

A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF FARMERS SUICIDES IN INDIA: SPECIAL REFERENCE TO FARMERS IN KOLLEGAL TALUK OF KARNATAKA

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Abstract:

India is an agrarian country with around 72.48% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture (2011 census Report). Being an agrarian country, farmers' suicides in India are worrying some factor. The distressful fact is that the farmers, who feed millions of Indians, are committing suicide. It is unfortunate to note that, as per the Central Government, despite a multi-pronged approach to improving income and social security of farmers, over 12,000 suicides were reported in the agricultural sector every year since 2013 (HRD report 2013). Farmer suicides account for approximately 10% of all suicides in India. There is no disclaiming that the menace of farmer suicides exists and runs counter to the aspirations of reaping benefits of our demographic dividend. In this article, researcher analyzing the farmers' suicides in India, particularly in the Kollegal Taluk of Chamarajanagara District of Karnataka and its related data, the reasons are investigated after having a discussion with the farmers who cultivate paddy, vegetables and commercial crops. It is not wise to blame only the private money lenders are responsible for the farmer's suicide. Hence, other factors like the rise in the cost of agricultural equipment, increase in the cost of fertilizers, seeds, labour, and crop failure due to bad weather are accounted for the farmer's suicide.

Keywords: Agriculture, Moneylenders, Monsoon, Farmers Suicide.

INTRODUCTION

In the present scenario, it is appalling to note that agricultural communities are suffering a lot in different states of India. Farmer's suicides are a key issue, newspapers, TV Channels are

beaming regularly the farmer suicide and drawing attention of the whole India, thus causing furor in the people mind and even in the Parliament. Opposition parties are blasting the ruling parties for the suicide of farmers. It is horrible to note that,

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farmers' suicides in India between 1995 and 2003 were 9.26 lakh (Inter-State Economic Indicators, 2010). Regarding the number of deaths of farmers in Karnataka, Veeresh Committee (2002) reported that during 1996 and 2000 there were 10,959 victims under the farming and agricultural activity category. Though farmers suicides have been occurring in Karnataka since 1998 (Shrishail, 2011). Suicides among the farming communities in states like Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka have been hitting the headline of the newspapers for the last couple of years (Mohanty, B B and Sangeeta Shroff 2003). Although state governments attribute the deaths to crop failure due to bad weather, the media highlights the rising cost of cultivation, problem of middlemen, brokers, greediness of private moneylenders, mounting indebtedness and bottlenecks in agricultural marketing. A number of studies have been undertaken to explain these suicides, particularly in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The causes are attributed mainly to agro economic problems like crop failure, indebtedness, etc. (Shiva and Jafri 1998; Deshpande 2002). Others highlight politico economic issues, blaming the state for the tragedies (Assadi 1998; Revathi 1998; Vasavi 1999; Sarma 2004). Parthasarathy and Shameem (1998) discoursed that the growing indebtedness is the main reason for the strain on the farmers. Most of these studies have analyzed the issue at the macro level.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Madhyapradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andhrapradesh and Tamilnadu are the 7 states account for 87.5% of total suicides in the farming sector in the country (Vasavi, 1999). Both marginal farmers and small farmers are committing suicide. Maharashtra is the worst affected state (Mohanty, B B 2001). Ironically, Punjab, which profited the most from the Green Revolution, also presents a miserable picture of farmer suicides in India. Between 1995-2015, 4687 farmers' suicides have been reported from the state of Punjab of which 1334 from one Mansa district alone (Shiva, Vandana and A H Jafri 1998). India's urban consumer-driven economic policies are in favor of urbanites. It is ironic to note that the political economy of India is driven more by urban consumers than rural producers. This state of distress is reflected in the urgency to impose price controls in case of price rise and uneventful withdrawal once the price is under control. Contrast this with how we have imposed minimum import price to secure our steel, cement, chemicals, medical equipment sectors. This step-motherly treatment to primary sector also limits profit margin and thereby hampers farmers' chances of breaking free from the cycle of indebtedness and suicides.

FARMERS PROBLEM - AGRARIAN PROBLEM

Another source of strong linkages between farmer suicides and indebtedness

is reflected from the spread of two major problems i.e., indebtedness and helplessness. While Maharashtra accounted 1293 suicides for indebtedness, Karnataka had 946. Note that both these states saw one of the highest incidences of farmer suicides as well as indebtedness. What has added to the already prevalent crisis is the unwillingness to cater and support each other's water needs amongst the states.

A case in point is the never ending Kaveri River and Krishna River Water disputes that saw Karnataka and Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhrapradesh battle out water shortage both in and outside the tribunal. There are instances in which both the parties fought and even to the extent of non-compliance with the tribunal award. In essence, the factors sum up to crop failure, unsustainable production and subsequent farmer indebtedness leading to failure of strengthening the economic state of the farmer as the driving force behind these suicides.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To know the economic problems of the poor farmers.
- To identify the reasons for the farmer suicide.
- To evaluate the role of moneylenders.
- To analyze the uncertainty monsoon rain in the rural areas.
- To understand the water disputes of neighboring states.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

- Farmers are experiencing extreme burden of loans.
- Poor farmers are becoming a victim of money lenders.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary source material relates to the field survey conducted in Kollegal Taluk of Chamaranajangara district of Karnataka, where a good number of farming land is irrigated in a large scale. They are cultivating paddy, vegetables and greens. In order to ease my study 50 farmers have been selected as respondents on the basis of Random Sampling Method and primary data collected from them. The secondary data was collected from the Magazines, Journals, Periodicals, Daily Newspapers, etc.

CAUSES BEHIND FARMER'S SUICIDES

Sociologists and Economists have given various reasons such as monsoon failure, River Water Disputes, climate change, high debt burdens, government policies, psychological health of the farmers, personal issues and family problems among the reasons for farmers' suicides in India. The following are the key causes of the farmer's suicide:

Increase in the Cost of fertilizers and seeds: out of 50 farmers 40 of them consisting 80% of them replayed that in recent days the cost of fertilizers and seeds have been increased drastically leads they borrow loan from the private

lenders. Hence, they said farming had become an expensive for already debt ridden. When the farmers failed to pay the interest and the principal amount at the stipulated period, the money lenders make trouble in the farmer's house. Hence, most of the farmers who brought huge money from the money lenders have committed suicide when they failed to get the right price for their crop.

Surge in the Costs of Agricultural equipment: 76% of the farmers consisting of 38 farmers expressed their view that rent prices of agricultural equipment like tractors, tillers, JCBs have increased. At the same time, dripping pipes, sprinklers, water pump sets, 4-inch water pipes have been increased drastically. Hence, they said it is very difficult for them to manage with their meager agricultural profit. When crop fails due to natural calamities, they said, the farmers incur losses and commit suicide.

Rise of Labour costs: More than 70% of the farmers consisting 35 of the respondents, expressed their displeasure that they are not getting affordable labour force. Cost of rented tractors and animals like bullocks is also increased. Therefore, the farmers are feeling the pinch of labour cost and they are unable to expand agriculture. In the rural areas unskilled labours are demanding Rs.600 to Rs. 700 per day. Hiring labours and making them to get profit is not possible for the majority of the small farmers. Hence, they take loan from the local money

lenders. Gradually they will be in a trap of the vicious circle of debt. There are instances in which, while inability to repay the debt the whole family has become bonded labourers and the male head of the family has committed suicide. The farmers also lamented that now a day many of the adult unskilled labour has opted MGNREGA and are demanding on par with the labour price.

Distressed due to bad loans: National Crimes Record Bureau (NCRB) data 2018 report points out of 3500 suicides that took place in this period, out of this 2474 suicides are committed by farmers alone. When investigated details the victim's farmers had unpaid loans from local bank and even they borrowed from the local money lenders. Hence the majority of the farmers consisting of 80% of them (40 farmers) expressed that exorbitant rate of interest drives them to the thought of suicide. Increase prices of agricultural equipment, seeds and irregular monsoon drives them crazy added psychological stress on them.

Lack of consciousness about government policies and programs: Nearly three fourth of the respondents of the farmers consisting of 40 respondents responded that they are illiterate and they are no match for the digital world. Hence, they do not understand the program and policies implemented by the respective government. Even though the Panchayat Development Officers (PDOs) explained the programs the respondents failed to implement the new methods in their farming land. Due to this farmer are

unable to cultivate commercial crops and get more profit.

The Critical situation of Water: Nearly half of the farmers consisting of 25 respondents said they are facing acute shortage of water supply to their farming land. In fact, Karnataka State government is bitter cross swords with Tamil Nadu and Maharastra in sharing the water. Hence the majority of the farmer's suicide is reported in the region where water woes are high. The deficit of the rain driving the Kollegal and surrounding region farmers in the state of suicide. The farmers expressed their view that, water bodies dried up fast as rain recedes, there is not enough ground water to feed their farm land led their precious time waste. Hence, due to water woes youngsters of the villages are migrating to neighboring towns like Mysore, Salem, Coimbatore and Bangalore and working as helpers drawing meager salaries.

Drastic Climate alteration: More than half of the farmers consisting 25% farmers said there is a incessant rain, deficit rain, flash floods has created havoc on the fully grown paddy and vegetable crops. The respondents said, nowadays they are in a dilemma whether they will get a profit or not through their production. Very few farmers said they are getting limited profit. Remaining of them lamented that they have incurred heavy loss due to the climate change and driving them the obsession of suicidal attitude.

CENTRAL AND STATE GOVERNMENT ANSWER TO FARMER'S SUICIDE

2006 Relief Package: this is a package program primarily aimed at 31 districts in the four states of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala with a higher relative incidence of farmer suicides.

Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme, 2008: Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme, which was launched in 2008 benefited over 36 million farmers at a cost of 65000 crore rupees equal to US\$10 billion. This spending was aimed at the writing off or waive off a part of loan principal as well as the interest owed by the farmers.

2013 Diversify Income Sources Package: In 2013, the Government of India launched a Special Livestock Sector and Fisheries Package for farmer's suicide-prone regions of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Kerala. The package was aimed to broaden your horizons income sources of farmers. Apart from these Central Government initiatives, there are many efforts from the state government's side like Maharashtra Bill to regulate farmer loan terms, 2008 and Kerala Farmers' Debt Relief Commission (Amendment) Bill, 2012.

MEASURES TO REDUCE THE FARMERS DISTRESS

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) must be encouraged in the agricultural sector, particularly towards capacity-building, skill development and the establishment of CHCs. Software

companies, Public and Private Sector Banks, Insurance Companies, Iron and Steel Manufacturing Units must be encouraged to involve them in the Corporate Social Responsibility so that farmers will get subsidized fertilizers and seeds and livestock's. District Commissioners of the respective suicide prone district must take the initiative of CSR speak with the Corporate Officials and makes them involve them in the service field.

Institutional financing must also be confirmed to be adequate and inclusive rather than catering to the elites or privileged within the farming community. Particularly to the farmers who are small and marginalized one.

Cooperative farming must be encouraged amongst small and marginal farmers to ensure that they are not left waiting while the big farmers reap the benefit at their cost. Village PDOs and Revenue Inspectors of the suicide prone areas must involve actively and create awareness about cooperative farming to the farmers and its benefits.

Doubling the farmer income by 2022 is a healthy aim, but loan waivers can't be the answer. Instead, sustainable agriculture must be encouraged with the farming communities. Addition the traditional farming, farmers must be encouraged to take poultry, fishing, mushroom cultivation, floriculture etc. This helps the farmers to double their income. Hence, farmers must be

empowered with new technology and farming methods to cope with the financial burden. Instead of looking at the farm loan waiver farmers should be empowered in asuch a way that they should provide more employment to the local landless labouers.

SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF THE FARMERS

Policies of integrated pest management to prevent pest damage:

An all-inclusive approach that integrates biological, chemical, mechanical and physical methodology should be used to prevent crop damage. In this case, seeking inspiration from Vietnam's no-spray early rule (predatory beetles are sustained biological pest control, cutting pesticide requirement by 50%) can be a good way to start.

Lower fertilizer costs: Helping fertilizer industries cut down on costs, through internal funding rather than external borrowing should lower the input costs. Leveraging advancements in Science and Technology by ensuring that state seed policies focus on new genotypes, contract farming and sensitization to adverse weather conditions.

Precision farming techniques like **SRI** (Systematic Rice Intensification) must be encouraged. Farm equipment policy must focus on imported equipment to provide for the cheaper local manufacture, some incentives like the grant of duty credit scrips may be tried. Subsidies must be rerouted towards capital generation and

entrepreneurial Custom Hiring Centers (CHCs) and the implementation must be ensured in a timely fashion.

Early-warning signals for unsustainable loans to launch a 2-pronged approach catering to both the burdened farmers as well as stressed banks.

Soft loans must be given to farmers in a regular interval with Options for restructuring loans must be used wherever possible. Insurance claim settlements must be speedy and just.

District wise list of indebted farmers and efforts in de-stressing them through counselling and other alternative mechanisms should be tried.

NABARD and local administration must take control of the situation and play a greater role in curbing farmers' suicides.

Innovative efforts like Crowd funding can be employed through the involvement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

Efforts like Agro-Climatic zoning, education through DD Kisan, Soil Health Card Scheme, various crop insurance and facilitative schemes like PM Krishi Sinchayi Yojana will go a long way in helping out.

Community-led awareness must be taken employing a role model approach, highlighting progress of farmers who have benefited from sustainable & climate-tailored agricultural practices.

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