

FARMER'S SUICIDE IN PUNJAB: ROOT CAUSES AND CURES

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Abstract: There is a general perception that agriculture is the backbone of Punjab economy. No doubt, Industrial sector and service sector are growing at a remarkable rate in the present scenario but still majority of the state's population resides in rural areas and they depend on agriculture and its allied activities including livestock, forestry & logging, fishery etc. Farmers in Punjab witnessed financial disorder and committed suicide, which recorded the largest wave of suicide in agriculture sector during last 16 years. Farmer suicide is a very complex phenomenon, largely associated with economic, social and psychological agony of the victim as well as their families. In the recent years, huge number of farmers have committed suicide due to rapid increase in debt, repeated crop failure, natural calamities, lack of alternative sources of income, exploitation by moneylenders, increase in the cost of production, sinking water table and overall rapidly diminishing profitability of agriculture etc. Today, farmers in most production districts such as Shri Muktsar Sahib, Patiala, Ferozpur, SAS Nagar and Fatehgarh Sahib are ending their lives because of all problems mentioned above. Here, an attempt is made to find out the root causes which force farmers to commit suicide in Punjab and also to cite and compare data of farmer's suicide. To reintegrate the affected farmers from this chronic situation, some innovative remedies like crop insurance, contract farming, extension services, agricultural credit etc. are also suggested, which can be implemented with sincerity by the government.

Keywords: Farmers, Punjab, suicide, causes, innovative.

1. INTRODUCTION

Punjab is the grain bowl of the country with a contribution of more than 43 percent of the central pool of wheat and 29 percent of rice. The total area of Punjab is just 1.4 percent of total area of the country, but it produces roughly 12 percent of the cereals produced in India. Agriculture continues to be a major contributor of the economy with 28.13 Percent Gross state Domestic Product (GSDP) being contributed by agriculture and allied sector against an all India figure of 18 percent. Also a considerable population of 36 Percent is dependent on agriculture and allied activities for its livelihood. The agricultural modernisation is at peak in Punjab, no doubt Production of Punjab is more and more but this speed of agricultural production decreases the Productivity and resources of the region, under the effect of green revolution, As an outcome, economy distress and farmers' suicide appeared in the state. Farmer's suicide is a Pre-Planned ending of one's life by a person, who depends on farming as a primary source of livelihood. The National Crime Records Bureau of India reported 5,650 farmer suicide in 2014. The highest number of farmer suicides was registered in 2004 When 18,241 farmers committed suicide (Anonymous, 2015). The number of farmers and agricultural labourers committing suicide has been growing in the recent past especially during 1995 to 2015. Suicide rate among the cultivators is higher as compared to the non-cultivators. A higher suicide tendency among farmers had been noted in Shri Muktsar Sahib, Patiala, Sangrur, Mansa, Barnala, Bathinda and Ferozpur districts (Singh and Manisha, 2015). The problem can not be solved unless the causes of farmers' suicide are properly discovered and comprehensive policies and programs are formulated. The Several reasons for suicide in Punjab's farmers are alarming enough to warrant a serious study.

Hence there is a need of objective and systematic study of incidences and causes of suicides in Punjab farmer in Punjab uncover the extreme rural plight that is otherwise covered by prevalent narrative of " India rising" India as one of the Fast growing economies of the world.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study entirely depends upon secondary data. The studies relating to the causes of farmer's suicide conducted by different experts have been consulted and analysed thoroughly. The data has been collected through research reports, Journals, various reports published on farmer suicide in various newspapers and Government websites.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Main objectives of present study are following:

- To analyse the causes of farmer suicide in Punjab.
- To find solutions for the Problem.

4. CAUSES OF FARMER SUICIDE

The critical analysis of research work done in India and abroad reported the following causes of farmer suicide.

- **Most farms are small and economically inconvenient**

Majority of the farmers in India own as little as two acres of land cultivation on such a small area is not economically profitable many farmers even do not own any land, which results in less profitable cultivation because a large portion of the earning go towards the payment of lease for the land (Anonymous , 2015)

- **Expeditious Rise in Debt**

The chief reason behind farmer's suicide is heavy indebtedness. This heavy indebtedness is not an overnight phenomenon that has occurred suddenly. It has its origin in the credit policy that has been followed over a number of years. The indebtedness arise from a discrepancy in cost of production and the support price and market price that the cultivators are receiving at the end of each cropping cycle. The small and the marginal sized farmers are highly affected by heavy indebtedness, though the large land holders in the rain fed areas of the state too, are coming under Strain. 85.9 Percent of farming households in the state of Punjab are under debts, Debts on Punjab farmers is 5,52 ,064.16 While the average amount of debt per household is 4,74,215.99. (Singh et al, 2017)

- **Repeated Crop Failures**

In the Present scenario, about 40 Percent of Farmer's suicide cases are due to crop failure. The crop failure has resulted in a reduction of Productivity and due to a number of reasons. The reasons could be due to the overuse of fertilizers, pesticides and dependence on high yielding variety seeds and to some extent on genetically modified seeds Such as Bt. Cotton. Thus, the crop failure becomes a cyclical phenomenon and not a onetime occurrence. Repeated crop failure has left the farmers with no other solution other than ending their lines. (Singh and Manisha, 2015). Crop fire, after rarely found, is also one of the reasons that farmers commit suicide. (S. Mishra, 2007)

- **Natural Calamities**

Natural Calamities are also responsible for farmers' suicide. The effective agricultural Production mostly depends on favorable weather Conditions. Natural condition has become more made reasons and leads to heavy raining, floods, droughts, delay in raining, heavy cyclones and manmade reasons like reduction in subsidies, fire accidents and so on, farmers are not able to take quantitating and qualities Production from their farms. Even when all the conditions are in favor of farmers, they do not get proper return of their product in the market, as more supply of goods reduces demand and it ultimately leads to reduction in prices. The government declares minimum support price (MSP) of the agricultural produce every year, which is less than the total cost incurred for production. Most of the time, farmers are not able to recover cost price of their products. Hence, agriculture becomes an assured loss making business, but the small and marginal farmers do not have any other option for earning and they continue the same practices. Continuous losses turn them to become insolvent and frustration of the same forces them to commit suicide. (Sadashiv , 2015)

- **Lock of alternative sources of income**

Majority of the states population lives in villages and agriculture is the most important activity of the state. But agriculture is a gamble on climatic conditions. So accompanying unit agriculture, allied activities like dairy, poultry mushroom etc. can be alternative sources of income from the government in this regard and farmers are not aware of it.

- **Financial Institutional Credit:-**

The green revolution increased the financial requirement of the farmers resulting in greater reliance on non-institutional sources of finance. Even after to years of independence, private money lenders remains the single largest source of credit to small and marginal farmers. This is so because the banking sector is fast moving moving out of the credit delivery mechanism. (Singh etal 2007)

- **Exploitation by Artiyas**

Farmers with no additional source of income except agriculture have to rely on credit to fulfill the significant amount of investment required for farm infrastructure, machinery and quality inputs and also their daily expenses short term expenses is provided by Cooperative societies, but for expenses like installation of a submersible pump, motor burn-outs and even various household expenses, like marriage, the farmers have to depend on Artiyas. The availability of loans at any time and for any purpose, increases the dependency farmers on the moneylenders (Kaur, 2015). The money lenders exploit them by charging higher rate of interest. As a result farmers become highly indebted and when they are unable to repay these heavy loans, they commit suicide.

- **Increase in cost of production**

In addition to the above reasons, increase in the cost of production forces the farmers to commit suicide Agricultural activities in Indian requires huge manpower for ploughing, digging, soil maintenance etc. for insecticides, pesticides, cutting, trans rotation and selling of products require funds. In addition to this, hybrid seeds are also required for good quality and quantity of product which are very costly and not affordable to poor and marginal farmers of India. The has increased cost of production which in turn has lead to the indebtedness and consequently to farmers suicide. (Sadashiw, 2015)

- **Ground water Depletion**

Intensive agriculture dominated by paddy-wheat monoculture has led to overexploitation of natural resources in Punjab, especially ground water. Currently, almost 14.19 lakh tube wells are in Punjab, contributing to fast-paced groundwater extraction and its depletion. The problem of overexploitation of groundwater is most severe in 10 districts (Amritsar, Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Ludhiana, Sangrur, Patiala, Fatehgarh Sahib, Moga, Mansa and Faridkot). It declined in the range of 5.85 meters (Amritsar) and 18.53 meters (Kapurthala) during 1996-2014. Out of 142 blocks in the state, water table is declining in 110 blocks due to over extraction of the water table depth in central Punjab is projected to fall below 70 feet in 66 percent area, below 100 feet in 34 percent area and below 130 feet in 7 percent area. Due to the depletion of groundwater resources, irrigation expenditure for rice and wheat has increased significantly in last decade. The increased cost of well deepening and pump replacement has contributed to increasing incidence of farmer's indebtedness especially on small and marginal farmers who lack sufficient resources to finance such investments (Kaur and Vatta, 2015)

- **Technological changes**

After the emergence of green revolution and innovation of new technologies new hybrid seeds, insecticides. Pesticides and farm cultivation technologies make farming more easier and production is increased considerably. But these technologies are innovations which are so expensive and not affordable to small and marginal farmers.

- **Government programs do not reach small farmers**

Government has implemented agriculture debt waiver and debt relief schemes from time to time. Recently, the Punjab cabinet gave in principle approval to debt waivers plan for farm labourers and landless farming members, a move which will provide loan relief to 2-85 lakh people comprising 70 percent dalits Government, in 2008, launched direct agricultural loan to stressed credit card. However, most of the subsidies and welfare schemes announced by the governments do not reach the poor farmers. On the contrary, only big landlords are benefited by those schemes. (Anonymous, 2015)

5. POLITICAL REASONS

Political environment plays an Important role for the success of any business and profession. The politicians, who play important role in the policy making and decision making, totally neglect agriculture sector. They frequently declare various relief packages for farmers but failing to take effective implementation of the same. So the needy farmers do not get the benefit of such packages. (Sadashiv, 2015)

- **Illiteracy, Traditions and Culture**

In addition to the above factors, illiteracy, Tradition and Culture also force farmers to commit suicide. Due to illiteracy and inadequate knowledge, farmers do not believe in the importance of education. Lack of education, weakens their decision making skills. Due to lack of money and perception capacity, they turn to rights and rituals of orthodox and other religious activities which again require more money. And sometimes, to perform these activities, these use to take heavy loans from private money lenders at a high rate of interest. In addition to this, marriages of daughters require huge fund. If the farmers fail to perform all these traditions and cultural activities, they become frustrated and ultimately leading to death.

- **Lack of work culture**

The previous farmers work in their fields own self and their family used to help them providing extra labour but, now farming is only dependent on labour hired by the farmers. They hire the labour and do not investigate the quality of work done by labour.

- **Nuclear Family**

Joint families are out of scene these days. People prefer to live in nuclear families. Each family now buys its own tractor, motorcycle, car, submersible pump, while the size of the landholding is shrinking due to the divisions. (Anonymous, 2015). Majority of suicide victims belonged to nuclear families, Supported the fact that recent phenomenon of disintegration of joint family in rural area. Which has been considered as hidden reason of suicide. In the joint family,

Table 1: Number of operational holdings (20-11-12) in Punjab

Categories	Number (000)	Percent	Area (d00 hectares)	Percent
Marginal (less than 1)	164	15.57	101	2.55
Small (1-2ha)	195	18.52	269	6.78
Semi-med(2-4ha)	325	30.86	855	21.55
Medium(4-10ha)	299	28.40	1713	43.18
Harge(10ha and above)	70	6.65	1029	25.94
Total	1053		3967	

Source: Agricultural handbook, Punjab Agricultural University2015.

6. FEASIBLE SOLUTIONS

We cannot leave the farmers of Punjab to fend for themselves in their time of crises. No doubt, government is very much aware about the agrarian Crisis and rural suicides Mere lip sympathy by political parties and government officials is not enough to bridge the gap in agricultural sector. Although copious amount of money is announced by the government of India to cure these crisis but who knows where this colossal amount vanishes and shrinks into a miniscule amount when it is actually utilized to server its purpose. The Following measures need to be taken immediately to deal with the problem of farmers' suicide.

- **Crop Diversification**

Many farmers in India are not aware of crop rotation and diversification. Though, education in urban areas has improved a lot, the government has ignored the same in rural areas in general and in agriculture sector in Particular. That's why farmers are not fully aware of the various programs implemented by the government. They should be educated for crop rotation and crop diversification. Cultivation of multi crops such as turmeric, Papaya, ginger, mushroom etc. will yield profitable results to the farmers. Many Countries in South East Asia have. Undertaken crop diversification to enhance

the productivity and cultivate high value crops with positive outcome and to meet the challenges of globalizing market in agriculture as well as the growing and changing needs of the population.

- **Collective farming**

Collective Farming is an excellent option for small and marginal farmers where a group of farmers can collectively work on big farm with collective inputs. This can lead to a village level build up of safe storage space to cut waste, reduce transportation cost and market produce when and where prices are attractive. (Anonymous, 2016)

- **Technological Advancement in Agriculture.**

By introducing farm techniques which guarantee a definite success, an increase in youth participation on agricultural fields is economically possible. This can be attained only by implementing new technology. Research efforts should continue for the production of crops with higher yield potential and better resistance to pests. Technological advancement in agriculture should be passed to the small farmers.

Water Management Techniques

The Dependency of agriculture on nature should be reduced. This calls for the effective management of water during seasons of good monsoons. Prevention of crop failure should be the primary aim of the government. Water management can be made more effective through interstate co-operation on water resources, where surplus water from perennial rivers can be diverted to the needy areas. Lack of water management causes water shortage. There should be the use of improved modern methods of rain water harvesting and irrigation.

- **Crop insurance**

Crop insurance is the need of the hour and the claim should be settled easily under the supervision of the district collectors. Traditional crop insurance depends on the direct measurement of the damage suffered by farmer to determine his/her pay outs however field loss assessment is often not feasible or expensive since most of our farmer are small holders procedure of getting crop insurance should be simplified.

- **Alternative source of income**

Small and marginal farmers should be encouraged to develop alternative source of income and the government should take up the responsibility for providing training to the farmers to acquire new skills the government should start alternative employment generation programs to reduce the dependence on agriculture as the sole source of income agro based small business can be alternative step. Farmers should produce for the market – product that fetch a good price.

- **Commercialization of agriculture**

Farmers need to be advised and guided economical method of cultivation which would save capital for them. The technology should be approachable to the small farmers the farmers could be helped to shift to the cultivation crops that would be easy and economical to cultivate in adverse conditions especially in drought be approached professionally and not as a traditional occupation the government can also encourage the pooling of the lands of small farmers and making bigger a chunk of economically cultivable and just like industrial zones there is an urgent need to establish special agriculture zones where only farming and agriculture related activities should be allowed.

- **Institutional finance**

The availability of institutional credit to every farmer is another important solution to protect the farmers from debt trap of money lenders institutional Finance should be made easily accessible to the poorest farmer. This calls for reducing formalities and procedures for obtaining the loans monitoring is also needed to check that the farmers are using the funds for the right purpose. Though overall institutional credit supply has increased yet availability of credit to small and marginal farmers is relatively low.

Co-operatives are the major source of agriculture credit the institution lending being inadequate and cumbersome the farmers resort to borrow from private non institutional source of finance at a very high rate of interest Emphasis should be cooperative credit information to improve their outreach and to ensure cost effective, adequate and timely flow of agriculture credit to the farmers credit facilities for investment in crops and livestock sector should be available at affordable interest rate.

- **Marketing facilities**

The agriculture produce market committee (APMC) act should be amended to provide direct marketing by farmers and development of private market to create an enabling environment for increased options to the farmers. There is no assured marketing and price for maize, pulses, oil seeds, vegetable and fruit. These crops are proposed for diversification and part replacement of paddy area for long term sustainability the product specific market e.g. for maize, potatoes, basmati, flowers, milk products etc should be developed to facilitate the handling of produce and its aggregation for purchasers a regulatory mechanism should be setup for regulation and efficient operation public for private markets producers markets on the line of cooperative markets / apni mandi should be encouraged in all the major towns of the state.

- **Contract farming**

Contract farming as a medium for providing ensured market to the producers, should be encouraged by making the mutual contracts enforceable well managed contract farming is an effective way to coordinate and promote production and marketing in Agriculture.

- **Skill Based Education**

The excessive dependency on migrant labour and farm machinery has made farmers lazy to do hard physical work. The previous farmers used to work in their fields themselves and their families helped them. Hence, There is a need to provide skill based education to increase their production and income.

Delivery of Extension Services

The delivery of technology package generated by university /institute to the farmers, is the basis to improve the rate of adoption of technology and productivity of agriculture. The farmers should be provided demonstrations of new technology at their own fields to tell them about its usefulness. There is a need to revitalize the extension services to meet the requirements of every farmer.

- **Simplifying life and reduce needs**

Punjabi's all over tend to show off during marriages, birth and death ceremonies, this needs to be minimized.

People should be motivated to lead simple life and not to spend too much money on these rituals. The people should think of their actual financial situation rather than their status.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The trend can be reversed through active participation of the government in dealing with the real issues of the farmers rather than forcing them to suicide majority of suicide victims borrow from private money lenders and are caught in vicious cycle of debt psychological pressure and constant feeling of stigma due to swelling debt forced farmers to commit suicide Temporary monetary relief would not be the solution. The efforts should be targeted at improving the entire structure of the farmers where in the relief is not given on a drought basis, rather are taught to overcome their difficulties through their own skills and capabilities.

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