

FARMERS IN DISTRESS: ADDRESSING INDIA'S AGRICULTURAL CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

India's agricultural sector faces a devastating crisis as farmers' suicides escalate. This study examines the complex interplay of factors contributing to this phenomenon, including debt, crop failure, climate change, and inadequate government support. Analyzing national data and case studies, we identify key drivers and propose multifaceted solutions to address this pressing issue. This study explores the intersectional factors contributing to farmers' suicides in India, using a mixed-methods approach. Our findings indicate that structural factors (government policies, market fluctuations) and agency-level factors (individual circumstances, social networks) intersect to produce vulnerability. We argue for a nuanced understanding of farmer distress, emphasizing contextualized interventions and policy reforms.

KEYWORDS: *Mullaiperiyar, Periyar, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Fasal Bima, Telungana, Andra Pradesh*

INTRODUCTION

India is a land of villages and it is predominantly an agrarian country with around 70% of its population depending directly or indirectly on Agriculture for their livelihood. If we look at the world as a whole, almost all the countries in their initial period were once an agrarian Country, but over the years, transformation had taken place and now they have become well developed Industrialized Nations. Agriculture is the base for any nation. Without Agriculture life will come to a standstill and no human can exist without eating. Moreover, agricultural products constitute as raw material to many agro based industries such as Cotton industry, Jute industry, etc.

From time immemorial, Agriculture has been practiced in India. Initially farmers have been practicing subsistence farming which means cultivating crops mainly for their family sustenance. Over the years they have moved on to commercial farming, whereby crops are cultivated mainly with the intention of selling them in the market for profit.

India with its varied and diversified regions have been cultivating different types of traditional and cash crops depending upon their soil and climatic conditions. So, one can get a variety of grains-paddy, wheat, millets-bajra, maize, fruits, vegetables, pulses, oil seeds, etc

Modern methods of Cultivation could not be practiced by all farmers due to the Law of Inheritance, which paved way for subdivision and fragmentation, thus making them proprietors to small acreage of land alone. So, this posed a constraint for the small farmers.

Farmers suicide have become an inseparable part of India due to the poor government policies, monsoon failure, drought, flood, poor crop yield, growing debt, rising prices of pesticides & fertilizers etc.

Meaning of Farmer

A Farmer is a person who ekes out a living by cultivating a variety of agricultural crops on his land or rearing livestock for getting dairy products. In India, farmers work on their own land or they also lease their land to others, for their family sustenance.

Types of Farmers

- Farmers have been classified into Small farmers, Marginal farmers and Large farmers.
- *Marginal Farmer*' means a farmer cultivating (as owner or tenant or share cropper) agricultural land up to 1 hectare (2.5 acres).
- *Small Farmer*' means a farmer cultivating (as owner or tenant or share cropper) agricultural land of more than 1 hectare and up to 2 hectares (5 acres).
- Large Farmers refer to farmer holding more than five acres of land.

Objectives of the Study

- To find out the reason behind farmers suicide in India
- To study about the different schemes enacted by the government for farmers welfare

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Agriculture is the backbone of any country and especially of a country like ours with rich and varied heritage. But the problem is, farmers are facing acute numerous problems such as water scarcity, rise in input prices tools and equipment, fertilizers, pesticides etc and moreover they do not get a very good minimum support price for their produce. And middlemen also eat away their income to a greater extent. So, they always reel in debt-this is especially the case with small and marginal farmers and also landless agricultural labourers. So, an insight into this topic "Farmers Suicide" can grab the attention of the government, policyholders, NGOs and Philanthropists etc to come out with lucrative policies for the welfare of the farmers and the betterment of our country as a whole. And it is a known fact that one cannot survive without food and food products.

Grounds for Farmers Suicide

In India, Farmers commit suicide, due to the growing debt which they have obtained from Banks, NBFCs and Money Lenders. The main reason behind their suicide was due to crop failure, low income, debt etc. These small and marginal farmers due to lack of sufficient income from their farmland are not in a position to purchase fertilizers, pesticides and apart from this, nature also have hit them badly either in the form of poor monsoon, drought or flood etc. and ultimately, they neither don't get good produce nor good price for it.

Rise in the price of agricultural equipment such as tractors, bore wells, submersible pump set etc and labour costs also has increased tremendously due to many reasons such as rise in input costs, increased minimum wage driven by Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Rural Guarantee Act etc

Farming practices have become expensive due to the rise in the price of fertilizers, pesticides, GT seeds etc. Although National Agricultural Marketing is of great help in integrating the farmers' produce directly into the market, thus reducing the role of intermediaries, the reality is still the farmers are lagging behind and they are not able to get a good price for their produce.

Interstate water disputes between the states have worsened the livelihood of the farmers, cultivating in the delta regions- thus leading to failure of crops and thereby these farmers who have taken loans find it very difficult to repay the loans and ultimately, they commit suicide.

Farmers have also taken loan for personal purposes, (either for conducting a marriage for their daughter or son) and due to bad harvest, they don't have means to repay the loan and ultimately, they are forced to end up their lives.

Change in the Climatic conditions, thus leading to extreme drought, floods at the time of harvesting have devastated the hopes of farmers, thereby triggering them to commit suicide.

In Tamil Nadu, Cyclone has hit the lives of the farmers in the regions of Nagapattinam, Triumviri, Chidambaram etc. over the years and their produce have failed- submerged in water ,the coconut trees had uprooted in their farm land and thereby leading to complete loss their livelihood , forcing them to committee suicide.

Data on Farmers Suicide

The National Crime Records Bureau in India is entrusted with the duty of collecting and summarizing data on farmer suicides across the country. The bureau publishes the data in its annual report titled "*Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India.*" The data for each year is published in the subsequent year's report. The bureau started publishing the farmer suicide data as a separate section right from the 2015 report.

The National Crime Records Bureau started recording the farmer suicide cases from 1995 onwards and it reported that a total of 296,438 Indian farmers have committed suicide since 1995. Out of these, 60,750 farmers suicide have taken place in the state of Maharashtra alone, since 1995. In states such as Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Madhya Pradesh farmers suicide have taken place to a greater extent. Farmer suicides account for 11.2% of all suicides in India.

According to the 2010 data majority of the farmers who committed suicide fell in the age group of 30-59 years and they constituted around 9910 farmers. There were around 4409 farmers in the age group of below thirty years who committed suicide, while 1645 farmers who committed suicide were senior citizens. The five most affected states of farmers suicide are: Maharashtra-3,141 farmers, Karnataka-2,585 farmers, Andhra Pradesh-2,525 farmers, Madhya Pradesh -1,237 farmers and Chattisgarh-1,126farmers. Moreover, out of the total deaths, around 15 per cent suicide victims were women farmers.

Maharashtra is the worst affected state, where farmers suicide has taken place to a greater extent. Similarly, Punjab now presents a sorry picture where around 4687 farmers committed suicide between 1995-2015. Out of these, 1334 farmers suicide have been reported from Mansa district alone. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh – are the two larger states of India

in terms of size and population, but still farmers suicide rate has been about 10 times lower than Maharashtra, Kerala and Pondicherry.

The farm sector suicides cover both farmers and cultivators who own land and those who work as farm labourers. Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat and Karnataka, which have got large acreage of land under irrigation have maintained high agricultural production levels, despite it, still these states saw a surge in farmer suicides in 2016, when compared to 2015. Farmers suicide is in surge in states which has got more than 80% irrigation. The main reason behind it is they are not able to get a good price for their produce. Bt cotton (*Bacillus thuringiensis* cotton) was also one of the reason for farmer suicide in Vidharba region of Maharashtra. Bt cotton seeds cost nearly twice as much as ordinary one. The higher costs forced many farmers to take huge loans, often from private moneylenders charging exorbitant interest rates (60% a year). The moneylender tried to collect his dues at harvest time, by compelling farmers to sell their cotton to him at a price lower than it fetched on the market. This led to stress and suicides among farmers.

There has been an upward trend in cases of farmer suicides in Maharashtra, Telangana, Karnataka and Punjab, in the December 2014 Intelligence Bureau (IB) report, [quoted](#) in *The Times of India*, contradicting the NCRB data.

There are three reasons for under-reporting:

First, suicide by a farmer is considered only if the farmer's name is on the land title and leaves out farmers whose land title is in their fathers' names.

Second, female farmers are considered "farmer's wives" (by custom, land is almost never in their names). "This classification enables government to exclude countless women farmer suicides and there are about 36 million female farmers in India, and they are also in the crisis.

Third, according to National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) data some states-report that there are no farmer suicides in their state

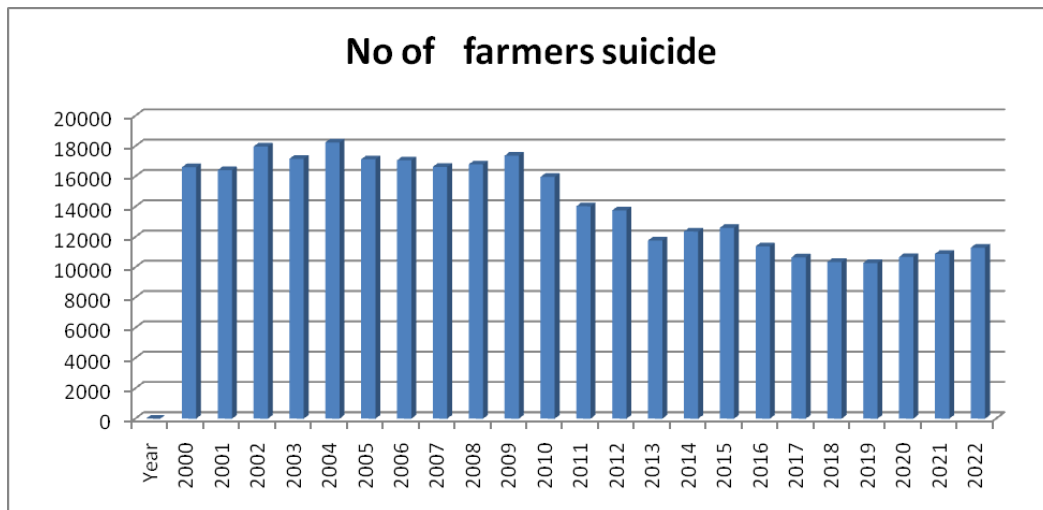
Data on Farmers Suicide in India from the year 2000 to 2022

Table 1

Year	No of Farmers Suicide
2000	16,603
2001	16,415
2002	17,971
2003	17,164
2004	18,241
2005	17,131
2006	17,060
2007	16,632
2008	16,796
2009	17,368
2010	15,964
2011	14,027
2012	13,754
2013	11,772
2014	12,360
2015	12,602
2016	11,379
2017	10,655

Table 1: Contd.,

2018	10,349
2019	10,281
2020	10,677
2021	10,881
2022	11,290



Secondary Source-NCRB Data

Figure 1

From the above table one can conclude that farmers suicide have been showing a continuous rise right from the year to 2000-2004. Though at certain years the number of farmers suicide has reduced, still it is a disturbing phenomenon. For it is the farmers toil, which really makes the human existence possible on earth. So, it is the duty of the government to safeguard the interests of the farmers and if the farmers suicide needs to be averted, then the government should try to fix minimum support price for the produce, so that at times of glut farmers will not be affected. Once again from the year 2019 onwards, the death of farmers suicide continues to rise.

Measures to Overcome

As recommended by M. S Swaminathan Committee, the Minimum Support Price for the agricultural produce should be more than 50% of the cost of cultivation, thus thereby the farmers could overcome their debt and live a peaceful and contented life.

In 2013, the Government of India launched a Special Livestock Sector and Fisheries Package for farmers suicide-prone regions of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Kerala. This package was aimed to diversify the additional source of income to farmers.

Farmers repaying capacity of loans have to be extended for a long-term period during destruction caused by natural calamities. Agricultural loan waiver are enjoyed only by the rich farmers to a greater extent, for they are the one who approach the Banks for credit facilities. The Poor and Marginal farmers should be should be given more credit facilities, and the government should come to their rescue by helping them fetch a good price for their produce, even if there is a glut in the market.

Water bodied- Rivers needs to be linked so that the state with scanty water source tends to benefit, similarly during times of high monsoon the overflowing water from the river source could be diverted to the scanty water regions.

Irrigation to be followed in the required regions,

Mullaiperiyar issue, the storage capacity of water in the dam could not be raised and so this also affected the lives of farmers dwelling in Theni belt. So steps should be taken to solve this problem amicably between these two states from people's point of view, because one state wanted the water storage capacity to be decreased and it emphasizes on the safety of its people residing in and around the districts near the dam, while the other state emphasizes on raising the water storage capacity in the dam, because the farmers livelihood will get affected and also for people dwelling in nearby regions, for the water flow from Periyar dam constitute their "JeevaNadhi" for their existence. So, these issues to be solved amicably rather than politicizing it.

Subsidy for the fertilizer price should be enjoyed by all the farmers and the government should see to it that scams are averted and this subsidy should directly benefit the farmers.

Sufficient dams need to be built by the respective state government to overcome water crisis. For the water from these dams can lend a helping hand to agriculturalists and also, they can quench the peoples thirst during times of acute water shortage.

WELFARE SCHEMES FOR THE FARMERS

Soil Health Card Scheme

This scheme was launched in 2015, mainly to assist the State Governments to issue Soil Health Cards to all farmers in the country. The Soil Health Cards provide information to farmers about the nutrient status of their soil and it also tells about the required dosage of nutrients needed to retain its fertility.

National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)

NMSA aims at promoting Sustainable Agriculture, trying to enhance agricultural productivity in rain fed areas focusing on integrated farming, soil health management, and synergizing **resource conservation**.

Neem Coated (NCU)

This scheme was introduced mainly to regulate the use of area, enhance the availability of nitrogen to the crop and reduce the cost of cultivation and it thereby improves the soil.

Parampara Raga Krishi Vikas Yojana

This scheme was introduced mainly to promote organic farming, so that farmers net income increases. So that at least 50 farmers could form a group having 50 acres of land to implement organic farming. The government aims to cover 10,000 clusters and five lakh hectares of arable land under organic farming.

National Agricultural marketing (e-market)

Through e- marketing, the farmers could get better remuneration for their produce and healthy competition prevails among the farmers due to transparency in the system.

Agricultural Contingency Plan

Indian Council for Agricultural Research along with the state Agricultural Universities prepared a district level contingency plan to tackle the situation of drought, flood, etc so that livestock, fisheries and horticulture are not affected.

Rainfed Area Development Programme

This scheme was launched mainly with the twin objectives of integrated water shed management and sustainable farming system. The main aim is to reduce regional disparities between irrigated and rain fed areas, creation of sustained employment opportunities for the rural community especially landless labourers., measures to enhance agricultural productivity and to reduce regional disparity between regions.

National Watershed Development Project for Rain fed Areas (NWDPA)

The main aim of this Programme is to promote the welfare of the farmers. This programme was launched mainly to protect the farmers living below poverty line, thereby bringing the arable and non-arable land under cultivation, creating water bodies, making them to grow a variety of crops depending upon their nature of soil, so that agricultural productivity increases.

Livestock Insurance Scheme

This scheme was introduced mainly to protect the farmers from accurate loss, in case of death of their livestock. It tells them the importance of insurance to livestock.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) Programme

Under this programme, a farmer having cultivable land up to 2 hectares, will be provided direct income support at the rate of Rs. 6,000 per year.

PM Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana

A crop insurance policy with relaxed premium rates on the principal sum insured for farmers, implemented with a budget of Rs 17,600 crore. This scheme provides financial support to farmers and cover their losses also.

Per Drop More Crop

Per Drop More Crop (PDMC) scheme was launched in the year 2015-2016 which aims to increase efficient use of water resource, reducing cost of inputs and increasing productivity at the farm level through Micro Irrigation technologies i.e. drip and sprinkler irrigation systems.

A National Beekeeping and Honey Mission (NBHM)

This scheme has been launched in 2020 as part of the AtmaNirbhar Bharat Abhiyan to increase productivity of crops through pollination and increase in honey production as an additional source of income. Rs. 500 crores for the period 2020-2021 to 2022-2023 has been allocated for beekeeping sector.

Providing Soil Health Cards to Farmers

Soil Health Card Scheme was introduced in the year 2014-15 to optimize usage of nutrients.

MIDH - Cluster Development Programme

The Cluster Development Programme (CDP) is designed to leverage geographical specialization of horticulture clusters mainly to promote integrated and market-led development of pre-production, production, post-harvest, logistics, branding, and marketing activities.

CONCLUSION

Government can avert farmers' suicide by introducing farmer friendly policies. A very good minimum support price should be given for their produce, thus helping them to put up a good state of life with all amenities. Subsidy can help the farmers to compete in the international market, apart from it, it also brings foreign exchange into the economy, thus paving way for our economy's growth. Farm loans should be easily accessible to small and marginal farmers, the government should also suggest ways to increase the agricultural productivity. Apart from this, the government should come forward to buy their produce at a good price (as suggested by M.S. Swaminathan) i.e. 50% more than their cost of produce - even in case of glut in the market, proper warehouses to be built for storage purposes, provide irrigation facilities etc. Government need to provide good monetary compensation benefit, whenever natural calamities bring total agricultural loss of their produce.

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