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# Farmers Suicides in India: An Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

*In recent years, the topic of farmer suicide has come to dominate the conversation about rural India. Agriculture has long been practiced in India, and it is often referred to as the "pillar" of the country's economy. Agriculture is the process of harnessing land for the purpose of cultivating various types of crops. Despite the fact that farmers feed the country, their living conditions are far from ideal. India is an agrarian country, with roughly 70% of the population relying on agriculture for a living, either directly or indirectly. India's agriculture industry accounts for more than 15% of the country's GDP and the country's economic development will be feasible only if the farmer's community is given top attention. Farm revenue has dropped dramatically as a result of a loss in exports, a rise in imports, and a corresponding drop in prices, as well as repeated droughts, stagnating output, and productivity. The mass suicides of farmers in the state were a tragic expression of the severity of the situation. Individuals and communities are under pressure to adapt to changes brought on by a shift in socioeconomic circumstances. The policies linked with the economic liberalization process have put a strain on the farmers, resulting in suicides. The unfortunate event should force us to draw critical conclusions for India's rural economy. This article examines the circumstances that led to the agricultural crisis, the growth in indebtedness among farmers, and the varied characteristics of farmer suicides.*

*"If you tickle the earth with a hoe he laughs with a crop." – Douglas Jerrold*

**Keywords:** *Farmers' Suicide, Agrarian Crisis, Agriculture, Debt, Crop failure.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest tragedies to strike our country in recent decades has been the agricultural crisis and due to this Farmer suicides have been on the rise in India for some years and it has become common in our nation due to variety of reasons..<sup>2</sup>Although no official data are available, media accounts suggest that the death toll is shockingly high. More than 25,000 farmers have committed suicide throughout the country since 1995, with over 3,500 occurring in the last year. <sup>3</sup>They have been compelled to take their life due to a variety of societal, economic, political, and personal issues. As is well known, agriculture in India is referred to as

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<sup>2</sup> [www.hindustantimes.com/news/specials/hthemotions2005/anger\\_farmer.shtml? Sid =ang. Raju Bist \(2004\) A price too high for Indian farmers www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/FF29Df02.html](http://www.hindustantimes.com/news/specials/hthemotions2005/anger_farmer.shtml? Sid =ang. Raju Bist (2004) A price too high for Indian farmers www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/FF29Df02.html)

<sup>3</sup> Srinivasa Murthy R. Farmers suicide: Need for mental health interventions. *Indian J Soc.* 2012; 28:26–35.

a "monsoon gamble," implying that it is overly reliant on nature, and that once the monsoons fail, crops collapse. Even irrigation systems are not well developed in India, and as a result, farmers are forced to take out large debts in order to cultivate crops, and many of them commit suicide as a result of their inability to repay the loans, which are primarily taken out from landlords. Farmers died in a variety of agro-climatic zones and unlike the waves of suicides that occurred in 1987-88, 1997-98, and 2000, the peasants who grew specific crops such as tobacco, cotton, chilies, and groundnut affected much economically. Farmers' Rights are increasingly recognized as a worldwide issue, but agreement on how to put them into practice remains elusive. Farmers play a crucial component of the economic, social, and political sector of society and it is the responsibility of the nation to protect them. Farmers' involvement in agrobiodiversity conservation and innovation is being more recognized. However, there is no consensus on what the actual nature, scope, and extent of Farmers' Rights should be. No crops were exempted, and no part of the tiny peasantry appeared to be unaffected. Small and marginal farmers and tenant cultivators, had no rights to the land they cultivated and paid expensive rates to landlords, contributed for the vast majority of the deaths.<sup>4</sup> Farmer suicides highlight the issue that has developed as a result of the rural sector's structural restructuring. The first phase, which lasted from the early 1950s through the mid-1960s, concentrated on land reforms, irrigation, and goals such as credit availability, all of which have yet to be fully realized. The Green Revolution was the second phase, during which the ramifications for resource distribution, economic and social development, and agricultural progress were neglected, and agricultural development was evaluated by productivity. The most recent era was marked by economic reforms and globalization, which only served to extend and deepen inequality. Even though, the Indian government has taken numerous attempts to address this issue throughout the years, but the responses and relief packages have been ineffectual, misguided, and defective in general. Agricultural products are frequently denied export opportunities due to import and export restrictions, making it more difficult to sell surplus supply in the country.<sup>5</sup> Government policy should encourage integrated pest management, which incorporates biological, chemical, mechanical, and physical methods to attack pests with the goal of eliminating or significantly reducing pesticide use. The local fertilizer sector needed assistance, and prompt payment of subsidies would be beneficial. Increase their capital requirements, allowing them to control

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<sup>4</sup> Moudgal S. Mounting Debts, Successive Droughts Push Up Number of Farmer Suicide Cases. Times of India Available from: <http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/Mounting-debtssuccessive-droughts-push-up-number-of-farmer-suicide-cases/articleshow/55929928.cms> .

<sup>5</sup> Moudgal S. Mounting Debts, Successive Droughts Push Up Number of Farmer Suicide Cases. Times of India Available from: <http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/Mounting-debtssuccessive-droughts-push-up-number-of-farmer-suicide-cases/articleshow/55929928.cms>

costs through internal sources rather than external ones loans from outside sources. The Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme (ADWDRS) of 2008 is widely regarded as a poor policy since it had a negative impact on borrowers' banking habits and failed to reach the true needy, small, and marginal farmers. Despite the fact that the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) was created to address the shortcomings of the National Agricultural Insurance Scheme, farmers argue that it was created to benefit private insurance companies because premiums are mandatory and contain hidden clauses, implying that policies rarely pay out. Cooperative farming should also be introduced on a nationwide scale to minimize input costs and increase agricultural productivity and output. Cooperation can take many forms, from obtaining loans to acquiring supplies to marketing to production. It also encompasses land Pooling, labour pooling, joint investment, joint water management, and joint production are all examples of collaborative efforts.

## **II. INDIAN LAWS ON FARMERS**

Agriculture is a concern in India that is shared by many emerging, heavily populated countries, particularly those in the planet's tropical belt. Agriculture is vital to India's economy, both in terms of job creation and GDP contribution. The share of agriculture in India's GDP has steadily declined over the last three decades due to rapid urbanization, unsound agro-industrial policies, and faulty practices, such as excessive reliance on groundwater pumping for irrigation and environmentally deleterious, soil depleting chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights Act, 2001, made India one of the first countries in the world to adopt laws providing farmers' rights (PPVFR). India's regulation is unique in that it attempts to protect both breeders and farmers at the same time. The demonstrators slammed Prime Minister Modi's efforts to change India's agriculture recently. They demanded that the new law on farmers should remove regulations approved in September 2020 that would reduce the government's involvement in agriculture and give private companies greater room to operate. The government claims that the new legislation would free up farmers and private investment, resulting in increased growth. Farmers, on the other hand, were concerned that removing governmental safeguards, which they already regarded insufficient, would make them more susceptible to greedy companies. India was able to overcome its food problem in the 1960s because to government support for farmers, which included guaranteed minimum prices for some important commodities. However, as India's economy has liberalized in recent decades, our system wants the country's GDP to almost quadruple by 2024 understood that such a significant government role in agriculture was no longer viable. Farmers, on the other hand, said that even with current safeguards, they are suffering. They anticipated that market-friendly

legislation would eventually abolish regulatory assistance, leaving them destitute, with little hope of a viable living in the weaker economy. Since independence, India's agriculture has progressed tremendously. A country that used to be food insecure and reliant on imports is now not only self-sufficient, but also a net exporter. Agriculture has gradually transitioned from subsistence to semi commercial, and old techniques have been replaced by modern, technology-driven production systems. Few laws which protects farmers rights are

The Plant Variety Protection and Farmers Rights Act (PPVFR) which was enacted in 2001. This is India's primary statute governing farmers' rights. The Act originated from a lengthy debate and is expected to be enacted after around five amendments to the draught. The PPVFR Act was created in response to the seed industry's requests for breeder's rights. Due to NGOs' efforts, a chapter on farmers' rights.

The National Biodiversity Act (NBA) which was passed in 2002. This Act is based on the CBD and focuses on controlling access to and use of genetic resources in India. One of the Act's key goals is to establish India's sovereign claim to its genetic resources by establishing administrative rules that allow foreigners and Indians to access genetic resources. The Act creates a National Biodiversity Authority at the national level, as well as State Biodiversity Boards in each state and Local Biodiversity Funds at the local level.

The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act of 1999 was enacted to protect geographical indications of goods. The Act's goal is to safeguard items (including agricultural goods) that come from a specified territory or region. The protection lasts for ten years, with the option to renew it. Despite the fact that it does not expressly address farmers, it will have an influence on them in terms of the protection that can be provided for agricultural goods. It can be used to defend farmers' rights, but depending on how it's applied, it might also limit farmers' access to protected commodities.

### **III. FARMERS RIGHTS IN INDIA AND IP**

India's capacity to be one of the world's first countries to enact national legislation on farmers' rights is a watershed moment. India has developed unique legislation, but it still has to put it into practice. This process is expected to be difficult, not just in balancing intellectual property rights with Farmers' Rights, but also in maintaining cooperation between multiple laws like the PPVFR and the National Biodiversity Act. The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act of 2001 established Farmers' Rights. India's experience is valuable because of its international contributions to negotiations on Farmers' Rights, its status as a biodiversity hotspot, and the complexities of agriculture in India, where these rights are being implemented.

India's law is unusual not just because of its extensive rights for farmers, but also because it attempts to protect both breeders and farmers at the same time. This endeavor to develop a multiple rights structure, however, may create various barriers to farmers' use and interchange of plant genetic resources. India has drafted a unique piece of law, but it still has to put it into effect. This should serve as a warning to the rest of the world. For decades, agriculture in India was largely excluded from intellectual property protection, and there was no legal system of Plant Breeders' Rights or Farmers' Rights. Since its inception in 1985, the Seed Association of India has aggressively supported the need for plant breeders' rights in India. Bilateral and international pressure was applied to India to create intellectual property rights in agriculture following the passage of the WTO Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). Non-governmental groups and farmers' lobbies in the nation were outspoken in their opposition to TRIPs implementation. In the middle of this debate, the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights Act (PPVFR) of 2001 was enacted. The PPVFR Act began as a response to the seed industry's desire for breeder's rights. The International Treaty's Governing Body must now focus on setting clear rules for defining and implementing Farmers' Rights. To protect national sovereignty while fostering global collaboration, a worldwide movement for farmers' rights would have to tread carefully. Farmers' rights, on the other hand, must be supported at the international level and cannot be left to the discretion of individual governments. Farmers' Rights would have serious consequences if each country erected obstacles to accessing genetic resources, limited resource trade, and competed to establish claims on innovations. Farmers' Rights is a movement with a long and tumultuous history. To encourage some kind of unanimity on defining and executing these fundamental rights, an international system is urgently needed. What has been gained so far in the fight to create these rights may be lost if the global community does not take up the issue of explicitly expressing Farmers' Rights. Farmers in India and other developing nations rely on Farmers' Rights to defend their livelihoods, gain access to resources, protect their seed rights, and, most importantly, to pull people out of poverty. Farmers are granted nine specific rights,

- Access to seed
- Benefit-sharing
- Compensation
- Reasonable seed price
- Farmers are rewarded for their conservation efforts
- Registration of farmers' varieties

- Prior authorization for the commercialization of essentially derived varieties
- Exemption from registration fees for farmers

#### IV. ISSUES FACED BY FARMERS

Suicide, it was discovered, as an act that snowballs throughout the victim's life as a result of several 'events,' 'actions,' and 'triggers.' As a result, there may be variety of reasons for a farmer to commit suicide. These explanations frequently cross the boundaries of social-economic, behavioral, and personal issues. In terms of the victim and control families of farmers' socioeconomic environments, the preceding synthesis highlights a few key elements in terms of social and economic background. The breakup of their combined family has lessened the emotional and physical support they had throughout their time together. Family difficulties and discords with spouses were one of the major causes for the victims' farm families, and this most commonly sprang from the breakaway. India has a total geographical area of 328.7 million hectares, including 141 million hectares of net planted land. Natural rainfall is relied on by 92.6 million hectares of land, while the rest is irrigated. Area that has been watered this demonstrates that dry land farming is unavoidable for Indian farmers. The crops that are grown Jowar, pulses, oilseeds, cotton, and other crops are cultivated in dry land farming. Reliant on timely rains, i.e. 'nature's bounty' India's rainfall is unpredictably variable.<sup>6</sup> Even Crop failure is also caused by the monsoon. As a result, Indian agriculture is known as the "Gamble of India. "Monsoon while signing a visitor's book at the National Dairy Research Institute (NDRI) in Bangalore in 1927, Mahatma Gandhi observed, "India lives in rural." He also said, "I chose to be recognized as a farmer" (Swaminathan, M. S. 2007). True, the bulk of our people live in villages, with agriculture and related activities serving as their primary source of income. Agriculture, being a crucial component of the Indian economy, plays a significant part in the country's socio-economic growth as well as our people's socio-cultural lives. Due to the process of industrialization, agriculture's contribution to the Indian economy in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been progressively falling year after year, although economic growth has picked up in different five-year periods. Over thousands of years, Indian soils have been utilized to cultivate crops with little regard for replenishment. This has resulted in Soils are being depleted and exhausted, resulting in low production. In the entire globe this is a severe issue that may be addressed by increasing the use of manures and fertilisers. Manures and fertilizers serve the same purpose for soils as adequate nutrition does for the human body. A well-

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<sup>6</sup> Deshpande A. *Maharashtra Saw 3,228 Farmer Suicides in 2015. The Hindu.* Available from: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/maharashtra-saw-3228-farmer-suicides-in-2015/article8103696.ece>

nourished body is similar to a well-nourished mind. A well-nourished soil is capable of producing high crops, as it is capable of executing any good work. Another issues faced is approximately 70% of the population is reported to be illiterate.

Among many issues stated main reason behind Farmers committing suicide is debts. The issue stems with the availability of finance in a timely manner. To prevent risk, the banking industry is unwilling to lend credit or loans to agricultural. Farmers' debt has increased by twofold between 1991 and 2001.<sup>7</sup> Agriculture credit became a low priority, with some panels recommending that farmers be denied credit. Credit for housing and automobile purchases is obtainable at a rate of 9 percent to 11 percent, while crop loans to farmers are accessible at a cost of 17 percent. This demonstrates the government's lack of support for farmers. Crop revenue is determined by the current market scenario, middlemen's greed, the logistics of selling the produce, and other variables. <sup>8</sup>The government-mandated minimum support price (MSP) frequently falls short of covering the cost of manufacturing. Most small and marginal farmers, on the other hand, must rely on expensive loans, mostly from private lenders, to support their farming operations; interest rates can vary from 30% to 60% in many cases.<sup>9</sup> Farmers become trapped in financial traps as a result. They require funds to pay off their debts, fund the upcoming agricultural season, and provide for their families. As a result, they take out more debts. The debt cycle continues to worsen. Loan recovery procedures may be begun, and they are frequently unethically aggressive, verging on illegal in character.

## V. REASONS FOR FARMERS SUICIDE

**Financial reasons:** As an agrarian system, agriculture and its activities related employ more than 60% of India's population. However, capital is required for the proper operation of agriculture and related operations. More than 80% of Indian farmers are small-scale proprietors with little financial resources. As a result, they are dealing with economic issues in order to manage agricultural activities successfully. At the same time, nationalized banks are reluctant to lend money to farmers since there is no guarantee that the money would be returned. Even private money lenders won't lend to them since they don't have a mortgage other than their land. Even when they lend money to farmers, they charge a high interest rate or compound interest rate.

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<sup>7</sup>Rukmini S. India's New Farm Suicides data: Myths and Facts. The Hindu Available from: <http://www.thehindu.com/data/indias-new-farmsuicides-data-myths-and-facts/article7461095.ece>

<sup>8</sup>Deshpande A. Maharashtra Saw 3,228 Farmer Suicides in 2015. The Hindu. Available from: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/maharashtra-saw-3228-farmer-suicides-in-2015/article8103696.ece>.

<sup>9</sup>Ravi S. India's Suicide Problem. The Indian Express. [Last accessed on 2015 Jul 21]. Available from: <http://www.indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indias-suicide-problem>



**Natural disasters:** In addition to economic factors, natural calamities are a leading cause of farmer suicide. The success of agricultural output is largely determined by favorable weather conditions. Farmers are unable to take qualitative and quantitative production from their farm due to global warming, deforestation, and other manmade reasons such as reduction in subsidies, fire, accidents, and so on. Natural conditions have worsened and farmers are unable to take qualitative and quantitative production from their farm due to global warming, deforestation, and other manmade reasons such as heavy raining, floods, droughts, delay in raining, heavy cyclones, and manmade reasons such as reduction in subsidies, fire.

**Increase in production costs:** In addition to the reasons stated above, an increase in production costs leads farmers to commit suicide. Agriculture in India needs a large workforce for ploughing, digging, and soil upkeep, as well as finances for insecticides, pesticides, cutting, shipping, and product sales. In addition, hybrid seeds are required for excellent quality and quantity of output, which are very expensive and beyond of reach for India's marginal and impoverished farmers.

**Illiteracy, Traditions, and Culture:** In addition to the aforementioned issues, farmers are forced to commit suicide by illiteracy, tradition, and culture. Farmers do not believe in the necessity of education due to illiteracy and inadequate information. Their decision-making abilities are limited due to a lack of knowledge. Due to a lack of funds and perceiving capacity, people turn to conservative and other religious rights and rites, which demand more funds.

**Irrigation facilities:** The geographical conditions of India vary from area to region. Some locations are seeing considerable rains, while others are in drought-prone areas. Heavy rainfall areas and drought-prone areas are experiencing irrigation challenges in both wet and non-rainy seasons, such as summer, due to a lack of water management. Indian agriculture policymakers have purposefully ignored this critical fact. Farmers in India use conventional irrigation systems, which consume more water than is really required, and farmers do not receive enough water for irrigation during dry seasons or droughts. To sum up the issues in points they are

- Indebtedness
- Failure of a crop
- Inability to sell the crops that have been raised
- Prices are being realized in an unsatisfactory manner.
- Problems in the family
- Feelings of bereavement and despair

- Costs of Agricultural equipment
- Cost of chemicals and seeds
- <sup>10</sup>Lack of direct market integration, initiatives such as the National Agricultural Market and contract farming are assisting farmers in integrating their produce directly with the market and reducing the role of intermediaries, reality still lags behind.
- Natural Calamities.
- Cutback in agriculture subsidies.

## VI. SUGGESTION

The Indian government must take steps to address the problems faced by farmers .In the instance of crop failure, the government must give adequate institutional financial incentives for farmers, as well as a robust crop insurance plan and real relief to the afflicted farmers. The few suggestion are

- The Smallholder farmers must be encouraged to participate in cooperative farming so that they are not left behind while large farmers profit at their expense.
- In the agricultural industry, corporate social responsibility (CSR) should be supported, notably in the areas of capacity building, skill development, and the construction of CHCs.
- Farmers should be deterred from engaging with private money lenders by making available agricultural loans with low interest rates and loan recovery methods that respect human rights.
- A fair price for farm goods must be guaranteed, and intermediaries must be eliminated by giving farmers direct access to the market.
- Smallholdings farmers should be encouraged to pool their farms in order to take advantage of the benefits that come with bigger landownership, such as the ability to adopt modern and mechanical agricultural practices.
- Integrated pest control policies to avoid pest damage.
- NABARD and local governments must take charge of the problem and play a bigger role in preventing farmer suicides.

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<sup>10</sup> Xavier PV, Dinesh N, John AJ, Radhakrishnan VK, Suresh Kumar PN, Ali A. Position paper and action plan on farmers' suicide: Presentation to chief minister and health minister Kerala. 2007; 22:68–75.

- To avoid crop damage, an all-encompassing strategy that incorporates biological, chemical, mechanical, and physical technique should be applied.
- Rainwater harvesting and overcoming interstate river water sharing problems require special attention.
- Farmers must be trained on current agricultural techniques and practices.
- Youth people should be encouraged to get involved in farming.
- Efforts like Agro-Climatic zoning, education through DD Kisan and crop insurance are among the key areas for improvement.
- Secondary rural investments in dairy farming, poultry farming, animal husbandry, and other businesses require training, as well as a clearly feasible chain from funding to commercialization.
- Farmers and crops should be protected against issues at every step of the agricultural cycle, and comprehensive yet inexpensive insurance programmes should be made accessible. Crop damage assessment should be swift, easy, and devoid of corruption, with relief payments made immediately into the claimant's bank account.
- Water issue: The preponderance of these suicides in water-short areas of states like Maharashtra and Karnataka demonstrates how the water crisis, and hence failing to satisfy production demands, has exacerbated the threat. This is especially true given the persistent failure of the monsoons.
- Climate change has functioned as the last nail in the coffin, increasing the already high levels of uncertainty in the monsoon system and, as a result, agricultural productivity. Whereas flash floods have exacerbated crop losses, prolonged monsoons have resulted in output shortfalls year after year.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

It's tough to pinpoint a single conclusion for farmer suicides in India, especially given the paucity of specific research. What can be deduced is that a confluence of factors has resulted in a picture of large-scale farmer indebtedness, which, when combined with a volatile ecological climate and socioeconomic landscape, has left hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of farmers vulnerable to a situation of crushing debt and desperation, prompting and making them to commit suicide. To overcome this situation govt needs to adapt a comprehensive approach even though many state governments in India have cancelled farmer bank loans, yet farmers are still

committing suicide. Short-term government initiatives are insufficient to prevent farmer suicides and the agricultural disaster. As a result, to control this situation the government should provide irrigation infrastructure, and also should establish a minimum support price for their goods, and expand long-term institutional financing. Winning public support and ensuring adequate enforcement are also essential for the success of these policies.

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