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### Farmer Suicide in India

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**Abstract :** *Farmer suicides are the most tragic and dramatic symptom of the crisis of survival faced by Indian peasants. It refers to the intentional ending of one's life by a person dependent on farming as their primary source of livelihood. Rapid increase in indebtedness is at the root of farmers taking their lives. Other causes range from drought to failure of governmental policies. The first state where suicide was noted is Maharashtra in the early 1990s. Soon newspapers began to report similar occurrences from Andhra Pradesh. Maharashtra ranks first in farmer suicide in India with 3146 distressed*

*farmers ending their lives in 2013 according to the latest data released by National Crimes Records Bureau. Suicide among female farmers has increased in the recent years. The chief reason being the anxiety caused by the role of conflict. If the government does not make any urgent legal provision to offer relief to the farmer in affected areas, the whole country will suffer the consequences.*

**Key words:** *farmer suicide, tragic, intentional, government policies, role conflict.*

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#### Introduction :

Farmer suicide is the intentional ending of one's life by a person dependent on farming as their primary source of livelihood. In 2012 the National Crime Records Bureau of India reported 13,754 farmer suicides in India. Rapid increase in indebtedness is at the root of farmers taking their lives. Significant reporting in suicides among farmers in India began in the 1990s by the Rural Affairs Editor of The Hindu, P.Sainath. The first state where the suicide was reported was Maharashtra in 1990. Soon newspapers began to report similar occurrences from Andhra Pradesh. The National Crime Records Bureau of India reported in its 2013 annual report that 1,35,445

people committed suicide in India of which 13,754 were farmers. Of these 5 out of 28 states accounted for 10486 farmer suicides- Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala. Maharashtra has topped the list of farmer suicides in India with 3146 distressed farmers ending their lives in 2013 according to the National Crime Records Bureau (The Hindu, 19.07.2015, p.13). The NCRB figures of 300000 farmer suicides till date reveal that every fifth farmer who ended his life in the country is from Maharashtra, with the maximum incidences from Vidarbha in the eastern part of the state. Farmer suicide rate in Bihar has been about 10 times lower than Maharashtra, Kerala and Pondicherry. Suicides among female farmers is on the rise. In 2012 a total of 2372 women farmers have committed suicide. Farmers need protection through protective legislation to help them to settle their debt or tackle the unprecedented price rise that leads them to commit suicide.

### **Objectives :**

The purpose of this research is to make people aware about:

- History of farmer suicide in India.
- Various causes of farmer suicide in India.
- Consequences of farmer suicide.
- Rehabilitative Measures.
- Role of media in highlighting farmer suicide.

### **Methodology :**

- Information collected from reports of NCRB 2013.
- Information collected from newspapers like The Hindu. The Times of India, Indian Express.
- Study from the different magazines like Yojna and Kurukshetra (May 2014)
- Information collected from websites

### **Tools and Techniques**

- Pictures from authentic websites.
- Data from newspapers and internet.
- Study of trends of farmer suicide.

### **History :**

Significant reporting in suicides among farmers in India began in the 1990s by the Rural Affairs Editor of The Hindu, P.Sainath. The first state where the suicide was reported was Maharashtra in 1990. Soon newspapers began to report similar occurrences from Andhra Pradesh (The Hindu, 29.10.2011).

Some allege the beginning of the increase in farmer suicides to the early 1990s. it was also claimed that while a comprehensive all-India study is still awaited, the most farmer suicides occurred in states of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala and Punjab. P.Sainath noted that India was losing more than 2000 farmers every single day and that since 1991, the overall number of farmers have dropped by 15 million.

In the beginning it was believed that most of the suicides were happening among the cotton growers, specially from the Vidarbha. A look at the figures given out by the State Crime Records Bureau, however was sufficient to indicate that it was not just the cotton farmers but farmers as a professional category were suffering, irrespective of their holding size (The Hindu, 29.10.2011).

### **Causes :**

- Indebtedness: Private money lenders charge high interest rates between 48-60% per annum. Although the co-operative sector brought down their interest rates to 7% the farmers are still taking loans from private individuals.
- Drought: Inadequate rainfall cause drought making crop failure more common. In the regions that have

experienced drought crop yields have declined and capital has become scarce.

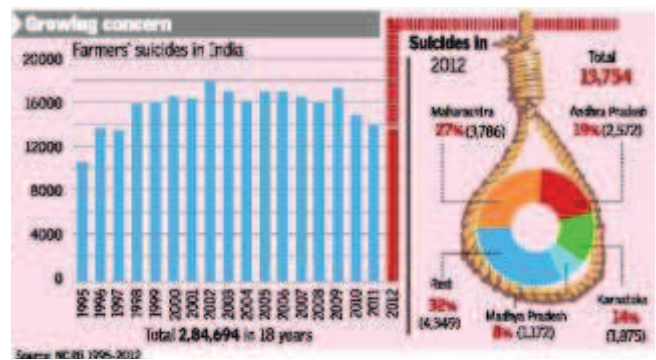
- Genetically Modified Crops: A number of social activist groups and studies proposed a link between genetically modified crops and farmer suicides. Bt cotton was claimed to be responsible for farmer suicide.
- Cropping Pattern: Monoculture and uniformity in cropping pattern increases the risk of crop failure. Diverse seeds adapted to diverse ecosystems are replaced by the rush introduction of and often untested seeds into the market.
- Failure of Government Policies: The government only helps a fraction of farmers. The civil society organisations, local government and panchayats are not consulted.
- Other Causes :
  - New Economic Policy
  - Suicide Ideation
  - Minimum Support Price
  - Groundwater
  - Health Factor
  - Neutral Seeds
  - Lack of Power Supply
  - Expensive Technologies

**Farmer Suicide Statistics :**

The National Crime Records Bureau of India reported in its 2013 annual report that 135445 people have committed suicides in India of which 13754 were farmers (NCRB Report, 2013). Of these 5 out of 28 states accounted for 10486 farmer suicides- Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala. In 2012 a

total of 135585 people committed suicide of which 14207 were farmers. In 2011, 15963 farmers have committed suicide in India. Farmer suicide rates in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh – two large states of India by population and size – have been about 10 times lower than Maharashtra , Kerala and Pondicherry. In 2012 there were 745 farmer suicides in Uttar Pradesh, a state with an estimated population of 205.43 million.

**Figure 1. Year Wise Distribution of Farmer Suicide In India (1995 – 2012)**



This is a graph depicting the rate of farmers suicide in India from 1995 to 2012. 2002 had the highest rate of farmer suicide in India. The main reason behind it was the failure of the government policies. A total of 284694 farmers committed suicide in 18 years(1995 – 2012).

**Figure 2. State Wise Distribution of Farmer Suicide In India**



This is a graph depicting farmer suicides in the four major cotton growing states of India.

Maharashtra has the highest rate of farmer suicide with 3786 farmers ending their life in 2012. Madhya Pradesh had the lowest rate among the four major cotton growing states with 1172 farmers ending their lives in 2012. A total of 13754 farmers have committed suicides in 2012 from the four major cotton growing states in India.

#### **Maharashtra Ranks First in Farmer Suicide :**

Maharashtra topped the list of farmer suicide in India with 3146 distressed farmers ending their lives in 2013 according to the NCRB (NCRB Report, 2013). There have been 6076 farmer suicides in the state since 1995. The data from NCRB shows 300000 farmer suicides till date and revealed that every fifth farmer who ended his life in the country is from Maharashtra, with the maximum incidences from Vidarbha in the eastern part of the state.

Besides increasing cost of inputs and cultivation practices, monoculture or dependence on a single crop only, poor awareness of agronomics and lack of proper credit availability leads to an increased hold of private moneylender which leads to suicide.

#### **Farmer Suicide in Bihar :**

Farmer suicide rate in Bihar have been ten times lower than Maharashtra, Kerala and Pondicherry (NCRB, 2012). In 2012, Jagdish Sharma, a maize cultivator from Katihar district had committed suicide (IFFCO, 2012). He was a Maize cultivator. In that year 50000 of the 3.75 lakh hectares of land under maize cultivation in the state had been damaged. Crop failure had been due to poor seed quality and bad weather. Yavendra Chowdhury of Purnia too found to his dismay that the maize crop had failed. Purnia which is one of the badly hit districts during the Kosi floods in 2008 has 12225 hectares under maize cultivation and the crop failure for the three consecutive years (2008-2011) had likely broken the backbone of the farmers (Google, 19.07.2015).

As India's most flood prone state 76% of the population in North Bihar lives under threat of flood devastation. The area prone to floods in Bihar was assessed by Rashtriya Barh Aayog to be 42.60 lakh hectares. Due to heavy rains, water released by Nepal is believed to be another major reason for the floods.

#### **Female Farmer Suicide :**

Suicide among the female farmers is on the rise. Out of the 13754 farmer suicides in India in 2012, 2372 farmers were females. Reasons most commonly given are role conflict and high workload. Farming women often become stressed and fatigued due to multiple tasks and the conflict between their traditional roles as a housemaker and the need for off farm income. As household work has become less profitable, women are taking more and more of farmwork to supplement the family income. Thus female farmers have an additional burden of performing household chores apart from farming. This makes farm women a risk category for suicide (Navdanya, 2007, Chapter 3, 4).

#### **Global Perspective :**

Farmer suicide is a global phenomenon. Outside India, studies in Sri Lanka, U.S.A, Canada, England and Australia have identified farming as a high stress work that is associated with a high suicide rate than in general population. This particularly is true among small scale farmers and in general after periods of economic distress. Farming population in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and United States have the highest rates of suicides of any industry and there is a growing evidence that those involved in farming are at higher risk of developing mental health problems. Their review claims a wide range of reasons behind farmer suicides globally including mental health issues, physical environment, family problems and economic stress. Significantly higher suicide rate among

farmers than general population have been reported in the developed countries such as UK and USA.

#### **Government Schemes :**

A number of relief measures to address the distressed farmers are available in the schemes sponsored both by the government of India and the state governments.

- **Rashtriya Krishi Bima Yojna (2006) :** It was introduced by the government of India during 1999-2000. The main objective of the scheme is to provide insurance coverage and financial support to farmers in the event of failure of any of the notified crops as a result of natural calamities, overuse of pests and crop diseases.
- **Minimum Support Price (1996-67) :** Minimum Support Price is one of the important mechanisms developed and implemented jointly by the Central and State Governments over years to avoid distress sale of agricultural produce. This was implemented for crops like paddy, jowar, maize, bajra, tur, green gram, black gram, soyabean, groundnut, sunflower, Bengal gram and cotton.
- **Sankata Harana (2001-02) :** This is a novel scheme introduced by IFFCO during 2001-02. Under this scheme any farmer purchasing fertilizer through cooperative societies would qualify for the relief for accidental death.
- **National Food Security Mission :** In order to increase the productivity of farm produce and to give ultimate advantage to the farmers, the Government of India through Ministry of Agriculture has introduced various programmes in which National Food Security Mission is one of

the major program formulated to increase the productivity of pulses.

#### **Consequences :**

If the government does not make any urgent recommendations or legal provisions to offer relief to the trend of farmer suicide in affected states, the whole country will suffer the consequences. Some of these are given below :

- Food inflation will rise at an alarming rate.
- The government is left with the huge task of rehabilitating the families of the deceased farmers.
- It causes a lot of psychological distress to the family of the deceased farmers.
- Widows are burdened with new responsibility as the bread winner of the family
- There is an increased social stigma.
- It also adversely effects the education of children.
- Farms are confiscated due to inability to pay back high interest loans. There is also loss of assets i.e. domestic livestock animals and agricultural implements.
- It also leads to child labour, thus resulting in deterioration in physical health of child.
- The families due to poverty, get transferred from farm labour to permanent labours.

#### **Rehabilitative Measures :**

- Counselling can be provided to the farmer's family.
- The families can be helped to gain benefits of various government schemes.
- Dependent family members can be provided with guidance to other livelihood alternatives.

- Seed support, manure, tank silt and cost of cultivation can be provided.
- Interest free loans and free health insurance services are also required.

#### **Role of Media in Depicting Farmer Suicide :**

- In 2010, the award winning film "**Jhing Chik Jhing**" was based around the emotive issue of farmer suicide.
- "**Summer 2007**" by producer Atul Pandey and 2009 Bollywood film *Kissan* stressed on farmer suicides.
- A new feature film **PEEPLI LIVE** written and directed by Anusha Rizwi and produced by Bollywood actor Aamir Khan tackles head on the grim topic of farmer suicides. Aamir Khan shines the spotlight on what caused an estimated 1,50,000 farmer suicides in India.
- **I WANT MY FATHER BACK** is, a short documentary written in 2008 by Priyanka, a social worker based at Vidarbha. It is a story of a father who had committed suicide, succumbing to the debts he had accumulated due to the poor yield from his cotton farms and government policies that opened up the market to Multinational companies without price regulations.

#### **Findings :**

- Our team visited the Department of Agriculture, Bihar and met the Deputy Secretary, Sanjay Kumar. According to him the rate of farmer suicide in Bihar is very low. The reason given by him is the effective implementation of various government policies.
- Farmer suicide is one of the most serious problems facing the country.

- There are many factors which contribute to farmer suicide in India ranging from health problems to failure of government policies.
- Suicide among female farmers has increased in recent years.
- Apart from India, Sri Lanka, USA, Canada, England and Australia have also identified farming as high stress that is associated with a high suicide rate.
- Government schemes have failed to address the issues of farmers in India.

#### **Suggestions :**

- Minimum Support Price mechanism for agriculture could be appropriate to considerable increase in agricultural inputs.
- A groundwater scheme and the line department could be integrated in order that the schemes are implemented effectively.
- Relevant research could be promoted, particularly dry land agriculture, for the development of drought and disease resistance seeds of pulses.
- Formal banking system in the rural area could cover all the credit requirements of farmer and the coverage of the formal financial system could be extended to all rural households.
- A distress fund could be set up to provide support to banks in drought prone areas and permit some debt relief to cultivators in extreme distress.
- Monitoring of the adverse effects of droughts and pests on agriculture and bringing in the required incentives by the

appropriate agencies could be undertaken to mitigate distress on account of these calamities.

- Proper opportunities to promote rural employment including nonfarm employment could be identified diversification in agriculture encouraged and value addition activities such as agro processing in rural area developed in a way that benefit farmers.
- Crop failures are a disaster for farmers and their families. Therefore government should make legal provision about crop insurance.
- Promoting relevant research is necessary, particularly dry land agriculture for the development of drought and disease resistance seeds of pulses.

#### **Conclusion :**

At last we can conclude that farmer suicide is one of the serious problems which needs immediate attention. The various measures adopted by government have only partially succeeded in recent times. It also needs to launch new schemes related to farmers' condition. Agriculture contributes 14.2% to the GDP of India. Therefore farmers need to be protected as they constitute an integral part of our country.

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