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A STUDY ON FARMERS SUICIDES IN RAYALASEEMA REGION

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ABSTRACT

As of March 27, 2025, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reports for 2022 have been published, and the process for collecting data for the 2023 report is underway, with the data collection and compilation done at various levels. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, the states with the highest incidence of farmer suicide in 2022 were Maharashtra (4,248), Karnataka (2,392), Andhra Pradesh (917) and Tamil Nadu (728) and Madhya Pradesh (641). Suicides by the farmers' is increasing in India. From 2005 to 2020, 319,598 farmers committed suicide and in states of AP and Telangana this number was 319,598 which is 28% of the total. It implies that more than one quarter of the total number of farmers' who committed suicide in the country were from Telangana and AP. The increase in farmer suicides is caused in part by a dangerous juncture of conditions, including monsoons, indebtedness, water crisis, technological inaccessibility, and unaffordability as well as unforeseen events like the Covid-19 pandemic. Between 2018 and 2022, Andhra Pradesh saw a total of 4,564 farm suicides, including that of 571 women farmers. In the last two years (2021 and 2022), suicides by agricultural labourers far outnumbered those by farmers. These are some of the latest findings from the NCRB report on accidental deaths and suicides in India.

INTRODUCTION

However, farmer suicides in Andhra Pradesh decreased by around 13% in 2022 when compared to that of 2021. AP once again stood third in farmer suicides in the country. A total of 917 people working in the farm sector (farmers, tenant farmers and agricultural labourers) ended their lives in the state in 2022 while the number of farmer suicides was 1,054 in 2021. As many as 369 farmers and 548 agricultural labourers died by suicide in 2022. The trend of more farm labourer suicides than farmer suicides began in 2021. Of the 1,065 farm suicides in 2021, 481 were of farmers, and 584 were of agricultural labourers. Historical records relating to frustration, revolts, and high mortality rates among farmers in India, particularly cash crop farmers, date back to the 19th century. However, suicides due to the same were rare. The high land taxes of the 1870s, payable in cash regardless of the effects of frequent famines on farm output or productivity, combined with colonial protection of usury, money lenders, and landowner rights, contributed to widespread penury and frustration among cotton and other farmers, ultimately leading to the Deccan Riots of 1875-1877.

The colonial government enacted the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act in 1879, to limit the interest rate charged by money lenders to Deccan cotton farmers, but applied it selectively to areas that served foreign cotton trading interests. Rural mortality rates, in predominantly agrarian areas of colonial India, were very high between 1850 and the 1940s. However, starvation related deaths far exceeded those by suicide, the latter being officially classified under "injuries". The death rate classified under "injuries", in 1897, was 79 per 100,000 people in Central Provinces of India and 37 per 100,000 people in Bombay Presidency.

Ganapathi and Venkoba Rao analyzed suicides in parts of Tamil Nadu in 1966. They recommended that the distribution of agricultural organophosphorus compounds be restricted. Similarly, Nandi et al. in 1979 noted the role of freely available agricultural insecticides in suicides in rural West Bengal and suggested that their availability be regulated. Hegde studied rural suicides in villages of northern Karnataka over 1962 to 1970 and stated the suicide incidence rate to be 5.7 per 100,000 population.^[25] Reddy, in 1993, reviewed high rates of farmer suicides in Andhra Pradesh and its relationship to farming size and productivity.

Reporting in the popular press about farmers' suicides in www.worldwidejournals.com

India began in the mid-1990s, particularly by Palagummi Sainath. In the 2000s, the issue gained international attention and a variety of Indian government initiatives.

The National Crime Records Bureau, an office of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, which has been collecting and publishing suicide statistics for India since the 1950s (as annual **Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India** report) has started separately collecting and publishing farmer's suicide statistics from 1995.

States Affected

Maharashtra has been the state worst affected by suicides in farming sector with over 60,000 deaths between the period from 1995 to 2013.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, the states with the highest incidence of farmer suicide in 2022 were Maharashtra (4,248), Karnataka (2,392), Andhra Pradesh (917), and Tamil Nadu (728) and Madhya Pradesh (641). Together, these five states recorded about 80 per cent of total suicides in the farming sector and about 85 per cent of farmers' suicides.

Reasons

Various reasons have been offered to explain why farmers die by suicide in India, including floods, drought, debt, use of genetically modified seeds, public health, and use of lower quantity pesticides due to fewer investments producing a decreased yield. There is no consensus on what the main causes might be but studies show suicide victims are motivated by more than one cause, on average three or more causes for dying by suicide, the primary reason being the inability to repay loans. Panagariya, an economist at the World Bank states, "farm-related reasons get cited only approximately 25 percent of the time as reasons for suicide" and "studies do consistently show greater debt burden and greater reliance on informal sources of credit" among farmers who die by suicide.

A study conducted in 2014, found that there are three specific characteristics associated with high-risk farmers: "those that grow cash crops such as coffee and cotton; those with 'marginal' farms of less than one hectare; and those with debts of 300 Rupees or more." The study also found that the Indian states in which these three characteristics are most common had the highest suicide rates and also accounted for "almost

75% of the variability in state-level suicides."

A 2012 study, did a regional survey on farmers' suicide in rural Vidarbha (Maharashtra) and applied a Smith's Saliency method to qualitatively rank the expressed causes among farming families who had lost someone to suicide. The expressed reasons in order of importance behind farmer suicides were – debt, alcohol addiction, environment, low produce prices, stress and family responsibilities, apathy, poor irrigation, increased cost of cultivation, private money lenders, use of chemical fertilizers and crop failure. In other words, debt to stress and family responsibilities were rated as significantly higher than fertilizers and crop failure. In a different study in the same region in 2006, indebtedness (87%) and deterioration in the economic status (74%) were found to be major factors for suicide.

Studies dated 2004 through 2006, identified several causes for farmers suicide, such as insufficient or risky credit systems, the difficulty of farming semi-arid regions, poor agricultural income, absence of alternative income opportunities, a downturn in the urban economy which forced non-farmers into farming, and the absence of suitable counseling services. In 2004, in response to a request from the All India Biodynamic and Organic Farming Association, the Mumbai High Court required the Tata Institute to produce a report on farmer suicides in Maharashtra, and the institute submitted its report in March 2005. The survey cited "government's lack of interest, the absence of a safety net for farmers and lack of access to information related to agriculture, as the chief causes for the desperate condition of farmers in the state."

An Indian study conducted in 2002, indicated an association between victims engaging in entrepreneurial activities (such as venturing into new crops, cash crops, and following market trends) and their failure in meeting expected goals due to a range of constraints.

Government Economic Policy

Economists like Utsa Patnaik, Jayati Ghosh, and Prabhat Patnaik suggest that structural changes in the macro-economic policy of the Indian Government that favored privatization, liberalization, and globalization are the root cause of farmer suicides. Business economists dispute this view.

GM Crops

A number of social activist groups and studies proposed a link between expensive genetically modified crops and farmer suicides. Bt cotton (*Bacillus thuringiensis* cotton) was claimed to be responsible for farmer suicides. The Bt cotton seeds cost nearly twice as much as ordinary ones. The higher costs forced many farmers into taking ever larger loans, often from private moneylenders charging exorbitant interest rates (60% a year). The moneylenders force farmers to sell their cotton to them at a price lower than it fetches on the market. According to activists and studies, this created a source of debt and economic stress, ultimately suicides, among farmers. Increasing costs in farming associated with decreasing yields even with use of BT cotton seeds are often quoted cause of distress among farmers in central India. A 2015 study in Environmental Sciences Europe found that farmer suicide rates in India's rainfed areas were "directly related to increases in Bt cotton adoption." Factors leading to suicide included "high costs of BT cotton" and "ecological disruption and crop loss after the introduction of Bt cotton." Other scholars, however, say that this Bt cotton theory made certain assumptions and ignored field reality.

Deadly Drought

Due to poor artificial irrigation facilities, as much as 79.5% of India's farmland relies on flooding during monsoon season, so inadequate rainfall can cause droughts, making crop failure more common. Climate change has increased the

frequency and coverage of droughts in India. According to UN Convention to Combat Desertification, in 2020-2022, nearly two-thirds of India was drought-prone. In regions that have experienced droughts, crop yields have declined and food for cattle has become scarcer, subsequently increasing their suicide rates.

Suicide Idea

Economist Patel found that southern Indian states have ten times higher rates of suicides than some northern states. This difference, they say, is not because of misclassification of a person's death. The most common cause of suicide in South India is a combination of social issues, such as interpersonal and family problems, financial difficulties, and pre-existing mental illness. Suicidal ideation is as culturally accepted in south India as in some high-income countries. The high suicide rates in southern states of India may be, suggest Patel et al., in part because of social acceptance of suicide as a method to deal with difficulties. Suicide ideation among surviving family members of farmers' suicide victims is another worry. A recent study shows that almost a third of suicide survivors (family members left behind) had suicide ideation in one month prior to assessment.

Debt

Many of the suicides by Indian farmers have been linked to the large amounts of debt and interest that many of these individuals accumulate. According to a 2006 study by P. Sainath, the percentage of farmers who were in debt in Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Karnataka, and Maharashtra was 70%, 65%, 61%, and 60%, respectively.

Maharashtra's Government Field Surveys

The Government of Maharashtra, concerned about the highest total number of farmer suicides among its rural populations, commissioned its own study into reasons. At its behest, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research in Mumbai did field research and found the top causes of farmers suicides to be: debt, low income, and crop failure, family issues such as illness and inability to pay celebration expenses for daughter's marriage, lack of secondary income occupations and lack of value-added opportunities.

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