

# Farmers' Suicide Deaths in India: Can it be Controlled?

M.V. Raghavulu

Deptt of Economics, SSA Government First Grade College, Bellary, Karnataka, India

Email: raghavalu\_veera@yahoo.co.in

Paper no: 96 Received: 12 March, 2013 Revised: 20 April, 2013 Accepted: 15 December, 2013

## Abstract

India is agrarian country, since 72 per cent of the area is rural area and more than 60 per cent of the people depend on this sector. But, the contribution of this sector to the nation's GDP is less than 17 per cent. Agricultural sector has had low production due to a number of factors such as illiteracy, insufficient finance, and inadequate marketing of agricultural produces. Also the growth rate of the agricultural sector in India the GDP has declined due to the fact that the sector has not adopted modern technology and agricultural practices and insufficient irrigation facilities. The time is come to safe guard the agricultural sector and to stop the farmers' suicides in the country. A special package is necessary to provide input subsidy and development of animal husbandry, horticulture and poultry sector and it is more help to the agrarian economy. The government may arrange a package of financial assistance to meet agricultural inputs and to meet expenditures of the social obligations

**Keywords:** Farmers' Suicide, GM Crops, MIS

## Introduction

India is agrarian country, since 72 per cent of the area is rural area and more than 60 per cent of the people depend on this sector. But, the contribution of this sector to the nation's GDP is less than 17 per cent. Agricultural sector has had low production due to a number of factors such as illiteracy, insufficient finance, and inadequate marketing of agricultural produces. Also the growth rate of the agricultural sector in India the GDP has declined due to the fact that the sector has not adopted modern technology and agricultural practices and insufficient irrigation facilities. As a result of this, the sector contribution is deteriorating day to day. Nevertheless, agriculture remains a major source of employment, absorbing about 52 % of the total national workforce in 2004-05, down from about 70 % in 1971. This shows, the sector faced insignificant place in the Indian economy, though India is called as agriculture country since ancient period.

The New Economic Policy of India is not developed in reality in the country as anticipated, especially in the agriculture sector; the Indian farmers are not benefitting either directly or indirectly. The policy has led to a phenomenal rise import cost which manifested in the form of subsidies on fertilizers and pesticides. The banks are not interested to give liberal finances especially marginal farmers and small farmers; ultimately they are getting loan from money lenders with high rate of interest and they are unable to repay the loan amount in due course. With this agrarian crisis, the farmers are committed suicides. The main aim of the paper is to find out causes for farmer' suicides in India and Karnataka and to give suitable suggestions to control it.

### **History of Farmer suicides in India**

The history of Indian farmer suicides is not new but officially available the statistics from 1990s. The first state where suicides were reported was Maharashtra. Soon newspapers has gone to report similar occurrences from Andhra Pradesh. In the beginning it was believed that most of the suicides were happening among the cotton growers, especially those from Vidarbha. However, National Crime Record Bureau is collecting the statistics/information regarding farmers' suicides.

According to the National Crime Records bureau (NCRB) data, more than 216000 farmers have committed suicide since 1997. A record of 2,50,000 farmers have committed suicide in India over the last 13 years. The Big States-5... Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh follow closely, with two thirds (68.4%) of farmer suicides being reported from these states. However, the NCRB figures across 18 years for which data exist show that at least 2,84,694 Indian farmers have taken their lives since 1995. (i.e., accepting the non-figures of Chhattisgarh and West Bengal). The average annual average farmers suicides is 15 369 over a period of 18 years.

During the period 1997-2002, farm suicides in the Big -5 states accounted for roughly one out of every 12 of all suicides in the country. In 2003-08, they accounted for nearly one out of every 10. India saw 1,38,321 farm suicides between 1995 and 2003 at an annual average of 15,369 .During the period 2004-12, the number is 1,466,373 at much higher annual average of 16,264. The Table- 1 reveals that annual average farmers' suicides during 1995-2002 is the highest at 2508 in Maharashtra followed by Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (2304), Karnataka (2259); while in the case of 2003-10 its place is the same.

### **Farmer suicides in Karnataka**

The story of farmers' suicide death in Karnataka is not ended. The farming sector has been going through a painful phase since last few years and a whopping 2909 farmers committed suicide across the state during the last one decade from 2003-04 to July 31<sup>st</sup> 2012. As per the data available state official statistics, on an average 25 farmers committed suicide in Karnataka every month in the last 10 years. This is because, agrarian distress is caused by crop loss on account of drought, floods and diseases; high burden of debts; high farming cost, particularly fertilizer; and low returns due to faulty policies of both State and Central governments. While the growth rate of the agriculture sector has been erratic during the last five years. According to Economic Survey, the sector recorded growth of 12.4 per cent of GDP of state in 2007-08, 2.3 per cent in 2008-09, 3.6 per cent in 2009-10, and 13.3 per cent in 2010-10 and minus 2.9 per cent in 2011-12.

**Table 1:** Annual averages Farmers suicides in select States 1995- 2002 and 2003-10

Si. No.	State	Annual average Farmer suicides		Difference (2 <sup>nd</sup> average-1 <sup>st</sup> Average)
		1995-2002	2003-2010	
1.	Andhra Pradesh	1590	2301	+711
2.	Assam	155	291	+135
3.	Karnataka	2259	2123	-136
4.	Kerala	1292	1071	-221
5.	MP & Chhattisgarh	2304	2829	+525
6.	Maharashtra	2508	3802	+1294
7.	Tamil Nadu	992	866	-126
8.	UP	640	531	-109
9.	West Bengal	1426	990	-436

*Note:* The table only includes States whose annual averages have risen or fallen by over 100 farm suicides between the two periods. It also treats MP, and Chhattisgarh as one unit for data purpose.

*Source:* NCRB- 1995-2010.

According to the official reports of Agricultural Department, Hassan district reported to have highest number of suicides farmers (309), followed by Bidar (220), Chikmangalur (213), Belgaum (205) and Chitradurga (193) in the last one decade. With regard to year wise suicide cases, during the year 2003-04 it was 708, 271 in 2004-05, 163 in 2005-06, 346 in 2006-07, 187 in 2011-12 and 23 case till 31<sup>st</sup> July 2013(Table-2).

**Table 2:** Year wise farmers' suicides in the State of Karnataka during 2003-04 to 2012-13

Sl.No.	Year	No. of Farmers' suicides
1.	2003-04	708
2.	2004-05	271
3.	2005-06	163
4.	2006/07	346
5.	2007-08	342
6.	2008-09	337
7.	2009-10	290
8.	2010-11	242
9.	2011-12	187
10.	2012-13	23

*Source:* NBCR-2012-13.

### Reasons for farmers' suicides

Farmer's suicides issues is not the recent academic and economic narrative, but is a old. The issue of suicides was linked to production in 1960s and in 1980s it is the terms of trade were going against agriculture is dominating the state policies and farming was becoming a losing proposition. The state policies led agitations, movements' suicides. During the decade of globalization, no activist from India side committed suicide protesting against globalization. Lee Kyung-Hae, a South Korean farmer and lawmaker in Cancun who was holding a banner that read. "WTO Kills Farmers", committed the first suicide against Globalization. Lee was the former president of the Korean National future farmer's and Fisherman's association, an agricultural

lobbying group. However, the Farmer's suicides are caused by mainly crop failure due to unfavorable conditions and usage of poor quality seeds and fertilizers and over dues etc. It, is therefore, states that the cause of farmer's suicides are multiple dimensions like ecological, economic and social each are inter linked with the other. The ecological causes related to intensive use of hybrid seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides causing the erosion of soil fertility and increasing crop susceptibility to pest and diseases. Hence, the farmers' suicides cases are different from time to time and place to places. Various Committees depending on the reasons are framed and quoted different figures at different periods and some of the causes and effects are discussed here under:

About 80 % of India's farm land relies on flooding during monsoon season, so inadequate rainfall can cause drought, making crop failure more common. In the regions that have experienced droughts, crop yields have declined and food for cattle has become scarcer. Agricultural regions that have been affected by droughts have subsequently seen their suicide rates increase in many of the states.

### **GM Crops**

Public attention was drawn to suicides by indebted farmers in India following crop failure during 1990s early 2000s. About 87 per cent of Indian cotton growing land was used for Bt cotton in 2009. During 2007-2012 the cost of cotton cultivation had jumped as consequence of rising pesticide costs associated with Bt cotton production, while crop yield declined. However, International Food Policy Research Institute, an agriculture policy think tank based Washington DC (2008) stated that there was no evidence for an increased suicide rate due to Bt cotton. Finally, the reported concluded that Bt cotton may have been a factor in specific suicide, the contribution was likely marginal compared to socio-economic factors. The New economic Policy of India adversely affected to the Indian farmers in many of the cases. Farmers, who were taken up the cotton cultivator increasing the cost of production and sharp decline in the price at international market led to crisis of farmers. And also, government has not given support price to some of the crops, led to the farmers not producing much more and not stored, ultimately import capacity is increasing. With all this, led to a series of suicides committed by the farmers. However, farmer suicides in 2011-12 have been particularly severe among Bt cotton farmers.

### **Burden of Debts**

The Royal Commission Report in 1928, on the plight of farmers under British colonial rule in India stated that the peasants' lives and dies in debt prior to 1991, 25 per cent of the Indian peasants were indebted. The study of a P.Sainath (2006), the rural affairs editors of Hindu, stated that 70% of farmers in AP, 65% in Punjab, 61% in Karnataka and 60%, in Maharashtra are in debts; indicating that burden of debt is a common future and they were facing the problem of repayment of debt and rate of interest, this is more in the case of small farmers, marginal farmers and medium farmers; with all this, a series of suicides committed by the farmers.

### **Natural calamities**

The expenditure on agriculture has gone up when the natural calamities like drought, floods and cyclones, hail storms, pests occurred, the farmers lost their crops. Agricultural is largely exposed to the nature, because, the cultivation is in the fields. That is why often the crops are being destroyed due to natural calamities. Consequently the expenditure on agriculture had enhanced; to meet this they are getting loans from unorganized sector. With the dictates of the World Bank the agricultural subsidies on fertilizers and other agricultural inputs have been reduced since 1991 and on the other side the process of agricultural inputs have gone up, consequently the expenditure on agricultures enhanced. Added to this, expenditure of social obligations is also increasing, led to mental disturbances.

### Price Policy

One of the main government interventions in the agricultural markets currently is its policy of Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for agricultural commodities. For procurement of horticultural commodities which are perishable in nature and not covered under the Price Support Scheme, with a view to protect the growers of these commodities from making distress sale in the event of bumper crop during the peak harvesting periods when the prices tend to fall below the economic cost of production, a Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) is implemented on the request of a State /UT Government, which is ready to bear 50 percent loss (25 percent in case of North-Eastern States), if any, incurred on its implementation. But, it is not implemented strictly in all the states, if it is implemented strictly, definitely the major problems would be solved further, Price protection is another problem, especially for MFs and SFs between producer price and consumer price. In the case of vegetables – Tomatoes producer get 0.50 per kg, while the consumer get 15/- per kg in the urban market, the difference amount goes to mediator. The position is same in the case of Onions. This should be avoided by establishment of price stabilization fund and a special fund especially for MFs and SFs.

### Marketing Facilities

Marketing is one of the important problems in this sector especially for MFs and SFs. These farmers have problems in getting inputs, credit, extension and marketing. In the recent years, there has been some form of contact arrangements in general agricultural crops such as tomatoes, potatoes, chillies, gherkin, baby corn, onions, cotton, wheat, basmati rice, groundnut, sunflower and some medical plants. Hence, contact forming arrangements should be strengthened by establishment of the taluk level branches. Sincere efforts are needed while facing crop failure, low yielding and market disturbances. In fact, the farmers have the problem of 'produce and perish trap'. In 2006, the bumper crop in AP raised the number of suicides not only because of fall in the prices, but also excess supply in market. Hence, the government has to purchase the agricultural produce at reasonable prices; in this case Andhra Pradesh government is purchasing the agricultural produce from the farmers.



### **Agricultural credit**

Agricultural credit is important one for development of this sector, but many of the farmers not able to get required the credit facilities due to technical and non technical reasons. The Kisan card not completely succeeded to provide credit facilities. But the credit system in some of the countries like Bangladesh, Taiwan, Indonesia, Mexico, and Brazil are some the successful example. But, Kudombasree programme in Keral, Velugu (Indira Kranti Padhakam), SHG Programme in Andhra Pradesh, SEWA (health), BASIX (lively hood) are some of the successful stories in India.

### **Crop insurance**

The government of India introduced crop insurance to the famers who were faced the crop failures. The provisions are not useful in many of the cases at right time. In many cases farmers are investing on the crop on an average of Rs 20,000 to Rs 40,000 in Karnataka state. But, they get less than Rs 5000/- as compensation that too rarely and some of the farmers have got nil. Hence, it should be amended that any farmer who ever faces, the loss should get proper compensation at in time. Sanction of compensation amount to the victim suicide families is not complete job of the Government; it is the duty of the concerned state government to sanction the loan amount, after very failure of the crop and to provide financial assistance for the crop. Then only the distressed families would relax from their problems both from family and agriculture.

### **Spurious seeds**

The market had inequality seeds due to private and local products and they are selling at lower rates. The farmers are not in opposition to recognize the spurious seeds and they are purchasing by the observation of the ads from the mass media. However, the yielding is low and the income came from this is not sufficient to meet the agricultural expenditure. This situation is more in drought affected areas.

### **Suggestions**

The following are the remedies and rehabilitation measures to control the farmers' suicides across the country.

1. At least three years moratorium should be promulgated on the agriculture to small and marginal farmers should be given by the public institutions at the rate of three per cent.
2. Special cell especially for small and marginal farmers should be opened by the central government to look after the finance position and their transactions at block level.
3. Crop insurance scheme should amend in the direction that any farmer whoever will face the loss due to natural calamities should get proper compensation or at least the crop loans should be paid.
4. One of the important causes for agricultural suicides is lack of remunerative price. In some of the state like Andhra Pradesh, the government is purchasing the agricultural produce to meet up the agriculture expenditure. Hence, this method should be adopted in all the States.
5. A Monitoring Committee should be formed to decide the process of the quality seeds. So that the private companies could be checked from exploiting the farmers. The seed bill should be amended in the useful manner to the farmers. The traders of spurious seeds should be punished severely.
6. Agricultural debt Self scheme announced by the union finance minister and it should be implemented by the RBI at an early time.



7. To provide micro finance to the peasants, with this, they can have self employment projects in rural areas in the slack period.
8. The agricultural farmers are working as agricultural labours by selling their lands to the governments under SEZ programme and corporate sector in many of the states; resulting agricultural land is decreasing and urban areas are increasing. The marginal and small farmers are not dominating the agricultural sector even today with quality produce. Hence, there should be a national wide programme for improvement of effective utilization of waste lands; and waste land should be distributed to the landless of marginal and small farmers, daliths and tribals.
9. Finally, there is a need to realize the importance of a produce and flourish rather than produce and perish equation, if we develop food and agro processing industries and marketing

To sum up, the agricultural sector is deteriorating from day to day, due to adverse effects of the globalization, industrialization, urbanization, unfavorable market conditions and natural calamities etc. Owing to the lack of pricing policies and intervention of middlemen in marketing activities, the farmer unable to get minimum price which is equal to actual expenditure; on the other hand, an even rain fall conditions and burden of over dues led to increasing the farmers' suicides across the country along with Karnataka state. On average about 15369 farmers suicides case are accounted over a period of 18 years in India. While in the case of Karnataka, the highest number of suicides farmers accounted in Hassan district (309), followed by Bidar (220) and Chitradurga (193) in the last one decade. However, while in the case of state's government steps, of the total 2907 cases reported, the state government setup a committee compensation rejected 1548 cases and sectioned compensation of Rs. 1 lakh to 1258 cases. The panel is yet to decide compensation in 101 cases, official said. As on 31st July 2013, about 23 cases of suicides have been reported from 8 districts. However, Prime Minister's rehabilitation Package sanctioned an amount accounting at Rs 2689.64 crores in six districts of Belgam, Chitradurga, Hassan, Kodagu and Shimoga had not held small and marginal farmers as per the research study of ISEC (2011). In fact better-off farmers benefited from the package. The time is ripe to safe guard the agricultural sector and to stop the farmers' suicides in the country. A special package is necessary to provide input subsidy and development of animal husbandry, horticulture and poultry sector and it is more help to the agrarian economy. The government may arrange a package of financial assistance to meet agricultural inputs and to meet expenditures of the social obligations as in the case of Vidarbha in Maharashtra, where the government arranged to provide a Mangalasutram, a Gas-cylinder and some vessels totally worth of Rs 10,000. Certainly the agricultural sectors revitalize and the farmers' suicides would control if the Central and State Government would take sincere suitable timely steps and the farmers aware in utilizing the available resources promptly.

## References

1. National Records Bureau of India –Reports
2. Times of India, Hyderabad Website International suicide statistics
3. Website-maitri
4. Navodaya, India's agrarian Suicides
5. Website International suicide statistics
6. WHO, Figures and Facts about Suicide, 1999
7. Other net sources