



### Short Review Paper

## Socio-economic status and its effect on Karnataka (India) Farmers' Suicidal Tendencies – An overview

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### Abstract

*Being India's primary industry, agriculture has always been celebrated. India is an agrarian economy, meaning that agriculture is Indian economy's primary sector. True to this, almost Seventy percent of the population still relies on agriculture for their livelihood, given the Indian economy opening up to the word and globalization. India's secondary and tertiary sectors are growing at rapid rates; a vast majority of Indians still rely on farming. Every strategy for the growth of the Indian economy is directed at the development of agriculture, which is justified because it is important to first address the growth rate of the major sector of the economy in order to achieve the growth rates that the economy is aiming for. One would be tempted to say yes by a superficial analysis of the above points, but the truth is far from it. The fact that Indian farmers face extreme poverty and financial crisis driving them to suicide lies behind all growth and development. The year 1997 saw the first few cases of farmers committing suicides, these cases steadily increased over the next decade, peaking in 2001, and reports say that in the state of Karnataka alone as many as 9642 farmers committed suicide over the past eleven years. The worst cases of suicide farmers come from the Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra regions. The tackling of farmer's problems thus becomes key factor in rebuilding new India. In order to provide human face to the liberalized economy agricultural credit reforms are urgently needed to bridge the gap between agriculture and other sectors. A dawn of new awakening through policy and practice can usher a new age of happiness of three millions of distressed families of farmers tomorrow.*

**Keywords:** Suicide, distress, farmer, agricultural, social.

### Introduction

India is the agricultural land and is the main occupation of over 70 percent of the country's population. India's economic prosperity is largely dependent on agricultural prosperity. This plays an important role in socio-economic development in general 72.2 percent Indian population are living in 6, 38, 000 villages (2001 census) and nearly 60% are them engaged in agriculture and allied activities. The allied activities are include animal husbandry and rearing of livestock the women folk in villages are engaged in agriculture labour work and few of them are engaged in creative and tailoring work. Agriculture is the rural people's main source of livelihood. Those not engaged in agricultural practices are indirectly related to agriculture. Not only does the agriculture sector have employment to the millions of people living in rural area, but also provides food of the people; also provides the raw materials manufacturing industries like textiles, sugar, vegetables, oil, jute, tobacco etc.

According to the 2005 survey contribution of agriculture sector to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is 18.6%. 43% of Indian Territory is used for agriculture activities. Agriculture draws its significance from wheat supplies and demon dings with manufacture sector. India has achieved the autonomy of food

grains within its political emancipation for a few decades this is due to remarkable success of Green Revolution and series of land reform measures taken by government. The production food grain in 2006-07 was 217 million tonnes. This is four- fold increase than that of 1950-1951. In 1950-1951 its production was 51 million tonnes<sup>1</sup>. Now per capita available food 539 grams per day and it was just 395 grams in 1950s.

Agriculture in India to a extend depending on natural rain fall out of the total 142 million hectors of net shown area 92.6% million hectors is yet to be irrigated the major crops that are grown in the dry land area rice, jowar, pulses, oil seed, cotton etc. The farmers of dry land area are dependent on timely rain fall but it is difficult to predict the rain fall in India. Many times failover of monsoon naturally results failover of crops due to this it is said that agriculture in India is 'Gamble of Monsoons'<sup>2</sup>. Failover of monsoon and failover of crops it is not new think to India but this is more affected in different states in India, special farm 1997 and onwards this problem is stile more in southern region that specifically that too Karnataka state failover of crop.

Karnataka is one of the 8<sup>th</sup> largest states in the entire country it has nearly 6 crores of population of which nearly 80% people living in villages and about 65% of them are engaged in

agriculture contribution of agriculture to the total income of state 49%. Nearly 80% of agriculture land is rain-fed 125 hectors of land is use for agriculture purpose the major food crop of Karnataka are rice, ragi, jowar, maize, millets, wheat and pulse. The major cash crops are ground nut, sugarcane, cotton, tobacco, coconut, coffee etc.

With the extreme draught in various parts of the state, the agricultural crisis was further emphasized. In 2002 alone, 143 talukas, which grew to 159 in the following year, were declared deficiency areas out of 176 taluks in the state<sup>3</sup>. There was a drought in 29,193 villages in total. 4499 villages belong to the "acute drought" category and 2712 to the "normal drought" category<sup>4</sup>. The drought has been the reaction or consequence of political inactivity, or apathy, in some districts. Over the past 10 years, many cases of farmers committing suicide have been registered in various parts of Karnataka. According to the Department of Agriculture, in the period 2004-07 (up to August 2007), 1605 cases of suicide of farmers were registered. As early as 1998, a 15-member Joint Committee of the Legislature was appointed by Karnataka Legislature to study the causes of farmers' suicides in various parts of the state, especially in Gulbarga and Bidar districts. In 2002-03, another government-appointed expert panel investigated the causes of suicide among peasants. Following the reports provided by these committees, the government implemented several measures to mitigate the suffering among farmers in the region. As for reported cases of suicide due to depression, the state government has also paid an exgratia sum of Rupees one lakh to farmers' families since 2003-04<sup>5</sup>. In July 2006, the Prime Minister of India declared a special package of relief to farmers in distress (commonly known as the Vidarbha Package) taking into account the widespread distress among farmers in several states like Karnataka. This program has been expanded to six Karnataka districts, i.e. Belgaum, Shimoga, Chickmagalur, Chitradurga, Hassan and Kodagu, which have reported a significant number of suicides among farmers. The program included initiatives such as rescheduling of interest discount on farm loans and grants to increase public spending in agriculture and associated sectors. Subsequently, in March 2007, the Karnataka government has announced a major scheme of waiving agricultural loans in excess of Rs.2000 crores in order to provide assistance to the state's farmers.

The press note released by Ministry of Agriculture Government of India states that 9642 farmers have committed suicides between 2000-01 and 2008-09 in Karnataka.

## Objective and Methodology of the Present Study

In this sense, the present study is undertaken to identify and examine the causes and consequences of the suffering of farmers and to delineate the motivating factors responsible for the much escalated suicide trend among them in Karnataka State. In doing so, our aim is to bring out a holistic, comprehensive and credible explanation for the causation in an

interdisciplinary frame work and to throw some light on this multifaceted problem at the micro level so as to suggest feasible policy initiatives and suitable action programmes at the macro level control and contain the situation. In doing so, it is our hope that such an exercise may ultimately contribute to provide some meaningful and scientific feedback to the policy makers and administrators in initiating proper, possible and feasible action programmes at their end to alleviate distress and to create confidence among the farmers who are the backbone of our society.

Accordingly, the study is based on the data generated from both secondary as well as primary-field sources in the all 30 districts of Karnataka. Altogether the study covered 120 cases of suicides as well as same numbers non-suicidal cases in the particular districts, 4 drawn from each of the districts. While the instrument used for generating needed data at the household level was the focused interview guided of course by a structured schedule of questions, the sampling unit (respondent) was mostly the victim's wife and a few other cases, the mother of the victim or the grown up son depending upon their availability at the time of our visit.

## Causes

**Prices and Marketing Structure:** Agricultural product marketing must be such that it provides adequate compensation or incentive for the contributions of the farmers who work from dawn to dusk. Sadly, in India, the middlemen are consuming the cream at the Indian peasants' detriment and illness instead of the manufacturer receiving the benefits. The distribution process we have is inefficient, inelastic, which does not help producers and customers. The benefit is enjoyed by the middlemen. The Indian agricultural marketing has the existence of excessive intermediaries between producers and consumers it is estimated 50 to 60 per cent of total value of commodities, goes to the middlemen like wholesalers, agent middlemen, jobbers etc. we also find certain strange practices in Indian unregulated markets even today. Numerous deductions made out of the price of the produce. We find that they deduct 'dalali' or 'arhat' which is not fair while weighing the produce the dealer cuts for weighment as 'baad'. The persons who help in loading and unloading and holding the bags and scale pans, charge their services called 'hamali' or 'palledari' the wholesaler deducts heavily for impurities in the produce in the form of 'garda', again as the produce is not seasoned he cuts for the possible loss in the weight in form of 'dalta'. Further his sweepers, watermen get the share in the form of 'daana'. The farmer is shaved cleanly for the purpose of charity to be given, to the dispensaries, gowshala's, schools etc. Around 20 per cent of money goes to them in one way or the other. Various mischiefs are also being played in the markets for agricultural good which are mostly unregulated. Non – standard weights and measures are used for buying and selling. Large portions of the produce are withdrawn as sample. One of the estimates says that in potatoes 57.72 per cent of share goes to the middlemen and 42.28 per cent of the

share goes to the producer, in rice 33.20 per cent goes to middlemen 66.80 per cent of the share goes to the producers, as per as wheat is concern 31.50 per cent is the share of middlemen and 68.50 per cent is the share of the producers.

During the British period the Royal Commission on agriculture for India observed that “the defects and chaotic conditions, prevailing in the markets for the agricultural goods could be removed only by the establishment of properly regulated markets. The over-all aim of establishing the regulated markets is to give solution to, and remove the defects which are clear-cut with our marketing system. The regulated market is the state government through a market committee, which consists of representatives of farmers, traders, agents, local bodies, co-operative society and government. It is a market in which the activities take place under the set of rules and regulation and mal practices like incorrect weighment, unnecessary deductions are curbed. The regulated markets are established with the objectives of safeguarding the interests of the both farmers and traders and to create conditions of fair competition.

The other step taken by the government for marketing the agricultural produce is encouraging the co-operative marketing societies. The co-operative marketing societies have been setup to improve agricultural marketing. These societies sell member produce at better prices and charge only a nominal commission for this service. The advantages of co-operative marketing are:

There is collective bargaining for individual bargaining. i. The co-operative marketing society advances loans to farmers and enables them to wait for better prices. ii. It has its own storage and warehousing facilities. iii. It also arranges for supply of manure, fertilizers improved seeds etc. iv. It can eliminate any of the middlemen and remove their large profit margin.

Government for improving agricultural marketing majority of the small holders do not take their produce to the APMC (Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee) or sell their produce through co-operative marketing. Because of the credit facilities they have taken from the moneylenders.

**Enlarged Agricultural Expenses:** During last few decades agricultural production process has become difficult due to increased expenditure. The costs of seeds, new harvesting equipment's, tractors, increase in the cost of manual labor etc. are major factors for increased expenditure on production. Farmers feel that it is better to sale agricultural land than to suffer in its vicious circle. For these purposes if he draws loan and if he is not capable to replay it, he again enrolls himself for new loan, which he cannot meet and the cruel circle goes on increasing.

**Family Responsibilities:** The farmers have to meet out their day to day responsibilities in a systematic manner. Unfortunately in village area the farmers are more predominantly superstitious and religious. They follow customs

and traditions and they prefer to celebrate marriages during early age of their wards to overcome their responsibility. Mahatma Phule has rightly pointed that lack of education (“Avidya”) and ignorance at all levels is the major reason for poverty and economic disabilities of farmers<sup>6</sup>.

**Religious Rituals:** The farmers celebrate different rituals in the whole year and he follows Hindu calendar to meet his spiritual needs. As pointed by Phule, persons fall prey to the exploitation of religious priests and he never comes out of such rituals in a continuous manner. The expenditure the farmer incurs on such rituals such as Satyanarayan, etc., is unproductive. This expenditure is based on his petty agricultural profits.

**Reckless Spending:** The farmer when he is in a good season receives better profits, than his earlier phase, in good moods his makes more expenditure on entertainment. He attains folk's festival Tamasha or he becomes drug addict, which gives a temporary happiness. In long term extravagance of farmers creates more complications. This extravagance affects his agricultural investment potentials and on the other side he tries to evade responsibility of debt clearance and the pending monthly installments against loans, which increased his interest on debt.

**Beware of Bankers:** The Co-operative credit Societies and District Co-operative Banks, which provides loans to the farmers at minimum rates have their own recovery techniques. They not only insult farmer, but hurt his ego by removing his tin sheet on his home and lives him shelter less. Further many a times his land holdings guarantee is also advertise in newspaper and he feels insulted. It has been observed that “For agriculture loans farmers prefer Co-operative system, than that of indigenous bankers”. From 1970 onwards due to Nationalization of Bankers, burden of Co-operative Credit has increased.

**Exploitation by Indigenous Bankers:** The farmers when they feel it difficult to receive loans from Co-operative Credit system, due to their hazards and complication, they term towards indigenous bankers and they suffer great deal due to heavy burden of compound interest and they also transfer their lands holdings on papers as a credit and if they do not pay the loan in time they have to lose their land. It has been observed that inspite of different types of rules the Government has failed to control the indigenous banking system.

In the recent drive in Maharashtra the Savakars i.e., indigenous bankers were carefully examined and many of them were punished. However, due to harassment few indigenous bankers have also committed suicides.

**Sickness and Persistent Diseases:** The farmers many a times are victim of continuous illness due to chronic diseases. In every house the senior citizens suffer a great deal due to lack of health services. In India the health services are not available on village level and farmers have to shift from villages to metro cities for

better treatment. Due to lack of insurance and lack of health rules, farmer patients are exploited by doctors as well as private Hospitals. Many a times they require heavy amount for operations. When they do not meet these expenses based on their agro profits, there is no way than to commit suicide.

## Remedies

There can be no single solution to end farmers ' woes. It is not an effective solution to provide financial relief. The approach should be directed at the whole agricultural system. Here are some solutions that might help improve the farmers ' state. i. The cooperative farming should be encouraged to derive benefits of large scale cultivation. ii. The existing cooperative societies should be strengthened exclusively in the interest of the farmers and agriculture. iii. Measures should be taken for the establishment of Seeds Bank in each of the villages. iv. The farmers should be motivated to grow the crops which suit with agro-climatic conditions and they should be properly educated and encouraged in organic farming. v. The farmers should be properly educated about the methods of using manure, fertilizers, pesticides and suitable crop pattern through the proper media. vi. The Farmers Counseling Centers (FCC) should be established at the village Panchayat level. vii. To maintain sustainable development, adequate supply of power and water should be made available for the agricultural work. viii. Crop insurance scheme should be effectively implemented. ix. The Agricultural Assistants working in the villages should be properly trained about the advanced agricultural techniques. x. The farmers who have crossed the age of 60 years to be declared as 'Senior Farmer' and provide them with concessions as given to 'senior citizens'.

Let us all make efforts to develop confidence among farmers and try to bring smile on their face.

## Conclusion

Giving loans on lest interest rate, distributing crop loans and loans in the form of subsidy to buy agricultural instruments are some of them. Besides Government bank's provide loans to farmers in regard to irrigation plans. In this way central and state government have taken so many programmes for farmers. Despite of all these plans by the government there has been no cease to the farmer suicides. Because the farmers have failed to make best use of these plans and even the Government institutes have also failed to create awareness among farmers about Government plans for farmers. This has been also a reason for farmer suicide. Many institutes work under the Government. The scope of their function is not restricted to any one topic. They function in regard to all matters. In India numbers of NGOs have been creating awareness among people through social reform programmes.

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