

Welfare Populism in Telangana State after 2014 – A Case Study on Rythu Bandhu Policy

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Introduction:

Telangana is a new born state which was founded in 2014 after many struggles of the civilians. After the emergence as a new political state, the government was majorly focused on welfare schemes which is known as the welfare populism and enacted various populist schemes to attract the voters for winning in the elections, a direct money transfer scheme Rythu Bandhu is one among them. Telangana was popularly known for the farmers' suicides before to the Telangana Statehood. Lack of resources for the cultivation, unavoidable and higher rate of debts, continuous droughts, crop failure etc. are the main reasons for this dramatic condition. Many of the farmers migrated from the rural areas. The districts like Mahabubnagar, Nizamabad and Karimnagar have been faced high amount of migration rate in the Telangana Region. The agriculture lands remained uncultivated. Even though the Two major rivers Godavari and Krishna flow through Telangana, the Telangana agriculture sector remained under developed. The irrigation projects were not at all constructed in Telangana region. Allocation of water resources was one of the major disputes between Telangana and Andhra Regions. In this situation, Telangana people struggled for the Water allocation as part of the separate statehood moment. After the separate statehood, the Telangana governments initiated multiple schemes to boost up the Telangana agriculture sector. Rythu Bandhu is one among them which is most popular welfare schemes across the country.

Welfare Populism:

Welfare populism refers to political strategies in which governments implement broadly popular direct benefits to the specific social groups to expand support and build political validity. In the Indian context, welfare populism has gained prominence in recent decades with the expansion of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mechanisms and the increasing competitiveness of electoral politics. States such as Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Delhi have been at the forefront of welfare-oriented populist governance.

Key characteristics of welfare populism include:

- Direct benefit transfer to identifiable social groups
- Simplified eligibility criteria
- Strong political branding of schemes
- Emphasis on electoral mobilisation

Agriculture sector occupies a central place in Indian politics, not only as a source of livelihood but also as a powerful electoral constituency. Agrarian distress, marked by indebtedness, crop failure, and income volatility, has led governments to introduce various support mechanisms, including loan waivers, subsidies, and income support schemes since the independence, but, during the past 7 years many governments focused on Direct Beneficiary Transfer (DBT) method in agriculture sector.

Welfare populism in Telangana after 2014:

In Telangana, after becoming a separate state in 2014, the government pursued *welfare-led governance* that prioritized direct financial support schemes for the major vote share such as

farmers, women, differently abled, marginalized social groups such as Scheduled Castes and etc. Under the framework of welfare populism, the Government of Telangana was enacted various schemes such as Aasara Pensions, KCR kit, Rythu Bandhu, Rythu Bheema, Dalit Bandhu, and etc.

Agriculture Sector in Telangana Region:

Telangana was initially part of Andhra Pradesh with 10 Districts, the main two rivers Godavari and Krishna passing through this region, but this region always victimized in the ruling of the Andhra leadership. Despite possessing significant agricultural potential, Telangana agrarian sector faced several challenges:

- Dependence on rain-fed agriculture
- High input costs
- Limited access to institutional credit
- Dependence on private moneylenders
- Frequent crop failures

These challenges made farmers politically sensitive and economically vulnerable groups. In 2014-15 financial years, 69% of the farmers are in debts and lack of institutional debts the farmer's suicides was recorded very high and Telangana stood second among the states in farmers suicides. Addressing the agrarian distress became central to the state's welfare agenda.

Rythu Bandhu is one of the most fascinating initiatives by the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) government. In Telangana majority of the farmers are having the land 2.7 Acres on an average. 44% of the total agriculture land is in the hands of Backward Classes (BCs) and 70% among the total farmers are belonging to BC (48%), ST (13%) and SC (9%) communities. Majority of them economically backward and unable to spend input investment. To address their issue, the government enacted this scheme in 2018.

used in pull back of the farming community from the Indebtness and it also gets huge appreciations from many of the intellectuals, Global leaderships and also gets the electoral support for TRS currently BRS party politically in rural areas.

What is Rythu Bandhu?

Rythu Bandhu currently known as Rythu Bharosa which is recognized as Farmers Investment Support Scheme, is a **direct cash-transfer welfare scheme** introduced in **May 2018** by the Telangana Rashtra Samithi government. It provides **unconditional financial assistance to land-owning farmers** to meet crop investment costs. The Idea of this scheme is simple that making the farmers community as debt free and stabilization of the agriculture sector by breaking the cycle of rural indebtedness. Initially the government was given 4000/- per acre for the two seasons Rabi and Kharief in a year later on it raised to 5000/- per acre and now the current government renamed it as Rythu Bharosa and giving 6000/- acre twice in a year. It gets huge support from the farming community and helped it to winning in 2018 elections. With the Inspiration of this scheme from 2019-20 financial year the Union Government started PM-KISAN Scheme which is distributing Rs. 2000/-per each farmer. Likewise some of the State Governments, Odissa (Kalia), West Bengal (Krishak Bandhu), Andhra Pradesh (Rythu Bharosa) are also started distribution of funds for the forming community.

Review of Literature:

1. Chandra Shekar, P., & Naveen Vodapally (2023) was conducted a research on "The Agriculture Investment Support Scheme (Rythu Bandhu) -A Ray of Hopes to Farmers". They proved that this Scheme helped a lot to the farmer's community development. Through Raithu Bandhu Scheme, the farmers overcome the barriers of market, labour, financial and

commodity and facilitates market operations for the sake of the development. They also stated that this scheme plays crucial role in the sustainability of the small farmers families.

2. Reddy D.N. (2019) in his article “Agrarian Distress and Policy Response: The Rythu Bandhu Scheme” argued that, this scheme failed in addressing the issues of cultivating farmers. This scheme is failed in execution. He further stated that the main objective of this scheme is provision of financial assistance to the farmers’ community at the beginning of season. But the financial assistance is directly transfers to the Non-cultivating farmers who are land slords which diluting the welfare objective of this scheme.
3. Kumar, R., & Rao, M. (2017). Kumar and Rao’s research provides an in-depth analysis of the Rythu Bandhu scheme, an agricultural welfare initiative by the Telangana state government aimed at providing financial assistance directly to farmers. The study evaluates the scheme’s impact on farm income, agricultural productivity, and financial independence. It explores the scheme’s success in reducing farmers' dependence on informal credit systems and mitigating the effects of crop failure due to adverse weather conditions.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To identify the importance of Rythu Bandhu scheme in common farmer’s life.
2. To understand the impact of Rythu Bandhu scheme on Agriculture Sector.
3. To study the impact of Rythu bandhu scheme on voter’s behaviour.

Methodology:

The study is descriptive in Nature. Both the primary and secondary data was utilized in this study. Interview schedule was utilized in this study. 30 respondents who are the beneficiaries with this scheme are interviewed in a Seetharampur village of Ghanpur Mandal, Jayashankar Bhupalapally district.

Data Analysis:

1. Land Details of the Respondents:

Response	Number	Percentage
0-1 Acre	04	13.3%
1-3 Acers	19	63.3%
3-5 Acers	05	16.7%
More than 5 Acres	02	6.7%

The above table shows the data regarding land holding of the farmer’s community. Among the total number of 30 respondents, majority of the respondents 19(63.3%) are holding the land between 1-3 Acers, followed by 05 (16.7%) of the respondents having the land between 3- 5 Acers, 04(13.3%) of the farmers are having the land between 0-1 Acer and only 02 (6.7%) of the farmers holding the land more than 5 Acers.

2. Any Changes in mode of cultivation after implementation of this Scheme

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	27	90%
No	03	10%
Total	30	100%

The above data shows there are any changes appeared in the mode of cultivation after the MGNREGS Scheme was implemented. Out of total 30 respondents, majority of the respondents 27 (90%) said their mode of cultivation shows tremendous change after the

implementation of this Scheme and the remaining 03 (10%) of the respondents said their mode of doing cultivation doesn't changed anything.

3. Utilization of Rythu Bandhu amount:

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Labour payment	12	40%
Buying Seeds, fertilizers and pesticides	03	10%
Machinery Cost	14	46.7%
Repaying of Debts	00	00
Household consumption	00	00
Any others	01	3.3%

The above table shows the utilization pattern of Rythu Bandhu Scheme. Out of total 30 respondents, majority of the respondents 14 (46.7%) of them utilized this amount for the machinery cost and 12 (40%) of them utilizing this for the payment of labour wages, 03 (10%) of them using this to buy the seeds, fertilizers and pesticides and remaining 01 (3.3%) of them using this for some other works. From the data it is to be noted that majority of the farmers utilizing this money initial days like ploughing, motors, tractor charges and payment of labours.

4. Changes

Response	Improved	Neutral	Decreased
Adoption of quality input mechanism	19 (63.3%)	10 (33.3%)	01 (3.4%)
Investment Capacity	26 (86.7%)	04 (13.3%)	00 (-)
Production	18 (60%)	12 (40%)	00 (-)
Psychological and Social Security	26 (86.7%)	04 (13.3%)	00 (-)

The above table shows the changes in farmers lives after the implementation of this scheme. Among the total 30 respondents, 19 (63.3%) of them said with this scheme their adoption of input mechanism is improved whereas 10 (33.3%) said it is neutral and 01 (3.4%) are said decreased. 26 (86.7%) of the respondents investment capacity is improved whereas 04 (13.3%) of their investment capacity doesn't shown any change. 18(60%) of the farmers production is improved whereas 12 (40%) of the farmers production remains unchanged. 26 (86.7%) of the farmers psychological and social security is improved whereas 04 (13.3%) of them said it is unchanged.

5. It Caused came out from the indebttness:

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	27	90%
No	03	10%
Total	30	100%

This scheme helped to the farmer’s community to came out from the unfair indebtness from the money lenders. Out of 30 respondents, majority of the respondents 27 (90%) are accepted this whereas 03 (10%) are not accepted to this.

6. Landlords receiving same amount is a right move

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	7	23.3%
No	21	70%
Can’t Say anything	02	6.7%
Total	30	100%

The above table shows whether lacking of land sealing to distribute the money under Rythu Bandhu is a right move. Out of total 30 respondents, majority of the respondents 21 (70%) felt that the land lards getting money under Rythu bandhu scheme same as small or medium scale formers is not a good decision whereas 07 (23.3%) of them said it is a correct decision and 02 (6.7%) of the respondents said they can’t say anything.

7. Exclusion of Tenant formers is a right move

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	05	16.7%
No	25	83.3%
Total	30	100%

The above table shows the data regarding whether the exclusion of tenant formers from rythu bandhu scheme is a correct decision by the government. Out of total respondents 30, majority of the respondents 25 (83.3%) of them said it is not a correct decision whereas 05 (16.7%) of them said it is a correct decision.

8. Influence of Rythu Bandhu Scheme in Voting

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
High	24	80%
Medium	05	16.7%
Low	01	3.3%
No Influence	00	00

The above table shows the influence of Rythu Bandhu Scheme on voting behaviour. Out of total 30 respondents, majority of the respondents 24 (80%) said this scheme highly influenced their voting behaviour, whereas 05 (16.7%) said medium influence and 01 (3.3%) of them said low influence.

Discussion:

1. Rythu bandhu is one among the most populist welfare policies in Telangana state which is also influenced the union government and the state governments Odessa, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. By seeing the support from Telangana people, they also initiated this scheme in their respected states and union government entire country.
2. Majority of the farmers came out from the initial input debts. Around 75% of the farmers utilizing this money for major tasks such as machinery cost and labour charges, it gets huge

respect among the farming community. Without any mediation, direct transferred to the farmers account is attracted the farmers community.

3. The reasons behind this huge people support to this scheme among the people is that, this is a first of its kind policy in the nation and many number of farmers those who are taking debts from the money lenders for highest amount of interest earlier are came out of it, 90% said this. The mode of cultivation is also changed after the implementation of this scheme and 90% of the respondents accept to this.
4. This scheme is also gets some criticism from the farmers community. Giving raithu bandhu to the non-farming land lords is a major adverse with this scheme, 70% of them said this. In other hand the actual farmers who are tenant farmers exclusion is another major mistake in this scheme, 83% of the respondents said this.
5. Input mechanism is one of the main tasks in agriculture sector, earlier to this scheme due to lack of input amount the farmers choose lesser quality mechanisms but this scheme changed that perspective. Their investment capacity is also improved which caused improvement in their investment capacity. This scheme also secured the farmers community socially and psychologically.
6. The impact of this scheme is very high among the farmers. It influenced 80% of the farmers voting behaviour in elections, and this is instrumentally helpful to the TRS party for their massive win in 2018 elections for the second time.

Conclusion:

Rythu Bandhu is one of the crucial policies taken up by the TRS government in 2018 which is a first of its kind and gets huge people support and become one of the most popular policies in the state. With the inspiration of Telangana government, other states Odessa, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Union Government also initiated such schemes with different names. Implementation of this policy gets fruitful outcomes among the farmer's lives. They are mentally and socially strengthened, came out from debts and able to spend investment in time for the machinery and labours. It caused for the increased production. However this policy is also gets some criticism. Not having any sealing, exclusion of Tenant farmers in Rythu Bandhu scheme gets serious negativity among the small, tenant farmers and also landless common men. However the policy makers succeeded in turnout the farmers as their major vote bank.

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