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October 2014 Vol - 2 Issue- 10

## AGRARIAN CRISIS AND FARMERS SUICIDES IN INDIA: A STUDY OF WARANGAL DISTRICT IN TELANGANA



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### ABSTRACT

India has been witnessing huge number of farmers' suicides in the last two decades. India is primarily an agrarian country and its economy is agrarian. Even now, 60% of India's population is dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. Since the time of the British rule, in most parts of India, agriculture was an occupation of the small and middle farmers. But today the status of agriculture in India is dismal. Liberalization and globalization have had a complex effect on the Indian agricultural sector and this is quite different from other nations who carried out radical land reforms before embarking upon macro-economic reforms. The main causes for such a negative effect can be attributed to India's failure to make better policies, investment measures and domestic preparations before liberalizing the economy.

**KEY WORDS:** agrarian crisis, farmer's suicides, Liberalization, globalization, economy.

### INTRODUCTION

India has been witnessing huge number of farmers' suicides in the last two decades. Never before in the history of mankind has the spate of farmers' suicides occurred anywhere in the world. As per reports available, farmer suicides did occur in certain countries. However, these are noted to be a few in number and occasional at times, when compared to the continuing spate of farmers' suicides in India.

This is the manifestation of farmers' untold misery and suffering, which is considered as a great human tragedy. Nothing is greater and nothing is so dear and near to ones heart than ones' own life. Such a precious human life is put an end to unnaturally by resorting to forced suicides.

Liberalization and globalization have had a complex effect on the Indian agricultural

sector and this is quite different from other nations who carried out radical land reforms before embarking upon macro-economic reforms. The main causes for such a negative effect can be attributed to India's failure to make better policies, investment measures and domestic preparations before liberalizing the economy. Various planning policies have helped the nation achieve the stage that it has now reached but the time has come for the role of the state to be redefined. The state should be given the role of a promoter cum facilitator of development. The so called market friendly policies that were designed to facilitate and diversify more private investment to make farming more viable and to compact land holdings will have to be revised.

### **DEEPENING AGRARIAN CRISIS AND FARMERS' SUICIDES**

The downward trend in agricultural sector had been steep since 1991. In fact, agrarian crisis has been deepening in the country in the last two decades due to the implementation of New Economic Policy (NEP) since 1991 by the dictates of the imperialist America and International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB) and World Trade Organisation (WTO) the three organs it controlled. The deepening agrarian crisis is manifested in a number of forms as discussed in the ensuing paragraphs.

### **OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the study are-

- ☆ To study the reasons behind the continuing farmer suicides in Warangal district.
- ☆ To study the adequacy of the events.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The present study in the agrarian state of Telangana. It will focus on the dismal state

of agriculture in the Warangal district of Telangana. The district was selected for study as 2/3rd of the farmer suicides have been noticed in the Telangana state and among which Warangal district has seen the highest rate of farmer suicides in the state. The district's agriculture sector has seen some bad times with drought, crop failures resulting from pests and attack from diseases and the non-availability of credits playing their part.

### **DECLINING OUTPUT GROWTH RATE**

Deceleration of agriculture since 1990's is one of the manifestations of agrarian crisis in the economy. Production of both food grains and non-food grains grew at a faster rate during 1980s at 3.33 percent and 3.89 per cent respectively. The overall growth rate of agricultural output was put at 3.45 percent. As against this, output growth rates of food grains and non-food grains decelerated during the period from 1990-91 to 2004-05 to 1.64 per cent and 2.81 percent respectively. The overall output growth during this period was 1.96 percent. This was much lower than the output growth rate during 1980s.

### **FARMERS' INDEBTEDNESS**

Indebtedness of farmers is one of the most cruel and agonizing phenomena of the agrarian crisis in the country. According to National Sample Survey Organization Report (2011), 49 percent of farmers are debt-trapped. The accumulation of farmers' debts is on account of substantial increase in the cost of production of agricultural commodities, without matching the price-rise at the same rate. It is estimated that every farmer incurs an expenditure of Rs 12,000 an acre annually on an average in crop production, while he gets an average annual income of only Rs 9,000 an acre from all the crops put together. Thus, he is incurring a loss of Rs 3,000 an acre in crop

production. Further, the family expenditure of farmer on an annual average is Rs. 28,600/- His income from all sources is only Rs 19,600. It means that the expenditure is higher than the income by Rs 9,000 for every farm family on an annual average basis. This is why and how farmers have been trapped into debts perennially.

### FARMER'S SUICIDES IN INDIA

Farmers' suicide is a serious issue in India. Farmers' suicide was first reported in 1987-88 from Prakasam and Guntur districts of Andhra Pradesh. About 100 cotton farmers committed suicide during that period due to crops loss on account of widespread attack of white. The deaths, however, remained unnoticed for long time and came to the fore only in 1995, when Warangal district of Telangana hit the headlines. Later the calamity of farmers' suicide spreads not only to other districts in Telangana but also to other States. Farmers' suicides are reported from across the country and the worst affected states are Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Punjab followed by Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh. In fact, farmers' suicides were reported from all the States and Union Territories for the period 1995-2012.

It is seen from Table that the total numbers of farmers' suicides were 2, 70,904 and the highest number of farmers suicides were reported from Maharashtra with 53,818, followed by Karnataka and Telangana with 28,891 and 33,326 respectively. Among the 2, 70,904 suicides reported, 42,082 are women farmers. They constituted one-fifth of the total farmers' suicides respectively.

**Table 1 – Farmers' suicides in India  
1995 to 2012**

S.No	States	Farmers suicides in India
1	Maharashtra	53,818
2	Karnataka	33,326
3	Kerala	18,907
4	Punjab	1,363
5	Chattisgarh	15,340
6	Telangana	28,891
7	AndhraPradesh	10,007

Source: National Crimes Record Bureau (NCRB) GOI, 2012

Although women work in the field are distressed by crop loss and debt burden, the suicide committed by a woman farmer is not considered as a farmers' suicide. Further, there was an increase in the number of farm labour committing suicide in Punjab and Madhya Pradesh. It was found that the number of tenant farmers committing suicide also increased. They received no legal protection and support from the State.

### FARMERS' SUICIDES IN TELANGANA

The entire country was shocked and stunned in 1995, when the farmers' suicides were reported for the first time from Warangal district of Telangana. Although farmers growing different crops committed suicides, cotton farmers were more among them. It was also reported that a great majority of suicides occurred in small and marginal farm families. Suicides were more in the farm families belonging to backward classes of the society. Farmers' Organisations, civil society organisations, rights Organisations and intellectuals termed farmers' suicides as murders by the Government and demanded immediate action to help the victim families of the deceased and also to prevent farmers' suicides.

Telangana occupies the second position in farmers' suicides in the country next only to Maharashtra. According to NCRB report, farmers numbering 28, 891 committed suicides. This is from 1995 to 2012. The district wise details were also provided in the table from 1995 to 2012. It is noted from table that farmers' suicides are highest in Karimnagar district which is 4433 followed by Warangal, Nizamabad districts. The lowest numbers of suicides of farmers are reported from Ranga reddy district. It may be noted, in the urban of areas of Warangal there were no suicides till 2009. The maximum number of suicides occurred in 2012 with an average of 2572. It is also noted that the spurt of suicides has been steadily increasing over the years.

Although the number of farmer's suicides is 28891, the Government recognised only 5686 as genuine suicide deaths in the State. This clearly shows that the government is bent upon denying the families of the farmers' suicides ex-gratia and other benefits. A continuous movement and struggle was being waged by farmers' organisations, civil societies, intellectuals and others.

**Table 2 – Farmers' suicides in Telangana 1995 to 2012**

S. No	District	Total
1	Hyderabad City	55
2	Cyberabad	536
3	Ranga Reddy	1977
4	Mahaboobnagar	3922
5	Nalgond	1887
6	Nizamabad	2786
7	Medak	4474
8	Warangal	5483
9	Warangal (U)	223
10	Khammam	1181
11	Karimnagar	4433
12	Adilabad	1601
13	R.P. Secunderabad	321

Source: National Crimes Record Bureau (NCRB) GOI,

2012

## **THREATENING UNEMPLOYMENT**

Unemployment among farm families was rampant and its growth was phenomenal during the decade from 1993-94 to 2004. The unemployment rates among rural men increased from 5.6 percent to 9 percent, while the same for rural women was from 5.6 percent to 9.3 percent. These figures concealed the seriousness of unemployment problem. The problem was much deeper. In addition to unemployment, under employment and disguised unemployment were also prevalent in agriculture. These types of unemployment were causing distress to the farm families. Despite the stagnation of output, the work force in agriculture continues to grow. So the growth of value added per worker in agriculture had been reduced to near-half (0.29 percent per year during the decade from 1993-94 to 2003-04). Value added per worker in 2004-05 was lower than that of the value in 1999-2000.

## **LOW LEVEL OF FARMERS' INCOME**

Farmers' income in real terms is on the lowest side. About 60 percent of the people dependent on agriculture are having a share of about 14 percent in the national income. And the 40 percent of the people engaged in manufacturing, service and other sectors have a share of 86 percent in national income. The National Commission on workers in unorganized sector estimated that about 77 percent of the workforce is living with less than Rs 20 per day per capita.

## **POVERTY OF FARMERS**

Farmers are said to be the most poverty stricken people in the country, as they are living under subhuman conditions, facing acute shortage of food and nutrition, clothing, shelter, drinking water, sanitation and least access to education and health. It is estimated that 70 percent of farmers, mostly small, marginal and tenant farmers were facing the problem of acute poverty.

**FOOD PROBLEM**

Farm families are facing food problem seriously, in terms of both under- nourishment and malnutrition. The problem arises because of two factors. These are uncertainty in availability of food and economic accessibility.

Availability has become uncertain due to fluctuations in the production of food grains and other commodities for consumption on account of a variety of factors including weather aberrations, natural calamities, etc. The details of production of food grains are provided in the Table below.

**Table - 3: Production of food grains**

Year	Rice	Wheat	Total Coarse cereals	Total Pulses	Total Food grains	Total Oil Seed
1991- 92	74.68	55.69	25.99	12.02	168.38	18.60
1995 -96	76.98	62.10	29.03	12.31	180.42	22.11
2001 - 01	84.99	69.68	31.08	11.08	196.81	18.44
2007 - 08	96.69	78.57	40.75	14.76	230.78	29.76
1991-92 to 2007 - 08	1.35*	1.59*	1.14**	0.46	1.29*	1.48***

Source: prepared from RBI data base on Indian Economy.

Note: \*significant at 1 per cent level; \*\* Significant at 5 per cent level; and \*\*\* significant at 10 per cent level.

Economic accessibility to food is limited due to rising prices of food, declining purchasing power of the people and galloping inflation etc. The private corporate companies have been controlling food trade, which are making the availability of food and its accessibility to the poor difficult by resorting to unfair practices, such as, hoarding stocks of food grains and raising prices, etc. Under-nourishment and malnutrition have deleterious effect on the wealth of the farm family members, particularly, women and children. According to the National Family Health Survey report (NFHS-2) 1998-99, 51.8 percent of women and 74.3 percent of children are suffering from anemia, which in turn, seriously affects their health. It is reported in 2004 that mortality rate per 1000 live births was 84 and infant mortality rate per 1000 infants was 62. Maternity mortality rate per 1000 women was 4.

**MIGRATION OF POOR FARMERS AND FARM LABOUR**

Due to lack of unemploy in the villages, farmers, especially small and marginal, agricultural labourers are migrating to towns

nearby and far-off places in search of work. Reports coming from different parts of the country and also from some of the foreign countries, such as the Gulf countries, reveal that migrant people are being paid low wages. They are also subjected to harassment and slavery. They are living in worst conditions in places they migrated. Back at home, old people and children are left at their homes back in villages and they are the worst sufferers, as no one takes care of them. Children are engaged in tending cattle and hence no schooling for them.

**LOSING PROPOSITION**

Since agriculture has turned-out to be a losing proposition, 40 per cent of farmers expressed their desire to quit agriculture forth with if they could find some good alternative source of livelihood. This is a finding of the National Sample Survey Organization, Govt. of India.

According to Dr Vandana Shiva (Internationally reputed environmentalist and social activist), "There is a genuine crisis in Indian agriculture. Subsidies and selective promotion of some sectors have benefited only a few rich farmers. Free trade or globalisation

is a two-way trend, while exports in India the years of liberalisation have made no great strides, in fact only declined, and the entry of multinationals in the seeds, chemical fertilisers and pesticide sectors has hit Indian farmers hard”.

The foregone discussion brings out clearly the picture of agrarian crisis in India, which threatens the livelihoods of millions of farmers and people dependent on agriculture. Farmers’ suicide is a manifestation of deepening agrarian crisis in the country.

## CONCLUSIONS

The development of agriculture and farmers is extremely important for the overall development of the nation. A agrarian crisis and farmers’ suicides are crippling the nation’s economy and also breaking the spine of the farmers. The unabatedly continuing spate of farmers’ suicides should be stopped forthwith. The family members of the deceased should be taken care of. Agriculture should be protected and farmers saved in the interest of the people of the country as a whole. The suggestions based on this specific study will go a long way in providing solutions to the agrarian crisis and farmers’ suicides, provided the Government implement them sincerely and faithfully.

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