



Determinants of farmers' suicides in Andhra Pradesh: An analysis

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Abstract

Agriculture is a biological industry and in India even after five decades of planned economic development is by and large still a way of life of the people of the country. The economic regeneration attempted in successive five year plans has made agriculture a pride of national economy. Indian agriculture is providing livelihood for nearly 60 per cent of labour force and playing vital role in Indian Economy. More than 70 per cent small and marginal peasants are still depending on non-institutional credit facilities (i.e., money lenders, micro financiers and traders). Majority farmers are leaning towards commercial crops at the cost of food security and most of the farmers' suicides are among commercial crops cultivators only, such incidents are taking place in poorest of the poor Scheduled Caste and Tribes families in the study areas. Low yields, extremely reduced profits and mounting debt make leading an agricultural life incredibly difficult. This paper focuses on farmer suicides in Andhra Pradesh, causes and determinants discusses.

Key words: *Cast and Land Reforms. Green revolution, Price Policy, Social structure*

Introduction

The Indian agrarian economy and society has witnessed substantial changes since the days of the British Raj. Prior to the introduction of the British rule, agriculture was mostly specific to local needs and the area under cultivation was adjusted to increases and decreases in population. Crops were grown according to the suitability of climatic conditions and agricultural operations were carried on with commonly practiced and simple technology. The social framework of agriculture was organized within caste, family and kinship relations. Due to similar socio-economic backgrounds, the farmers shared common values and their needs and aspirations were limited. By and large, agriculture was well integrated with the social structure.

British colonialism brought a series of changes through the introduction of new land tenure, commercialization of agriculture and expansion of the politico-legal system. The provision of new land tenure enhanced the propensity to invest more in land, and the privileged and affluent sections started acquiring more land. The area under cultivation was increased and the emphasis was on the cultivation of cash crops like cotton, sugar cane, jute, etc, to feed Britain's industries. The cultivation of these crops was largely profitable because of rising demands in domestic as well as international markets.



Review of Literature

The findings of studies conducted in the state of Andhra Pradesh are in no way different. The economic analysis of cotton cultivation made by Parthasarathy and Shameem (1998), says that with special reference to Warangal district, indicated the rising indebtedness as well as the price and yield instability of cotton crop as the main reason for the strain on cotton farmers, but concluded that farmers did not commit suicide only for these reasons. It hinted at social disintegration and a deepening alienation of farmers from society, as they belonged to nuclear families and backward castes.

Nirmala (2003), says that are research based on an analysis of 30 suicide cases and comparing them with an equal number of control cases, argued that farmer suicides in Andhra Pradesh may not be attributed only to loss of income caused by crop loss, market imperfections, etc, but also to growing social detachment and individualistic orientation of the farmers. The 60 case sheets on suicide, victims as given in Murthy, (2005) reveal that the suicide victims were mostly young and innovative backward-caste farmers belonging to nuclear families. The loss of integration of the farmers with the village community and institutions in Andhra Pradesh as a result of the introduction of market-driven new agricultural practices has also been reported by others. The study based on a recent sample survey of the socio-economic characteristics of suicide victims in the four districts by Revathi (2007), clearly shows the nuclear family as a characteristic feature of the deceased farmers. While 71% of the suicide victims in Mahabubnagar belonged to nuclear families, in Anantapur and Guntur districts it was

more than 75%, and in Warangal district it was 94%. The study also shows that across the four districts the suicide victims were from the lower castes and tribes. In both Warangal and Mahabubnagar districts, the lower castes and tribes together constituted nearly 90% of the deceased farmers. However, their number is relatively less in the other two districts (51% and 73% in Anantapur and Guntur, respectively). Hence there is a research gap that why the farmers suicides are more in lower castes and tribes than higher casts in Andhra Pradesh.

Methodology : The present study entirely depends upon secondary data analysis. The data has been elicited from various NSS reports, Human Resource Development; UNDP'S and research reports etc. The data analysed are presented in simple tables to examine the extent of state wise and district wise percentage of suicide farmers.

Objective of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine caste and land holdings in Andhra Pradesh;
2. To assess the impact of the green revolution on the farmers;
3. To analyze rural credit, price policy and new agriculture system in Andhra Pradesh;
4. To find out main causes of suicides of lower caste farmer
5. to assess socio-economic impact of suicides on their families

Sources of Data: The present study is based on secondary sources of data.



Suicides on agriculture and Indian farmer on suicides in particular at the level of individual researchers, voluntary organizations and concurrent evolution studies conducted by respective CESS and government of Andhra Pradesh are taken as background information.

Tools of Analysis: In order to derive conclusion, the data are analysed in terms of simple percentages and charts. Also electronic data package like MS-Excel, MS-Word have been used.

Caste and Land Reform

The rich upper-caste people reaped the benefit of the expanded forces of production because of their large-scale landholding and vantage economic position. The small and poor farmers were hardly in a position to cultivate these commercial crops as they were constrained by their small landholding and poor resource base. The caste-based occupation and division of labour provided a kind of organic linkage among the rural communities. Besides, the joint family and strong kinship ties were very common in rural areas. The organic solidarity of the rural society started gradually crumbling down after independence, particularly in the post-planning period. Planned efforts were made to achieve agricultural growth and distributive justice. Keeping in view the large-scale unequal distribution of land, especially the landlessness of lower castes and tribes, land reform became a part of the planning for a package of measures like abolition of intermediaries, imposition of ceiling, distribution of ceiling surplus land, etc, which was introduced invariably in all states.

Impact of Green Revolution

The green revolution started in the 1960s, following the introduction of high yielding variety (HYV) technology

based on water-seed-fertilizer strategy, and the associated land and crop-based subsidized formal credit facilities generated a strong impression that agriculture is a relatively profitable source of income. The agricultural modernizing endeavors of the post-planning era broadened the economic and social horizon of all categories of farmers. More importantly, to the newly entrant lower-caste farmers, who had earlier witnessed the prosperity of the upper-caste landholders through agriculture as labourers, the new provisions such as availability of land, low-cost credit, HYV seeds that provide higher profit, etc, appeared as a means to fulfill their long-cherished desires. The strong social movements and mobilization of the lower castes by Ambedkar and his followers, and many lower-caste political organizations like the Republican Party of India in Maharashtra and Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh also expanded their socio-economic aspirations.

Though the agricultural revolution initiated in the planning period spelt prosperity for the farmers, it also created conditions that were likely to push the farmers to undesirable grave consequences. True, efforts were made to expand irrigation, but excepting a limited number of states, the area under irrigation did not increase substantially and cultivation of high-value crops like cotton was left to the vagaries of monsoon. As the new HYV seeds require high doses of pesticides, fertilizers and other inputs, the cost of cultivation became higher.

The farmer was expected to be aware of the updated information on changing market situations and agricultural extension services regarding appropriate doses of agricultural inputs



and timings of their applications etc. A first generation of farmers entering modernized agriculture with some experience in its intricacies was not fully competent in the skills it needed. They were weak in dealing and coping with institutional channels of modernization – markets, traders, input dealers and institutional finance – without effective access to crucial services like insurance, warehousing, post-harvest processing, and export.

Rural Credit and Price Policy

The risks and uncertainty associated with modern agriculture multiplied following the economic liberalization initiated in the 1990s. After the nationalization of banks in 1969, a package of policy initiatives ensured that the share of moneylenders in rural credit fell from an average of over 75% in 1951-61 to less than 25% in 1991. But in the post reform period, there has been a sharp decline in the share of the formal sector in rural credit. The share of public sector banks in rural credit has fallen continuously from the peak of 15.3% in 1987 to 8.4% in 2006, and the share of rural deposits has fallen steadily from its peak of 15.5% in 1999 to 10.8% in 2006. The “targeted priority lending” or “directed credit” to agriculture was put on the back burner at the recommendation of the Narasimham Committee (1992) on financial reforms. As a result, farmers are required to depend on moneylenders/private shopkeepers, who usually charge exorbitant rates of interest, for a timely agricultural input requirement.

The social structure of the rural society also witnessed profound changes. The joint family, the rural caste hierarchy, and the harmony of village life have lost their tenacity. The traditional

joint family was the predominant feature of agrarian economy and it was a link between continuity and change with a major potential to provide stability and support at the time of crisis. In the recent years the joint family and kinship ties have gradually weakened due to the spread of urban values, education and the impact of development planning, etc.

Innovations of Agriculture

As the new methods of farming made traditional skill and knowledge almost obsolete, the experienced elderly cultivators, who were often consulted for agricultural operations, lost their traditional authority and remained isolated from the larger community. This apart, the rising assertiveness of the members of the lower caste, in view of their wider mobilization and organized activities, created a kind of hostility between the members of lower and higher castes. The cumulative effects of agrarian change in India broke down the traditional family, kinship, caste and community ties of the farmers and enhanced their social and economic aspirations, which ultimately led to the emergence of anomic suicidal currents in the context of growing egoism in rural society. The analysis of empirical evidence reported by studies undertaken in states with high incidence of suicide will substantiate it further. Table 1.1 shows the of Genuine Farmer Suicides by Govt. of Andhra Pradesh

Impact of Suicides

Loss of Bread winner in the family
Psychological distress to family
Increased social stigma
Adverse effect on children’s education
Loss of Assets: Domestic Animals,
Agriculture implements
Moving from own farm labour status to permanent labour status



Family members attempting suicide
 Child labour
 Physical Health
Determinates
 Increase of pesticides and fertilizers prices
 Intermediaters high involvement of farmers families
 Farmers are depended by money lenders
 Farmers are depended monsoon and climate

Crop rate a very low prices and Government did not supporting prices for agricultural production.
 Government did not support to subsidies
 There is no use of capital intensive techniques and only use up old method and techniques
 Impact of globalization on farmers they are suffering from finance problems.
 They did not implementation of crop diversification.

Table-1.1: List of Genuine Farmer Suicides by Govt. of AP

District	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Adilabad	9	18	23	25	25	25	2
Ananthapur	9	9	27	35	60	22	13
Chittoor	0	6	2	4	1	4	7
East Godavari	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Guntur	5	12	1	4	5	1	4
Kadapa	0	0	0	0	1	5	3
Karimnagar	12	15	15	36	38	36	11
Khammam	1	7	0	9	4	7	2
Krishna	1	0	2	0	1	0	1
Kurnool	13	6	3	6	11	7	1
Mahaboobnagar	4	15	20	9	22	17	4
Medak	2	1	5	5	11	25	17
Nalgonda	10	9	8	15	19	11	34
Nellore	0	0	0	1	0	2	7
Nizamabad	1	3	6	8	24	9	8
Prakasham	0	4	4	1	1	0	0
Rangareddy	0	4	2	1	6	5	2
Srikakulam	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Vishakapatnam	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vizianagaram	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Godavari	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Warangal	46	78	79	95	97	77	27
Total	113	188	197	255	327	253	143

Contd. next table



District	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Adilabad	68	60	83	48	42	18	6	0	452
Ananthapur	59	70	65	90	95	40	41	19	654
Chittoor	33	21	26	24	17	9	0	0	154
East Godavari	4	2	3	2	1	0	8	2	24
Guntur	69	24	31	22	36	3	20	19	256
Kadapa	18	17	9	26	21	10	4	1	115
Karimnagar	96	73	48	55	64	42	0	0	541
Khammam	37	23	22	7	12	2	0	0	133
Krishna	23	13	6	4	2	4	6	2	65
Kurnool	77	64	72	68	66	59	22	9	484
Mahaboobnagar	112	57	35	30	29	17	4	0	375
Medak	92	45	30	28	32	32	21	7	353
Nalgonda	53	52	48	13	43	17	11	0	343
Nellore	6	7	1	2	2	3	0	0	31
Nizamabad	64	27	12	17	7	10	0	0	196
Prakasham	44	9	8	10	8	0	9	6	104
Rangareddy	56	40	19	21	18	25	0	0	199
Srikakulam	4	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	11
Vishakapatnam	9	5	2	1	1	2	3	0	23
Vizianagaram	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
West Godavari	8	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	11
Warangal	112	45	32	24	11	2	0	0	725
Total	1045	655	552	493	509	297	158	66	5251

Main Causes

- Rising costs of cultivation; high dependence on external inputs
- Unremunerative prices – do not cover costs of cultivation, let alone rising living costs
- Unsustainable cropping patterns and production practices
- Trade liberalization and export-import policies



- Lack of support systems like credit, insurance, markets, storage, farmer collectives
- Neglect of rainfed agriculture

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