

AGRARIAN CRISIS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON FARMERS: A CASE STUDY OF WARANGAL DISTRICT

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Abstract:

Any assessment for the status of Farmers has to start from the social framework, social structures, cultural norms and value systems that influence social expectations regarding the behaviour of both men and women and determine women's roles and their position in society. A society is composed of many institutions and most important of them are the system of decent family and kinship, marriage and religious traditions. They provide the ideology and moral basis for men and women about their rights and duties and their status and role. Living condition of women living in plain region is totally different from women living in mountainous region. Relief is the main factor which influences a person's stability.

Keywords: social structures, kinship, religious traditions, ideology, moral basis

Introduction

Indian agriculture had reached the stage of development and maturity much before the now advanced countries of the world entered on the path of progress. At that time, there was a proper balance between agriculture and industry and both flourished hand in hand. This situation continued till the middle of the eighteenth century. Agriculture contributed two-thirds of national income and after the initiation of planning in India, the share of agriculture GDP declined from 55.3 percent in 1950-51, and 37.9 per cent in 1980-81 and further to 12 in 2012. In 1951, 69.5 per cent of the working population was engaged in agriculture. This percentage fell to 52.1 percent in 2004-05 of underemployment and disguised unemployment.

Six major causes for agricultural crisis because of globalization policies in India they are: liberal import of agricultural products, cutback in agricultural subsidies, lack of easy and low-cost loan to agriculture, decline in government investment in the agricultural sector, restructuring of the public distribution system (PDS), and special economic zones are the major reason for agriculture crisis in India. Deforestation, neglecting surface water storage, choosing high water consumption Crops, exploitation of ground water and sand mining in river beds making the farmers in draught prone areas to suffer even more. Mostly small and marginal farmers cultivating the fully water depend crops increasing cost of drought.

Farmers in drought-prone areas of Telangana face special problems related to the following: poor resource endowments including poor soils, degraded forest and low/untimely rainfall and frequent and often consecutive crop failures due to drought, Lack of assured irrigation; and lack of alternate livelihood opportunities such as dairying, poultry, etc; Lack of adequate wage employment; Implying lack of access to health facilities even at primary and secondary levels. Mostly small and marginal farmers' cultivating the fully water depend crops increasing cost of drought.

Study of Area

Warangal is located at 18.0°N 79.58°E. It has an average elevation of 302 metres (990 feet). It is settled in the eastern part of Deccan Plateau made up of granite rocks and hill formations which left the region barren making the cultivation depend on seasonal rainfalls. There are no river flows nearby Warangal, which makes it to rely on Kakatiya Canal which originates from Sriram Sagar Project to meet the

drinking water requirements. Located in the semi-arid region of Telangana.

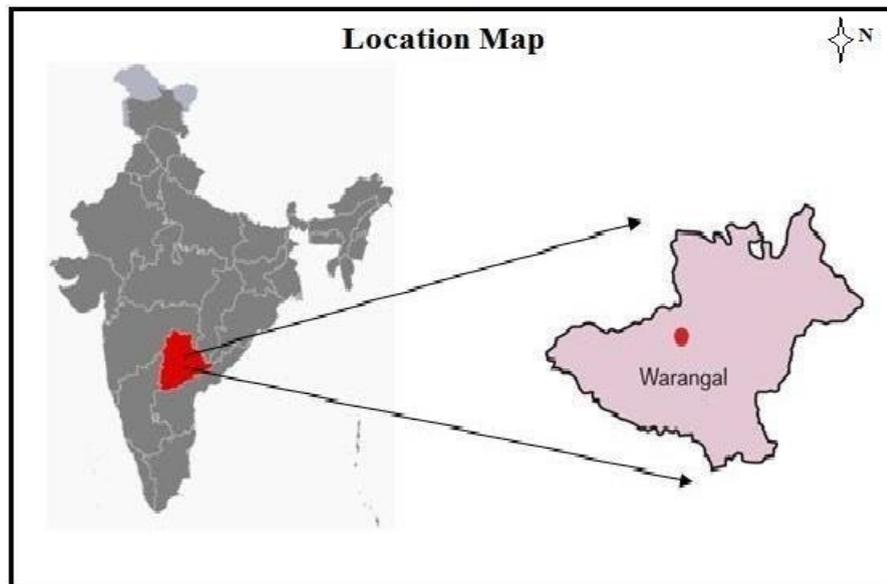


Figure Study Area Map

In 2011 a study on Warangal reported that, 471,000 ha are cultivated each year, and of them, 138,900 are sown more than once, resulting in a gross cropped area of 609,800 ha. 323,900 hectares (68.8%) of cultivated land are irrigated and the remaining cropland is rain fed. At the time, the largest crop is rice, which accounts for 198,000 hectares each year (32.5% of gross cropped area). Almost all rice cultivation in Warangal is irrigated. The next largest crop is cotton, planted on 158,700 hectares (26% of gross cropped area). Altogether, farmers grow grains (mostly rice and maize with some sorghum) on 287,000 hectares (47.1% of gross cropped area), pulses and legumes (groundnut, green gram, red gram, bajra, and Bengal gram) on 104,300 hectares (17.1% of gross cropped area), and horticultural crops (mostly chillies, some turmeric) on 33,400 ha (5.5% of gross cropped area).

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To study the socio-economic conditions of the selected farmers in study area.
- To identify the contributory factors for farmers suicides

Need for the Study:

Agricultural activity for their income. Agriculture in India is undergoing a structural change leading to a crisis. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are the first state that drew country wide attention through a state of suicides by farmers. The first spurt in farmer’s suicides occurred in the mid-1980s. 1986-1987 there were a few cases in the later years, so the early warnings of crisis in agriculture in the form of suicides were ignored as aberrations. During the year 1997-2007 farmer suicides in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana was 21,174. Different causes for farmer’s committed suicide in India increasing indebtedness, inadequate support price and repeated crop failure. Agrarian conditions in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have marginalization of holding and resource stress, income and consumption levels of farmers monthly level of income is less than the monthly consumption expenditure for all classes of farmers up to semi-medium farmers.

Statement of the Problem

- Telangana mainly dependent on rain fall for production, change in climate has severe impact on forming shortage of rains greatly reduces the yields and profitability.
- Deccan plateau in general prolonged dry spells high incidence of rain water runs off cause’s soil erosion.

- Electronic and print media have exposed the farmer suicides in Warangal district of Telangana. Farmers growing different crops have been committing suicide. However, cotton farmers in the district formed the majority. It is to be noted that cotton is not a traditional crop in the district. A shift from traditional food crops to commercial crops such as cotton, chillies etc have taken place. Cash crops are capital intensive and risk prone.
- Crop failure or loss is said to be one of the main contributory factors of farmer's suicides, besides several others. On account of this, thousands of farmers committed suicide. The members of deceased farmer's families have become orphans at once and are facing innumerable difficulties, troubles, pains, sufferings, agony and misery.

Hypothesis of Study

- Social factors have influenced farmer's suicides.
- A strong correlation exists between farmer's indebtedness and suicides.
- Relief and rehabilitation measures have helped the family members of the victims or deceased farmers.

Methodology and Data Collection

The present study has been conducted in the agrarian state of Telangana. It focused on the dismal state of agriculture in the Warangal district of Telangana. The region was selected for study as 2/3rd of the farmer suicides have been noticed in the Telangana region 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.

By analyzing various aspects of the district data in the agricultural sector like yield, productivity, land utilization, irrigational facilities, agricultural credits etc. the study has been carried out to determine the reasons for the dismal state, of agriculture in the district. To collect data structured questionnaire is used primarily for quantitative analysis and followed with unstructured interview method to procure additional information which would also enhance the response quality. Both questionnaire and interview data was used for complete analysis.

Review of Literature

V.S Vyas (1994) points out four major weaknesses that plague Indian agriculture a) Preponderance of low value agriculture, b) Low cost-benefit ratio, c) Inefficient use of natural resources. Vyas also says that the income levels of Indian farmers are less. The Green Revolution tremendously increased food production and accelerated the pace of modernization and urbanization in India. On the negative side, it also created serious regional imbalances and increased the gap between the size classes of the farmers.

Mohan Kanda (1997) tries to find out reasons for shortfall in agricultural credit and suggests remedies. Found that there exists a large gap between availability of credit and dependence of farmer on informal sources, and there is no improvement in the rural credit sector. There are few problems like continuous decline in the number of primary agricultural cooperatives, shortfall in the disbursement of agricultural credit and investment in agriculture.

According to citizen's report on 'Gathering Agrarian Crisis-Farmers suicides in Warangal District of Andhra Pradesh by **A. Sudarshan Reddy (1998)** The other reason must be the inability of very small farms to generate adequate income and employment to keep him as cultivator.

Deshpande (2002) According to him it's mainly due to such interlocking that the farmers tend to buy spurious pesticides from the vendors, as well as fall into a debt trap and he argues that the proactive role of pesticide companies and their marketing strategies are largely responsible for heavy

application of pesticides. He emphasizes that Crop insurance has operated for a long as crop credit insurance and did not provide a sufficient safety net cover to the farmers and . It is only now that the scheme is likely to be effective, with the establishment of a separate authority for administering crop insurance. He continues that Market inadequacy and crash in prices were reported as major reasons for farmer's distress.

However, a sudden crash in prices and consistently lower prices disproportionate to the price level of inputs causes severe agony and economic stress in the farm family. The prevailing market intervention schemes and MSP do not adequately support the farmers without a time lag and are therefore completely ineffective. He says that the committee emphasized on support subsystem through facilities for healthcare, awareness of the harmful effects of alcohol, crop insurance, and rationalization of the credit system. He said that a broader economic perspective, the farmers who died were entrepreneurs who tried to adopt new ventures. Unfortunately, their life was cut short due to unexpected happenings and a lack of opportunity for them.

Farmers Suicide in India:

In 2014, the National Crime Records Bureau of India reported 5,650 farmer suicides. The highest numbers of farmer suicides were recorded in 2004 when 18,241 farmers committed suicide the farmer's suicide rate in India has ranged between 1.4 and 1.8 per 100,000 total populations, over a 10-year period through 2005.

India is an agrarian country with around 70% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. Farmer suicides account for 11.2% of all suicides in India. Activists and scholars have offered a number of conflicting reasons for farmer suicides, such as monsoon failure, high debt burdens, government policies, public mental, personal issues and family problems. There are also accusations of states manipulating the data on farmer suicides.

States Affected

As of 2017, farmer suicides have occurred in large numbers in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Jharkhand

Reasons

Various reasons have been offered to explain why farmers commit suicide in India, including: floods, drought, debt, use of genetically modified seed, public health, use of lower quantity pesticides due to less investments producing a decreased yield and also government economic policies. 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 committing suicide. Panagariya 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" amongst farmers who commit suicide.

Agrarian Distress in Telangana:

Present in most of the agriculturally advanced states, it has been most virulent in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh with two-thirds of suicide deaths in India in these state alone. During the past seven or eight years the peasants of TS & AP., known for militant agrarian struggles before and after independence, actually the phenomenon of suicides in TS & AP dates back 1987-88 when desperate cotton growers took their lives in Guntur and Prakasham districts. There was a boom in cotton cultivation in the early 1980s bringing good profits to the farmers. The farmers called cotton "white gold". But from mid -1980s onwards, cotton farmers suffered heavy losses due to crop failure however ,the area under cotton cultivation continue to grow in the state, as it expanded to other regions

, especially Telangana.

According to Report Published in Deccan Chronicle On 04/01/2017 Telangana has recorded a massive increase in suicides by farmers; it now has the second highest rate of farmer suicides in the country. Recent data released by the National Crime Record Bureau reveals that more farmers ended their lives in TS in 2015 than in previous years. Failure of their crops, increasing debt, harassment from money lenders, ill health and alcohol addiction have been cited as the main reasons for driving farmers to suicide. NCRB data shows that 1,358 farmers committed suicide in Telangana in 2015; 898 farmers committed suicide in 2014.

Deficit rainfall of minus 21 per cent in the monsoon season till August 2015 caused a major crop failure in the state. There was also a massive shortfall in rice production. In the kharif season, only 10 per cent of the normal rice production occurred in the state. The area under rice cultivation was also less because of the poor rainfall; official government data shows that only 30 lakh hectares of land was under cultivation as against 42 lakh hectares earlier. As the kharif crop started to fail, the rate of suicides increased. In July alone, 12 farmers killed themselves in five districts. The decreasing groundwater level has also caused distress as farmers were not able to pull out water using conventional borewells. Many of the farmers were being harassed by illegal money lenders before they ended their lives. A majority of the farmers in Warangal and Medak are tenants, who have to pay very high lease rates. Governments, at state and central level, sometimes throw compensation packages at debt ridden farmers but do little to actually address the causes of agrarian distress.

Socio-Economic Survey in Warangal

Characteristics	Warangal
Gender Composition (%)	
Male	97.21
Female	2.78
Literacy (%)	
Literates	46.5
Non literates	53.5
Age Group(%)	
30-50	66.1
Family Type (%)	
Nuclear Family	93.9
Joint Family	7.1
Social Group(%)	15.8
SC	
ST	4.4
BC	67.5
OC	12.3
Ownership Category (%)	
Pure Tenant	7.5
Pure Owner	63.5
Owner cum Tenant	25.2
Operational Category (%)	
Marginal & Small	91.2

Semi-medium & Medium	8.5
Large	Nil
Farmers Having agri. as the only Occupation (%)	47.5

A recent sample survey of socio-economic characteristics of farmers who committed suicide in 2018 and 2019 also shows similar results comparable to earlier studies. The survey also brought out the factors contributing to the incidence of suicides.

The Roots of This Crisis in Warangal

Fragmentation of land: Demographic pressure has pushed down the land: man ratio to less than 0.2 hectares of cultivable land per head of rural population. It has also progressively pushed down the size structure of landholdings. Around 83% of rural households are either entirely landless or own less than 1 hectare of land. Another 14% own less than 3 hectares. At the opposite end, less than 0.25% of rural households own more than 10 hectares of land and a minuscule 0.01% own over 20 hectares.

- **Shortage of money:** Landless or marginal farmers lack the resources to either buy or lease more land or invest in farm infrastructure—irrigation, power, farm machinery, etc.—to compensate for the scarcity of land.
- **Weather:** The large majority of small farmers are dependent on the rains. A weak monsoon or even a delayed monsoon—timing matters—means a significant loss of output. Soil fertility, pests and plant diseases is another risk.
- **Price variations:** Farmers are usually at the mercy of traders. The better the crop the lower would be the price. Net income sometimes collapses if there is a very good crop of perishables. The highly distorted and exploitative product market is the second most important factor responsible for the misery of the small farmer.
- **MSP:** small farmers usually do not benefit from the government assured MSPs. It mainly benefits the large traders who sell grain to the government. Small farmers typically do not have enough marketable surpluses to justify the cost of transporting the crop to government corporations in the towns. Their crop is usually sold to traders at rock bottom post-harvest prices in the village itself or the nearest mandi.
- **APMCs:** Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs), which were supposed to protect the farmer, have had the opposite effect. Farmers have to sell their produce through auctions in regulated markets controlled by cartels of licensed traders, whose licences give them oligopolistic market power. These cartels fix low purchase prices, extract large commissions, delay payments, etc. According to a study, the farmers may typically get as little as 25% of the price that consumers finally pay. A consolidated mark-up of 300%.
- **Migration:** The rural youth, especially young males, are migrating to the towns and cities for a better future. But their dreams are quickly shattered. There is not much employment growth anyway and they lack the skills required for a decent job. What remains is a burgeoning army of unemployed, miserable and frustrated young men.

Other Reasons

Increasing debt burden

The share of institutional loans disbursed to agriculture and allied sectors has risen from 9% in 2000-01 to 31.4% in 2015-16. The amount of short-term institutional loans for agriculture exceeds the total cost of inputs including hired labour. This indicates that a part of crop loans is spent on non-agricultural purposes. According to NSS surveys on Investment and Debt (NSS-I&D), loans taken by cultivators from non-institutional sources is rising faster than from institutional sources. Much of the

growth in household demand in rural India has been debt-ridden and not supported by growth in income.

Problems Faced By Our Farmers

Crop insurance programmes

Crop insurance programmes have not been able to recover farmers' investments in most cases. This is due to lack of accurate farm-level data that can be used to settle claims. Satellite and remote sensing technologies are for the future

- High-input cost of farm labour
- The cost of labor has risen due to social welfare programmes and minimum wage levels
- Also, the problem is the availability of labour at the right time and at the right cost
- At peak times, like sowing, transplanting, harvesting, etc., it is very difficult to get sufficient farm labour
- One solution to address this is greater reliance on technology
- It can be through farm mechanization, the use of weedicides or genetic engineering that can lower input and time costs
- Farmers should be encouraged to use such labour-saving options instead of being burdened with the social objective of protecting rural employment and being denied access to new technology.

What can be done

An idea that has gained much traction in recent days is cooperative farming. This is already popular in France, Germany, Romania, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua, Kenya, and Bangladesh among others. There are several variants of cooperation ranging from collective action in accessing credit, acquiring inputs and marketing to production cooperatives that also include land pooling; labour pooling; joint investment, joint water management and joint production.

Advantages of cooperative farming

The advantages of aggregating small farms into larger, voluntary, cooperatives include greater capacity to undertake lumpy investment in irrigation and farm machinery, more efficient farming practices, greater bargaining power and better terms in the purchase or leasing of land, access to credit, purchase of inputs and the sale of produce.

Supreme Court for policy to curb farmer suicides

Supreme Court: The Centre should address the "serious issue" of farmers taking their own lives and implement a comprehensive policy to be adopted by the State governments for preventing the tragedy. Govt: Soon coming up with a comprehensive policy to address the problems of the farmers. The policy would address crop loss or crop failure and a compensation for farmers. Other steps: Insurance cover has been increased for the farmers. Earlier, it was for those who took agriculture loan but now it has been extended to all the farmers. No need for middlemen: Now the government is directly procuring food grains from the farmers at the minimum support price and they did not need to take the help of middlemen or market.

Findings:

These findings may be summed up as the following stylized facts:

- The more the dependence on the ground water sources of irrigation for cultivating non-food crops, the higher the probability of the farmers committing suicides
- The more the dependence of the farmers on the high cost informal credit for working capital and fixed capital for raising the non-food crops, the higher the plausibility of the farmers committing suicides

- The tenant farmers who grow non-food crops and depend on ground water sources for irrigating the crops are more prone to commitsuicides
- Though suicides are not class specific, majority of suicides are among small and marginal farmers, followed by upwardly mobile middle level farmers.
- Suicides are noticed among all caste groups of farmers but most of the cases are among ‘other backward classes’OBCs.
- The more the dependency of farmers for the inputs on the markets, and the more the market volatility in output prices, more is the probability of farmers committing suicides.
- The farmers whose household income is more diversified, the less the possibility for the farmers committing suicides.
- The more is the proportion of their income that farmers are forced to spend on education, health and social events, the more is the probability of farmers committing suicides.

Conclusion

The agrarian crisis is morphing into a social nightmare. It’s time for a complete overhaul. There are many lessons of successful cooperative farming in India and abroad that will have to be learned for the institutional transformation of our small farmer economy into cooperative farming systems on a national scale to address the agrarian crisis.

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