



## **FARMER'S SUICIDE IN INDIA: DEFINING CAUSES**

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*India is an agricultural dominating country where 60% of total population employed in agriculture sector. But there is an extremely miserable condition of farmers in this country which is called the country of farmers. This paradox holds great concern as the sector which is providing employment to a large part of population, is the reason of thousands of farmer's suicide. This paper is an attempt to identify the various causes of farmer suicide in India.*

**Keywords:** Safe State, Unsafe State & Farmers.

### **INTRODUCTION**

India, the land of 1.3 billion people and the largest body of surviving farmers in the world, have the honor of being the 7th largest country on the globe, with an area of 3.288 million sq. kms (FAO, 2018). The earth is the greatest employer in this country providing employment to the 60% of its total population in agriculture who have been farming this land for more than 5000 years. However, it contributes only 15% to the GDP of India. The low contribution of agriculture in the GDP is a matter of great concern as it is very crucial to our farmers to get sufficient earnings from their agricultural cultivation and activities for their basic livelihood. In actuality, let us go little deeper with this problem of low contribution, the low contribution constitutes with low agricultural production which further leads to low outcomes and low income. As we know, the agriculture sector is providing employment to the 60% of total population, the low income from agricultural activities lowers the income of a large population of India which is a severe drawback of low contribution of agriculture in the GDP.

Indian farmers are living a vulnerable life and they are in the severe clutch of poverty. They are deprived, poor due to number of reasons which are provoking them to suicide. While discussing the various factors/causes of farmer's suicide in India, different causes have been identified which are provoking the farmers to commit suicide.

Jonathan Kennedy & Lawrence King (2014), P. B Behere & A. P Behere (2008), Nitin Chowdary Pavuluri (2013), Sukhpal Singh (2018) have studied in their respective papers that the indebtedness is the main cause of farmer's suicide.

Vandana Shiva & K. Jalees (2005), Atul Deulgaonkar & Anjali Joshi (2016), Kharat Rahul Sadashiv (2015), Lakhwinder Kaur, Preeti Sharma & Lavleesh Garg (2016) have discussed various factors which are provoking the farmers to suicide. For example- Crop failures, natural calamities, lack of alternative sources of income, financial institutional credit, age, family structure, irrigation problem, etc.

While discussing the various causes of farmer's suicide, Dr. G. L. Parvathamma (2016) has shown that 'habits like drinking, gambling, etc' is responsible for the highest part (20.35%) of farmer's suicide in India.

### **The Problems of Farmers in India**

India's GDP is registering a high rate of growth but the same time the farming has become a weapon of ending lives of the farmers. Thousands of farmers are committing suicide every year in India. The sector which providing employment to about half of the population is failing to provide basic amenities, the 'Annadata' of the country is unable to feed himself.

In India, farmers are suffering from number of problems. A large section of Indian population depends upon agriculture (60%) which has very low (15%) contribution in GDP. Consistent decline in land-holding area, increasing number of marginal farmers (farmers cultivating agricultural land up to 1 hectare, i.e. 2.5 acres), very low returns from cultivation are resulting in very low income for farmers. Government neglecting the importance of agriculture in the plan resource allocation has declined the public investment in irrigation and other agricultural infrastructure. Another problem of farmers is declining institutional credit in agriculture which is inadequate and leading to greater dependence on informal sources which creates higher interest burden on farmers. Poor market condition for agricultural produce and changing technology are leading farmers to the uncertainties of both the product and factor market. Basically, income, yield, price, input, technology, and credit are the major risks involved in Indian agriculture.<sub>2</sub>

### **Farmer's Suicide in India**

The Political Parties, Policy Makers, Think-Tanks and all other constituents of Indian government are indifferent about the misery of agricultural activities which is considered as the back-bone of Indian economy. The surprising fact is that, the farmers (reason of food and hence reason of life) are compelled to commit suicide due to their insistence on carrying out farming and find consolation, it seems, only through committing suicide. 2,96,438 people have committed suicide across India between 1995 to 2014.

Farmer's suicide has declined from 2015 (12,602) to 2016 (11,370) but still at alarming stage. The most dangerous state for farmers in India is Maharashtra where 4,291 farmers committed suicide in year 2015 and 3,661 farmers committed suicide in year 2016 with a decline of 15% but still the numbers of suicide of farmers indicating their worst condition of socio-economic status. In percentage change in number of farmer's suicide, Telangana has shown the highest decline of 54% (1,400 in year 2015 to 645 in year 2016) and Punjab has shown the highest increase of 118% (124 in year 2015 to 271 in year 2016). Punjab is the largest contributor of the central pool of food-grains in this country, despite 118% increase in farmer's suicide from year 2015 to 2016 is a matter of great concern.

**Table-1: Farmer's Suicide in Selected States**

State	No. of Farmer's Suicide		Percentage change
	Year 2015	Year 2016	
Punjab	124	271	+118.00
Haryana	162	250	+54.32
Gujarat	301	408	+32.50
Andhra Pradesh	916	804	-12.20
Chhattisgarh	954	682	-28.50
Madhya Pradesh	1,290	1,321	+2.40
Telangana	1,400	645	-54.00
Karnataka	1,569	2,079	+32.50
Maharashtra	4,291	3,661	-15.00
India's Total	12,602	11,370	-9.80

Source: *Business-standard.com*

The miserable condition of farmer's suicide can be seen in Maharashtra, where 60,365 farmers committed suicide during 1995 to 2014. After a decline of 15% in this number, Maharashtra is still the home of maximum farmer's suicide which is 4,291 in year 2015 and 3661 in year 2016. [Table-1]

In Table-2, the state wise number of farmer's suicide in India has been given. If we distinguish all the state in 5 categories namely-

1. Safe State: State having no farmer's suicide
2. Moderately Safe State: State having single digit number of farmer's suicide
3. Unsafe State: State having double digit number of farmer's suicide
4. Severely Unsafe State: State having three digit number of farmer's suicide
5. Extremely Unsafe State: State having four digit number of farmer's suicide

Therefore from the above written categories in year 2015, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Bihar, Jharkhand, Mizoram, Nagaland, and West-Bengal are safe states. Rajasthan, Meghalaya, Tripura, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Kerala, and Tamilnadu are moderately safe states. Assam, Haryana, Sikkim, Odisha, and Gujarat are unsafe states. Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh are severely unsafe states. Maharashtra, Telangana, and Karnatka are extremely unsafe states.[Table-2]

**Table-2: State-wise Suicides Committed by Farmers/Cultivators in India in Year 2015**

S.N	State	No. of Farmer's Suicide
1	Jammu & Kashmir	00
2	Himachal Pradesh	00
3	Assam	84
4	Punjab	100
5	Haryana	28
6	Uttarakhand	00
7	Delhi	00
8	Uttar Pradesh	145
9	Rajasthan	03
10	Bihar	00
11	Jharkhand	00
12	Sikkim	15
13	Meghalaya	02
14	Tripura	01
15	Mizoram	00
16	Manipur	01
17	Nagaland	00
18	Arunachal Pradesh	07
19	West Bengal	00
20	Odisha	23
21	Chhattisgarh	854
22	Madhya Pradesh	581
23	Gujarat	57
24	Maharashtra	3030
25	Telangana	1358
26	Karnatka	1197
27	Kerala	03
28	Andhra Pradesh	516
29	Tamilnadu	02
	<b>Total</b>	8007

*Source: NCRB, 2015*

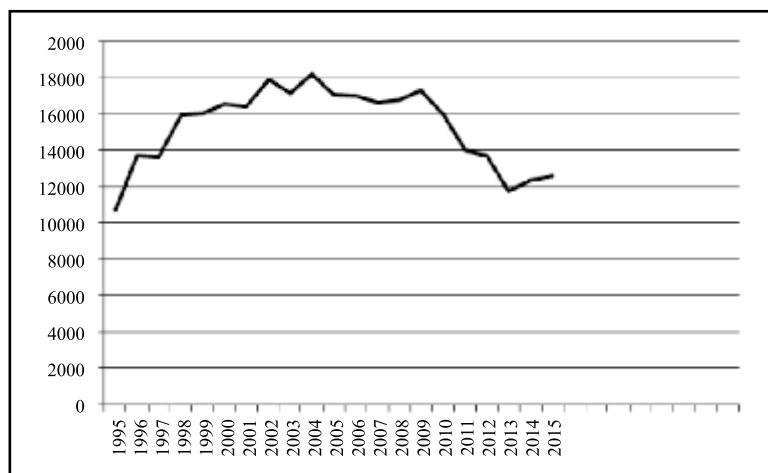


**Table-3: Year-wise Number of Farmer's Suicide in India from 1995 to 2015**

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of Farmer's Suicide</b>
1995	10,720
1996	13729
1997	13622
1998	16015
1999	16082
2000	16603
2001	16415
2002	17971
2003	17164
2004	18241
2005	17131
2006	17060
2007	16632
2008	16796
2009	17368
2010	15964
2011	14027
2012	13754
2013	11772
2014	12360
2015	12602
<b>Total</b>	<b>322028</b>

*Source: NCRB Data*

**Figure-1: Trends in Farmer's Suicide in India From 1995 to2015**



Source: From table-3

The number of Farmer's suicide was increasing with fluctuation from year 1995 to 2004 and during this it was at peak in year 2004, after that it started declining with fluctuation and it was at minimum in year 2013 after 1995. The matter of concern is that, the number of farmer's suicide was declining till year 2013, but after that it again started increasing.

The objective of this paper is to examine the different causes of farmer's suicide in India.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Different studies related to farmer's suicide has examined different issue of farmers suicide.

Jonathan Kennedy & Lawrence King (2014), P. B Behere& A. P Behere (2008), NitinChowdaryPavuluri (2013), Sukhpal Singh (2018) have studied in their respective papers that the indebtedness is the main cause of farmer's suicide.

Vndana Shiva & K. Jalees (2005), AtulDeulgaonkar& Anjali Joshi (2016), Kharat Rahul Sadashiv (2015), LakhwinderKaur, Preeti Sharma &LavleeshGarg (2016) have discussed various factors which are provoking the farmers to suicide. For example- Crop failures, natural calamities, lack of alternative sources of income, financial institutional credit, age, family structure, irrigation problem, etc.

While discussing the various causes of farmer's suicide, Dr. G. L. Parvathamma (2016) has shown that 'habits like drinking, gambling, etc' is responsible for the highest part (20.35%) of farmer's suicide in India.

Jonathan Kennedy & Lawrence King (2014) 'The Political Economy of Farmer's Suicide in India: Indebted Cash-crop Farmers with Marginal Land Holdings' has examined State-level Variation in Suicide Rates' & examined the relationship among indebtedness, land holding,

cash crop production and farmer's suicide and found a clear relation between indebtedness and farmer's suicide.

P. B Behere & A. P. Behere (2008) in their paper 'Farmer's Suicide: Across Culture', found that despite a popular image of farming as a peaceful and healthy way of life, agriculture sector has highest rate of mortality and he also found that indebtedness is the main cause of farmer's suicide.

Nitin Chowdary Pavuluri (2013) in his paper 'Farmer Suicide: Transitional Costs for Indian Society, As A Result of Policy Changes 1990' found that indebtedness is one of the main cause of farmer's suicide, apart from it, he has also found poor irrigation facilities, drought, natural calamities, crop failure, govt. policy failure etc are also the cause of farmer's suicide in India.

Sukhpal Singh (2018) also found indebtedness as the main cause of farmer's suicide in Punjab in his work 'Death in The Midst of Plenty: Farmer Suicide in Punjab'. His study says that 75% farmer suicide happened in Punjab due to high debt burden. 6,926 farmers committed suicide in Punjab during 2000-10. Farmers in Punjab were bearing a total of 80,000 crore debt burden in 2016-17 which compelled the farmers to commit suicide.

Vandana Shiva & K. Jalees (2005) in their report 'Farmers Suicides in India' analyzed the different aspects and causes of farmer suicide in India, and found that there are number of problems which are provoking the farmers to suicide such as crop failure, natural calamities age, indebtedness, lack of alternative source of income, financial institutional credit etc.

Kharat Rahul Sadashiv (2015) in his paper 'Farmers Suicide in India- Causes and Remedies: 2006-2010' has analyzed the causes and respective remedies of farmers suicide on India and found that financial problem, natural calamities, increase in cost of production, political reasons, global reasons, illiteracy, new and other changes are responsible for farmer suicide in India.

Lakhwinder Kaur, Preeti Sharma & Lavleesh Garg (2016) in their paper 'Causes and Cure of Farmer's Suicide' examined the causes and their respective cure of farmer suicide and found that farmer suicide is a very complex phenomena crucially related with socio-economic and psychological distress. The paper says that rapid increase in debt, repeated crop failures, natural calamities, lack of alternative sources of income, increase in production cost, sinking water-table and overall rapidly declining profitability etc are causing farmer suicides.

### **CAUSES OF FARMER'S SUICIDE**

An exotic feature of Indian agriculture is that, the farmers in India are the Price-Taker in the input market as well as in the output market. It is a miserable fact that the input cost and the cost of credit are so high and the agricultural output prices are very low which ultimately results as the reduction in the returns/profitability from farming, i.e. farmers receive very low return. This feature of Indian agriculture traps the farmers in deprivation and poverty.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data exposes number of causes of why farmers are committing suicide.

**Table-4: Cause-wise and Year-wise Data of Farmer's Suicide  
from Year 2014 to 2015 in India**

S. N.	Cause of suicide	Total number		Percentage Share of suicide	
		2014	2015	2014	2015
1	Poverty	149	92	2.64	1.1
2	Property dispute	52	86	0.92	1.1
3	Marriage related issues	121	157	2.14	2.0
4	Family Problems	1135	933	20.41	11.7
5	Farming related issues	969	1562	17.15	19.5
6	Illness	745	842	13.19	10.5
7	Drug abuse/ alcoholic addiction	250	330	4.24	4.1
8	Fall in social reputation	07	11	0.12	0.1
9	Indebtedness	1163	3097	20.58	38.7
10	Unknown Causes	231	334	5.91	4.2
11	Other causes	828	563	14.65	7.0
	<b>Total</b>	5650	8007		

*Source: ADSI-2014 & ADSI-2015 by NCRB*

There are mainly 11 reasons which have been marked as causes of farmer's suicide by NCRB. These causes are detailed as follows-

#### **1. Indebtedness**

The indebtedness of farmers has approx doubled from 1991 to 2001 ( 26% of farm families in 1991 to 48.6% in 2001).[N. P. Pavuluri] Indebtedness leads to decrease in economic condition of the farmers and at the time of repayment the farmers have to sale their asset.It is clear from the Table-4,that the biggest reason of farmer's suicide in India is Indebtedness which is responsible for 20.58% suicide in year 2014 and 38.7% in year 2015. The cause wise data of farmer's suicide is available for the year 2014 and 2015 only, before 2014, only profession wise suicide data had been published by NCRB and the surprising news is that, the NCRB has stopped publishing farmer's suicide data after 2015. But this two year's data clearly depicts that it is indebtedness which is the main cause of farmer's suicide in India. According to the NCRB data, it is the agricultural loans (crop loan, farm equipment's loan) which is causing most of the farmer's suicide, the non-agricultural loan is not that much hazardous for farmer's life with compare to the agricultural loans. In year 2014, the agricultural loan caused 987 farmer's suicide where the non agricultural loan caused 176 suicides. In year 2015, NCRB published the share of institutional and non institutional loan in the number of farmer's suicide, and it is shocking and eye-opening fact that the institutional loan caused 2474 farmer's suicide where

non-institutional loan and loan taken from both financial institution as well as non financial institutions/money lenders caused 302 and 321 suicide respectively. It is a clear indication of policy failure of the government that announces to protect the farmers and to provide them cheap and easy agricultural finance.

## **2. Farming Related Issues**

Farming related issues are concerned with crop failure, poor irrigation facilities, natural calamities, declining soil fertility due to over utilization of pesticides and insecticides, inability to sell the agricultural produce etc. These problems are resulting in low production of agricultural product. Indian agriculture is a 'gamble of monsoon', farmers primarily depend upon monsoon due to poor irrigation facilities, now in this context, the failure of the monsoon causes crop failure. The data given in table-4 shows that, farming related issues is the second biggest cause of farmer's suicide in India in year 2015. It caused 1562 suicides in which failure of crop due to natural calamities caused 879 suicides and other reasons like poor irrigation facilities etc caused 673 suicides. A total of 1552 farmer committed suicide due to crop failure and 10 farmers committed suicide due to inability to sell their farm produce in 2015. While in 2014, 491 farmers committed suicide due to natural calamities, 491 committed suicide due to other reasons (like poor irrigation facilities etc) which caused crop failure and a total of 952 committed suicide due to crop failure, 17 farmers were committed suicide due to inability to sell their farm produce. This scenario clearly indicates that, the lack of basic agricultural facilities like irrigation, natural calamities, over rain, etc, increases farmer's vulnerability and deprivation.

## **3. Family Problems**

The family issues, another cause of farmer's suicide. The breaking down of the joint families in to nuclear families leads to partition of and in smaller parts which further results in decline in the farm production. This individualization forces the farmer to bear all the risk, debt burden, burden of sell etc. This decreased production and increased burden provoke them to commit suicide. In year 2015, these family problems killed 933 farmers. They committed suicide and ended their life. While in 2014, there were 1135 farmers who committed suicide because of their family problems. [Table-4]

## **4. Health Issues**

Poverty, vulnerability and deprivation usually lead to health related problems. Poor health condition is one of the biggest causes of farmer's suicide in India. Diseases like AIDS, Cancer, Paralysis, Insanity, and other prolonged illness, etc. are causing severe health issues in farmers. The non-curable diseases provoke the farmers to suicide. There were 745 farmers in 2014 and 842 farmers in 2015 were committed suicide due to health issues. Illness is responsible for 13.9% farmer's suicide in 2014 and 10.5% farmer's suicide in 2015. The number of farmer's suicide due to illness has increased from 2014 to 2015 but the percentile data has declined.

## **5. Other Causes**

The above mentioned four causes namely indebtedness, farming related issues, family problems and health issues are responsible for the 80.4% farmer's suicide in 2015 and in 2014, it was 71.33%. There are some other causes too that are responsible for rest of the farmer's suicide, Such as marriage related issues which caused 2% farmer's suicide in 2015 and 2.14% in 2014. Poverty (2.64 in 2014 and 1.1% in 2015), property dispute (0.92% in 2014 and 1.1% in 2015), drug abuse/alcoholic addiction (4.24% in 2014 and 4.1% in 2015), fall in social reputation (0.12% in 2014 and 0.1% in 2015). 231 farmers (5.91% of total farmer's suicide) in 2014 and 334 farmers (4.2% of total farmer's suicide) in 2015 committed suicide due to unknown causes and 828 farmers (14.65% of total farmer's suicide) in 2014 and 563 farmers (7% of total farmer's suicide) committed suicide for other causes.

Apart from above written causes, age is also responsible for farmer's suicide. Old aged farmers get frustrated with a little increase in the burden, and this frustration provokes them to commit suicide, problems like traditional techniques of agriculture, lack of political will, illiteracy among farmers are also responsible for farmer's suicide as these problems directly or indirectly increases the deprivation and vulnerability of farmers and put them in vicious circle of poverty which gets cruel with each passing year.

## **CONCLUSION**

India is an agriculture dominating country where a large part of population depends upon farming, in this context political, social and economical care of agriculture hold a great importance. Farmer's suicide due to various reasons is an indicator of increasing poverty, deprivation and vulnerability among the farmers. Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, and Maharashtra are hub of farmer's suicide [Table-2] despite these states were the centre of economic liberalization and green revolution.<sup>4</sup> Even micro finance system is firstly introduced in Andhra Pradesh, in the light of these facts and number of farmer's suicide in these states, it can be said that the government policy failure is also an important cause of farmer's deprivation and their suicide. If our farmers stay hungry and deprived, the socio-economic development of the country will be difficult and have no use. Therefore it is very important to take care of farmers and their farming. The govt. should be concerned with the causes of farmer's suicide and take appropriate measures to eradicate the problems of agriculture.

## **NOTES**

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