



DETERMINANTS OF FARMERS' SUICIDES IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

A first generation of farmers entering modernized agriculture with some experience in its intricacies was not fully competent in the skills it needed. They were weak in dealing and coping with institutional channels of modernization – markets, traders, input dealers and institutional finance – without effective access to crucial services like insurance, warehousing, post-harvest processing, and export. Approximately 52% of the Indian population are engaged in Agriculture. Recent changes in the agrarian sector have been reflected in socio- cultural domains of farmer's lives. These include increase in small and marginal landholdings, shift from the subsistence to cash crops, individualization of agrarian practices, and insurmountable debts. Rapid and multiple shifts have led to fractures within family and community bonds, and also caused major ruptures in cultural identities. Many small and marginal farmers caught in these struggles have experienced severe distress. In some states of India, farmer suicide has reached epidemic proportion. A staggering 182,936 Indian farmers have committed suicide over the past ten years. Majority of these have occurred amongst cotton farmers in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Karnataka, in order of severity. Suicide is identified as a preventable public health problem. Every suicide has a devastating impact on the family members and large numbers of suicide amongst farmers has a detrimental impact on their health and social fabric. There is a paucity of interdisciplinary research to understand and address farmer suicides from an integrated medical anthropological and public health perspective.

Introduction:

Crops were grown according to the suitability of climatic conditions and agricultural operations were carried on with commonly practiced and simple technology. The social framework of agriculture was organized within caste, family and kinship relations. Due to similar socio-economic backgrounds, the farmers shared common values and their needs and aspirations were limited. By and large, agriculture was well integrated with the social structure. British colonialism brought a series of changes through the introduction of new land tenure, commercialization of agriculture and expansion of the politico-legal system. The provision of new land tenure enhanced the propensity to invest more in land, and the privileged and affluent sections started acquiring more land. The area under cultivation was increased and the emphasis was on the cultivation of cash crops like cotton, sugar cane, jute, etc, to feed Britain's industries. The cultivation of these crops was largely profitable because of rising demands in domestic as well as international markets. Individuals and communities are under pressure to cope with the changes brought about by a churn in socio-economic conditions. The policies associated with the process of economic liberalisation have imposed a stress on the peasantry leading to suicides. The tragic developments in rural Andhra Pradesh should compel us to draw important lessons for India's agrarian economy.



Objective of the Study

1. To examine caste and land holdings in Andhra Pradesh.
2. To assess the impact of the green revolution on the farmers.
3. To analyze rural credit, price policy and new agriculture system in Andhra Pradesh.

Caste and Land Reform

The rich upper-caste people reaped the benefit of the expanded forces of production because of their large-scale landholding and vantage economic position. The small and poor farmers were hardly in a position to cultivate these commercial crops as they were constrained by their small landholding and poor resource base. The caste based occupation and division of labour provided a kind of organic linkage among the rural communities. Besides, the joint family and strong kinship ties were very common in rural areas. The organic solidarity of the rural society started gradually crumbling down after independence, particularly in the postplanning period. Planned efforts were made to achieve agricultural growth and distributive justice. Keeping in view the large-scale unequal distribution of land, especially the landlessness of lower castes and tribes, land reform became a part of the planning for a package of measures like abolition of intermediaries, imposition of ceiling, distribution .of ceiling surplus land, etc, which was introduced invariably in all states.

Impact of Green Revolution

The green revolution started in the 1960s, following the introduction of high yielding variety (HYV) technology based on water-seed-fertilizer strategy, and the associated land and crop-based subsidized formal credit facilities generated a strong impression that agriculture is a relatively profitable source of income. The agricultural modernizing endeavors of the post planning era broadened the economic and social horizon of all categories of farmers. More importantly, to the newly entrant lower-caste farmers, who had earlier witnessed the prosperity of the upper-caste landholders through agriculture as labourers, the new provisions such as availability of land, low-cost credit, HYV seeds that provide higher profit, etc, appeared as a means to fulfill their long-cherished desires. The strong social movements and mobilization of the lower castes by Ambedkar and his followers, and many lower-caste political organizations like the Republican Party of India in Maharashtra and Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh also expanded their socio-economic aspirations. Though the agricultural revolution initiated in the planning period spelt prosperity for the farmers, it also created conditions that were likely to push the farmers to undesirable grave consequences.

Rural Credit and Price Policy

The risks and uncertainty associated with modern agriculture multiplied following the economic liberalization initiated in the 1990s. After the nationalization of banks in 1969, a package of policy initiatives ensured that the share of moneylenders in rural credit fell from an average of over 75% in 1951-61 to less than 25% in 1991. But in the post reform period, there has been a sharp decline in the share



of the formal sector in rural credit. The share of public sector banks in rural credit has fallen continuously from the peak of 15.3% in 1987 to 8.4% in 2006, and the share of rural deposits has fallen steadily from its peak of 15.5% in 1999 to 10.8% in 2006. The “targeted priority lending” or “directed credit” to agriculture was put on the back burner at the recommendation of the Narasimham Committee (1992) on financial reforms. As a result, farmers are required to depend on moneylenders/private shopkeepers, who usually charge exorbitant rates of interest, for a timely agricultural input requirement.

Innovations of Agriculture

As the new methods of farming made traditional skill and knowledge almost obsolete, the experienced elderly cultivators, who were often consulted for agricultural operations, lost their traditional authority and remained isolated from the larger community. This apart, the rising assertiveness of the members of the lower caste, in view of their wider mobilization and organized activities, created a kind of hostility between the members of lower and higher castes. The cumulative effects of agrarian change in India broke down the traditional family, kinship, caste and community ties of the farmers and enhanced their social and economic aspirations, which ultimately led to the emergence of anomic suicidal currents in the context of growing egoism in rural society. The analysis of empirical evidence reported by studies undertaken in states with high incidence of suicide will substantiate it further. Table 1.1 shows of the Genuine Farmer Suicides by Govt. of Andhra Pradesh.

Farmer Suicides – how can we prevent them?

Agriculture has always been celebrated as the primary sector in India. India is an agrarian economy, which means, Agriculture is the pre-dominant sector of the Indian economy. True to this, even to this day, inspite of the Indian economy opening out to the world and globalization, close to 70% of the population still depends on agriculture for its livelihood. The secondary and tertiary sectors in India are growing at rapid rates, still a vast majority of Indians continue to depend on agriculture. Every plan for the growth of the Indian economy aims at agricultural development, which is justified because to achieve the growth rates that the economy aims at, it is important to first address the growth rate of the major sector of the economy. Since the first Five year plan, India's focus has been on agriculture and after 50 years of Five year plans, where does Indian agriculture stand?

Thanks to the Green Revolution, India is now self-sufficient in food production, gone are the days when India had to import even food grains for daily consumption. Indian agriculture has been making technological advancement as well. Today, a visit to the villages will reveal that more and more farmers are adopting mechanization for their farming, there is an overall improvement in the agricultural trends in India.

To understand this, one must analyse the agricultural set up in India. Indian agriculture is predominantly dependant on nature. Irrigation facilities that are currently available, do not cover the entire cultivable land. Any failure of nature, directly affects the fortunes of the farmers. Secondly, Indian agriculture is largely an



unorganized sector, there is no systematic planning in cultivation, farmers work on lands of uneconomical sizes, institutional finances are not available and minimum purchase prices of the government do not in reality reach the poorest farmer. Added to this, the cost of agricultural inputs have been steadily rising over the years, farmers' margins of profits have been narrowing because the price rise in inputs is not complemented by an increase in the purchase price of the agricultural produce. Even today, in several parts of the country, agriculture is a seasonal occupation. In many districts, farmers get only one crop per year and for the remaining part of the year, they find it difficult to make both ends meet.

Determinates

Increase of pesticides and fertilizers prices Intermediaters high involvement of farmers families Farmers are depended by money lenders Farmers are depended monsoon and climate Crop rate a very low prices and Government did not supporting prices for agricultural production. Government did not support to subsidies There is no use of capital intensive techniques and only use up old method and techniques Impact of globalization on farmers they are suffering from finance problems. They did not implementation of crop diversification.

Main Causes

Rising costs of cultivation; high dependence on external inputs Unremunerative prices – do not cover costs of cultivation, let alone rising living costs Unsustainable cropping patterns and production practices Trade liberalization and export-import policies.

Conclusion:

The government response to the crisis of farmer suicide has been simplistic and in some cases perhaps aggravating. The main problem with offering 'special packages' to deal with such a problem is that it is reactionary rather than pre-emptive long term policy. Suicides are characterized by a prior history of difficulties and perhaps also mental illness that renders the person vulnerable to suicidal behavior. Suicide is caused by many factors even when it occurs in a cluster. Therefore it is crucial to avoid oversimplification of causes and sensationalizing the issue. This requires responsible and sensitive reporting by the media. In the Indian case, the data clearly shows that even among the farming community, health is the largest reported cause for suicides, not debt or bankruptcy. Evolutionary-psychology literature argues that a sense of burdensomeness towards kin/family may encourage suicide by eroding the motive of self preservation. It suggests that perceived liability towards one's family is a precursor of suicide. Renowned psychologist, Cialdini points out that people, by committing suicide, believe that they are helping others to counteract their own negative affective state. In the Indian farmer's context, policy makers are arguing that this negative state is that of indebtedness. But then loan waivers and cash supports are aggravating this problem because they provide the farmers with the incentive to make this 'rational' decision. Perhaps these short sighted measures are having the exact opposite effect. They are probably sending out the wrong signal to millions of distressed farmers who are struggling to make ends meet.



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