

Policy Reforms and Farmers' Suicides in Punjab

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ABSTRACT

As per seventh schedule of constitution of India, Agriculture is in state list, hence overall responsibility of promotion and development of agriculture lies with the state government. But government of India through ministry of agriculture and farmers welfare supervises and assists state/UTs in development and welfare of person involved in agriculture. Punjab is known as the bread basket of India. Punjab is also known for rich farmers but the reality is far away. In Punjab the farmers who have a big lend live a luxury life, but the position of small and marginal farmers is not good. Punjab witnessed a high growth during Green Revolution but after that position of farmers' starts deteriorate. In recent years, many farmers in Punjab have committed Suicides because of high debt burden, natural calamities, increase in cost of production, lack of credit etc. Farmer suicide is a very complex phenomenon largely associated with economic, social and psychological distress of the victim as well as family. To bring down the suicides among farmers, some preventive measures should be taken like crop insurance, adequate, credit, contract farming etc. These services/ steps need to be strengthened.

Keywords

Farmer suicide, Agrarian, Punjab Farmers, Indebtedness, causes, Initiatives

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To analyze the spread of farmer suicide in Punjab.
- To study the causes leading to suicide in Punjab.
- To study the government initiatives for the welfare of farmers.
- To make suggestions to prevent farmers' suicides in Punjab.

DATA SOURCES

The data have been drawn from secondary sources. The main sources of data are various research journals, internet

websites, news paper articles, economic survey of Punjab 2016-17, Punjab statistical abstract.

INTRODUCTION

In India farmers' Suicides are raising day by day. The five states- Maharashtra, Telangana, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala are the top most states where farmers' suicides are rising continuously.

Punjab, which is also called the food basket of India, is an agrarian state. Agriculture has an important role in the economy of Punjab. Majority of the population lives in villages depends on agriculture as a main occupation. In 2015-16 agriculture and allied activities contributed 28.59% to the GSV (Gross state value added) at constant prices. According to the census 2011, 36% of total workers depend on it. The geographical area of Punjab is 5036 thousand hectare; the net area sown in year 2015-16 was 4137 thousand hectare which means that 82% lend of Punjab comes under agriculture. Most of the agriculture lend in Punjab is sown more than once; hence the gross cropped area in 2015-16 was 7872 thousand hectares. According to this the cropped intensity in Punjab is 190% (AS per economic survey of Punjab-2016-17).

In Punjab mainly two cereal crops wheat and rice are grown in rotation during the year. Other than wheat or rice some quantity of other cereals are also grown but only in small areas. There are number of industries which are directly related to agriculture. For instance nestle, Mark fed, National Fertilize Ltd. etc.

Although the agriculture sector is instrumental in ensuring national food security but agriculture is in deep crisis and facing serious challenges, the major problem before agriculture sector is over exploitation of scarce water resources. The ground water has decreased drastically since the last few decades. Other problem is high incidences of debt on farmers which has resulted in farmer's suicides. The high debt burden on small and marginal farmers has destroyed many farmers and farmers have had either to sell or mortgage their lend. This ultimately triggered instances of famers' suicides in Punjab.

AGRICULTURE SECTOR PERFORMANCE IN PUNJAB

Table 1

Key Indicators of Agriculture Sector						
	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014 (R)	2014-2015 (P)	2015-2016 (Q)	2016-2017 (A)
Share of Agriculture & allied in GSVA (at constant 2011-12 prices)	30.80	29.17	29.10	27.10	26.14	25.81
Growth in GSVA in Agriculture & allied sector	-	0.90	3.30	(-) 3.50	1.36	4.46
Agriculture (crops)	-	0.12	3.18	(-) 6.76	(-) 0.64	4.93
Livestock	-	3.70	5.27	2.94	5.07	4.08
Forestry & Logging	-	(-) 1.73	(-) 1.88	(-) 1.02	2.73	2.17
Fishing	-	1.56	4.92	10.34	4.59	8.28
Employment in Agriculture as share of total workers (census, 2011)	35.56%					

Source: Economic and statistical organization, Punjab (R) - Revised Estimate, (P) - Provisional, (Q) Quick Estimates, (A) Advance Estimate

Table 1: Shows the declining share which represents the structural transformation of the economy from agriculture to other sectors of the economy.

PROBLEM OF FARMERS' SUICIDES IN PUNJAB

Punjab's farming is in crisis and showing declining trends as it suffers from falling productivity and shrinking returns. After Independence our nation's first requirement was that India initiated 'Green Revolution' in mid- sixties which put Indian farmers into market nexus from subsistence agriculture. During this, Punjab remained self-sufficient in food production and earned the reputation of country's bread basket'. It also performed well in other sectors, for example industry, education, health etc. Punjab becomes one of India's most developed states with a low poverty rate. During 1990s, approximately 94% of Punjab's population was above the poverty line. In 2001, Punjab was ranked second (after Kerala) State of the country in terms of overall National Human Development.

But now, the whole seen has changed due to faulty agrarian policies. Peasants of Punjab are under heavy debt and are not in a position to repay the loan of money lenders, Co-operative societies etc.

In a report sent to the centre, the state government had confirmed 2116 cases of farmer's suicide between 1988-2005. However, Mr. Inderjit Singh Jaijee, Convener of the MASR (Movement Against State Repression), Says that the state government is deliberately underpaying such suicides MASR estimates 50,000 suicide across Punjab from 1988 to 2006. The governments figures are, however,

significantly lower. Various groups are reporting a significantly number of farmer suicides in Punjab. MASR and NGO working in Southern Punjab for the past two decades, has recorded 1,738 suicides in 91 Punjabi villages between 1988 to 2014. These 91 villages are from two sub- divisions of district Sangrur. In 2006, Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) estimated 29,766 cases in eight districts of Punjab and estimates 90,000 farmer suicides in Punjab from 1990-2006.

Hindustan Times, Dated on 17 June, 2017 described that, 674 farmer committed suicide during sixteen years in seven districts of Punjab in which muksar worst. From 2013 to 2016, 572 cases of suicides were reported in seven districts of Punjab as compared to 1,102 cases of suicide in 13 years i.e. 2013. From 2013 to 2016 there are 265 cases of suicide in musktar followed by Patiala 152 cases and faridkot 64 cases.

Most of the victims (60% used poisonous insecticides available in farmer households, (16%) died of hanging and the remaining jumped before trains or into wells.

The Tribune dated on 6 march, 2017 declared that over 80% of farmers were cotton growers, who committed suicide.

PROFILE OF FARMER SUICIDE IN PUNJAB

Sukhpal Singh Senior economist and head of the Department of Economics and Sociology at Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) conducted a study on the indebtedness and suicides among farmers. The study

reveals that the average debt on the household than large farmers. It was the highest among marginal farmers at Rs. 1, 70,184, followed by small farmers at Rs. 1, 04,155 and for other small farmers are in crisis, both economically and socially. "In a census- based study of farmers' suicide in six districts of Punjab during 2011, it was found that the largest number who took their own lives belonged to the category of small farmers".

The farmers who committed suicide due to unseasonal rains reveals they are mostly marginal and small farmers, with land holdings up to five acres, who had taken additional land on lease at the rate of Rs. 30,000- 40,000, a well-established practice in malwa region of Punjab. This is the same category of small and marginal which accounts for 70 to 80 per cent of farmer suicides.

CAUSES OF FARMERS' SUICIDE

- **Rapid increase in debt and poverty**

The major reason for the farmers' suicide is the heavy indebtedness. This heavy indebtedness is not an overnight phenomenon that has occurred suddenly. It has its roots in the credit policy that has been followed over a number of years. According to study conducted by Punjab Agriculture University (PAU) in district Ludhiana, Fatehgarh Sahib, Bathinda, Sangrur and Mansa, it was found that indebtedness (73%) While committed suicide due to other reasons. The suicides in Punjab are the result of mental stress and this mental stress is most often caused by poverty especially by indebtedness.

- **Small and uneconomic Farms**

The Majority of farmers in India own as little as two acres of land. Farming on such small area is not economically feasible which results in very less profitable or loss cultivation.

Operational holdings in Punjab (2011-12)

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

Source: Agriculture Handbook, PAU, 2015.

- **Natural Calamities**

Natural Calamities are also responsible for farmers' Suicides. Due to global warming, deforestation, natural environment has become more worsen and reasons like heavy raining, floods, heavy cyclones etc. so, farmers are not able to take qualitative and Quantitative production from their farms.

- **Repeated Crop Failures**

There has been repeated crop failure every year. This crop failure has resulted in a reduction in the Productivity of the land due to a variety of reasons.

These could be due to overuse of fertilizers, pesticides. A repeated crop failure has left the farmers with no other solution other than ending their lives.

Consumption of Fertilizers (000 Nutrients tone)

	2010-2011	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015 (R)	2015-2016 (P)
Total NPK (000 Nutrient tone)	1911	1972	1713	1677	1943
Consumption of chemical fertilizers per hect. (Kg.)	242	252	218	212	247

Source: Director of Agriculture, Punjab.

R- Revised, P- Provisional

Thus, the consumption of chemical fertilizers has been increasing steadily in the state.

- **Lack of Alternative Sources of Income**

Majority of Indian and Punjab's population lives in villages and agriculture is the most important activity of the state. Because there is lack of initiative from the government, allied activities of agriculture like dairy, poultry etc, farmers are not aware of it.

- **Lack of credit and Money lenders**

The Green revolution model increased the money requirements of the farmers which results in the greater dependency on non- institutional credit. Because of less formality farmers prefer money lenders for credit.

- **Exploitation by Arhtiyas**

Farmers in Punjab have become heavily dependent on commission agents (arhtiyas) because of urgent need and

easy availability of loans at any time. Arhtiyas exploit them by charging high rate of interest and therefore farmers become highly indebted and they commit suicide.

- **Increment in Inputs Price**

There is greater need of HVV seeds, fertilizers and pesticides for farmer in order to get good quality and quantity of crop. But the price of these inputs is very high. So high cost of production which in turn has led to the indebtedness and consequently to farmers' suicide.

- **Ground water Depletion**

Intensive agriculture dominated by paddy- wheat monoculture has led to overexploitation of natural resources in Punjab, especially groundwater. Tube wells are the main source of irrigation in the Punjab followed by canals. At Present, ground level is depleting rapidly in the state.

Net Area Irrigated by Source in Punjab

Source	2010-2011	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Canals	1116	1133	1160	1175	1201
Tube Wells	2954	2982	2981	2943	2936
Other Sources	-	-	-	-	-
Total	4070	4115	4141	4110	4137

Source: Director of lend Records Punjab

Economic Survey of Punjab (2016-17)

- **Technological Changes**

After the green revolution and innovation of new technologies makes farming easier. But these technologies and innovations are so costly and not affordable to poor small and marginal farmers.

- **Lack of Implementation of government Program**

Most of the subsidies and welfare schemes announced by the central and state government do not reach the poor farmers. On the contrary, big landlords are benefited by those schemes.

- **Political Reasons**

The politicians who play important role in policy making and decision making totally neglect agriculture sector. They frequently declare various relief packages for farmers but failing do not get the benefits of such policies.

- **Illiteracy, Traditions and Culture**

Because of illiteracy, farmers turn to rights and rituals of orthodox and other religious activities which require money. So farmers used to take heavy loans from money lenders for instance loan for marriage of daughters etc.

- **Nuclear Family Culture**

Joint families have disintegrated and holdings also shrink due to division of Land/ property. In the joint family there is less expense as compared to nuclear families.

Recent state Government Initiatives for the welfare of farmers in Punjab

1.) Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchaye Yojana (PMKSY) with the motto of 'Har khet ko Paani' has been launched in order to ensure access to some means of protective irrigation to all agricultural farms. PMKSY will have following programme components:

- Accelerated irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP)
- PMKSY (Har khet ko Pani)
- PMKSY (per drop more crop)
- PMKSY (Watershed Development)

2.) District Irrigation Plans (DIPs) of all the 22 districts of the Punjab are near completion. These DIPs will be amalgamated into state Irrigation Plan (SIP).

3.) To reduce input costs of farmers 1697 Agro Service Centers have been established through cooperative societies. With this objective cooperative societies have been provided with latest machinery on subsidy for providing on custom hiring basis to small and marginal farmers at a fair rent so that ordinary farmers can avail benefit of costly machinery. During 2014-15, state govt. gave a subsidy of 66.56 crore rupees on 24828 implements and in 2015-16, 37.96 crore rupees were given as subsidy on 22995 implements.

4.) Punjab Government has sent a proposal to central government for plot based crop insurance scheme for farmers of the state as the present crop insurance scheme take village or block as a unit for compensation which is not beneficial for farmers of the state. And it also neglects total input costs and farmer benefit.

5.) To promote maize crop under crop diversification programme and for its smooth marketing, 3 maize dryers

of 64 ton and 5 maize dryers of 16 ton capacity have been installed in maize growing areas to facilitate the marketing by farmers.

6.) For Promotion of technology and provision of latest knowledge and information to the farmers, the state Department of Horticulture has established a centre of excellence in citrus at khanaura (Hoshiarpur), a centre of excellence in vegetables at kartarpur (Jalandhar) and a centre of Excellence in Potatoes at Dugri (Jalandhar).

7.) Strengthening of marketing infrastructure also received greater thrust attention during the last few years. The Punjab Mandi Board has established a modern AC Fruits and vegetables market at Mohali with an investment of Rs. 56 crore. It has also established a fish market at Ludhiana with investment of Rs 8 crore. The state has established a network of 61,436 kms of link roads, which connect the farmers with over 1821 purchase centres. During 2015-16, the Board repair 7812 kms (special repair), 7786 kms (Patch work) and 291 kms (D.B works) of link roads with an investment of Rs. 1200 crore. In 2016-17 Mandi Board will repair 6348 kms of link roads with an investment of 746 crores.

8.) The Punjab settlement of Agricultural indebtedness Act, 2016 has been enacted. The new Government is taking special initiatives in order to remove debt burden of farmers.

CHALLENGES & PROSPECTS

- The cropping intensity in the state has already reached saturation and the irrigation potential has also been fully exploited. Given that almost 99% of the cultivable land in the state is under plough, there is no further growth in agriculture has to necessarily come either from increased productivity or increase in prices of agricultural output. However, productivity has also stagnated in the absence of any major scientific breakthroughs and MSP of major crops is fixed by government of India. Government of India shall fix the MSP on the basis of Swaminathan formula to make agriculture profitable.
- The Sustainability of agriculture in the Punjab is at serious risk due to rapid depletion of ground water resources and excessive reliance on the wheat- rice cropping pattern. Better management practices and measures to improve input resource efficiency are needed to check the depleting water table and soil degradation.

- The high incidence of debt among farmer households mainly due to falling real farm income. Urgent steps are required to enhance the profitability of agriculture.

SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REDUCING FARMERS' SUICIDE

- i. Crop Diversification
- ii. Crop Insurance
- iii. Alternative Sources of income for farmers
- iv. Collective farming
- v. Technology Advancement in agriculture
- vi. Professionalization of agriculture
- vii. Proper Credit sources
- viii. Marketing Facilities
- ix. Contract farming
- x. Educate the farmers
- xi. Informal money- lenders should be regulated by Govt.

CONCLUSION

The Government is very much aware of the problems of farmers and rural suicides. There is rise in the farmer's suicide in Punjab. More than 80% suicide victims are small and marginal farmers. Modern farming and focus on marketing might bring prosperity to a few farmers but it is not the solution for all farmers. The first and utmost important step to take at this stage of the crisis is to reduce the costs of production of farmers which is responsible for debt burden on them. In a nutshell, we can say the 'development' is a cumulative force and should influence social as well as economic growth. The disequilibrium in the agrarian society is leading to wrong tendencies like drug abuse, crime and suicides. For preserving its 'bread basket' status, Punjab needs to better the lot of the agrarian community. The state must devise institutions and norms which may assure the real economic and social development of the agriculturists.

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