

THE REASONS AND TRENDS OF FARMER SUICIDE: ANALYSING THE SITUATION IN INDIAN STATES

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ABSTRACT

A great deal of attention is paid to economic growth rates in India in recent years, with an ignorance of the on-going agrarian crisis. During the last two decades the agriculture sector has witnessed crisis such as decline in agriculture growth rate, rising numbers of farmers' suicides, declining prices of several crops, and a widening gap between the agriculture and non-agriculture sectors. The agriculture sector is experiencing unprecedented crisis with stagnation or declining rural employment growth and as a result, food security and employment opportunities for the rural poor is eroding.

Farmers' suicide in different parts of India has become a recurring phenomenon over the past one-decade or so, which reflects the deep-rooted agrarian crisis. Indian agriculture continues to employ the vast majority of the people but in recent years it has experienced a slowdown in growth rates. This sector is experiencing unprecedented crisis with low productivity, high rural unemployment and food insecurity. In the past, availability of credits to farmers, along with subsidies on new inputs were as important determinant of investment in agriculture.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the pattern and the trend of the farmer's suicide and the main causes behind it. It had been shown that farmer's suicide rate is higher in several states like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala. Both union and state government have implemented several kinds of policies and steps in favour of farmers but these cannot change the actual picture. The trends of farmer's suicide have been increasing in the last few years.

Keywords: *Farmer's suicide, Indian agriculture, government policy, agrarian crisis, agrarian distress*

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Introduction

A great deal of attention paid to economic growth rates in India in recent years, while the on-going agrarian crisis is being ignored. During the last two decades the agriculture sector has witnessed crisis in such as decline in agriculture growth rate, rising numbers of farmers' suicides, declining prices of several crops, and a widening gap between the agriculture and non-agriculture sectors. The agriculture sector is experiencing unprecedented crisis with stagnation or declining rural employment growth and as a result, food security and employment opportunities for the rural poor have been eroding. This paper is an attempt to study the role of agriculture sector in the Indian economy and its better performance for inclusive growth (World Bank 2006). This sector at present contributes only 17 percent of the GDP, while it provides employment to 57 percent of the Indian work force (GoI 2010B)

Farmers' suicide in different parts of India, particularly Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala and Karnataka over the past one-decade or so have completely changed the discourse of Indian agriculture. These issues of suicide have come at a time when the debate on agrarian economy have been shifting from the debate on mode of production of 1960s to the growing crisis of the economy in the 1980s to the farmers' suicide in recent years.

A regional survey in rural Vidarbha (Maharashtra) expressed reasons in order of importance behind farmer suicides as debt, alcohol addiction, environment, low produce prices, stress and family responsibilities, apathy, poor irrigation, increased cost of cultivation, private money lenders, use of chemical fertilisers and crop failure (Dongre and Deshmukh 2012). In other words debt to stress and family responsibilities were rated as significantly higher than fertilisers and crop failure. In a different study in the same region in 2006, indebtedness (87%) and deterioration in the economic status (74%) were found to be major risk factors for suicide (Behere and Bhise 2009). The issues of farmer's suicide would be extremely complex, involving socio-economic, cultural and psychological factors.

This paper attempts to understand the reason of farmer's suicide, to understand the farmer's suicide rate in different states of India and to study the gender wise Farmer suicide rate in India. The study is descriptive in nature based on available secondary data. The secondary data was used for study, from Government websites, various journals, reports, and newspapers.

Reasons of farmer suicide in India

The Government of India (GoI 2013) 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 diversify income sources of farmers. The total welfare package consisted of 912 million. India has 40 percent more cultivable land than China, but average agricultural yields are 50 percent lower than China (Dev 2008).

The Agricultural debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme (GoI 2008) argued that the genderwise suicide rate was 16.2 male farmer suicides per 100000 male farmers compared to 12.5 male suicides per 100000 for general population. Among women, the suicide rate was 6.2 female farmer suicides per 100000 female farmers compared to 8.5 female suicides per 100000 for general population of India.

In Maharashtra the State government passed the Money Lending (Regulation) Act, 2008 to regulate all private money lending to farmers. The bill set maximum legally allowed interest rates on any loans to farmers, setting it to be slightly above the money lending rate by Reserve Bank of India, and it also covered pending loans. In 2010, Maharashtra announced the Village Farmers' Self Help Groups that will disburse government financed loans, a low rate Crop Insurance programme whose premium will be paid 50 percent by farmer and 50 percent by government. It also announced the launch of alternate income opportunities such as poultry, dairy and sericulture for farmers in high suicide prone districts (GoMH 2010).

Farmers claim suicide deaths in India are among unemployed individuals and individuals in professions other than agricultural work were, collectively (Patel et al. 2012). Kerala, in 2012, amended the Kerala Farmers' Debt Relief Commission Act, 2006 to extend benefits to all distressed farmers with loans through 2011. It cited continuing farmer suicides as a motivation (GoKL 2012). According to the National Crime Reports Bureau (NCRB)'s Annual Report 2013-14 on Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (Gol 2014) the reasons of suicide deaths in India are multiple.

Table-1
Factors behind Suicide deaths

Reasons	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Poverty	140	9	149	2.6
Poverty dispute	52	0	52	0.9
Marriage related issues	63	58	121	2.1
Family problems	1038	97	1135	20.1
Family related issues	868	101	969	17.2
Illness	682	63	745	13.2
Drug/alcohol addiction	250	0	250	4.4
Fall in social reputation	6	1	7	0.1
Bankruptcy/Indebtedness	1112	51	1163	20.6
Not known	208	23	231	4.1
Other causes	759	69	828	14.7
Total	5178	472	5650	100.0

Source: Government of India, Annual Report 2013-14, Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India, National Crime Reports Bureau.

'Bankruptcy or Indebtedness' and 'Family Problems' are major causes of suicides, accounting for 21 percent and 20 percent respectively of total farmers' suicides during 2014. The other prominent causes of farmers' suicides were 'Failure of Crop', 'Illness' and 'Drug Abuse/Alcoholic Addiction'. During 2014, major causes of suicides among male farmers were 'Bankruptcy or Indebtedness' and 'Family Problems', which accounted for 22 percent and 20 percent respectively of total male farmers' suicides. Whereas, in female farmers' suicides, 'Family Related Issues', 'Family Problems', 'Illness', and 'Marriage Related Issues' and 'Bankruptcy or Indebtedness' were the major causes of suicides, accounting for 21.40, 20.55, 13.34 and 12.28 percentage respectively during 2014 (GoI 2014).

Demography and trends of Suicides

The gender imbalance in suicides is very high in India. A cursory look at the statistics would provide the clear picture of the suicides trends. It also provides some idea of intensity in geographical terms of such incidences.

Table-2
Gender wise Farmer's suicide rate in different states of India

State/UT	Gender wise suicide rate					
STATES	Male	Percentage (%)	Female	Percentage (%)	Total	Percentage (%)
Andhra Pradesh	157	98.1	3	1.9	160	2.8
Arunachal Pradesh	0		0		0	
Assam	21	100	0	0	21	.37
Bihar	0		0		0	
Chhattisgarh	391	88.3	52	11.7	443	7.8
Goa	0		0		0	
Gujarat	31	68.9	14	31.1	45	.8
Haryana	14	100	0		14	.2
Himachal Pradesh	28	87.5	4	12.5	32	.6
Jharkhand	0		0		0	
Jammu & Kashmir	7	58.3	5	41.7	12	.2
Karnataka	297	92.5	24	7.5	321	5.6
Kerala	107	100	0		107	1.9
Madhya Pradesh	688	83.3	138	16.7	826	14.6
Maharashtra	2498	97.3	70	2.7	2568	45.5
Manipur	0		0		0	
Meghalaya	0		0		0	
Mizoram	0		0		0	
Nagaland	0		0		0	
Odisha	5	100	0		5	.08
Punjab	21	87.5	3	12.5	24	.4
Rajasthan	0		0		0	
Sikkim	33	94.3	2	5.7	35	.6
Tamil Nadu	63	92.6	5	7.4	68	1.2
Telangana	751	83.6	147	16.4	898	15.9
Tripura	0		0		0	
Uttar Pradesh	59	93.6	4	6.4	63	1.1
Uttarakand	0		0		0	
West Bengal	0		0		0	
TOTAL (STATES)	5171	91.7	471	8.3	5642	99.9
UNION TERRITORIES						

Andaman & Nicobar Islands	7	87.5	1	12.5	8	.1
Chandigarh	0		0		0	
Dadar & Nagar Haveli	0		0		0	
Daman & Diu	0		0		0	
Delhi (UT)	0		0		0	
Lakshadweep	0		0		0	
Puducherry	0		0		0	
TOTAL (UTs)	7		1		8	.1
TOTAL	5178	91.64	472	8.36	5650	100

Source: Government of India, Annual Report 2013-14, Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India, National Crime Reports Bureau.

A total of 5178 male farmers and 472 female farmers have committed suicides, accounting for 91.6 and 8 percent of total farmers' suicides. Out of the total female suicide, 42, 31, 16, 16, 3 percentages were reported from Jammu & Kashmir, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Telengana and Maharashtra respectively. In Maharashtra alone a total of 2568 farmers' suicides were reported followed by 898 in Telangana and 826 in Madhya Pradesh, accounting for 46, 16 and 15 percentages respectively, while Chhattisgarh and Karnataka accounted for 8 and 6 percent of the total farmer suicides reported in the country. These five States together accounted for more than 90 percent of the total farmer suicides reported in the country during 2014 (GoI 2014).

Table-3

Farmer suicide report from 1995 to 2014 in India:

Year	Farmers and farm labour's suicide(all states and UT of India)
1995	10720
1996	13729
1997	13622
1998	16015
1999	16082
2000	16603
2001	16415
2002	17971
2003	17164
2004	18241
2005	17131
2006	17060
2007	16632
2008	16796
2009	17368
2010	15964
2011	14027
2012	13754
2013	11772
2014	12360

Source: Compiled from Government of India, Annual Reports of 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-14, 2013-14, National Crime Reports Bureau.

In this report the suicidal tendencies among farmers had been increasing from 1995-2004, when the farmers were committing suicide at a large number. In 2004 these numbers exceed 18000. But introduction of several policies and plans, like relief package (in 2006), agricultural debt waiver (2008) and debt relief scheme (2008), the suicidal rates decreased but its rate is very slow. In 2014, the number has increased. It is shocking that despite all schemes, plans, projects implemented by the government, the significant impact to reduce the suicidal tendencies among the farmer is not very encouraging.

Table-4
Age group wise farmer's suicide distribution 2014

Sex	Age				Total
	Below 18 years	18-29 years	30-59 year	60 years and above	
Male	35	1131	3480	532	5178
Female	24	169	232	47	472
Total	59	1300	3712	579	5650
% Share	1%	23%	65.7%	10.2%	100%

Source: Government of India, Annual Report 2013-14, Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India, National Crime Reports Bureau.

A total of 59 farmers (below 18 years of age) have committed suicides during 2014. Ten percent of farmers who have committed suicides were senior citizens (60 years & above). Generally it has been shown that among the age group 30-59 years, suicide rate is very high compare to the other group. Generally the peoples in this group are encircled by their families. For the betterment of the lifestyle and other reasons they take loans but cannot repay. Hence debt turns out to be the major problem. Other family problems would also arise in this period, thus accounting it to family reasons.

Landholding and Suicide

Landholding and suicide trends seem to be interlinked. However many peasants who are landless and do not hold any land also commit suicide. Such number has not been clearly provided in the details provided in the reports of NCRB.

Table-5
Land holding capacity wise farmer suicide distribution

Type of farmers	Suicide percentages
Marginal farmer	27.9
Small farmer	44.5
Medium farmer	25.2
Large farmer	2.3

Source: Government of India, Annual Report 2013-14, Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India, National Crime Reports Bureau.

According to the land holding capacity the farmers are divided into four categories such as marginal, small, medium and large. The statistics portrayed

that small and marginal farmers' suicide rates are 44 and 28 percent. The two categories of farmers together account for 72 percent of all farmer suicides.

Table-6
Statewise landholding and suicide caste with gender demography

States	Marginal			Small			Medium			Large		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Andhra Pradesh	62	2	64	48	0	48	46	1	47	1	0	1
Arunachal Pradesh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Assam	4	0	4	10	0	10	7	0	7	0	0	0
Bihar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chhattisgarh	120	16	136	173	22	195	78	11	89	20	3	23
Goa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gujarat	3	0	3	8	0	8	17	13	30	3	1	4
Haryana	0	0	0	2	0	2	10	0	10	2	0	2
Himachal Pradesh	12	2	14	16	2	18	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jammu& Kashmir	6	5	11	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Jharkhand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Karnataka	50	1	51	144	5	149	100	17	117	3	1	4
Kerala	44	0	44	43	0	43	18	0	18	2	0	2
Madhya Pradesh	324	79	403	225	42	267	133	17	150	6	0	6
Maharashtra	601	26	627	1303	32	1335	533	11	544	61	1	62
Manipur	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Meghalaya	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mizoram	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nagaland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Odisha	0	0	0	5	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Punjab	2	1	3	12	2	14	7	0	7	0	0	0
Rajasthan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sikkim	22	0	22	0	0	0	11	2	13	0	0	0
Tamil Nadu	46	2	48	14	3	17	3	0	3	0	0	0
Telangana	110	19	129	326	40	366	299	78	377	16	10	26
Tripura	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Uttar Pradesh	12	1	13	35	3	38	11	0	11	1	0	1
Uttarakhand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Bengal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total (States)	1418	154	1572	2364	151	2515	1274	150	1424	115	16	131
Union Territories												
A & N Islands	7	0	7	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chandigarh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
D & N Haveli	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Daman & Diu	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Delhi (Ut)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lakshadweep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Puducherry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1425	154	1579	2364	152	2516	1274	150	1425	115	16	131

Source: Government of India, Annual Report 2013-14, Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India, National Crime Reports Bureau.

This data reveals some important factors where state wise farmer's suicide rate is enlisted. Here we can see in some states or in specify in some region the suicide rate is high compare to another state. Most number of marginal and small farmer's death was recorded in the states of Maharashtra (627 and 1335) followed by Karnataka (324 and 267) and Telangana (110 and 366). In the case of medium and large farmers' too, Maharashtra stands in first position (533 and 62).

The small farmers have a minimum amount of land but a large farmer and medium farmer's land is larger where they cultivate varieties of crop. A small farmer completely depends upon one type of crop. In the case of medium and large farmers if there is a crop failure, they would survive, but small farmers cannot. The marginal farmer possess small landholding than the small farmers but they have other income opportunity like they works as a agricultural labour, servant of others house, now they have enlists their name in MGNREGS³ programmes. Hence it seems that the small farmers have a big risk than other categories of farmers. It can be said that in particular that some states of India like Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka farmer's suicide problem is high though they are the richest states in India. Perhaps these incidents happened due to the rural credit system and the negligence of the government.

Conclusion

As with any suicide, mono-causal explanations for farmers' suicides would be totally inadequate and they cannot be explained purely in terms of behavioural patterns and personal psychological motivations. They have to be seen as social phenomena and one has to unearth the underlying social causes. It is worth emphasising this simple point because there have been attempts at late, especially by state functionaries – particularly in the most affected states to delink farm suicides from the agrarian crisis. The claim often made is that a number of farm suicides are not attributable to agrarian crisis and are due to factors like unsustainable life styles of farmers, alcoholism, large expenses on marriages, or due to some incurable diseases. These types of explanations, we believe, are seriously flawed, since they do not view suicides as a social phenomenon.

The agrarian crisis is prominent and the cultivation of the food crops are low. The credit structure is very poor while the banks do not provide the money at the time of cultivation since the farmers do not have some valuable things for bondage. On other side the money lender provides the money immediately but

³ This refers to Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Act

the interest rate is too high. Alternative livelihood options are absent particularly for the poor in the suicide prone states. Thus when the crops fail, they do not have any options.

The basic changes in state policies rarely come without pressures created by mass movements of the deprived sections of the population. India has had an enviable tradition of farmer's movements in pre-independence and post-independence period like Tebhaga movement, Mopala movement, or the Bengal communist movement. But today such movements seem to be dried off. Large numbers of farmers seem to be taking their lives rather than taking to the streets. And suicide is a cry of desperation rather than a form of social protest.

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