



AGRARIAN CRISIS AND FARMERS' SUICIDES - A MAN MADE DISASTER - AN ANALYSIS ON TELANGANA

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Agrarian Economy is facing a major crisis since 1991. The New Economic Policy adopted by the Government under the GATT rates and subsequent changes in tariffs, quantitative restrictions, quota systems, subsidies and other related aspects have had greater impact on entire economic system of the country. The basic features of Indian agriculture are such that more than 70 percent are small and marginal farmers with fragmented tiny land holdings. The agrarian crisis has taken a new dimension with the penetrative implementation of liberalisation policy, which has given scope for import of capital, technology and goods and services. The agrarian distress in the Indian countryside has become a subject of major policy concern in view of the recent spate of suicides by farmers in a number of states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Punjab. Most literature surrounding the analysis of farmers' suicides has been restricted to the immediate causes. However, to dismiss the agrarian crisis as being a result of purely economic factors would oversimplify the complex scenario. "Suicide is an individual phenomenon the causes of which are essentially social in nature"

Keywords: Agrarian, distress, Economy, Policies, Suicides

Introduction

The Indian Agrarian Economy is facing a major crisis since 1991. The New Economic Policy adopted by the Government under the GATT rates and subsequent changes in tariffs,

quantitative restrictions, quota systems, subsidies and other related aspects have had greater impact on entire economic system of the country. 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 State 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.

Particularly the agriculture sector has faced many challenges with the ongoing process of globalisation, WTO and its new rules have prompted many countries to liberalise their native economies in tune with global manifestations. The process of globalisation has given ample opportunity for transnational companies to enter into various markets of the developing economies, viz., the input market, product market, capital market and technology market. These companies have established their hold under the protection from TRIPS and TRIMS. The WTO agreement has opened up export opportunities to the developing economies at large scale but the Indian economy hasn't benefited much due to many inherent weaknesses. The share of Indian exports not even surpassed one percent of the total World exports and thus the prospects are somewhat debatable.

The basic features of Indian agriculture are such that more than 70 percent are small and marginal farmers with fragmented tiny land holdings. Their economic position is so weak that they frequently depend on borrowings for their productive and unproductive purposes. Poor infrastructure facilities, lack of sufficient irrigation and other factors have adding fuel to the fire. The agrarian crisis has taken a new dimension with the penetrative implementation of liberalisation policy, which has given scope for import of capital, technology and goods and services. With the introduction of hi tech agriculture expenditure levels have increased substantially and this has warranted even small and marginal farmers to opt for huge investments. On the other large scale imports under AOA (Agreement on Agriculture) have slashed market price of many agricultural commodities at producer level. The Minimum Support Price (MSP) being announced by the Government of India is also not so remunerative in view of ever increasing input costs. Another important factor that augmenting the agrarian

distress is the slow progress in irrigation development. Even today only 32 to 35 percent of the cultivated land is under assured irrigation. The remaining cultivation is on the mercy of resulted in wide spread farmers suicides across the country. Southern states like Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka have experienced the real brunt. Among the southern states the Andhra Pradesh which has initiated the economic reforms so early than the other states has suffered the crunch of the situation.

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. Last year 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. The worst effected districts are Warangal, Mahabubnagar, Karimnagar, Nalgonda and Medak districts. The Warangal district topped the list with reported cases of more than 983. Among these farmers most of them are cotton growers. Normally the farming community invites a shift hi the cropping pattern to improve their income levels and living conditions. But for the dismay of Telangana a shift in cropping pattern in favour of cotton has been a curse to the farmers.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the socio-economic conditions of the selected farmers.
2. To analyze the cropping pattern, yield levels, economies of agriculture of selected farmers.
3. To identify the contributory factors for farmers' suicides and
4. To critically review the relief and rehabilitation measures for the families of the deceased farmers.

Methodology

The study is based on secondary sources of information and data. Secondary data includes season and crop reports, statistical abstracts of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh,

National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), published and unpublished works of scholars, reports and monographs published by the State Government and Central Government.

Problems of Farmers:

The Telanganastate comprising of Ten districts with a population of 3.5 crores has its own specific problems which have driven number of farmers into death trap. It is highly drought effected region, particularly Warangal, Mahabubnagar, Medak, Nalgonda and Adilabad districts are the worst effected areas, hi spite of large catchment area of Krishna and Godavari rivers, the Telangana has its own problems with regard to canal irrigation. High dependency on ground water induced most of the farmers irrespective of their land holding and economic strength to opt for tube well irrigation. Earlier tank irrigation was the prominent sources of irrigation, but gradual negligence on the part of the state government and local governments the importance of tank irrigation has slowly pushed to the back seat In due course the extent of tube well irrigation increased phenomenally 5,88,884 and with that the power utilisation also increased abnormally. The recurrent drought conditions during the wee years of 1990 and the first quarter of present decade have created a situation where the ground water level has gone into deep and deep. This has increased expenditure on digging and maintenance of bore wells significantly and in most of the cases success rate of bore wells is also low. Even hi cases of success the power usage 'has increased sharply to extract the water from 300 to 400 feet from the ground level. The power supply in the state is almost erratic since 10-12 years or so. Frequent power cuts, low voltage have resulted in disruptions in agricultural operations and increased the expenditure on maintenance of pump sets. Huge investment on irrigation and its maintenance is one of the basic factors for mounting indebtedness of farmers in Telangana districts. Power sector reforms that have been prompted by the World Bank have further aggravated the voews of the farmers.

Major causes of farmers' suicides

Problems	Percentage of farmers
Indebtedness	94
Crop loss, crop failure and risk factor	70
Input related problems	60

Failure of agriculture extension	70
Lack of storage and marketing facilities	55
Lack of remunerative price	50
Absence of agricultural Insurance	10
Psychological factors	30

Spurious of Seeds and pesticides:

Another area of concern is spurious seeds. Entry of multinational companies into the seed market under new rules of WTO has changed the entire scenario. The traditional seed development has gone in its way. The Genetically Modified Seeds and the new patent regime have given ultimate grip for multinational companies over Indian seed market. The situation is more alarming with reference to commercial crops and that to particularly with regard to cotton. More number of farmers' suicides that have been reported in Telangana districts are of cotton growers. This malady can be attributed to the two important factors, one is high seed costs and the other is spurious seeds. Many times the farmers have been grossly exploited by the multinational companies and their dealers with inferior seeds. The inferior cotton has taken heavy toll of cotton growers in Telangana districts and mostly in Warangal district. The companies like Boll guard, and Monsanto have played long cruel game with innocent farmers by supplying spurious seeds at exorbitant prices. In most of the cases small and marginal farmers who purchase the seeds on credit have to pay additional price on MRP depending on demand situation.

One more area of concern is the havoc attached with discriminative use of pesticides. Modern agrarian technology invariably imposes more and more application of pesticides. As newly developed seeds and particularly that of cotton seeds are sensitive to topographical conditions and nature of the soil, they need regular application of pesticides. In the post globalisation period the pesticides market also gone into the hands of multinational companies and the price of many such pesticides has increased alarmingly. Here also adulterated pesticides with inferior quality have played havoc with farming community and especially cultivators of commercial crops. In most of the farmer's suicide cases, they have consumed these pesticides to end their life. "It is irony and tragedy that the pesticides which have to save the life of the crop have taken the life of the farmers"

Investment:

Among the host of the problems being encountered by the farming community, availability of credit is the icon of the problems. The rural credit structure is still weak and inconsistent. The period of globalisation has changed the priorities of the government. The agriculture sector has been relegated to back seat and service sector gained importance. The Public investment into the agriculture sector has declined sharply and the global phenomena has induced the central and state governments to slash the subsidies and other protective measures. The input market has opened up to the market economy. Culmination of such manifestations has created an inevitable situation, where the individual farmers have to depend on private lending. Commercial Banking Sector with its mounting NPAs (Non Performance Assets) has reduced its lending to the primary sector. The money lenders, traders and commissions agents are playing a major role even today in providing rural credit. Here also the demand side of the economy is playing a vital role. Seasonal demand for borrowings naturally put up pressure on interest rate, hi the peak stages of agricultural operations the interest rate even cross 36 percent. High range of investment on irrigation, seeds, pesticides and working capital have invariably increased the volume of borrowing, hi spite of such borrowing and investment the farmers are not in a position to come out of the vicious circle.

Human Factors:

Two important causative factors for such situation are human factors and non- human factors. The present context manifests that case of the farmers' suicides across the country is basically a manmade disaster. Failure of the government in providing adequate irrigation facilities and particularly in strengthening local irrigation potential has increased private expenditure on irrigation and its maintenance. In a region like Telangana where river Godavari flows nearly 800 feet below to the surface land in mid areas, the earlier governments haven't come up with alternative workable solutions. Gradual negligence of tank irrigation in Telangana has prompted excess dependency on well irrigation which again increased the expenditure on irrigation. Obviously the institutional setup is also not so positive towards the agrarian economy. Marketisation of supply of credit, seeds' and pesticides has opened chance for gross exploitation by the private financiers and trading community in collusion with multinational companies. Some times the nature is also not in favour of farming community with erratic monsoons, flash floods, drought conditions and scanty rainfall, but this is also primarily a man made factor, where human activities are posing threat to the environment. The

ultimate conclusion that arises from the above analysis is that the farmer's suicides across the country, in the state of Andhra Pradesh and specifically in Telangana region are the result of number of human errors.

Farmers' suicides are linked with human dignity, human values and human rights. Suicides as an act on mass scale lower the dignity of the country. A serious look into various alternative approaches to stop the tendency is the need of the hour. Various state governments including Andhra Pradesh have come up with committee and commissions to thoroughly probe the genesis of farmers' distress and to provide alternative suggestive approaches.

Reasons for Suicides:

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.

Failure of the state's agricultural policy

Most of Telangana's agricultural land is still rain-fed. It lacks adequate irrigation facilities in comparison to coastal Andhra Pradesh which has an efficient irrigation network. With a delayed and deficient monsoon, farmers in Telangana have to depend on borewells. But the government doesn't offer institutional credit for digging borewells and activists say farmers are forced to borrow from private money lenders at exorbitant interest rates.

Farmers' organisations point out that there are around 2 million functional borewells in Telangana. With Rs 60,000 as the average cost of setting up one borewell, farmers in Telangana

have invested Rs 12,000 crore on borewell irrigation. Farmers, however, do not receive sufficient power supply from the state. Of the seven hours of free power promised by the government, farmers receive only two to three hours of electricity to run the wells. Additionally, for every functional borewell, there are two to three failed borewells. These reasons cause farmers to fall into debt traps.

The lack of fresh bank loans in the monsoon crop season has also pushed farmers to despair. Loan waiver promised by major political parties, including the TRS, is the major reason why banks are not granting fresh loans to farmers. Farmers demand the state should waive institutional as well as private loans taken for cultivation and for digging borewells.

P SrihariRao, president of TelanganaRythuRakshanaSamithi, an organisation that supports farmers, says 26,000 farmers have committed suicide in Telangana in the last 20 years. In the last 4 to 5 years, around 1,000 farmers ended their lives each year."Since January this year, around 900 farmers have taken their lives. The main reason for these suicides is the anti-farmer policy of the Centre as well as the state. Pushing farmers into deep distress and financial crisis and forcing them to commit suicide amounts to murder," says Srihari, who has filed a public interest petition in the Andhra Pradesh High Court seeking help for the families of farmers who have committed suicide.

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.

On contrary the Comptroller and Auditor General, which has assessed the implementation of the irrigation projects in Telangana state, has exposed that the state government has not disclosed the financial results of any of its irrigation projects despite having largest irrigation projects in India. It has further mentioned, “Several policy initiatives taken up by Government were either unfulfilled or were partially executed, primarily due to non-approval of scheme guidelines/modalities, non-commencement of works for want of administrative sanction and poor project implementation, apart from non-release of budget.”

The Comptroller and Auditor General observation clearly reflects the haphazard vision of the state leadership and its administrative failures in managing the emerging agrarian crisis in the state. Handling of irrigation projects today stand as a monument for faulty and mindless planning.

In other instance, the autocratic approach and dictatorial tendency towards farmers by the Telangana Government has clearly reflected in its affidavit filed before high of court of Hyderabad, which stated that due to lavish life style, and spending huge amount of money on marriages and children’s education are among the reasons for farmers’ suicide in the state.

Whereas, in the midst of financial crisis, in an absolute disgrace the Chief Minister has travelled to China on a private jet hired for Rs. 2 crore on an exchequer cost, to attend the World Economic Forum. Similarly, the chief minister has gifted himself a swanky bulletproof Mercedes Benz bus, which bleed the whole of Rs 5 crore to the exchequer.

During separate Telangana agitation, the political parties including the TelanganaRasthraSamiti, had promised to change the fortunes of the farmers, who were subjected to exploitation of their resources like water and power. However, the plight of farmers, under the current dispensation is effectively left at the mercy of the monocratic government, which remains insensitive towards agricultural sector.

While the state economy is shambles, the ruling government took a decision to increase the salary of the legislators from Rs 95,000 to Rs 2.5 lakh per month, and the chief minister’s salary has been hiked from Rs 2.44 lakh to Rs 4.21 lakh, while the ministers salary has increased from Rs 2.42 lakh to Rs 4 lakh. Interestingly the ruling party has tried to justify the

hike on grounds of increased expenses and that the legislators were involved in the process of 'nation building'.

Conclusion

The development of agriculture and farmers is extremely important for the overall development of the nation. A agrarian crisis and farmers' suicides are crippling the nation's economy and also breaking the spine of the farmers. The unabatedly continuing spate of farmers' suicides should be stopped forthwith. The family members of the deceased should be taken care of. Agriculture should be protected and farmers saved in the interest of the people of the country as a whole. This specific study will go a long way in providing solutions to the agrarian crisis and farmers' suicides, provided the Government implement them sincerely and faithfully. In the current scenario, the growing agricultural crisis and its manifestations have not gone entirely unnoticed, with the state government. In past the Telanganastate is known as "Rice Bowl of India" and today the agriculture sector in this region is in advanced stage of crisis and the causes of this crisis are manifold and they are predominantly related to the mal governance and feudal practice of the state.

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