



Farmers' Suicide in Odisha: A Study of Socio-Economic and Psychological Dimension of the Crisis

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Abstract: Farmers' suicide in different parts of India has robbed off the sound sleeps of both governments and agricultural planners who have been collectively fighting for the upliftments of the farms and famers for many decades. Crores of rupees spent in the context of farms and farmers but in the contrary a single week does pass peacefully without witnessing the dead body of a farmer who commits suicide due to the loss of his standing crops. The present paper attempt to find out the cause and consequences of the farmers' suicide in India

Key Words: Suicide, Crops, Loans, Cooperative Society, Green Revolution, Self Help Group, Globalization

Introduction

In India, the risk in agricultural sector has multiplied followed by rise in farmer suicide reaching almost epidemic proportion in many parts of the country. In 2000, the issue of farmer suicide gained international attention, raising many eye brows on efficacy of India's political economy. A number of studies undertaken in India on famer's suicide revealed the fact that there is a steady increase in farmers' suicide at a compound growth rate of 2.5% per annum over period of 1997 to 2006. NCRB Report 2014 reported that 2014 alone accounts for a total of 5650 farmers committing suicide. The Government of India, despite of its best effort to transform agricultural sector in post independent and period through introduction of Green Revolution, still the condition of farmers in India has not improved rather continued to be deplorable.

Followed by Green Revolution, agriculture sector in India became more mechanised with crop diversification, adopting new varieties which consequently increased the production cost and demand of more capital for agriculture. To meet the exigency of the situation of the change scenario, the Government established cooperative societies, which were operated at district level to look into the financial problem of farmers for farm purpose. But agriculture of India being gamble of monsoon with low percentage of ensured irrigated area suffered burden due to climatic variation. This resulted in crop failure burden effecting the poor farmers and small farmers. The small and marginal farmers who were already burden with non institutional credit, mostly borrowed from SHGs, could not able to sustain

their economic set back of crop losses, plunges into debt trap which forces them to committee suicide.

The political economy of farmers' suicide got a new dimension in the era of Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation(LPG).With the introduction of neo-liberal economic policies during 1990,with withdrawal of subsidy and cut in institution credit facility for small and marginal farmer not only increase the cost of cultivation but greatly affected their income with increased indebtedness to informal agencies mostly micro finance institution (MFIs) and Self Help Group(SHG).These none institutional agencies delivered credit at farmers need but at high interest rate. Therefore any crop loss in season affects small and marginal farmer's greatly at large scale increasing the farmers' suicide cases. However the incidence of farmers' suicide in India did not appears to vary simply according to whether or not agricultural production is in crisis, that suggest in terms that other causes as social, psychological are as important as economic one as factors explaining incident and variation of farmers' suicide in India.

Statement of the problem

India is an agrarian country with nearly half of its population depends directly or indirectly upon agriculture. Nearly 70% of rural work force is engaged in agriculture, which fetches 20% GDP of the country. Given the importance of agriculture in Indian economy and the vast multitude of its population accepting it as their main source of livelihood, there is an urgent need of strengthening agricultural sector and strengthening the socio economic status of the people engaged in this sector. But now a days due to crop failure ,lack of financial support, credit burden especially recovery problem of non-institutional finances which has resulted in a state of farmer suicide cases in a number of Indian state becoming a vital concern affecting the political economy of rural society. According to census of India clarification a farmer is one who own and work on the field as well as those who employ/hire workers from field work/farming activities. However, agricultural laborers do not fall under its gambit. Farming is portrayed and happy way of life and a nation is prosperous only when its farmers is happy but the shocking thing is that highest number of suicide in India occurs in agricultural sector than any other



sector of economy. According to ADSP annual report, 2014 farmers' suicide in India has become a major cause of concern in last two decades. For the Indian farmers, agriculture has become already a risky venture due to increasing climatic variability, uncertainty in production and cost of cultivation, lack of financial support and credit burden and lack of adequate facility for marketing of products. Thus on the above background, given the conflicting currents and issue of farmer suicide, it has become the most pertinent and baffling question to understand and comprehend the issue from the empirical evidence and to enquire its socio-economic and psychological dimension of the crisis.

Overview of Literature

Review of literature is an important component of any research study. Earlier study on a particular research topic provides a clear road map to a researcher to formulate his or her research problem on the untouched aspect of the research problem. There is plethora of research done in the broad area of farmer suicide. Below, we have reviewed a spate of literature with their insightful empirical findings. Das, (2011), Schurman (2013) in their empirical study stated that now a days the spate of farmers suicide causes in a number of Indian states is one of the vital concern to indicate the multiple crisis affecting rural economy and rural society. Gruene and Sengupta (2011) in their seminar work have stated that despite portrayal of farming as healthy and happy way of life and happy farmers means a prosperous nation as popularly statement, agriculture sector in India records on of the Highest numbers of suicide than any sector of economy categorically in last two decades. Nagraj 2008 revealed that in 2000s the farmer suicide issue gained international attention and for a variety of Indian government initiative. He opinioned that in India farmers suicide have kept up steady increase at a compound growth rate of 2.5% per annum over period of 1997 to 2006.

According to a study by the Mumbai-based Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, the rate of suicides by farmers went up from 5.2 per 100,000 males in 2000 to 9.8 in 2004 and rising. While this is still low compared to Maharashtra (52) and Andhra Pradesh (44), the trend is disturbing, to say the least. So, what are the reasons? Is it spiraling debt burdens, or is Odisha again finding itself caught in a trap of tragedy and shame of impoverishment?

The recent report of the Suresh Tendulkar Committee, which singled out Orissa as one of the poorest states, corroborates this. Small and marginal farmers make up a large segment of the population and they have got no benefit from

development programmes. "Agricultural and other labourers in rural Orissa," says Srijit Mishra, a senior researcher, "has a high incidence of poverty. What's worrying is 46 per cent are poor among those who are self-employed in agriculture." Their plight has only worsened as holdings have declined in size over the years while their number has risen. Further, on account of declining returns from agriculture, the incremental value of output has become negative. Over the last decade and a half, the cost of farming has risen multi-fold while returns have crashed, which explains the agrarian distress. With irrigation capacity more or less constant, the erratic monsoon has compounded the misery of the farmers. The Naveen Patnaik government focused on industrial growth and ignored the farm sector. The government's excessive leniency towards industrial houses in water distribution has triggered serious unrest among farmers. Irrigation potential remains seriously unutilized, exposing farmers to floods and drought, which have recurred with alarming frequency in the last 10 years. The last monsoon saw at least 15 districts reeling under drought and sustained crop loss of 50 percent and more. It is from these districts the suicides reports have poured in.

According to NABARD data, Odisha now has only over 4.5 lakh SHGs against a whopping over 5.23 lakh SHGs in 2013. While the loan outstanding of the SHGs in the State has increased during the period, the dampener is the Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) which have increased exponentially to an unsustainable level of 22 per cent from a mere 2.3 per cent in 2010.

NABARD sources indicated that the higher loan outstanding against SHGs in State is to be its disadvantage as it could add more to the NPA worries in coming years as there is a slack in institutional support to Self Help Groups (SHGs) unlike in the southern States. The Mission Shakti launched with much fanfare helped in adding numbers but have very little resources to bring a turnaround in their health, observed a senior official. The target-oriented approach of State Government is compromising with the quality of SHGs and is the genesis of the rot in the SHG sector here, he remarked.

Even, ground reports suggest many farmers owing dues to the SHGs committed suicide in western and northern Odisha. Thus the repayment pressure led many to take extreme action, but the Government washed off its hand as they were not agriculture loans.

Another expert states that it was not the rain god alone that has failed the Odisha farmer, but the Government policies and their



implementation too were no less responsible for the shocking incidents of farmers committing suicide. Apart from failed monsoon and failure of the government to provide support to farmers, the non-remunerative nature of agriculture adds to the farmers' woes. As of now, as many as 164 farmers have brought an abrupt end to their lives. It all started with a trickle of rain in the month of September; by November the situation worsened. In September the figure of suicide stood at 3; in October it was 43 and in November 84. No one knows how many more cases went unreported. These farmers have either swallowed pesticides or have hanged themselves. They have paid the price for taking up agriculture as their occupation.

Aim of the study

The proposed post doctoral research study proposal is designed to study the political economy of farmers' suicide in Odisha. The small and marginal farmers who after crop losses failed to generate income and plunged into debt trap and subsequently embarrassed and harassed by non institutional credit agencies including Self Help Groups (SHGs) for loan recovery, finding no way out but commits suicide.

The marginal and landless farmers to who banks do not lend money approach to their local SHGs. The SHGs lend them loans at 5 percent to 7 percent rate of interest per month during cropping seasons. As it is a crying need for these farmers to invest in the cropping field, they are bound to take loan from these groups as they do not have any other alternatives.

Odisha is always succumbed to the natural calamities like flood, drought and cyclone. Often the standing crops are destroyed due to moth-eaten. So in circumstances the marginal and landless farmers, who cultivate the land of the other people, earmarked a heavy loss. During natural calamities both the state and central government render some financial assistance for the loss of the crop, but these assistance directly added to the account of the land owner. Though the landless marginal farmer toll had with the loan from the SHGs and in care of crop losses return with an empty hand. As he takes the land on lease from the land owner by giving the annual premium demanded by the land owner and after the loss of the standing crop his family left in the lurch. In a situation while the family of the marginal farmer are in the state of starvation and going through deep mental crises, any further mental pressure put on them by the SHGs to return the loan with interest becomes fatal to them. These marginal farmers who are not in a position to repay the loan, either pocket the insult pursued by the SHG or commit suicide to escape the situation. As per information in Odisha 130 farmers have committed

suicide within 6 month only due to their inability to repay the loan which they had obtained for their cultivation purpose. As per report of the intelligence agencies that almost all of the farmers who have committed suicide had taken loan from the village Sahukar or SHGs.

SHGs are run by the women who they get money from the government loan from nationalised banks at a low rate of interest and choose the easy way of investment by lending these marginal farmers. When these groups realize that the loanee farmers are not in a position of refund their loans they even go to the extend of staging a dharana at the farmer's 'varanda'. As a result farmers were bound to sell his minimum assets to refund the loan. In this way the farmers became poorer to poorer. The sahuakar is a single man who may hackle the farmers for refunding loan which is not as insulting as the SHGs atrocity.

A leading Odiya daily 'the Sambad' reported on February 7, 2016 that more than 100 SHGs in different districts pay loans to these poor and marginal farmers and hackle them by different ways by which a farmers suffered from mental injury.

Thus at this backdrop the present proposed study wants to make a detail enquires into the socio-economic and psychological dimension of farmers suicide in Odisha through an indepth empirical study.

Methodology:

The methodology adopted in this study is mainly survey method in which data will be collected from both primary and secondary sources which will be based on patio temporal analysis of farmer's suicide in Odisha. The primary data will be collected both from primary and secondary sources. The quantitative data will be collected from the household, family members of deceased farmers, selected SHGs, Key informants, through semi structured scheduled. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Written and audio recording narratives will be collected from our respondents. Whenever and wherever the exigency of the situation demanded the respondents would be warmed up through focused group discussion and regional language will be used to get proper responses.

The secondary data will be collected from published and unpublished documents of government Departments and private agencies such as, TV discussion, newspaper coverage, fact finding teams (government and opposite party), Statistical Abstract of Odisha, District Statistical Hand Book, District at a Glance, District Census Handbook, District Gazetteer, and special reports



prepared by District Collectors, channel reports of NABARD, Blocks of district, Panchayat offices, and websites etc. Besides a detailed study and analysis of plethora of university research team. As source of secondary data Books, Journals, Manuals periodicals, Articles and public opinion on farmers suicide which based on field lists to number of places which prone to the farmer suicide and related issues.

Objectives of the study

- To study the temporal change of farmers' suicide of odisha.
- To study the age and sex composition of the farmers' suicide on the state.
- To study the land holding status of the farmer committing suicide.
- To study the causes of farmer suicide in the state
- To study the psycho-social and economic dimension of farmers suicide in odisha.
- To study the harassment and embarrassment aspect of non-institutional credit agencies for farmers' suicide.

Hypothesis

1. Crop loss, decline in income level and debt burden forces the small and marginal farmer in the state to committee at a large scale

2. New liberal economic policies of subsidy cut, non availabilities of institutional finance affecting socio-economic and psychological status of marginal farmers has added to the incidence of farmers' suicide.

Relevance of the study:

National relevance:

The proposed study is a unique piece of research to be undertaken which would enquire into the most pertinent and baffling issue in our society is encountering in contemporary times. India in general and Odisha in particular are truly agrarian economy, of which 70% of its workforce are engaged in agriculture and agriculture continues to be main source of their sustenance and livelihood. Agriculture is considered to be the backbone of our economy and small and marginal farmers are the real harbinger of our agricultural produce, hence constitute an important component of our economy. But the large incidence of farmer's suicide in our country has raised many eyebrows on the working of government policies on our farm sector development. The proposed study will be an honest and earnest endeavour to provide solution to one of the vital problems of our country. The proposed research would provide a clear road map to government, economic and planners to address to

the pressing issue of sustenance of our agro economy and reduce life risk of farmers in our country. Thus this piece of research will have immense national relevance as it would by recommending the ways and means to stabilize farm income which could be an effective panacea to problem of farmer's suicide.

International relevance:

The present research, while having great national importance, also has international, also has international relevance for it talks largely on life and livelihood issue of a major chunk of humanity who are down trodden, marginalized and have-nots nothing at their disposal other than their labour. This piece of research booted carve out the deficiency of human elements in the neo liberal reform policy or the macro economic adjustment model, which has demofimated national governments to dissociate with farm sector development by cutting subsidy and stop providing financial support and other benefits to small and marginalized farmers. Thus the present research by examining the psycho-social and economic dimension of the problem of farmer's suicide will provide an enduring solution to the great human tragedy.

Anticipated Outcomes and Proposed Outputs from the Research:

- The empirical findings of the proposed research will provide for proper understanding of the socio-economic and psychological aspect of the problem of farmer suicide.
- The research study would be a precaution for the Government; the policy makers and implementers to adopt suitable measures to case the farmers owes, which will help in sustainability the agro economy in the state.
- The research outcome will be a great help for researchers, academician, policy makers, NGO professional to deal with the most baffling issue of farmer's suicide and this will provide a clear road map for further research in this area.

Time plan

1. Pilot Study and Scheduled Design	1 months
2. Desk research	3 months
Review of literature	
3. Data Collection	6months
4. Data analysis	4 months
5. Report writing	4 months
6. Draft Report Submission	2 months
7. Final Report Submission	3 months.



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