

## Agrarian Crisis - Farmers Suicides in Telangana

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### **Abstract**

The total number of farmers in India to be about 600 million (50% of total population). With one farmer committing suicide every half-an-hour, the number of farmers who have ended their lives as per official records in India is estimated at over 300,000 over the past two decades. These numbers do not include suicides by agricultural labourers, though they too are victims of the agrarian crisis. As each death affects at least the immediate family of the deceased, the number of persons in severe distress is very large. With over half the country dependent on agriculture for a livelihood, these suicides constitute a colossal agrarian crisis in India. There are multiple reasons for the crisis: rising costs of inputs, non-availability of key resources such as water for irrigation, volatility in prices of produce, inadequate knowledge of modern methods of farming, changing and inimical policy regimes, and worsening terms of exchange. The number of suicides by farmers in Telangana during 2015 was 1,358 as against 516 in the neighbouring Telugu state of Andhra Pradesh, according to the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB). It may be mentioned here that in 2014 also Telangana stood at second position with 898 suicides by farmers while AP was at sixth rank registering 160 suicide cases.

**Keywords:** Crisis Telangana, Farmers Suicides, Agrarian, Farming

### **Introduction**

India is an agricultural country with agriculture as a predominant occupation of two third of working population living the rural area. Agriculture is not only an important occupation of our people, but also a way of life, culture and custom. Most of the Indian customs and festivals are observed in consonance with agriculture seasons, activities and products. The rural Indians are dependent on agriculture as a main source of livelihood. It is supplemented with animal husbandry and rearing live stock. Women are engaged in quite a few creative and tailoring works. Agriculture influences almost every sphere of life in rural areas. Those who are engaged in non agricultural activities are indirectly connected with agriculture. Agriculture not only provides food but also provides raw material to the manufacturing industries. According to Union Finance Minister the GDP from agriculture, forestry and fishing for the year 2008-09 was 16 per cent. Despite a steady decline of its share

in G D P, agriculture is still the largest economic sector and plays a significant role in the overall socio-economic development of the country. It is the main source food to the growing population of our country. Our country could achieve the self sufficiency of food grains in few decades of its political emancipation. The food production in India reached to 213 million tonnes in 2001-02. It was increased to 231 million tonnes in 2007-08 and there was a decrease of the same by one million tonnes (230 million tonnes) in 2008-09 due drought in some states, flood in some other states, and also due to agricultural crisis in some other states. Consequently per capita availability of food grains is steadily declining. Per capita availability of food grains in 2003 was 27 kgs less than what it was in 1991(Guruswamy M et al 2008). Farmers indebtedness one of the main causes of distress in the agriculture sector. Almost half (49 percent) India's farmer households are indebted. The small and marginal farmers get the loan at a higher rate of interest from private money lenders due to non availability of institutional credit. As a result they are unable to clear of the loan of the private money lenders the farmers enter in to vicious debt trap. As per the information presented in the Lok Sabha in 2005 the estimated numbers of indebted farmer house holds in Karnataka were 24897 and the farmer households indebted are 61.6 percent (Guruswamy M et al 2008). With the Invention of state-of-art agricultural implements, HYV seeds, effective pesticides and chemical fertilizers and with the ever increasing demand for a agricultural products farmers showed lot of interest in incorporating new methods of cultivation.

There is a widespread perception that the "agrarian crisis" is more or less an outcome of natural calamities like drought which no one can fight. Governments over the years have used this misperception in their favour to hide their inefficiencies in problem-solving. In fact, until the late 80s, governments continued to deny that a crisis even existed in the agricultural sector. One should understand that an agrarian crisis not only affects the farmer but the whole rural economy.

Therefore, an agrarian crisis is a much broader phenomenon than it is understood as by many. The rural economy is an extremely complex web connecting different professions which are directly or indirectly dependent on farming. Most of these professions, such as weaving, pottery and traditional handicrafts, are on the brink of complete collapse.

This is because all people related to these fields have farmers as their main "market" or "target group" since times immemorial. It is their interdependence on each other which has been the beauty of how the Indian rural economy survived and thrived for centuries. When the agricultural output is low, the farmer's purchasing power goes down and so does the market of non-farming entities in rural markets. These local businesses can't venture into urban markets to sell their products as they are not in a position to compete in a highly industrial and commercialized sector where mass production and cheap rates rule the roost. This has led to a huge migration of people—farmers or otherwise— from rural areas to urban centres in search of jobs. Those who can't afford to migrate as they have huge debts to pay to banks and moneylenders often commit suicide. These "suicides" have often caught the attention of media, the death of a farmer being deemed more newsworthy than his life.

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However, the agrarian crisis doesn't begin and end with farmer suicides. Farmer suicides are just an extreme outcome of the agrarian crisis.

The agrarian crisis in India is like a ticking time-bomb, and it's crucial to rectify the mistakes which are contributing to it. Political decisions on agriculture need to be taken while keeping the farmers in mind. The time has come to scrutinize the impact of LPG (Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization) reforms on Indian agriculture and thus the economy as a whole.

If the government continues to put industrial greed before the farmers' needs, matters are going to worsen a lot. Market interests are important but not at the expense of farmers. Also, the former can't survive if the latter doesn't. Farmers are the real providers of food security to everyone. Steps should be taken to remove the middlemen between the farmers and consumers. This would ensure price stability of the essential commodities and the burden of increasing price would be eased on both the farmers and consumers. In the eyes of the government only those in whose name the land is registered are seen as farmers. The rest escape consideration.

Nationwide steps must be taken in order to protect farmers from private moneylenders who follow highly exploitative practices. To achieve this, the government needs to create awareness among rural populations about new schemes and their rights. Such an effort needs to be made keeping in mind the low rates of literacy in rural areas, particularly for women—their level of awareness on technical and non-technical aspects of modern agriculture is understandably low.

The next crucial question is who is a farmer? Because in the eyes of the government only those in whose name the land is registered are seen as farmers. The rest escape consideration. This is problematic because most people toiling in the fields are landless laborers' who work for a pittance. The landed farmers are generally big farmers with large land holdings. A survey commissioned by NABARD and undertaken by Punjab Agriculture University has confirmed that 94% of the government subsidies are being availed by big and medium farmers. The smaller farmers for whom subsidies are actually meant are sidelined. The land to the tiller policy needs to be implemented in India so that those who are actually doing the farming get the benefits due to them. Whenever crop failure happens due to natural calamities such as drought, floods etc, it's the landowners who get the compensation and not the land tiller. What happens under the current system is that whenever crop failure happens due to natural calamities such as drought, floods etc, it's the landowners who get the compensation and not the land tiller. This is sheer injustice due to the lacunae in the system.

The other major issue which needs to be solved is the issue of ensuring water to the crops. The motto of "more crop per drop" under the Prime Minister Agriculture Irrigation Scheme is a positive step towards this, although it needs to be implemented on the ground before it can be properly lauded. Finally, the agrarian crisis needs to be handled with a human touch. Lakhs of farmer have committed suicide and those who failed in these attempts have been imprisoned under the law. This shows the collective failure of both the society and the

state; the time has come to ensure that no farmer is pushed to the brink, because human lives matter above all.

**Causes for Suicides:** Local money lenders are usually portrayed as the villains in India's farmer-suicides narrative, but government data shows that 80 per cent of farmers killed themselves in 2015 because of bankruptcy or debts after taking loans from banks and registered micro finance institutions.

- According to National Crime Records Bureau's latest farmer-suicides data, of the over 3,000 farmers who committed suicides across the country in 2015 due to debt and bankruptcy, 2,474 had taken loans from banks or microfinance institutions.
- It's for the first time that the NCRB has categorized farmers' suicides due to debt or bankruptcy based on the source of loans.
- The figures (see page 2) show that only 10 per cent farmers had committed suicide due to debts caused by loans taken from both banks and moneylenders — the share of loans from moneylenders under this section was 9.8 per cent.
- As first reported by The Indian Express on August 19, 2016, farmer suicides saw a spike of 41.7 per cent in 2015 from 2014. The year 2015 saw 8,007 suicides by farmers compared to 5,650 in 2014, according to NCRB data.
- Among the states, the data showed, Maharashtra (3,030), Telangana (1,358), Karnataka (1,197), Chhattisgarh (854) and Madhya Pradesh (516) led the table. Karnataka saw a more than three-fold rise in farmer suicides in 2015, as compared to 2014 when around 300 farmers ended their lives.
- "The latest data is interesting because all of us thought that moneylenders were the culprits of the piece. Even today, more than half the people take loans from moneylenders," said Abhijit Sen, a former member of the erstwhile Planning Commission.
- However, Sen said, moneylenders were more flexible compared to banks and microfinance institutions. "The organized sector is less flexible because rules don't permit them flexibility. The microfinance sector is worse. They put pressure by telling others in self-help groups that their share would be cut if one person does not pay loans in time. This creates social pressure, as well. Many also send goons to the neighborhood to scare borrowers," he said.
- According to the NCRB data, "bankruptcy and indebtedness" witnessed the sharpest spike in 2015, registering an almost three-fold increase (3,097) as compared to 2014 (1,163).
- Similarly, farm-related issues, too, have seen a sharp spike of over 61 per cent. While 969 suicides were recorded due to crop-failure and other farm-related issues in 2014, 2015 saw 1,562 suicides in this category.
- Among states, Maharashtra (1,293) reported the maximum number of suicides due to "indebtedness", followed by Karnataka (946) and Telangana (632). With 131 deaths, Telangana reported the highest number of suicides by farmers who took loans from

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moneylenders, with 131 deaths, followed by Karnataka (113).

- Similarly, farm-related issues such as crop failure forced 769 farmers to end their lives in Maharashtra, followed by 363 in Telangana, 153 in Andhra Pradesh and 122 in Karnataka. Family problems (933) and illness (842) were other top reasons for suicides among farmers in 2015, according to NCRB data.

### **Agrarian Crisis in Telangana**

After a prolonged struggle for six decades, the hopes and expectations to achieve a separate state hood for Telangana region was to cherish Achhe Din for agriculture sector, which was under distress during undivided Andhra Pradesh. However, an appalling situation continues, wherein the farmer suicides and severe drought has been haunting the Telangana region till today. In the last two years, the ruling political regime, which came into power, has taken initiatives with much self-glorification and media blitzkrieg, such as rebuilding of tank network and focus on irrigation projects. However, the past continues to horrify the agricultural sector in the state, due to various reasons such as shortage of rains, change in climatic conditions, increase in the cost of cultivations and lack of irrigation facilities.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, 898 farmers committed suicides in Telangana during 2014, which was the second highest number in the country after Maharashtra. In 2015 year also the state government has admitted in the state assembly that 430 famers ended their lives in last 15 months. However, the political parties and non-governmental organizations alleged that nearly 2000 famers committed suicide since the separate state came into existence. As per published reports nearly 34 farmers committed suicide in a single village in the home district of the Telangana Chief Minister.

Farmer suicides were attributed to a number of reasons ranging from crop failure to indebtedness. State Government failed to provide crop insurance at par with what is available to industry, as agriculture is the sector most vulnerable to the vagaries of nature. Failure of crops almost always renders the farmers incapable of paying back the loan installments, and if crops fail in two or more consecutive seasons, farmers invariably find themselves in a debt trap. This is exactly what is happening in Telangana region, where the maximum suicides have been reported.

Too much surprise, the state government has been reluctant to declare drought year, despite the official record shows that there has less than 50 percent rainfall in last two years. The state government feels that, if they declares drought year, it will echo the backwardness of the region and reflects the decline in the state economy, which will hamper the prospect of attracting private investment in the state. This motive reflects the neo-liberal agenda of the ruling party, which is planning to protect the interest of the corporates.

In an embarrassing remark on the functioning of state leadership, the Comptroller and Auditor General in its report for 2014-15 was tabled in the State Assembly, which has

observed that there is an evidence of unrealistic budgetary assumptions and weaknesses in expenditure monitoring and control. The entire Supplementary provision of Rs 5,359 crore proved unnecessary as the actual expenditure Rs 64,097 crore incurred was less than the original budget provision of Rs 1,01,323 crore. The report also further stated that the unrealistic budgetary allocations resulting in substantial savings, unnecessary Supplementary grants, expenditure incurred without provision and excess re-appropriations resulting in excess provision are indication of poor budget management.

Recently, the Department of Information and Public Relations of Telangana government has published two page advertorial in daily newspapers highlighting Mission Kakatiya programme, which was already launched in 2014, aims to increase agriculture based income for small and marginal farmers, by accelerating the development of minor irrigation infrastructure. It was stated in the advertorial that under the Mission Kakatiya program more than 45000 tanks and many lakes will be restored in Telangana region and it will have huge bearing on generation of rural employment, poverty reduction and agricultural growth. Further, it was also mentioned that Rs. 26,657 crore budget has been allotted for the year 2016-17.

**Table 1. Farmers Suicides in Telangana since 2014:**

Name of the District	No of Suicides since June 2014 to June 2017
Nalgonda	338
Siddipet	269
Warangal Rural	168
Medak	151
Vikarabad	144
Nagarkurnool	139
Adilabad	137
Shamshabad - Rangareddy	134
Bhupalpalle Jayashankar	134
Sangareddy	116
Karimnagar	103
Nirmal	99
Jangaon	98
Yadadri	94
Sircilla Rajanna	83
Mahbubnagar	83
Khammam	80
Kamareddy	80
Jagtial	78
Kothagudem - Bhadradi	77
Wanaparthy	74

Mahabubabad	70
Warangal	64
Peddapalle	64
Suryapet	58
Nizamabad	58
Gadwal - Jogulamba	41
Mancherial	38
Komaram Bheem	25
Medchal-Malkajgiri	8
Grand Total	<b>3105</b>

New Delhi, 2017.

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Source: NCRB,

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committed suicides in Telangana state during the last 3 years of its newly statehood. The districts are arranged in the decending order of their number suicides committed during the last three years period. There are about 11 districts witnessed more than 100 suicides in the said period. Theses districts are Nalgonda, Siddipet, Warangal rural, Medak, Vikarabad, Nagarkurnool, Adilabad, Shamshabad-Rangareddy, Bhupalpalle-Jayashankar, Sangareddy, Karimnagar. The districts like Nirmal, Janagoan are also touching 100 suicides during the last three years. Among the districts Nalgonda tops the table with more number of suicides with 338 agricultural farmers who sacrificed their lives with the failure of the agriculture. Siddipet, the home district of honorable chief minister also ranked second place in the state with 269 cases. The district like Medchal-Malkajgiri witnessed less no of suicides with 8 cases because of its urban surroundings. In the district like Komaram Bheem which witnessed 25 suicides during the last three years which is comparatively low in the state.

### Conclusion:

Due to the agrarian crisis in Telangana, farmers suicides are increasing day by day. The youngest state in the country which emerged with self rule also become helpless in controlling the farmers suicides. The government of Telangana has launched the mission kakatiya programme to provide irrigational facilities to the farmers based on tanks renovation. This takes much time. In addition to providing water facilities, the government should come forward facilitating and effective implementation of availability of institutional credit, subsidies, support prices, and crop insurance etc.

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