

Farmer's Suicides

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OPINION

Farmer's suicides, also known as the agrarian crisis is a phenomenon seen in India since the 1990s. According to NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau), the crisis is so severe that in the last two decades, more than 300,000 farmers have committed suicide in India. This is disturbing since India is an agrarian country and most of the people, directly or indirectly are dependent on agriculture. The falling farm prices and increasing costs of production in addition to declining farm credit are imposing a debt burden on the farmers. This burden and the accompanying psychological stress is forcing the farmers to commit suicide.

Farmer's suicides are primarily caused due to the economic distress which leads the farmers into the debt trap. The Green Revolution required farmers to adopt the new chemical and industrial inputs which increased the cost of cultivation. The new inputs introduced by the Green Revolution like heavy irrigation mechanisms, costly hybrid and GMO seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, overpriced farm equipment, and machinery necessitated huge financial investment and borrowing money from public credit institutions and private money lenders.

The new inputs have not only led to the instability in the farming profession but have also ruined the ecological foundations of agriculture. The genesis of the agrarian crisis lies in chemical and industrial agriculture practiced with these kinds of inputs. In fact, farming is an activity where nature is predominant. The interdependence of ecological entities like land, water, flora, and fauna is a process that cannot be manipulated by some chemical triggers. These chemical triggers dilute the quality of the farm

product and excessive use of these chemical inputs leads to toxification of the entire food chain. As such the very purpose of agricultural production or farm output is defeated. An ecological worldview suggests that the extreme weather in the form of droughts, floods, hurricanes, etc., directly affect crop production.

Despite the declaration of MSPs (Minimum Support Prices), for main crops, the farmers are forced to make distressed sales and incur huge losses which mount their indebtedness. The entire methodology of deducing an MSP is questionable. The process is totally non-transparent and ignores the fact that production costs vary from region to region. The MSP is never remunerative for the farmer. Three assurances are very crucial to good remunerative farming. First, there must be a remunerative price mechanism in place. Secondly, all the conditions that are non-natural, which can be controlled, must be favorable to the farmer. Thirdly there must be adequate state support to the farming system in the form of provision of good inputs. Also, there must be an assured market.

In order to fix agrarian distress or infuse money into the rural economy, need a completely new vision for rural India which considers the changing climate, the fluctuating market situations, the aspirations and ambitions of the masses like good education, efficient health facilities, etc. For implementing this new vision, we need a new delivery mechanism for rural India in which agriculture is the focus. Also, we need to have large amounts of public and private investment not only in agriculture but in the agrarian economy. We need to support rain-fed farming which is nearly 65% of our total farming and is practiced in regions where farmer's suicides are dominant, like Vidarbha, North Karnataka, Bundelkhand, and Marathwada.

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