

Research Paper



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AGRARIAN CRISIS IN INDIA, TRACING THE TRAJECTORIES SINCE REFORMS: A STUDY OF TELANGANA

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture has become a complex sector in India, facing crisis at multiple levels, which exacerbates the food quality and security crisis, the environmental crisis so forth. Suicides of farmers are the cause of concern. The number of suicide cases in rural parts has been mounting. Since mid-1990s more than three lakh farmers are dead by this distress. In the present liberalized trade market, farmers are exposed to price volatility because of fluctuations in domestic production and international prices of agricultural commodities. The most serious aspect of this crisis is deceleration in agricultural growth. The crisis in Indian agriculture is not a recent phenomenon. The severity of the crisis can be easily accessed from the series of increasing farmer suicides and farm debt. Take tenant farmers, those who cultivate the land owned by others, paying a rent in cash or with a share of the produce. Most tenancy contracts in India are in formal and not recorded. So, tenant farmers struggle to get bank credit, causing indebtedness to moneylenders, as a result committing suicides. However, with no record of identity, tenant farmers have all along been undercounted in the farmer's suicide category. The economic crisis is reflected in the increasing costs and decreasing returns, reducing budgetary support and increasing indebtedness. According to the Economic Survey 2015-16, agricultural growth was below 0.2% in 2014-15. Maharashtra, AP including Telangana, Karnataka, MP and Chhattisgarh are the 'Big 5' states of farmer suicides. The crops in Telangana mainly depend on rainfall, the region in general has the history of prolonged dry spells, high incidences of rainwater run offs causing soil erosion. Change in climatic conditions has also severely impacted on farming community with shortage of rains greatly reduces yields and profits. Most farmers in the State are tenants and majority farmers are small and marginal farmers. According to NCRB report, majority farmers who committed suicides are small and marginal farmers accounting for 74.2 per cent. On the other hand, non-agriculture sectors are not willing to provide employment to the large numbers leaving from agriculture. By and large, this paper attempts to throw light on the persisting agrarian distress in India in general and Telangana since reforms in particular. **Methodology** for this study includes the secondary data sources like National Crime Report Bureau (NCRB) Report 2016 which is used to analyze national level tendency of farmers' suicides and the possible reasons and the to explain the situation in Telangana. The primary sources of the data have been collected through a questionnaire from the families of deceased farmers and the major observation focuses on age of the deceased farmers, social relations in the villages, and major causes of the farmers' suicides. This paper **Hypothesizes** that with changing policies in the name of reforms, the agrarian structure manifested into grave distress, subsequently the small and marginal farmers are the most affected.

KEYWORDS: Agrarian Crisis, Small and Marginal Farmers, Changing Policies

INTRODUCTION

Agrarian Crisis has forever been a major social and economic issue in India, regardless of the growth of institutional credit to agricultural, indebtedness among farmers persists. The prosperity of India depends on agriculture and 58 per cent populations are engaged in the agriculture sector for their livelihood. After independence, it was our national requirement

that India should self-reliant in agricultural products. To acquire self-reliant status India introduced new scientific approach like green revolution to agriculture. After the Green Revolution and liberalization and globalization agricultural activities have become high investment in modern inputs. Neoliberal reforms promote liberalization, privatization and globalization State support to agriculture curtailed with a view to reducing



subsidies to meet fiscal deficit targets under the World Bank-IMF SAP agenda. As a result, input costs rise sharply. Financial liberalization reduces access to institutional credit for agriculture and leads to a sharp rise in real interest rates. Opening the economy to imports of agricultural products at a time of global deflation in agricultural prices leads to crash in output prices. Result massive agrarian distress. Dismantling controls and “freeing” private players Privatization, with related “incentives” opening the economy to “free” cross border flows of capital and commodities Exclusive focus on reducing the fiscal deficit by reducing Expenditure

The states which have had largest number of farm suicides for several years now including Maharashtra (2568), Telangana (898), Madhya Pradesh (836), Chattisgarh(443) and Karnataka (321). According to NCRB data for earlier years, a total of 37,912 farmers committed suicides in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in the last 19 years. Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat etc .For 2016, the NCRB’s ADSI report is still awaited. Compilations from media reports are always matter of under-reporting. The reported data of around 6867 farm suicides for 2016 is mainly from 5 states, as recent statements made in the State Legislature (Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra), or as numbers cited by Opposition (Tamil Nadu) or from compilation of media reports in the case of Telangana. This is 55% of 2015’s numbers, from just 5 states. Information seems to indicate nearly 6867 farm suicides, that too in a year when many states had tided over the drought crisis that was experienced in the earlier 2 years.

Economic Reforms:

The biggest input for farmers is seeds. Before liberalization, farmers across the country had access to seeds from state government institutions. The institutions produced its own seeds, were responsible for their quality and price, and had a statutory duty to ensure that seeds were supplied to all the regions in the state, no matter how remote. The seed market was well regulated, and this ensured quality in privately sold seeds too. With liberalization, India’s seed market was opened to global agribusinesses like Monsanto, Cargill and Syn Genta. Also, following the deregulation guidelines of the IMF many state government institutions were closed in 2003. These hit farmers doubly hard: in an unregulated market, seed prices shot up, and fake seeds made an appearance in a big way. Farmers were encouraged to shift from growing a mixture of traditional crops to export oriented ‘cash crops’ like chili, cotton and tobacco. These need far more inputs, pesticide, fertilizer and water than traditional crops. Liberalization policies reduced pesticide and fertilizer subsidy (another explicit condition of the IMF agreement). Fertilizer prices have increased by 300% and electricity tariffs have also been increased. Pre-liberalization, subsidized electricity was a success, allowing farmers to keep costs of production low.

Studies show that after the economic reforms the government’s expenditure and investment in the agricultural sector has reduced drastically. This is based on the policy of minimum intervention by the government enunciated by the policy of globalization. The expenditure of the government in rural development, including agriculture, irrigation, flood control, village industry, energy and transport, declined from an average of 14.5 per cent in 1986-1990 to six per cent in 1995-2000. As part of the economic reforms, the system of taking over land by the government for commercial and

industrial purposes was introduced in the country. As per the Special Economic Zones Act of 2005, the government has so far notified about 400 such zones in the country. Very often it is fertile land which has been acquired. The government has acquired five million hectares of land for purposes other than agriculture between 1991 and 2003.

The state of agriculture in Telangana

The crops in Telangana are mainly depends on rainfall, the region in general has the history of prolonged dry spells, high incidences of rainwater run-offs causing soil erosion. Change in climatic conditions has also severely impact on farming community with shortage of rains greatly reduces yields and profits. Telangana receives rainfall mostly during South-West monsoon period; it needs adequate rainfall in order to be agriculturally sustainable.

Most farmers in the State do not own the land they cultivate and majority of farmers are small with land holding more than 1 hectare and less than 2 hectare and marginal farmers with land holding upto 1 hectare. According to NCRB report, a majority who committed suicides was small and marginal farmers and both put together accounts for 74.2 percent of total farmer suicides, which also includes landless agriculture labourers, tenant farmers, oral leases and shape-croppers. As per Telangana agriculture department statistics (2015) the distribution of land in Telangana is that 44.73 percent families are landless and there are 55.54 lakh operational holdings with an area of 61.97 lakh hectares – Marginal farmers holds (34.41 lakh numbers), Small (13.27 lakh numbers), semi-medium (6.03 lakh numbers), Medium (1.67 lakh numbers) and Large (0.16 lakh numbers).

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are-

- To Analyses the Causes behind the continuing Agrarian Crisis in Telangana.
- To Analyses the factors behind the farmer suicides in Telangana.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

K. Nagaraj, et al. (2013) Farmers’ Suicides in India: Magnitudes, Trends, and Spatial Patterns, 1997-2012, The last decade has seen a high degree of agrarian distress in India, of which the large number of suicides by farmers across the country is stark evidence. Despite one-off efforts by some State governments, activist organizations, and the press to enquire into the phenomenon, there is a need for a comprehensive picture based on a single, nation-wide data source. The present paper is a modest attempt to fill this gap in analysis. Using secondary data on suicides by profession, obtained from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the paper provides a simple analysis of the magnitude of, and trends in, farmers’ suicides in India from 1997 to 2012, and of regional patterns in these suicides. He argues that while the socio-economic causes underlying farm suicides are complex and require further empirical work, there can be little denying that farm suicides are strongly linked to the larger context of agrarian distress in the country.

G. Saritha (2015) paper titled Agrarian Crisis and Farmers Suicides in India a Case Study of Andhra Pradesh, the authors classified in two parts of Agrarian Crisis National and State level Agriculture continues to play a predominant role in influencing the overall performance of the Indian economic.

Agriculture is the main occupation for more than 60 percent of Indian population. Indian agriculture has been passing through a phase of crisis. The crisis in agriculture has many manifestations, of which suicides of farmers one is that came as a rude jolt. Andhra Pradesh is the first state of suicides by farmers. Here some causes of agrarian distress and farmers suicides in Andhra Pradesh monsoon failure, increasing cost of cultivation mono cropping. The exact causes of agrarian distress may vary from one to another state but everybody agrees on the common causes i.e., external trade liberalization and neo-liberal policy driven reforms in the economy have divested the life of agrarian community who have embraced agriculture as their main occupation. While the workforce in agriculture has remained stagnant its contribution to nations GDP has been steadily declining ratio of worker productivity in agriculture to non-agriculture. Because an increasing number of holdings and constant and even declining cultivable land area, the burden of farmers has been increasing. Instead, the task of resolution of these contradictions has been rendered more complicated.

Pauline Ahoy (2016) paper titled Agrarian Crisis India: An Aftermath of the New Economic Reforms, the authors have offered number of conflicting reasons for farmer suicides, such as monsoon failure, high debt burdens, genetically modified crops, government policies, public mental health, personal issues and family problems. Seeds produce higher yields and are pest resistant are highly disputed. Output is not

commensurate with the heavy investment in the seeds, and farmers are pushed into debt. The agricultural sector in India is facing a crisis today. The LPG process, which started in the 1990s, is the main reason for this crisis. The solution of the problem is not in a few "packages" but in drastic changes in the present economic policies related to agriculture. For this, the government should be ready to take bold steps. It is high time that the government and the people realize that India can become a real "superpower" only when most of the people, especially the farmers in the rural areas, become prosperous and are really empowered. His will be focusing mainly on the government policies leading to agrarian crisis.

Buta Ram (2017) Paper title, Agrarian Crisis in India-Its Causes and Effects, Indian farmer who works without any prior training and coursework and without any eligibility criteria when enters into his work he faced many problems such as huge indebtedness, poverty, low standard of living, pessimistic outlook etc. the one of the major effects of these problems is agrarian crisis in India. Farmer's suicides are raising day by day. The five States Maharashtra, Telangana, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala and the top most states where farmers' suicide is rising continuously. Crop failure indebtedness, bankruptcy, government policies, vicious circle of poverty, illiteracy, pessimistic outlook, domestic affairs, drug addiction, old traditions etc. are the major cause responsible for it. There is a great need to make a radical change in the outlook of the farmers towards agriculture to check this agrarian crisis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Farmers suicides since June 2014 to June 2017 in Telangana State.

Table - Farmers Suicides since June 2014 - June 2017 in Telangana State															
S. No.	Districts	2014		2015		2016		2017		Total		Women Farmers 2014 - 2017		Total (7+8)	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Nalgonda	83	10.48	109	9.50	111	14.16	32	9.47	335	10.94	24	13.56	359	11.09
2	Siddipet	87	10.98	84	7.32	61	7.78	36	10.65	268	8.76	15	8.47	283	8.74
3	Warangal Rural	37	4.67	62	5.40	54	6.89	15	4.44	168	5.49	9	5.08	177	5.47
4	Medak	43	5.43	63	5.49	30	3.83	13	3.85	149	4.87	5	2.82	154	4.76
5	Vikarabad	26	3.28	63	5.49	44	5.61	10	2.96	143	4.67	10	5.65	153	4.73
6	Nagarkurnool	48	6.06	53	4.62	25	3.19	11	3.25	138	4.51	8	4.52	145	4.48
7	Adilabad	44	5.56	42	3.66	34	4.34	14	4.14	135	4.41	5	2.82	139	4.29
8	Shamshabad	34	4.29	55	4.79	31	3.95	12	3.55	133	4.34	8	4.52	140	4.32
9	Bhupalpalle	31	3.91	46	4.01	26	3.32	29	8.58	132	4.31	15	8.47	147	4.54
10	Sangareddy	25	3.16	43	3.75	34	4.34	13	3.85	115	3.76	3	1.69	118	3.64
11	Karimnagar	21	2.65	44	3.84	29	3.70	8	2.37	102	3.33	9	5.08	111	3.43
12	Nirmal	29	3.66	42	3.66	20	2.55	6	1.78	97	3.17	2	1.13	99	3.06
13	Jangaon	25	3.16	34	2.96	27	3.44	11	3.25	97	3.17	8	4.52	105	3.24
14	Yadadri	17	2.15	35	3.05	24	3.06	16	4.73	93	3.04	6	3.39	98	3.03
15	Sircilla Rajanna	24	3.03	29	2.53	25	3.19	5	1.48	83	2.71	2	1.13	85	2.63
16	Mahabubnagar	23	2.90	34	2.96	18	2.30	7	2.07	83	2.71	6	3.39	88	2.72
17	Kamareddy	27	3.41	27	2.35	14	1.79	8	2.37	80	2.61	1	0.56	77	2.38
18	Khammam	15	1.89	22	1.92	26	3.32	16	4.73	79	2.58	3	1.69	82	2.53
19	Kothagudem	18	2.27	23	2.01	20	2.55	13	3.85	77	2.52	1	0.56	75	2.32
20	Jagtial	12	1.52	31	2.70	21	2.68	12	3.55	76	2.48	5	2.82	81	2.50
21	Wanaparthy	19	2.40	32	2.79	19	2.42	2	0.59	74	2.42	8	4.52	80	2.47
22	Mahabubabad	19	2.40	26	2.27	15	1.91	10	2.96	70	2.29	7	3.95	77	2.38
23	Warangal	19	2.40	19	1.66	20	2.55	6	1.78	64	2.09	5	2.82	69	2.13
24	Peddapalle	11	1.39	29	2.53	13	1.66	9	2.66	62	2.03	3	1.69	65	2.01
25	Suryapet	14	1.77	26	2.27	8	1.02	8	2.37	57	1.86	5	2.82	61	1.88
26	Nizamabad	10	1.26	28	2.44	13	1.66	3	0.89	57	1.86	0	0.00	54	1.67
27	Gadwal	5	0.63	25	2.18	8	1.02	3	0.89	41	1.34	3	1.69	44	1.36
28	Mancherla	17	2.15	10	0.87	5	0.64	4	1.18	36	1.18	1	0.56	37	1.14
29	Komaram Bheem	9	1.14	8	0.69	4	0.51	4	1.18	25	0.82	0	0.00	25	0.77
30	Medchal	0	0.00	3	0.26	5	0.64	0	0.00	8	0.26	0	0.00	8	0.25
	#N/A	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.59	2	0.07	0	0.00	2	0.06
	Grand Total	792	100	1147	100	784	100	338	100	3061	100	177	100	3238	100

Source: Rythu Swarajya Vedika

This above table gives the information on farmers' suicides in the entire Telangana State from June 2014 to June 2017. In total there were almost 3,238 farmers committed suicides. The highest numbers of suicides were recorded in 2015, that is 1,147. And in the year 2017 lowest number of

suicides 338 was recorded. There are 177 women farmers committed suicide between June 2014 and June 2017. More farmers committed suicide in Nalgonda district. After Nalgonda, it is the newly formed Siddipeta district that holds second place.

Table 2: Details of highest farmers suicides districts in Telangana State from 2014-17

Table - Details of Highest farmers suicides districts in Telangana State															
S. No.	Districts	2014		2015		2016		2017		Total		Women Farmers 2014 - 2017		Total (7+8)	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Nalgonda	83	27.04	109	25.53	111	34.05	32	23.70	335	28.03	24	30.77	359	28.20
2	Siddipet	87	28.34	84	19.67	61	18.71	36	26.67	268	22.43	15	19.23	283	22.23
3	Warangal Rural	37	12.05	62	14.52	54	16.56	15	11.11	168	14.06	9	11.54	177	13.90
4	Medak	43	14.01	63	14.75	30	9.20	13	9.63	149	12.47	5	6.41	154	12.10
5	Vikarabad	26	8.47	63	14.75	44	13.50	10	7.41	143	11.97	10	12.82	153	12.02
6	Bhupalpalle	31	10.10	46	10.77	26	7.98	29	21.48	132	11.05	15	19.23	147	11.55
Grand Total		307	100	427	100	326	100	135	100	1195	100	78	100	1273	100

Source: Rythu Swarajya Vedika

This table shows highest farmers suicides districts in Telangana State from 2014 to 17. There are six major districts out of 32 recording highest number of suicides including Nalgonda, Siddipet, Warangal Rural, Medak, Vikarabad, and Bhupalapalle. In these four years there are 1273 farmers committed suicide. The highest number of suicides is from Nalgonda 359 comprising almost 28 per cent. And lowest number out of these six is from Bhupalapalle 147 which is 11.55 per cent. In these four years 2015 has more suicides

than the other years, that is 427. The lowest suicides are recorded in 2017 with a figure of 135. It is observed that in all these four years, 78 women farmers also committed suicide. In 2015 highest suicides have recorded in Nalgonda. Nalgonda alone claimed lives of 100 out of 427 lives in the entire state which comprises almost 25 per cent. The lowest numbers of suicides were recorded in the year 2017 amounting to 135. Of which highest 36 were recorded in Siddipeta which is a little higher than Nalgonda. But comparing with all the other districts Nalgonda occupied the dominant position in farmer suicides.

Table 3: Age of the farmers who committed suicides.

S. No.	Districts	Age				Overall
		< 25 Years	26 - 40	41 - 55	56 and above	
1	Nalgonda	2 8.00	5 20.00	12 48.00	6 24.00	25 100.00
2	Siddipet	4 16.00	6 24.00	10 40.00	5 20.00	25 100.00
3	Warangal Rural	3 12.00	5 20.00	14 56.00	3 12.00	25 100.00
4	Medak	1 4.00	7 28.00	13 52.00	4 16.00	25 100.00
5	Vikarabad	2 8.00	4 16.00	13 52.00	6 24.00	25 100.00
6	Bhupalpalle	2 8.00	6 24.00	10 40.00	7 28.00	25 100.00
Total		14 9.33	33 22.00	72 48.00	31 20.67	150 100.00

Source: Primary Data

The above table elaborates the age details of the farmers who committed suicide in various districts. The farmers are grouped into four categories based on their age. First category consists of farmers below 25 years and the second group between 26 and 40 years, the third between 41 and 55 years and the fourth between 56 years and above. The figures in the table make it evident that most of the farmers who committed suicide are in the category of middle age ranging between 41 and 55. 72 of 150 belonged to this category. This age group constitutes almost half of the total 48 per cent while, 9.33 per cent of the people hail from the age below 25

years. It is noted that the people of this age group are very less in number among the farmers who died of suicides. There are 22 per cent of the people between the age group of 26 and 40 years. And the remaining 20 per cent are from the age group of 56 and above.

Age plays an important role in farming activities. It is generally believed that the farmers of middle aged groups are more dynamic and experienced in taking up farming activities. Age influences thinking of the farmers many a time. Usually the younger farmers are better-off in understanding the problems and facing misery and suffering. However, the



middle aged people do not have adequate mental strength and courage to face the losses and sufferings. Generally, they lose their hope on future. People above 56 years are also mentally weak, peevish and cowardly. It is observed from Table 5.5

that at the overall level, only 5 per cent of the farmers' community who commit suicides are below 25 years. About 44 per cent of them are in the age group of 41 to 55 years, while 22 per cent of them are in the age group of 26 – 40 years.

Table 4: Major causes of farmers' suicides

Major Causes of Farmers' Suicides		
S. No.	Problems	Percentage of farmers reporting the cause %
1	Indebtedness	94
2	Crop loss, crop failure and risk factor	70
3	Input related problems	60
4	Failure of agriculture extension	70
5	Lack of storage and marketing facilities	55
6	Lack of remunerative price	50
7	Absence of agricultural insurance	10
8	Psychological factors	30

Source: Primary Data

The above table explains the causes of farmers' suicides. It is observed that 94 percent of the farmers out of 150 committed suicides due to indebtedness while crop loss is the reason for 70 percent of the farmers suicides. Among other reasons which compel farmers for suicide include input related problems, failure of agricultural extension, lack of storage and marketing facilities, lack of remunerative price, absence of agricultural insurance and psychological factors. The percentages of the causes as mentioned in the table are 60, 70, 55, 50, 10 and 30 respectively. But among all indebtedness is noted to be playing the greater role in farmer's suicides where other reasons are increasing the chances of suicides.

SOCIAL RELATIONS IN THE VILLAGES

Social relations are connected to farmers' suicides directly or indirectly in addition to economic relations. The distress of farmers or suicides may have a chance to be prevented if people in the village extend their counseling and sympathy etc., to the farmers in distress. The tradition of consoling each other in case of difficulties is fast disappearing in the villages. People in the villages are neither sympathetic nor helping the farmers in distress. However, the picture in the selected villages seemed to be different to some extent as is evident from Table 5.

Table 5: Social Relations in the Village of Selected Farmers

S. No.	Category	Social Relation in the village				Overall
		Cordial relation	Sympathetic	Helping	Consoling in case of difficulties	
1	< 1 Acre	12 (16.44)	18 (24.66)	23 (31.51)	20 (27.39)	73 (100.00)
2	1 - 2.5 Acres	42 (20.09)	56 (26.79)	62 (29.67)	49 (23.45)	209 (100.00)
3	2.5 and above	56 (26.05)	48 (22.33)	57 (26.51)	54 (25.11)	215 (100.00)
Total		110 (22.13)	122 (24.55)	142 (28.57)	123 (24.75)	497 (100.00)

Source: Primary Data

CONCLUSION

India is an agrarian country with around 48.9% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. Despite a steady decline of its share in GDP, agriculture is still the largest economic sector and plays a significant role in the overall socio-economic development of our country. It is the main source of food to the growing population. Unfortunately, due to uncertainty of monsoon, non-availability of credit, increasing prices of seeds, pesticides and fertilizers, agriculture has become a most critical industry and farmers are suffering due to economic distress and they

are committing suicide on large scale in different provinces of the country. In the present days the problem of farmers' suicides is one of the vital concerns that need to be addressed by the Government. Considering the paramount importance of this issue, the NCRB (National Crime Record Bureau), for the first time, has collected detailed data on farmers' suicides. The large section of the farm households has been facing a distress as consequence of decline in agricultural income, declined repaying capacity and thereby increased debt burden than others. The failure of these monsoons leading to a series of droughts, lack of better prices, exploitation by Middlemen,

all of which have led to a series of suicides committed by farmers across India. With this backdrop, this study is going to make a state level analysis of the determinants of the farmers' suicide in India. The results have some policy implication

RECOMMENDATIONS

An in-depth analysis of the above issues reveals the severity of the present agrarian crisis. To mitigate the present crisis, the researcher came up with many recommendations, which are as follows:

Input costs should be reduced. Markets must be made available for agricultural produce. A good market price must be provided for the Agro-products. For farmers, credit should be made available at low interest rates. Extension system should be revived to solve problems in the field. There should be a proper system to address the issue of water scarcity. Adequate water for irrigation should be provided. Conserve Agro Bio-Diversity in Gene and Seed banks. Increase budget outlay for Agriculture in every Five-Year plan of the Government of India. Agricultural land should not be given to SEZ. The use of Genetically Modified Seeds should be stopped and organic agricultural practices encouraged. Farmers' Rights law has to be implemented immediately. Investments should be made to restore soil health. Agriculture should be diversified with introduction of new varieties.

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