

Study of Suicide Victims of Agriculture in Punjab

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Abstract

Punjab is going to approach environmentalism, labour diversification and economic growth moving forward. The agricultural system that had been introduced as part of a development, project has failed for especially the weaker parts of Indian society ie agricultural labourers, marginal and small farmers. It already boasts one of the highest unemployment rates, and despite its agricultural success, farmers livelihoods have been declining resulting in a record number of farmer suicides. The various reasons, for suicides among Punjab farmers is perturbing enough to warrant a serious study. In the present case, suicide among Punjab farmers have by all means become a public issue as these are no longer confined to isolated cases.

Keyword

Suicide, Lack of Human value, Agriculture, Financing

I. Introduction

India is an Agrarian country with around 60 percent of its people directly or indirectly depend upon Agriculture. Agriculture in India is often attributed as gambling with monsoon because of its almost exclusive dependency on monsoons. The failure of these monsoons leading to series of droughts lack of better prices, exploitation by Middleman have been leading to series of suicides committed by farmers across India.

The current spate of farmers suicides highlighted by the media first in Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and now in Punjab, is certainly a disturbing phenomenon.

Punjab is going to approach environmentalism, labour diversification and economic growth moving forward. It already boasts one of the highest unemployment rates in India, and despite its agricultural success, farmer livelihoods have been declining, resulting in a record number of farmer suicides. The various reasons, for suicides among Punjab farmers is perturbing enough to warrant a serious study. Hence the need for an objective and systematic study of the incidence and causes of suicides in Punjab.

In the present case, suicides among Punjab farmers have by all means become a public. Issue as these are no longer confined to isolated cases.

II. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To find out if there has been an increase in the incidence of suicide, particular farmers' suicide, in recent years in Punjab.
2. To identify the distinctive socio- economic characteristics of the cases of suicide.
3. To explore both predisposing and precipitating factors that lead to suicide.
4. To find out the relationship between indebtedness and suicide.

A. Punjab- The Land of Farmers' Suicide

Punjab records shown that some 130 (approx.) farmers committed suicide between 2000 to 2009. Grass root organizations put the number at 20000 plus. After the Punjab Government light that some 2890 farmers and farm labourers killed themselves in the

last nine year in distress because of farming crisis of indebtedness. This is approximately one suicide everyday. About 87 per cent of them were small farmers and agricultural labourers.

For instances:

1. Najam Singh in Mansa district committed suicide in the year 2000 by drowning. He had got his sister married and his younger brother too and his loans were over Rupees 3 lakh. When the Aritiya refused to give him more loans, he simply committed suicide.
2. Mithu Singh of the same district consumed poison on 2nd January 2004 after returning from a meeting with the Artiya. He sold his land and got nothing from the Artiya as it was considered to be loan repayment. He simply could not take the humiliation and the poverty.
3. In 2001, Jasbeer Singh from Sangrur district owned 3.5 acres and his debts were over Rupees 3 lakh, including the purchase of a truck on loan. He was unable to pay the instalments. The recovery agent had come to his house that day and claimed the truck back. They drove the truck away, which skidded and fell near a pit. Jasbeer Singh was returning home when he saw this from a distance. He rushed to his room and consumed the dreaded pesticide from humiliation or hopelessness or perhaps.
4. In August 2005, 23 year old Dhyan Singh in Sangrur district came from the fields complaining that his stomach was hurting badly. He had already consumed the 'spray'. It was too late to save him. He had a loan of rupees 6000 already and was trying to take a fresh loan. The marriage expenses of his sister were weighing on Dhyan Singh's mind of her son's death, the mother took another loan of Rupees 1 lakh for agricultural purposes. With the help of this new loan she paid part of the earlier loan and also got her daughter married.
5. In 2007, 31 year old Satnam Singh of Ferozepur district consumed poison. Although the couple has been married for more than 10 years and was also greatly troubled by their childlessness, the situation was triggered by his sister's wedding, which obliged him to arrange for the dowry money. That was only four months before the suicide.

III. Why are Farmers Committing Suicide?

The suicides in Punjab are the result of mental stress and this mental stress is most often caused by poverty and especially by indebtedness. Indebtedness and the inability to earn enough income to relief the debt will assault the farmers feeling of self-esteem and respect. In many cases the individuals who committed suicide where responsible for the income and this debt created the feeling that they were incapable of taking care of their loved ones and themselves. This feeling has brought shame upon them and might even have confirmed for them the idea of being backward or underdeveloped. Once this has entered their minds it accumulates and creates a heavy mental burden. It is important to note that it is most likely that most farmers who committed suicide probably blamed themselves for their poverty and indebtedness. The newly introduced farming system has increased cost of production which in turn has led to the indebtedness and the disturbance of the harmony within farmers themselves. These suicides as these acts are shoeing us that the agricultural system that had been introduced

as part of a development, project has failed for especially the weaker parts of Indian society i.e agricultural labourers, marginal and small farmers. In India the marginal and small farmers are being passively sacrificed in the name of progress and policymakers with their lack of creativity and their narrow economic thinking are unable or maybe unwilling to resolve this major crisis although it is happening right underneath their eyes. There near not be a one track solution to the agrarian crisis and steps should be taken that fit the profile of the diverse needs of small and large farmers. Modern farming and focus on marketing might bring prosperity to a few farmers but it is not the solution for all farmers.

IV. Characteristics of Suicide Victims

1. Indebtedness was reported major cause of suicides by 30 per cent of the victims families following by conflict at home and poor financial position of the house.
2. Around 86 per cent of the victims were actually under debt.
3. Majority of the suicide victims were small and marginal farmers.
4. Majority of the suicide victims were illiterates or semi literate.
5. A vast majority of the victims belonged to young and middle age groups.
6. Majority of the suicide victims had borrowed money from informal credit agencies and for consumptive purposes.

Declining income due to ever increasing cost of production and stagnant farm productivity output prices and high amount of debt were reported to be major causes for non-payment of loans.

V. Causes

We can draw the following causes of the suicides of the cultivators:

1. The major reason for the suicides is the heavy indebtedness that the cultivators find themselves. This heavy indebtedness is not an overnight phenomenon that has occurred suddenly. It has its roots in the credit policy that has been followed over a number of years.
2. The indebtedness itself results from a mismatch in the cost of production and the support price and the market price that the cultivators are receiving at the end of every cropping cycle.
3. There has been repeated crop failure in the every years. This crop failure has resulted in a reduction in the productivity of the land due to a variety of reasons. These reasons could be due overuse of fertilizers, pesticides and reliance on HYV(High Yielding Variety) seeds and now to some extent on the genetically modified seeds such as the Bt. Cotton. Thus, the crop failure becomes a cyclical phenomena and not a one time occurrence.
4. Heavy indebtedness is spreading across the landholding patterns. The small and the medium sized cultivator is the most affected of the lot, though the large land holder in the rain fed areas of the state too is coming under strain.
5. The access to information base that the cultivators have largely comes from the agents of the fertilizer and seed companies. The government extension machinery is not visible in the sense that it can provide an objective data base in information to the cultivators.
6. Availability of credit, even after 55 years of Independence, private money lending remains the single largest sources of credit to small and marginal farmers. This is so because the banking sector is fast moving out of the credit delivery

mechanism.

7. Technological change as having played an instrumental role in the problem. In Punjab showed dramatic misuse of agricultural chemicals in farmer households in the absence of guidance on how to correctly use these deadly chemicals and linked it to the chemicals were in widespread use.

VI. Measures Adopted Help by the Government

The Punjab State Government has only recently begun acknowledging the farmer suicide problem, which it previously dismissed as non-existent. The state has set up a pension fund for these windows but not all have received it. And, in any case, it is minimal at Rupees 250 per month.

The co-operative bank many be made the nodal agency. At the village level the scheme should be implemented through primary agriculture cooperative societies. An expert group having representatives of the Provident Fund Commissioner, Agricultural Department, Co-operative Department and the bank may be constituted.

A credit card scheme for farmers may be introduced in the suicide prone districts in the first phase on a experimental basis.

A special plan for self employment of women and unemployed youths among the small and marginal farmers and landless labourers should be evolved.

VII. Suggestion

1. Raise the awareness: Articles in newspapers, magazines, documentaries, songs, blogs, you tube etc, let us educate ourselves on the issue and increase the decibel level.
2. Generate Employment: The debt-trapped farmers, their families, families of those farmers who have committed suicide are all seeking employment. There are no industries in those poverty struck areas. But these are hardworking people and employment should get.
3. Educate the farmers: Educate the farmers about the pitfalls of borrowing money from the profit sharks. Make or sponsor radio ads to counter the radio ads by the profit sharks. work with high risk farmers to steer them away from contemplating and committing suicide.
4. Organization: The organization also has a program that actively adopts families who have a family member commit suicide and provides them with practical education to help them overcome some of the barriers they face
5. Guiding and helping the farmer in the proper implementation of organic farming techniques.
6. Helping the policy maker and administration to come forward with sound policies to help the farmers.
7. To plan setting up of family, health and career counselling centers.

VIII. Conclusions

Punjab Government should invite suggestions and inputs from all the stack holders and partners for sustainable development of state before formulating any policy. Public Hearings and dialogue must be initiated to make policy people oriented and realistic. All quite understandable as long as we do not stop there but go on to educate ourselves on the issue and work towards the reconstruction. It is clear from the current crisis, however, that the agrarian interest is much more marginalized in the national policy agenda today.

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