's caste-based gurudwaras, forms of discrimination and exclusion, wages and land-holdings. One specific thing that I think is worth all of us paying attention to is the Zameen Praapati Sangarsh Committee, which is an organization based in Marva and one of its' aims is to get Dalits one-third (1/3) of village common lands – get their access and ownership to one-third (1/3) of shyam-lot lands. This is a statute that is on the books, but it is a law that is rarely been enacted.

The reason it hasn't been enacted is because predominantly Jatt landowners don't want Dalits to have access to their own lands to cultivate, because if they cultivate their own lands they won't work for low wages as laborers on the lands of Jatts. It is a direct conflict and has been happening in Malva for a very long time. We should be clear that the Zameen Praapati Sangarsh Committee is made of up Dalits and there are Jatts that support them. The kisaan unions, which are largely led by Jatts, support and have built relationships with the Zameen Praapati Sangarsh Committee. The people that are opposed to them are Jatt landlords, and this is a direct tension in the community. We all know that there are conservative, narrow-minded, reactionary Sikh, and there are thoughtful, creative, radical revolutionary Sikh. That spectrum exists in every community, so this is the one that is in ours. The Zameen Praapati Sangarsh committee has supported the protests – they've sent their members to the frontlines and are working with the kisaan Unions in this struggle because the neo-liberal Hindutva is a direct threat to them as well. In forging those ties with the kisaan Unions and are actually there on the ground at the blockades, you can imagine that there's a spirit of camaraderie. You're sitting together all day, you're cooking meals together, you're sleeping alongside one another, you're listening to speeches, confronting the police, and I don't think we can overstate the power of what the commonality means. That's why I say that after engaging in something like that, when you go back to your village, you can imagine that the kisaan Unions will be much stronger, the khet mazdoor Unions are going to be more empowered, and even some of those Jatts who would oppose land for Dalits will start rethinking their position. You've seen people come together and fight this common threat and now these other differences have to get addressed. You cannot simply put boundaries on issues. To give an example in the U.S. context, think about how vicious racism was in the 1930s and 1940s and what led to the support for the Civil Rights Movement. Large numbers of African-Americans fought in World War II – the movies don't show this. Huge numbers fought on the front lines and in all sorts of other fields; they fought and died in Europe and the Pacific for freedom and liberty. Then they come back home to America and they can't get served at a lunch counter, and they can't get a loan for their home, and they're spit on in the streets. This contradiction of "we were good enough to die for you over there, but now we're not going to tolerate this kind of discrimination and exclusion". A lot of these ex-GIs were the ones that went on to support the student non-violent coordinating committee with the Black Panthers, the Nation of Islam and other groups in bringing about the Civil Rights Movement. Something parallel, not identical, is in play with Dalits and Jatts coming together in this morcha (fight) and has implications for Punjab. It will not eliminate the conflict, but if there's something to be hopeful it is things like this.

Navraaz: Dr. Bikram Gill we have a question for you: can you speak more about the connections between Hindutva's fascism and global capitalism and the seeming contradiction between Hindutva as a nationalist force, and yet its' global relationship to capitalism, like Cargill, etc.

Dr. Bikram Gill: I think I kind of addressed it earlier, so I'll take the opportunity to further answer the question that was directed to Dr. Navyug Gill. What's important to recall is the fact the caste oppressions, contradictions and struggles in Punjab (gender ones as well), are not separate from the farmer/capital conflict and caste is somewhere else. Dr. Navyug's work is central to this. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, how did Jatts end up with all the farmlands in Punjab? We need to ask ourselves this question – and Dr. Navyug's research does that really well. To de-naturalize this fact that it wasn't just by chance that the Jatts ended up with this land and Dalits were dispossessed from land, the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial capitalist period is not a modern period separate from a tradition of caste. These things went hand in hand. Validation of colonial capital involves naturalization of a certain caste/land-owning relationship which is then further entrenched in the Green Revolution. The exclusion of women from land is also part of this process, where globalizing capital is building upon and further intensifying. A question for Jatt-Sikhs to ask themselves in these struggles is "how do you denaturalize existing land relations on gender and caste"? When we think of defending the dismantlement of the mandi board and think about what we are defending – think about how the mandi board was a compromise that involved the bracketing out or the foreclosure of radical options. This is an invitation and opportunity to return to the 1960s and 1970s some of the impulses and gestures towards a more Red Revolution rather than a Green Revolution, which would have potentially centered caste and gender.

Now on this specific question of global capitalism and fascism, there's a whole history of literature globally that looks at the way capital in its' most extreme global corporate form takes a fascist form. It prefers fascism of the sort that Hindutva embodies. I would point to scholarship that came up in the 1990s by two of my own teachers, Dr. Anandya Mukherjee and Dr. Radhika Desai, who wrote books on how the rise of Hindutva was tied to India's globalizing and opening up to global capital.

I'll re-emphasize that it's a really important contradiction that can be used to oppose the BJP and its' pretenses of nationalism.

Navraaz: Thank you Dr. Bikram Gill for elaborating on that. Manpreet, you had previously covered how we as families and descendants of farmers in Punjab or India can translate their struggle to what happens here in our agricultural societies and the exploitation of migrant labor; how we can find a sense of responsibility here and be accountable for our decisions and actions.

Before we wrap up our webinar here, I'd like to ask how our speakers plan on personally engaging with this dynamic issue?

Manpreet: I'll add to my part quickly. The Jakara Movement was heavily involved with the census in the 2020 campaign. I'd like to share a quick story, which I will keep anonymous, in regards to circumstances that our communities encountered. In specific, with Punjabi farm owners in the US and elsewhere, there is attention that needs to come to the conditions with which farm workers and business owners, and the plight of political prisoners, and refugees that have settled in places across the United States. We were given the large responsibility of counting the Sikh/Punjabi community here in California, and we encountered people who didn't have an address because they were living on the land that they tilled and were working for Punjabi landowners or farm owners. This happened more than once. It was much like Punjab, where they were living in a hatti (small dwelling) in the back. These are conditions of our community and communities beyond our own, who are our neighbors and who we live amongst. In terms of our diasporic responsibility to not only be engaged with what's happening with Sikhs in Punjab, as well as those globally, like Punjabi farmworkers in Italy. There is attention needed everywhere. It starts with us having a knowledge base to even begin these conversations, and then we begin to start deconstructing notions of caste. We've done that at conferences in the past or smaller webinars that we've done. These are ongoing conversations and we ask that folks engage and join in on conversations, to learn the plights of those who are of lesser privilege than many of us on this call.

Navraaz: Anyone want to add to that?

Dr. Navyug Gill: To wrap up, I'd like to say that I've seen so many brilliant questions as I scroll through. What they demonstrate is that there's a deep desire to engage on this issue and want to get involved and to act on this issue. I take solace in that. (speaking in Punjabi): If we consider ourselves to be warriors, brave and like lions, now time will tell and we will have to take action. If we stay quiet, there's no point in just flaunting that we are warriors, we are brave or we are lions. (speaking in English): We are exhausted with the machismo and superficiality that has been the staple of cultural production for so long. Now is the moment to do something that is actually worthy of struggle and sacrifice and strength. I think this webinar is a small step in that direction. History will see what we do with it.

Dr. Bikram Gill: It's hard to answer the question because I've learned so much from the questions that were asked and Manpreet Bhen (sister) and Navyug Bhai's (brother's) presentations. In terms of going forward, in reading Navyug's article in Al Jazeera, and thinking about the question of political form and political content – what it means and how it reflects on us back here in the US. If this is a global struggle that is confronting peasants and farmers across the global South in many ways and there is no post-agricultural future that global capitalism can offer, no jobs that people are going to step

into – how do we conduct this (our actions) on a global scale? We're sitting in the heart of empire here. I don't mean to keep harping on Cargill here, but a lot of the forces propelling agricultural globalization located here. Can we actually offer solidarity? How far can the farmers' protests actually succeed without actually confronting the power of states like the United States and the role they play in global agriculture? Does it mean thinking about the farmers, in political form, as Navyug Bhai's article points out, how they embody and shut down Delhi instead of just going and shutting down the ballot box? They're introducing a new, disruptive politics that is absent here (in the US.). Our politics (in the US) often end up in a consumerism – what can we do as consumers? It's the endpoint of so many food struggles in United States – you end up at farmers' markets, right? Or we end up with some sort of consumer choice. This is showing the power of collective struggle, of solidarity, and embodied struggle. I like the way different speakers put it. Something is happening on the ground. There's something generative happening. When we think of how much of our politics fail here – how consistently governments are overthrown, wars are waged, corporate sectors situate themselves here while go elsewhere and interfere there – what would it take to contest that? We need to start thinking of political form of the sort that the farmers' protests have introduced to our historical era in India.

Navraaz: Once again I want to sincerely thank all of our speakers today: Manpreet Kaur, Dr. Navyug Gill and Dr. Bikram Gill. Thank you so much for joining us in this webinar that has been extremely helpful in explaining and providing context to the current struggles that the farmers are facing during these historic protests. Before I hand it back to Kiran Kaur from SALDEF, I want to thank everyone who participated today: all the audience members, all those that asked questions. Those that leave with questions, know that we will be providing information where you can access the speakers from today and continue to have these discussions and these dialogues.

In these unprecedented times, stay safe, stay well, stay informed, and stay engaged. Thank you.

Kiran Kaur: Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh. I also want to thank all the panelists, Dr. Navyug Gill, Dr. Bikram Singh Gill, Manpreet Kaur and our excellent moderator Navraaz Kaur Basati. This webinar came together in short notice, and all of your availability, willingness to accommodate, and the expertise that you shared today helps all of us better understand this issue. We learned a lot of information today; I'd like to share some additional resources. We will send out a recording of this webinar, it will be available on SALDEF's Facebook page, and the resources will be emailed out.

With that, thank you everyone for your time. Thank you, the listeners, for your interest and time. Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh.