

## **FARMERS' SUICIDES IN INDIA: TRENDS AND CAUSES**

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### **1. Introduction:**

According to the new series of national income released by the Central Statistical Organization (CSO), at 2011-12 prices the share of agriculture in total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is 18 per cent in 2013-14. As against a growth target of 4 per cent for agriculture and allied sectors in the Twelfth Plan, the growth registered in the first year at 2011-12 prices was 1.2 per cent, 3.7 per cent in 2013-14, and 1.1 per cent in 2014-15. The agriculture sector growth is not only important for supporting national economy but for providing food grain, contribution in international trade and generation of more employment also. But, the man behind this sector is farmer, who is committing suicide and this becomes an arguable topic among the academicians and also policy makers. Between 1995 and 2012, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported 284,673 farmers' suicides, which is 13.9% of all reported suicide deaths (Table 1). So, in this paper an attempt has been made to study the trends and various causes of farmers' suicides in India.

### **2. Objectives:**

The objectives of this paper are:

- i) To assess the trends in farmers' suicides in India,
- ii) To identify various causes of farmers' suicides in India.

### **3. Methodology and Data:**

This study is mainly focused on secondary data. The time series data on farmers' suicides and area, production and productivity of agricultural sector were collected from the published sources like Economic Survey of India published by Government of India, Handbook of Statistics on the Indian economy published by Reserve Bank of India and some notable research reports and papers.

### **4. Scope and Limitations:**

This study is restricted only to agriculture sector development in India. In that we have considered only rural area data. So, all the results applicable to only above mentioned limitations.

## 5. Findings and Discussions:

### 5.1. Trends in the Farmers' Suicides in India:

In the eighteen year period between 1995 and 2012 as many as 284673 farmers committed suicide in India (See Table 1 below). It is also clear from the table that the number of farm suicides have kept up a more or steady increase over this period in the country. The year 1998 in fact show a sharp increase in the number of farm suicides – an 18 percent jump from the previous year; and the number remained more or less steady at around 16,000 suicides per year over the next three years upto 2001. The year 2002 once again saw a sharp increase – close to a ten per cent increase compared to 2001 – and the number has more or less remained steady at around 17,000 to 18,000 per year in the period after that. The average number of farm suicides per year in the five year period 2002-2006, at 17,513 is substantially higher than the average (of 15,747 per year) for the previous five year period (Table 1)

**Table 1: Farmers' Suicides and All Suicides by Sex in India, 1995-2012**

Year	Farmers' Suicides				All Suicides			Farmer s' suicides as % of all suicides
	Males	Female s	Total	Males as % of Total	Males	Female s	Total	
1995	8295	2425	10720	77.4	52357	36821	89178	12.0
1996	10897	2832	13729	79.4	51206	37035	88241	15.6
1997	11229	2393	13622	82.4	56281	39548	95829	14.2
1998	12986	3029	16015	81.1	61686	43027	104713	15.3
1999	13278	2804	16082	82.6	65488	45099	110587	14.5
2000	13501	3102	16603	81.3	66032	42561	108593	15.3
2001	13829	2586	16415	84.2	66314	42192	108506	15.1
2002	15308	2663	17971	85.2	69332	41085	110417	16.3
2003	14680	2463	17143	85.6	70068	40511	110579	15.5
2004	15929	2312	18241	87.3	72651	41046	113697	16.0
2005	14973	2158	17131	87.4	72916	40998	113914	15.0
2006	14664	2396	17060	86.0	75702	42410	118112	14.4
2007	14509	2123	16632	87.2	79295	43342	122637	13.6
2008	14145	2051	16196	87.3	80544	44473	125017	13.0
2009	14951	2417	17368	86.1	81471	45680	127151	13.7
2010	13592	2372	15964	85.1	87180	47419	134599	11.9
2011	12071	1956	14027	86.1	87839	47746	135585	10.3
2012	11951	1803	13754	86.9	88453	46992	135445	10.2
<b>All years</b>	<b>240788</b>	<b>43885</b>	<b>284673</b>	<b>84.6</b>	<b>1284815</b>	<b>767985</b>	<b>2052800</b>	<b>13.9</b>

**Source:** Srijit Mishra-2014, Farmers' Suicides in India, 1995-2012: Measurement and interpretation, Asia

Research Centre Working Paper 62.

If we consider the gender composition of farm suicides in the country, according to official data, its take place overwhelmingly by the male farmers. Considering the period 1995-2012 as a whole, close to 86 per cent of all the farm suicides are by male farmers and over the period share of male farmers suicides is higher all the time (Table 2). It is also worth noting that the number of male suicides among farmers has increased quite rapidly, at around 3 percent per annum during this period, 1995-2012; the number of female farm suicides in sharp contrast has remained almost static during the period. Consequently the extent of concentration of farm suicides among males has witnessed a steady increase over the period.

**Table 2: Share of Farmers’ Suicides by Sex in India, 1995-2012 (%)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Total</b>
1995	77.38	22.62	100.00
1996	79.37	20.63	100.00
1997	82.43	17.57	100.00
1998	81.09	18.91	100.00
1999	82.56	17.44	100.00
2000	81.32	18.68	100.00
2001	84.25	15.75	100.00
2002	85.18	14.82	100.00
2003	85.63	14.37	100.00
2004	87.33	12.67	100.00
2005	87.40	12.60	100.00
2006	85.96	14.04	100.00
2007	87.24	12.76	100.00
2008	87.34	12.66	100.00
2009	86.08	13.92	100.00
2010	85.14	14.86	100.00
2011	86.06	13.94	100.00
2012	86.89	13.11	100.00
<b>All years</b>	<b>84.58</b>	<b>15.42</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Table 1

The part of the reason for this overwhelming focus of farm suicides among males may have to do with the possible undercounting of female farm suicides in the police records on which the NCRB data are based. The NCRB takes in to account those person famers’ suicide who has land title on his name. The high concentration of farm suicides among males in fact represents an objective reality. In a context where the male head of the household is usually reflected the ‘bread winner’ in the household, this phenomenon would point towards economic distress as a major encouraging factor underlying large number of these suicides, and the acute agrarian crisis in the country would be the basis for this distress.

## 5.2. Causes of Farmers' Suicides in India:

There are many causes responsible for farmers' suicides in India:

### a) Decrease in the Productivity of major crops:

A checking of the rates of growth in yield reveals that most of the crops have recorded highergrowth during the 11th Plan than that during the 10th Plan. However, sugarcane, and rapeseed & mustard, soybean and cotton recorded lower rates of growth in yield during the 11th plan than that of the 10th Plan which is commercial crops.

**Table 1.2: All India Average Annual Growth Rate Yield of Principal Crops (%)**

Crops	10 <sup>th</sup> FYP (2002-03 to 2006-07)	11 <sup>th</sup> FYP (2007-08 to 2011-12)
Rice	1.17	2.41
Wheat	-0.32	3.29
Jowar	2.07	3.26
Bajra	7.28	8.64
Maize	-0.15	6.47
Ragi	0.40	6.66
Small Millets	2.32	4.08
Barley	-0.90	4.64
Coarse Cereals	1.75	7.27
<b>Total Cereals</b>	<b>0.74</b>	<b>3.76</b>
Gram	0.28	2.27
Tur	-0.41	1.51
<b>Total Pulses</b>	<b>0.65</b>	<b>2.78</b>
<b>Total Foodgrains</b>	<b>0.59</b>	<b>3.55</b>
Sugarcane	0.66	0.47
Groundnut	4.32	13.91
Sesamum	0.51	5.30
Rapeseed & Mustard	3.24	0.76
Sunflower	0.37	6.20
Soyabean	6.18	3.90
<b>Total Nine Oilseeds</b>	<b>3.53</b>	<b>5.32</b>
Cotton	19.40	3.93
Jute & Mesta	1.45	1.12

Source: State of Indian Agriculture-2012-13, Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation Directorate of Economics and Statistics, New Delhi

In order to promote growth in agriculture it is to increase yield through use of new technology, which is not happening as per expected rate. So, farmers' income is not increasing due to lower productivity and this is becoming cause of suicides in our country.

### b) Shifting in cropping Pattern more towards commercial crops:

There is a clear shift in cropping pattern from traditional crops like cereals to commercial crops like oilseeds and soyabean over the last twenty years. For these types of commercial crops more costly inputs are required, which increase in the cost of cultivation.

But from other side there is many fluctuation in the rainfall in our country this is may be due to climate change like factor. So, finally farmers are not getting returns what they expecting from cultivation of commercial crops and they got into the distress situation, in which they are committing suicides.

**c) Increase in the Farmers' Indebtedness by non-institutional source of credit:**

Non-institutional sources were dominant in 1951, accounting for 93 per cent of the outstanding debt of cultivator households, but their share declined rapidly to 81 per cent in 1961 and further to 66 per cent in 1971 and 36.8 per cent in 1981. After 1981, the rate of decline slowed down and the share of non-institutional sources was 30.6 per cent in 1991. There was, however, a reversal of this pattern thereafter and the share of non-institutional debt actually climbed up to 39 per cent in 2002 and dropped to 36 per cent in 2013. During this period, the share of moneylenders in providing credit rose from 17.5 per cent in 1991, to 26.8 per cent in 2002 and 29.6 per cent in 2013.

**Table 3:Share of Debt of Farmers' households from different sources: 1951-2013**

(Figures in percentages)

Source of credit	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2002	2013
Institutional	7.3	18.7	31.7	63.2	66.3	61.1	64.0
Cooperative Societies/Banks,etc.	3.3	2.6	22.0	29.8	30.0	30.2	33.3
Commercial Banks	0.9	0.6	2.4	28.8	35.2	26.3	30.7
Non-institutional	92.7	81.3	66.3	36.8	30.6	38.9	36.0
Moneylenders	69.7	49.2	36.1	16.8	17.5	26.8	29.6
Unspecified (Relatives, Friends & others)	--	--	--	--	3.1	--	6.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Expert Group on Agricultural Indebtedness, 2007 & All India Debt and Investment Survey, Various Issues, NSSO

The growth in institutional credit came mainly from commercial banks and, by 1991, they had become the dominant agency, leaving co-operative banks well behind. In subsequent years, however, co-operative banks gained some lost ground and, by 2013, there is more or less parity in the standing of these two agencies as far as outstanding loans in the agricultural sector are concerned. If moneylenders share increase, which charge higher rate of interest create causes of concerned. Many studies (IGIDR-2006, Ministry of Finance-2007) have been pointed out that, increase in the supply of non-institutional credit is the main cause of farmers' suicides in India.

**d) Increase in the cost of cultivation:**

After introduction of 'green revolution' in Indian agriculture sector many farmer started using high yielding variety (HYV) seeds, more pesticides, fertilizer and modern irrigation methods which brought huge amount of cost on farmers. Over the period agriculture occupation become now costly, because of bringing more inputs from market. But at the same time, that much growth is not visible in returns from selling crops in the market. So, increase in the cost of cultivation become cause of distress among farming community in India.

**e) Increase in the Non-productive use of Credit by Farmers':**

On the basis of purpose agricultural credit needs of the farmers can be classified on into the following categories-i) Productive, ii) Consumption needs, and iii) Unproductive. The share of productive loans taken by the farmers household declined over the period viz., from 71.6 per cent in 1981 to 62.9 per cent in 2002 (Table-4). This is may be because of decline guarantee about expected agricultural income or fears of failure of crop due to unpredictable rainfall.

**Table 4: Distribution of cash credit by purpose among rural Cultivator household in India: 1961-2002** (Figures in percentages)

Sr. No.	Purpose	1961	1971	1981	2002
<b>I</b>	Productive	40.1	54.0	71.6	62.9
1	Farm business	36.6	49.7	63.8	52.5
	i)Capital expenditure	26.8	34.7	45.3	34.3
	ii)Current expenditure	9.8	15.0	18.5	18.2
2	Non-farm Business	3.5	4.3	7.8	9.4
	i)Capital expenditure	1.4	3.2	6.3	7.4
	ii)Current expenditure	2.1	1.1	1.5	2.0
<b>II</b>	Non productive	60.0	46.0	28.4	38.1
1	Household expenditure	49.2	37.8	20.0	27.7
2	Other purposes	10.8	7.2	8.4	10.4
	i)Repayment of debt	5.0	1.5	0.1	1.5
	ii)Expenditure on Litigation	1.8	0.7	0.8	0.3
3	Financial investment	0.2	0.2	1.0	0.6
<b>(I+II)</b>	All Purposes	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Expert group on agricultural indebtedness, 2007

Farmers often require loans for consumption purpose also. Between the moment of marketing of agricultural produce and harvesting of the next crop there is a long interval of time and most of the farmers do not have sufficient income to sustain them through this period. Therefore they have to take loans for meeting their consumption needs. But,

institutional credit agencies do not provide loans for consumption purposes. In addition to consumption, farmers also require loans for a multiplicity of other unproductive purposes such as litigation, performance of marriages, social ceremonies on the birth or death of a family member, religious functions, festivals, etc. This unproductive purpose of loans decreased up to 1981 from 60 per cent in 1961 to 28.4 per cent. But it has increased 38.1 per cent in 2002 (Table-4). The cause of concern here is increasing unproductive use of agricultural credit of the farmers, but this type of purpose loans not providing by institutional sources. Accordingly, farmers are forced to fall back upon moneylenders and mahajns to meet such requirements

## **6. Conclusion:**

The man behind this sector is farmer, who is committing suicide and this become arguable topic among the academician and also policy makers. In this paper an attempt has been made is that trends and various causes of Famers' suicides in India. From above study we found following important conclusion:

*Firstly*, in the eighteen years period between 1995 and 2012 as many as 284673 farmers committed suicide in India. It is also clear from the data that the number of farm suicides have kept up a more or steady increase over this period in the country. *Secondly*, if we consider the gender composition of farm suicides in the country, according to official data, its take place overwhelmingly by the male farmers. Considering the period 1995-2012 as a whole, close to 86 per cent of all the farm suicides are by male farmers and over the period share of male farmers suicides is higher all the time. *Thirdly*, there are major causes of famers' suicides in India like decrease in the productivity of major crops, increase in the non-productive use of credit by farmers', increase in the cost of cultivation, increase in the farmers' indebtedness by non-institutional source of credit, shifting in cropping pattern more towards commercial crops etc.

Finally, we would like to give suggestion like a) there is need to intervention by the government to innovate high yielding varieties of seeds (need of second green revolution) which will increase in productivity of crops in the country, b) there should be more encouragement to use credit by farmers' for productive use, which will increase farmers' income.

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