

**Agrarian Society,  
Law and Development  
in the Era of Globalization**

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# Agrarian Society, Law and Development in the Era of Globalization

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## CONTENTS

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<i>Preface</i>	iii-v
1. <b>Ascendancy of Sustainable Agriculture: A Legal Facet on the Pathway to National Prosperity</b> <i>B. Madhana &amp; P.S. Arya Abaranji</i>	1
2. <b>Agriculture Through the Lens of Intellectual Property Rights</b> <i>Zorah Susan Abraham</i>	13
3. <b>Agricultural Laws : Understanding the Implication</b> <i>Sameta Sangwan</i>	26
4. <b>Food Security Law in India : Challenges and Ways Ahead</b> <i>Dr. Sangeeta Chatterjee</i>	36
5. <b>Farmers Suicides in India : An Analysis</b> <i>Sherin Farhana Ev</i>	55
6. <b>Farmer Suicide Vis-a-Vis Faith in Humanity : A Way Forward</b> <i>Dr. Ashwini Vinod Ingole &amp; Dr. Sourabh Vasant Ubale</i>	68
7. <b>Implementation of Farmers' Rights in India : The Eclipse of Oblivion over Rights</b> <i>Mehak Rai Sethi &amp; Dr. Vandana Singh</i>	79
8. <b>Universal Basic Income and the Agrarian Crisis : Challenges and Solutions</b> <i>Shruti Chaturvedi</i>	92

## Farmer Suicide Vis-a-Vis Faith in Humanity: A Way Forward

Dr. Ashwini Vinod Ingole\* & Dr. Sourabh Vasant Ubale\*\*

### ABSTRACT

Agriculture is the real identity of India and farmers are the backbone of society. India is an agrarian country in which 70% population is directly or indirectly depend on Agriculture. However, unfortunately, the farmer suicide are a common issue in our country. Both marginal farmers and small farmers are committing suicide. The first state where the suicide was recorded was Maharashtra. Maharashtra is the worst affected state for farmer suicide. Nowadays the problem of farmers' suicides is one of the vital concern that need to be addressed by the Government. Government taken certain steps to tackle farmers suicide by introducing several packages to help the farmer in distress but these have not helped much in putting an end to farmer suicide and therefore not only the government but everyone in the world should remember that if there are no farmers then all will have to starve for centuries thus save them at least to save humanity.

At this backdrop, the authors of the present research paper will trace the issues and consequences of farmer suicide. The authors will attempt to outline the current solution to deal with farmer suicide. The authors will focus on Constitutional perspective, Indian and International Legal Frameworks, Governmental Notifications and Programmes. After these analytical attempts, the authors will discuss the several packages introduced by the government to tackle with the farmer suicide in India. Based upon these thoughts, the authors will attempt to provide a balanced solution to eradicate the farmer suicide.

*Keywords:* Farmer, Suicide, Government, Law, Policy, Remedies.

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## INTRODUCTION

*"Farmers . . . not only produce the food and fiber we need, but they help to ensure our national security and economic stability."*

*-Michelle Grainger<sup>1</sup>*

In India mere about 70% of population depends directly or indirectly upon agriculture for their livelihood. In India's GDP, the agriculture industry contributes more than 15%. Development off any country is possible only if, the farmer's community is taken care of on a priority basis, but in India Farmers are far behind in development. Farmer is a person who engaged in Agriculture. A farmer is usually a owner of a farm. He is a person who promote or improve the growth of a plant, crops etc. Suicide means ending your own life. It is something a way for people to escape from pain or suffering. When someone ends their own life, we called it as "Died by Suicide". The suicide of a farmer is a painful for his family as well as for other farmers. Farmer suicides are an unfortunate result of the agrarian distress plaguing the rural economy of many states of the country.

National Crime Records Bureau, an office of the Ministry of Home Affairs Government of India, has been collecting and publishing suicide statistics for India since the 1950s, as annual Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India report. It started separately collecting and publishing farmer's suicide statistics from 1995. Mere about 12,000 farmers committed suicide in Maharashtra between 2015 and 2018. According to a report by the National Crime Records Bureau, the states with the highest incidence of farmer suicide in 2015 were Maharashtra (3,030), Telangana (1,358), Karnataka (1,197), Madhya Pradesh (581), Andhra Pradesh (516), and Chhattisgarh (854). Tamma Carleton<sup>2</sup>, compared suicide and climate data, concluding that climate change in India may have "a strong influence" on suicides during the growing season, triggering more than 59,000 suicides in 30 years. More than 23,000 farmers have committed suicide in the state of Maharashtra between 2009 and 2016.<sup>3</sup>

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2 Researcher at the University of California, Berkeley.

3 Sawant, Sanjay, "Maharashtra Assembly: Over 23,000 farmer suicides have taken place since 2009, says Devendra Fadnavis", *First Post*, March 16, 2017.

Many Activist and Scholars have offered number of conflicting reasons for farmer suicide like High debt burden, Mental Health, personal issues, monsoon failures, family problems etc.

Thirty-five years ago, it was on 19 March 1986 that the first mass suicide by a farmer's family in Yavatmal district was recorded. Sahebrao Karpe Patil, a farmer, a former panchayat member of ChilGavhan village (Yavatmal district, Maharashtra) had committed suicide along with his wife and four children.<sup>4</sup> Is there any way to come out of it? So, we have to check where it goes wrong. We have to find solution for it.

### REASON FOR FARMER SUICIDE

The suicidal tendency among the farming community owes its origin from Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh and Vidarbha region of Maharashtra since in the end of 1990 and it spread to other states. In 2014 The National Crime Record Bureau of India reported 5650 farmer suicides. The higher number of suicides recorded in 2004 when 18241 farmers committed suicide.<sup>5</sup> There are various economic, social, individual and environmental causes of farmers' suicide. Various reasons have been offered to explain why farmers commit suicide in India some are discussed as below:

#### 1. Inability to Pay Debt

Since there are no tools in the hands farmer to meet the big needs of the house and therefore there is a practice of taking out crop loans and meeting the needs from them so the financial crunches of the farmer never ends the debts burden does not get lighter. The government thinks that giving interest free loans to farmer will solve their problems. However, this is not entirely true. It needs a policy basis but it cannot be said that it will end its dependency.

#### 2. Lack of Amenities

The productivity of field crops should be increased if the necessary facilities should reach to them. But the farmers are suffering due to non-availability of these facilities. There are many errors in roads, transport, electricity, water planning,

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4 Barun S. Mitra, "35 years ago on this day, first farmer family suicide was recorded in Maharashtra", *The Print*, March 19, 2021.

5 Dr. G. L. Parvathamma, "Farmers Suicide and Response of the Government in India -An Analysis" 7(3)1 *IOSR Journal of Economics and Finance* 1-6 (May - June, 2016).

water supply guarantee, weather forecast, cold storage, under agricultural laws. All this effort is affecting only the farmer.

### 3. Lack of Communication between Agricultural Workers and Farmers

No agricultural extension work has been done in the last few years. The plan of agricultural expansion to keep the balance between the farmers and the government, to promote the various agricultural schemes announced by the government, to reach out to the farmers has completely collapsed. Even after the new research that is being done in the agricultural universities has been unable to reach farmers. Therefore the whole system is there but the negligence of the government, the agriculture department and negligence on the part of the agricultural workers the whole system is collapsed. therefore the purpose for which they have been selected has been destroyed.

### 4. Climate Change

Change and changing nature is becoming a chore for the agricultural sector. If nature preserves it, it will fill it up, but the shout that man is destroying it and trying to destroy it has upset the whole balance of the environment, so the cycle of nature has changed and therefore the change in nature is definitely dangerous for Agriculture.

### 5. Farmer's Frenzy in Running Behind Crop Rates

The price of any commodity has never been the same for five consecutive years. The best rate for a product is one year. So, the whole peasantry turns to the production of that commodity. Again, the yield of that crop increases and prices fall. So, the farmer gets confused. He does not know what to do. Therefore, the government set up market committees to work out a solution but these market committees are unable to help the farmer, as they became independent bases for politicians. From that, the farmers were left to get the right rate.

### 6. Expensive New Technologies

In earlier days, money was not spent for work till sowing in the field, now nothing works without money. This is the result of use of new technology and machinery. This new technology is costly, making it difficult for farmers to cultivate. Therefore, new technology has increased the production but also increased the cost.

7. **Degraded Farm Lands by Polluted Water**

Water from rivers, canals and wells has become more alkaline due to mixing of sewage and industrial waste water from various factories. As a result, the irrigation does not get good water and therefore the agricultural lands rapidly degraded and saline. Alternatively, production and quality of agricultural commodities is declining.

8. **Electricity and Water Scarcity**

Electricity and water scarcity are the two most important factors in man-made crises on agriculture. The Government is pursuing a time-consuming policy in providing both. It is unaffordable not to give these things in time. As a result, Agricultural productivity has declined significantly. Out of this, agriculture is running at a loss.

9. **Question Marks of Seeds Quality**

If the seeds you sow is of good quality, then the crop is vigorous. Seed selection is important for here. No companies throw out the remaining seeds. It is mixed in next years seeds. Some even re-pack the same seeds and market them with a new date label. Seller are paid extra commission for both the types of seeds. This benefits the company and sellers but the farmer suffers.

10. **Sustainable Agricultural Encroachment**

Encroachment on good crop land is increasing in different ways. Today these lands are being bought with huge amount of black money. Where buildings, industries, farm house, government schemes, road widening, railway widening projects are introduce by the government. As a result, they are under agriculture is declining. One day we have to decide how much area we have to keep for agriculture

11. **Lack of Education**

He cannot provide higher education to his children as the farmer is poorly educated. Although there is a way for the farmers to improve their economic condition, it is not possible for them due to their economic woes. It is true that we say that there is no way out without education, but at present the farmers do not have the financial means required for higher education so they cannot provide higher education to their children. This situation is enough to send the farmers to depression

In addition to some of the problems mentioned above, laziness, ignorance, superstition, inadequate facilities in rural areas, theism, unnecessary fears, lack of positive lifestyle, etc. lead to farmer suicides.

### **FARMER SUICIDE: THE FOOTPRINTS**

As we are all very proud to say that our country is an agricultural country. Everyone wants that country to be happy and prosperous. The real king of this agrarian country is the farmer, but unfortunately today it is the same farmer who is turning to suicide. What a shock to a family where a farmer commits suicide. Only the people of the house know what will happen to their sons, daughters, wives, parents. Farmers suicide not only affect the family. We should all keep in mind that the suicide of a farmer is not only detrimental to the family but also to the progress of the country. Therefore, farmer suicide is a social issue. It creates severe personal, social and economic consequences within family such as,

- **Family Disturbance**

Mostly the family heads committed suicide, who is the main bread earner of the family. Therefore, it is very difficult to his family member to survive. Due to which the whole family was disturbed and face so many consequences. The families move from farm labour to permanent labour. The poor economic condition compelled their children to leave the school and go for wage earning for sharing the consumption expenditure of family which leads to child labour and deterioration of physical health and therefore ultimately increase the tare of child labour. Thus, the farmer suicide not only affect the family but it also affects the social condition.

- **Psychological Impact**

Due to the sudden death of family head severe psychological impact was observed on other family members. severe anxiety and stress were developing about future life, which leads to mental instability.

- **Effect on Working**

After the death of the head of the family, not only the mental health of all the members of the household deteriorates, but also their financial condition deteriorates, which also affects the economy of the country.

- **Due to Compensation Received**

As deceased was the only major income earner for all family members. But while providing Government help, particularly spouse of victim was considered for receiving compensation and not the older family members. Due to which conflict was created among the older family members and spouse of the victims. It invites the new dispute before the court which ultimately increase the burden of judiciary to resolve such dispute.

The above-mentioned consequences faced by the family members need to be taken into consideration by various government and non-government organizations and social workers for planning various measures for survival, rehabilitation and future of the victims' families. Therefore, when farmers commit suicide, the consequences are felt not only by their families, but also by the country. We should all take note of this.

### **FARMER SUICIDE: THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT**

The National Crime Records Bureau of India reported that a total of 296,438 Indian farmers had committed suicide since 1995.<sup>6</sup> Out of these, 60,750 farmer suicides were in the state of Maharashtra since 1995 and the remaining in Odisha, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Chhattisgarh, all states with loose financial and entry regulations.<sup>7</sup>

The Government of India and various state Government have announced various packages from time to time to prevent the incidents of suicide among the Farmers such as,

- Relief package, 2006
- The Maharashtra Money-Lending (Regulation) Act, 2014
- Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme, 2008
- 70% cut in Monsanto's Royalties
- Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojna
- Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bheema Yojna i.e. Crop Insurance for farmers
- Relief to farmers in Input subsidy
- Soil Health Card etc.

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6 Rajbir Singh Manku, Har-Rai Kaur Palray, "Indian Farmers Protest: what you need to know", *The Boar*, March 7, 2021.

7 Dr. Parveen Kumar, Dr. D. Namgyal, "Farmers' Suicides :A National Catastrophe", *Early Times*, September 2, 2020.

Even the Government of India appointed various committees and commissions to study and to suggest measures to resolve the crises in the agriculture field. Even the Government of India has set up the national commission on farmer in February 2004 under the chairmanship of Dr. M.S. Swaminathan. This committee started its work with a declaration that "serving Farmers and Saving Farming".

Although the Government has declared different policies to stop farmers suicides, the Government has not been able to stop Farmer suicides completely.

### FARMER SUICIDES: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Worldwide, suicide is among the three leading causes of death among those aged 15-44 years and the second leading cause in the 10-24 years age group.<sup>8</sup> Every year about one million people die from suicide; giving a "global" mortality rate of 16 per 100,000.<sup>9</sup> Mental illness is a well-researched risk factor for suicide.<sup>10</sup>

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), at least, 2,70,940 Indian farmers have taken their lives since 1995. This occurred at an average of 46 farmer's suicides a day. The matter is also becoming a global concern.

Farmer's suicide is a global phenomenon. Outside India, studies in Sri Lanka, USA, Canada, and Australia have identified farming as a high-stress profession that is associated with a higher suicide rate than the general population.

In France, there is a farmer suicide every two days, in the United States of America (US) the rate of farmer suicide is just under two times that of suicide amongst the general population, and Australia reports one farmer suicide every four days. Broadly speaking, the causes of farmer suicide can be divided into three factors: the economic, social and the physical factors. In US the farmer deaths are often reported as accidents instead of suicides. In India, a 'farmer' is defined as a holder of a land title. This excludes farmers without land holding, agricultural day labourers, and women, who often get categorized simply as 'wives. Suicide is also often misrepresented as an 'accident' to

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8 McCurdy, Stephen A., "Agricultural injury", *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* 38(4) 463-480 (2000).

9 M. S. Reddy, "Suicide Incidence and Epidemiology", *Indian J Psychol Med* 32(2) 77-82 (July-December 2010).

10 *Supra* Note 8.

the NCRB. Suicide being a crime, further deters the intentions to reveal the facts. Two, removing all social stigmas attached to mental health issues. This needs a two-pronged approach. First, would be to make mental health services accessible. The second would be to work with NGOs, to campaign and host information activities that help remove the negative perception of mental health issues. A major step in this direction would be to set up rural support networks. These networks can have General Practitioners (GPs), mental health counsellors, and farming experts. An example for is the charity organization YANA (You Are Not Alone) in the UK. Even in Australia, an incentive-based programme has been implemented to provide special grants to medical practitioners within rural areas.

In 2009, the International Museum of Women included an examination of the impact of farmers' suicides on the lives of the farmers' wives and children in their exhibition *Economica: Women and the Global Economy*. Their slideshow "Growing Debt" and accompanying essay by curator Masum Momaya entitled "Money of Her Own" showed how many widows were left with the burden of their husbands' debts, and were forced to work as indentured servants to repay the debt. The widows were also unlikely to remarry because other men in the community were unwilling to take on the widows' debts for themselves.

### **SUGGESTION & CONCLUSION**

Some 5,579 Indian farmers died by suicide in 2020, Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Narendra Singh Tomar, told the Lok Sabha November 30, 2021. The figures are according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), that has published reports on farmer suicides up to 2020.

Agriculture is clearly a high-stressed occupation. Changing farming practices and various regulations governing it have compounded stressors traditionally associated with agricultural production. A number of studies have found high rates of depression and anxiety among farmers. Various risk factors act in cohesion to culminate into suicide by farmers. Although there are social and geographic variations, farmers' suicide is a global problem that needs detailed evaluation. The preventive strategies used by other nations may not completely apply in the Indian scenario, but it can be a guiding path for more

research and to assist in the development of a paradigm shift in the way we think about the issue of crop loss.

With this in mind, we propose the following:

- There needs to be a paradigm shift in the way we think about the issue of crop loss.
- Agricultural practices need to be re-evaluated and improved.
- There needs to be a paradigm shift in the way we think about the issue of crop loss.
- Provide fertilizer and other inputs at a reduced cost and at minimum prices.
- The farmer should provide with the necessary inputs to increase the agricultural productivity.
- Farmer should be provided with direct water subsidies.
- Insurance is needed.
- Land holding should be consolidated.
- Market should be regulated direct provision of input to farmer by government.
- To develop watersheds.
- To increase the agriculture budget to use new technologies and train the farmer.
- Government must subsidize the organic fertilizers instead of chemical fertilizers.
- There is a need for a systematic epidemiology of the mental health of farmers facing weather related adversity.
- To explore the roles of social support & sense of belongingness as resilience factors for protection from suicide.

Today, progressive states have one of the highest rates of farmer suicides in the world. This is a realistic picture that pushes the progressive tradition. Therefore, there is an urgent need to declare this as a national catastrophe by paying serious attention to the issue of farmer suicides. The government should consider the more fundamental ideas put forward by the Swaminathan Commission for the development of farmers.

11 P. B. Behere, M. C. Bhise, "Farmers' suicide: Across culture", *Indian J Psychiatry* 51(4) 242-243 (Oct-Dec, 2009).

The problem of agriculture will not be solved just by thinking that the piece of land will be in the name, but the problem of everyone who depends on agriculture for their livelihood will have to be understood.

All women and men subsisting on agriculture, landless agricultural laborers, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, small, marginal, semi-marginal and medium plantation door farmers, large land holders, fishery and poultry farmers, animal herders, planters, beekeepers, who are engaged in silk and insectivorous industries, migratory forestry, collection and use of forest products other than timber, crop and animal husbandry and subsistence farming and fisheries and forestry, agriculture and home science graduates etc to be included in the definition of farmer as per the recommendation by the Swaminathan Commission. It must be considered. Only then will the policy of sustainable development be decided in the true sense of the word and the present government will have to be more vigilant in avoiding preconceived notion and past mistake.

Therefore, everyone in the world should remember that if there are no farmers, we all will have to starve for centuries! Save them at least to save humanity.

## About the Editors

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