

FARMERS' SUICIDE IN MAHARASHTRA: A STUDY OF REASONS AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

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Abstract:

India is an agrarian country with around 70% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. But farmers' suicides in India are worrying. As per the Central Government despite a multi-pronged approach to improving the income and social security of farmers, over 12,000 suicides were reported in the agricultural sector every year since 2013. Farmer suicides account for approximately 10% of all suicides in India. (Reference: TOI). The main purpose of this paper is to analyse the various reasons behind the suicide of farmers in Maharashtra State and the responses of the government to this suicide. Farmers' suicides in India have led to public policy and academic discourse. Relatively higher suicide rates for farmers are to be identified as a symptom of a larger socio-economic malaise. Various reasons are attributed to the suicides namely, poor productivity, fluctuation in rainfall and climate, huge investment and low income, indebtedness, and socio-economic impact.

KeyWords: Farmers' Suicide in Maharashtra, Various Reason behind Suicide, Government Response to Suicide, Remedies.

Introduction:

The phenomenon of suicide by farmers has in recent years tended to dominate the discourse on rural India. Between 1995 and 2014, more than 300,000 farmers committed suicide in the country (Basu, Das, & Misra, 2016). There have been several studies pointing to the significance of the phenomenon as well as the magnitude of the distress that goes with it. Underlying several of these studies is the role of inequality in this phenomenon. The emphasis on farmers' suicides suggests that there is an inequality in the vulnerability of different groups to suicide, with farmers having a greater vulnerability than others. Again, the presentation of farmers' suicides as a national crisis suggests that while there may be regional inequality in the vulnerability to suicide, all states face the same crisis. And if we were to go beyond the existing literature, there is the question of whether inequality can be a cause of farmers' suicides. This paper seeks to explore each of these roles for inequality in the patterns of farmers' suicides. While such an exploration may help us better understand the nature of farmers' suicides, this paper does not claim to provide a comprehensive explanation for the phenomenon. It begins with an exploration of the relative vulnerability of different groups to suicide; it then explores

the nature of regional inequality in farmers' suicides; before ending with a preliminary exploration of the relationship between inequality, poverty, and farmers' suicides.

Objectives of the study:

The following are the objectives of the study;

1. To know the number of farmers suicides in Maharashtra as compared to India
2. To study the various reasons behind farmers' suicide in 'Maharashtra'.
3. To analyze the government responsesto the farmers' suicide.
4. To suggest remedies for farmers 'suicides in Maharashtra

Research Methodology:

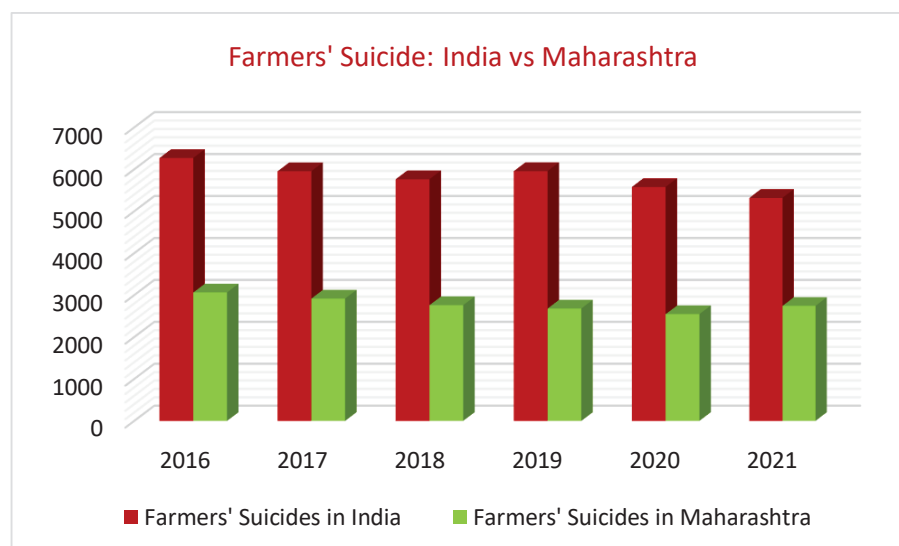
The present study is based on secondary sources of data which is obtained from various books, reference books, journals, articles, reports; newsletters published,and extensive use of the internet.

Farmers Suicide in Maharashtra State: 2016 to 2021:

Years	Farmers' Suicides in India	Farmers' Suicides in Maharashtra	% In India
2016	6270	3063	48.85%
2017	5955	2917	48.98%
2018	5763	2761	47.90%
2019	5957	2680	44.98%
2020	5579	2547	42.59%
2021	5318	2743	51.57%

(Source: National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) Reports)

Figure Showing Farmers Suicide in Maharashtra as Compare to India:



(Source: National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) Reports)

The above table & figure shows the total number of farmers who have ended their lives by committing suicides in India as well as in Maharashtra State from 2016 to 2021. It also shows the percentage contribution of Maharashtra State in the total number of farmers' suicides in India. The table is prepared as per the record of the report given by the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB). The state reported 3063 farmer suicides in 2016 (i.e., 48.85% of India), 2917 in 2017 (i.e., 48.98% of India), and the number stood at 2761 in 2018 (i.e., 47.90% of India) and 2680 in 2019 (i.e., 42.59% of India). Whereas 2743 farmers suicides in 2021 (i.e., 51.57% of India) compared to 2547 in 2020 (i.e., 42.59% of India). When we analyze the percentage contribution of the State in India, we can conclude that there is a steady decline in the number of farmers suicides in Maharashtra State from 2016 up to 2020 but there is an increase the year 2021.

Reasons behind the Farmers' suicide in India:

Scholars have given various reasons such as monsoon failure, climate change, high debt burdens, government policies, mental health, personal issues, and family problems among the reasons for farmers' suicides in India. Let's analyze.

- **The surge in input costs:** A major cause of the farmers' suicides in India has been the increasing burden on the farmers due to inflated prices of agricultural inputs. The culmination of these factors is seen in the **overall increase in the cost of cultivation**, for wheat, the cost at present is three times what it was in 2005.
 - **Cost of chemicals and seeds:** Be it fertilizers, crop protection chemicals, or even the seeds for cultivation, farming has become expensive for the already indebted farmers.
 - **Costs of Agricultural equipment:** The input costs, moreover, aren't limited to the basic raw materials. Using agricultural equipment and machinery like tractors, submersible pumps, etc. adds to the already surging costs. Besides, these secondary inputs have themselves become less affordable for small and marginal farmers.
 - **Labour costs:** Likewise, hiring **labours and animals** is getting costlier too. While this may reflect an improvement in the socio-economic status of the labours, driven primarily by MGNREGA and a hike in minimum basic income, this has not gone too well with boosting the agriculture sector.
- **Distressed due to loans:**
 - NCRB data points out that in 2474 suicides out of the studied 3000 farmer suicides in 2015 the victims had unpaid loans from local banks. This is clear enough an indication for drawing correlations between the two. Whether or not the banks had been harassing them, however, is a long-drawn debate and needs more specific empirical evidence.
 - Moreover, a shift away from the usual trend also revealed that of the loans taken by these farmers, only 9.8% were loaning from moneylenders. Thus, the pressure or musclepower of moneylenders could be far from being a major driving force, as is otherwise perceived.

- **Lack of direct integration with the market:** Although initiatives like the National Agricultural Market and contract farming are helping integrate the farmers' produce directly with the market, cutting the role of intermediaries, the reality is still lagging behind.
- **Lack of awareness:** The digital divide, as well as the literacy gap, has made marginal and small farmers particularly vulnerable due to their inability to utilize the positives of government policies. This is reflected in the continued unsustainable cropping practices – like cultivating sugarcane in water-deficit regions.
- **Water crisis:** The concentration of these suicides in the water-deficit regions of states like Maharashtra, and Karnataka is a manifestation of how the water crisis and thereby failure to meet production demands have intensified the menace. This is particularly true in the backdrop of continued failed monsoons.
- **Interstate water disputes:** What has added to the already prevalent crisis is the unwillingness to cater to each other's water needs amongst the states. A case in point is the recently resurfaced Kaveri dispute that saw Karnataka and Tamil Nadu battle out water shortage both in and outside the tribunal even to the extent of non-compliance with the tribunal award.
- **Climate change** has acted as the last nail in the coffin by resulting in furthering the uncertainties associated with the already uncertain monsoon system and hence agricultural production. While incidents like flash floods have led to crop losses, deferred monsoons have seen production shortfall year-in and year-out

Government Response to Farmers' Suicide i.e., (Government Schemes):

Some of the major relief packages and debt waiver schemes announced by the government are summarized below:

- **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Shetkari Sanman Yojana:** On 24 June 2017 Maharashtra Government launched this loan waiver scheme to improve the state of the farmers by lessening the burden of loans.
- **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchan Yojana:** Despite several efforts in past decades, the largely agricultural area is still depending upon the monsoon and in the event of failure of the monsoon, farmers had been facing hardship for the survival of their crops. So, to resolve this problem and also to provide "HarKheto Ko Pani" the government has approved PMKSY
- **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana:** Despite hard work and dedication farmers are facing a lot of risk of loss because of natural fluctuation. To tackle this situation the government has launched the PMFBY in April 2016, for helping farmers to cope with weather uncertainties.
- **Maagel Tyaala Shet Tale:** The farmers of Maharashtra especially in the rain-fed region are often the victims of unseasonal rainfall. The government introduced this scheme of constructing a 'Farm Pond' for rainwater harvesting
- **Jal Yukt Shivar AAbhiyan:** The Maharashtra government has launched Project JYSA for making Maharashtra drought-free by 2019. The project aims to make 5000 villages free of water scarcity every year.

- **Solar Water Pump Scheme:** Maharashtra Government launched this scheme for farmers in which the beneficiaries are supposed to buy solar pumps at a highly subsidized rate. This scheme helps the farmer to get subsidies for installing solar water pumps which save energy and light bills and also there is no impact of load shading and power cut.
- **70% Cut Monsanto's Royalties:** Monsanto is an American Agrochemical and Agricultural biotechnology corporation. Monsanto's GM cotton seeds have helped Indian Farmers in many ways. Indian seeds makers produce GM cotton seeds using Monsanto's technology and company for using the same.
- **Cooperative farming** must be promoted amongst small and marginal farmers to ensure that they are not left lurking while the big farmers reap the benefit at their cost.
- **Doubling the farmer's income** by 2022 is a healthy aim, but loan waivers can't be the answer. Instead, sustainable agriculture that thrives on re-investment & restructuring is the way ahead. The role that the state has been playing is one of emancipation, but what the primary sector and the farmer needs is empowerment.

Remedies:

1. Govt. should provide adequate funds to the farmers in the form of the loan before production.
2. Seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides should be supplied under the supervision and control of government officials to avoid duplication and price-related malpractices.
3. The electricity department should provide power on day ship and not on night ship without the gap.
4. Govt. should declare a 'Guaranteed Rate' for Agri products before harvesting the final product by farmers.
5. Government should provide education and hospitality facilities at a concessional rate to child farmers.

Conclusion:

Risk management in agriculture should address yield, price, credit, income, or weather-related uncertainties among others. Improving water availability will facilitate the diversification of cropping patterns, but this should go hand in hand with policies that increase non-farm employment. The availability of affordable credit requires the revitalization of the rural credit market. A challenge for all is to provide innovative products that reduce costs while increasing returns. Besides, public institutions, there is need for a greater involvement from civil society. Moral Support is also important to motivate farmers and to avoid farmers' suicides.

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