
AGRICULTURAL SUICIDE: THE FARMERS' CURSE

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Abstract : India is known as land of agriculture for many but people who are providing basic food to our nation is still under a vicious circle of suicide where they are losing hope of having life with minimum facility. Poor return on cultivation and absence of non farming opportunities are indicator of the preponderant socio-economic illness in rural India. This needs to be addressed as there is a big risk that the farmer faces – production, yield, raw material, technology and last but not the least problem of genuine credit among each other. The increasing case of farmer's suicides is symptomatic of a larger crisis, which is evident in society.

This piece of work would focus the issue related to farmer, suicide case, risk mitigation strategies and other long term strategies which require stable income from agriculture and also from nonfarm sources. So that the curse on farmer can be reduced and the institution can address the tangible and intangible problem of agricultural farmer.

Key words : Agricultural Laborers, Farmers Suicide, Farm Suicides, Farm Population, National Crime.

Introduction : The shifts in the priorities are an unavoidable occurrence for a country like India as the stability in its political structure is itself challenged. The country is still struggling to evaluate it's success either on the basis of systems, policies, their implementation or on the basis of the final outcome confirming that are the on-going ad campaigns of various political parties on the electronic media, where flashy stars can be seen telling the public to vote for one particular party as if telling to use one particular tooth paste to keep our teeth healthy and white. The golden idiom of "actions speak louder than words" starts echoing in our minds and we conclude that the actual doings of the political parties are so less that they actually have to hire window dressers to sell them. The Indian agricultural research system is the largest in the world. It has successfully produced over 3,500 varieties of crops. We are the world's largest milk producer and rank second in food grain, fruit and vegetable production. Such statistics naturally is expected to boost up the moral of our farmers but it fails to do so. And further to intensify the regret, it suggests thousands of causalities due to pathetic financial condition of farmers in almost all the agriculture oriented states in India. On Baisakhi day the front-page news that greets us in the morning is of farmers' suicides. News Papers today are flooding with such headlines. In Sira, 120 km from Bangalore, five farmers and two policemen died in sudden violence, as groundnut farmers burn down the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) office. Only within a week another incident happened where the farmers were offered Rs 900-1,500 a quintal, but later the offer was Rs 400 lower. The reasons officials cite range from a government ban of pulse exports, to a record yield due to plentiful rain. "We have no control in a free market where prices fluctuate

based on demand and supply," plead the officials. Several states, where the suicides continue unabated, are in the dock for neglecting agriculture, bypassing the average farmer, and letting the rural economy shatter. According to agriculture ministry estimates, close to 9,000 farmers, mostly cotton growers have killed themselves in Maharashtra, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. In Sangrur, Punjab, and Vidarbha, Maharashtra, a few villages are even up for sale, though no one's interested. The once-prosperous farmers want buyers, under whom they can work to repay their debts. This paper is an attempt to convert a political agenda into a real life discussion because; we are not going to remain unaffected, if the farmer fails to survive today.

Causes of Suicides: In India farmer are committing suicides due to various reasons. The study of IGIDR, conducted in 2006 is there to support the causes behind the suicide. Another research conducted in the area to support the opinion is The figure related to number of suicide in India in various states and their total percentage of National Crime

Record Bureau is as follow : Indebtedness killing farmers in a country that has witnessed green revolution is distressing enough. The first green revolution precisely depended on farmer training centres, technology assistance to them, and their interaction with crop research and seed development centres. And today unfortunately they are dyeing in absence of all of them. Efforts taken and results drawn are never in tune with each other. Situation deteriorates being deprived of complete remedy to the problem. Taking a brief stock of the circumstances, following emerged as the prime factors responsible for the Indebtedness :

Declining yields and production of traditional crops : Changing weather calls for additional measures to ensure availability of various natural resources but actually they are struggling with absence of farmer training centers, technological assistance to them, and their interaction with crop research and seed development centers. When the monsoon fails, they get caught in the debt trap and have to labour in towns. And when the skies open up, the surplus crop has to be sold at prices that leave them still in debt. Either way, they end up being the loser. Attack of seasonal pests and insects , worsens the situation.

What drives them to suicide*	
Indebtedness	87%
Decline in economic status	74%
Crop failure	41%
Change in social position	36%
Marriageable daughter/sister	34%
Inspired by other suicides	32%
Drug/alcohol addictions	28%
Change in behaviour	26%
Disputes with others	23%
Health problems	21%

*A study on suicides by Maharashtra farmers conducted by the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research

Unplanned diversification into cash crops : Farmers who plant or diversify into cash crops like cotton (or spices and coffee in Kerala and horticulture in Punjab) for higher returns are more affected. They take a much higher risk

because the prices of these crops are more volatile and globally linked. For many, the gamble doesn't pay off. Over time, they accumulate enough debt to get trapped in a vicious cycle of no return. None of these are very poor or subsistence farmers (who grow food which even if they can't sell, they can at least eat and survive); on the contrary, they have land or cattle which could be secured for debt. So when the debt covers all of their assets, they are actually despaired.

Liberalization and globalization : Sliding global prices coupled with a low 10 per cent duty also made imports cheaper; imported cotton now sells at Rs 17,000 a bale compared to Rs 19,000 for Indian cotton. The result: more cotton was imported in the past five years than in the previous two decades. But the central government didn't feel the need to make cash payments to the farmers, as happens in many developed nations, or increase import duties to shelter cotton farmers from the volatility of global markets. Instead, the relief packages talk about starting counseling camps for the farmers, asking them to join Art of Living classes, or attend morning bhajans. For the families of the dead farmers, the politicians promise the moon—like a lucrative compensation package or a promise to get the daughters married. Nothing like that happens. Their inputs were getting costlier, but produce prices were falling, leading to falling incomes and a growing consumption burden.

Farmers' Suicide - The Reality : The various governments claim to have done more than enough to stop the suicides. N. Raghuvendra Reddy, the Andhra Pradesh agriculture minister, says he has accepted 170 of the 174 recommendations made by the Jayati Ghosh Commission. He adds that the Centre, too, is planning a special package for the farmers in 34 districts in four states, including 15 in Andhra Pradesh. Even the Maharashtra government claims to have implemented two relief packages in the affected areas. But recommendations don't work all the way and planning (if prolonged) may take as many more lives as are in acute need of some help. There are many reasons to celebrate the award of the Nobel Peace Prize for 2006 jointly to Muhammad Yunus, the recognized creator of the "microcredit" model of finance for the poor that has swept across the developing world, and to the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh that he founded few decades ago. But before starting the Government appraisal song, a proper evaluation of the model needs to be done. The theory of micro-finance works on the fact that since giving credit is always associated with some risk of default therefore bankers of all types usually require some form of surety (collateral) against which they can lend. And this obviously eliminates the farmers, who are by definition without significant assets and usually also lack secure streams of income through regular employment. So the farmers get automatically excluded from formal financial institutions, and are forced to go to private moneylenders who charge very high rates of interest. The traditional money lenders get an opportunity in such circumstances as they can somehow ensure that the loan and interest are repaid through extra-economic means, or can be extracted by other forms of payment such as labour services. But now we need to evaluate it as the statistics suggests that the geographical sectors where the scheme of micro credit has been accepted widely are now gradually moving towards non-farming employments. The model

propagated highly as to ensure the interest of poor consisting of farmers to a large number actually landed at generating substitute to farm employments even if that could be ensured as being done properly. Now the issue is priority again. If agriculture is the priority, how come we plead micro finance as a remedy to farmers? The idea is not to criticize the micro-credit model but to evaluate the subsidies that are available to a farmer, who wishes to continue with his present occupation. The Government in such circumstances is expected to come out with not lame schemes and rosy assurances but ways to ensure pragmatic remedy to the problem. M.S. Swaminathan, father of the green revolution and now chairman, National Commission on Farmers comments on the situation," we had suggested a Livelihood Security Compact and specific steps for Vidarbha region like a rural non-farm livelihood initiative in the form of agri-business centers, food parks and other rural non-farm employment programmers by restructuring agencies. We have to also get a proper suicide census done. An immediate step would be to launch a price stabilization fund. It should assure remunerative price for farm produce as well as for affordable and timely inputs. Most of the poor farmers depend on the input dealer who, in suicide areas, also doubles up as the moneylender. Ultimately, a single Indian market can solve these problems. With a proper code of conduct, contract farming could be more beneficial for small farmers."

Conclusion : The time is right for introspection and not for patting the back. And the situation demands a high level of state and local administration involvement or the planned no-involvement on an ongoing basis in the agriculture economy, and extension of technological and knowledge empowerment to the grassroots. Telling rosy stories rather mystifies the truth and the poor farmer at the end does not get the sympathy even.

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