ABSTRACT

The Indian farmers are trapped in a vicious circle of crop-loss, low price and indebtedness, which lead to dilapidated conditions in agriculture. It is generally accepted that agricultural activity is a noble profession. However nature’s fury, exploitation of the market and negligence on the part of the authorities compel the farmers and agriculturists to do away with extensive cultivation. In recent years, the noble profession of Agriculture has become non-profitable to farmers. The contribution of agricultural sector to National income estimation declined from 55% in 1950-51 to 18% in 2007-08, while people’s dependency on agriculture remains almost the same. This paper studies impact of economic reform in Indian economy particularly agriculture sector of Wayanad. The Indian state has launched unprecedented relief and rehabilitation measures in response to the suicide crisis. This article makes a strong case for grounding the study of farmers’ suicides in ethnographies of agrarian practice and the local developmental state.

Keywords: Indian Agriculture; Economic Reforms; Suicide

INTRODUCTION

Agriculturists in general and the small and marginal farmers in particular have been the worst sufferers from the onslaught of globalization. With more than 40 percent of agricultural lending even today coming from the non-institutional sources charging anywhere between 30-40 percent interest per annum, the farmers are in an immiserizing situation. They are committing one of the worst human tragedies – suicides. Rural India without them definitely is not shining. And with the woeful lack of infrastructure there is a gloom not a bloom in the countryside. A decline in the share of agriculture in the national income from over 50 per cent during the 50s to less than 20 per cent today may be a sign of structural transformation but the question today is whether Indian agriculture will be able to meet the new demands placed upon it by Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG).

Wayanad district

Wayanad District in the north-east of Kerala, India, was formed on 1 November 1980 as the 12th district by carving out areas from Kozhikode and Kannur districts. Kalpetta is the district headquarters as well as the only municipal town in the district. The Folk etymology of the word says it is a combination of Vayal (paddy field) and Naad (land), making it 'The Land of Paddy Fields'. There are many indigenous tribals in this area. It is set high on the Western Ghats with altitudes ranging from 700 to 2100 m. This tiny district located in the high ranges of Kerala has a population of about 7 lakh, of which 90 per cent depend upon agriculture for sustenance. There are 40,129 farmers, 74,813 agricultural labourers, and 17,413 plantation labourers in the district. Another 37,267 people earn their livelihood from animal husbandry and forest produce. (Source: District Project - Draft Document, Wayanad, 2001, Govt. of Kerala). The district has highest tribal population - about 1.25 lakh - constituting 17 per cent of the total population. The major crops grown here are coffee, pepper, tea, cardamom, areca nut, etc. These are perennial cash crops.
Wayanad: Economy

Wayanad is 3.79% urbanised. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. Oranges, Coffee, tea, cocoa, pepper, plantain and vanilla are the main crops. Besides these cash crops, the most important crop in the district is rice. Dams and aqueducts have been constructed to take water to the other dry areas in the district. Price of land is going up even though agrarian crisis. Wayanad has two or more rice with its own property; gandagashala and geerakashala are most aromatic rice in world. In 2006 the Ministry of Panchayati Raj named Wayanad one of the country's 250 most backward districts (out of a total of 640). It is one of the two districts in Kerala currently receiving funds from the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF). The NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) enacted by the UPA government has helped and Wayanad and Palakkad were the only districts selected to receive the benefits under this scheme because of the acute need in these areas. The daily wage under NREGS, regardless of gender, in Kerala is the highest among all the states. Work under NREGS includes building elephant trenches (crop-raiding by wild elephants is another problem in Wayanad), water bodies, roads, etc.

Impact of economic reforms in Wayanad

The agrarian crisis and farmers' distress in Kerala especially Wayanad are closely linked to the neoliberal policy regime implemented in the country in the recent past. The association between the two is more in the regions of the state that are heavily dependent on export-oriented crops such as coffee and pepper. The worst affected are the small farmers, as they are more vulnerable to crop losses and price declines. Unless the plight of farmers is addressed in terms of changing the macro-policies regulating taxes, prices and imports, the condition of the farmers cannot be improved on a sustainable basis, either by increasing the availability of institutional credit or providing some alleviatory sops to the victims of suicide families.

Farmers' suicides in India

Significant reporting on suicides among farmers in India began in the 1990s in the 1990s India woke up to a spate of farmers suicides. The first state where suicides were reported was Maharashtra. Soon newspapers began to report similar occurrences from Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. In the beginning it was believed that most of the suicides were happening among the cotton growers, especially those from Vidarbha. A look at the figures given out by the State Crime Records Bureau, however, was sufficient to indicate that it was not just the cotton farmer but farmers as a professional category were suffering, irrespective of their holding size. Moreover, it was not just the farmers from Vidarbha but all over Maharashtra who showed a significantly high suicide rate. The government appointed a number of inquiries to look into the causes of farmer’s suicide and farm related distress in general. The families of farmers who had committed suicide were also offered an ex gratia grant to the tune of Rs.100,000 (about $2,000) by the government, though this amount was changed several times.

India is an agrarian country with around 60% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. Agriculture in India is often attributed as gambling with monsoons because of its almost exclusive dependency on precipitation from monsoons. The failure of these monsoons can lead to a series of droughts, lack of better prices, and exploitation of the farmers by middlemen, all of which have led to a series of suicides committed by farmers across India.

Farmers' suicides in wayanad

In the recent years, Wayanad, a tiny hill district in Kerala famous for its spices and coffee plantations, has been in the news for the widespread suicides by distressed farmers - a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly commonplace in rural India as a result of implementation of free market economic policies. Recent reports indicate a rise in farmer suicides owing to financial distress in the hill district of Wayanad. Farmers committed suicide in Wayanad is trapped in a vicious cycle of mounting loan liabilities. This fact brings to the fore the magnitude of the economic collapse that prevails in the district, which is no less serious and meriting attention than that of the state of Andhra.
The farmer's suicides are not limited to Wayanad alone. The paddy cultivators of Palghat and Alleppy are facing a very miserable economic crisis. The last few years have witnessed a steady crash in the prices of the main agricultural products of the district. The persistent droughts in the last three years have only added to the misery of the farmers. The gravity of the situation is evident from the fact that the entire district was declared as drought affected by the central government in 2003 and two villages were brought under the Annavari Relief Project that mandates the government to make compulsory distribution of all essentials, including water and food, for the sustenance of the people.

**Causes of Farmer’s Suicide**

Following are the main causes of farmers’ suicide

**High Interest Rates on Loans**

Impractical, blood-sucking loan-interest burden by unlawful money-lenders is one of the major causes. Once rural and poor people get the bank account then they become eligible to avail bank loans for farming and domestic purpose at 10% per year interest rate. It would be a great transformation of rural and poor India. Currently village money-lenders lend at very high interest rates (10% to 30% per month i.e. 120% to 360% per year) which results into many social evils like debt-trap, bonded-labor for generations, poor become poorer and children get deprived of education, families get shattered and many farmers commit suicide every year due to impractical, blood-sucking loan-interest burden. Thus financial inclusion will put stop to unlawful money-lending business and the associated social evils.

**Drought**

As much as 80% of India's farmland relies on flooding during monsoon season, so inadequate rainfall can cause droughts, making crop failure more common. In regions that have experienced droughts, crop yields have declined, and food for cattle has become scarcer. Agricultural regions that have been affected by droughts have subsequently seen their suicide rates increase.

**GM crops**

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, public attention was drawn to suicides by indebted farmers in Wayanad following crop failures. Various studies identify the important factors as insufficient or risky credit systems, the difficulty of farming semi-arid regions, poor agricultural income, absence of alternative income opportunities, a downturn in the urban economy which forced non-farmers into farming, and the absence of suitable counseling services. The report concluded that while BT may have been a factor in specific suicides, the contribution was likely marginal compared to socio-economic factors. Anti-biotech activist Vandana Shiva criticized the report saying, "Nothing in that paper is addressing the issue of debt, which is the prime cause of suicide." In 2011, a review of the evidence regarding the relationship between Bt crops and farmers' suicides in India was published in the Journal of Development Studies, also by researchers from IFPRI, which found that "Available data show no evidence of a ‘resurgence’ of farmer suicides. Moreover, Bt technology has been very effective overall in India.

**Wide spread crises**

All sections of the people, including agricultural labourers, traders, workers in the service sector etc., have become victims of the crisis in the agricultural sector. Families of agricultural labourers who have no work and wages are facing starvation. Thousands of people are migrating to neighboring districts and states in search of livelihood. The welfare schemes for the poor are not being implemented properly. The plantation sector is also facing a serious crisis. Dozens of big and medium estates are currently under either formal lockout or illegal shutdown. Wayanad had plenty of water. But today the entire region is facing drought due to unchecked deforestation and large-scale conversion of paddy fields into plantations. In 1982, there were 30,000 hectares of paddy fields in Wayanad. It has shrunk by more than 76 per cent to 7,000 hectares in 1999. The ecosystem and
environment of the district, which is famous for its biodiversity, is greatly endangered today. The last few years have seen severe droughts, hitherto unforeseen in the history of Wayanad, with even wild animals dying for want of drinking water. If the government does not give top priority to forestation and protecting paddy fields, the ecosystem and environment of Wayanad will perish.

**RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The socio economic development amongst the farmer is of paramount importance for ensuring their well-being and empowerment, especially in the context of the specific depressing situations that farmer are in viz. – outsiders exploitations, ineptness, abject poverty, asset lessens, poor productive capabilities, primitive technology, lack of marketing linkages etc.. This study is focusing mainly on the challenges faced by the government and other institutions while implementing various developmental and scaffolding programes for the empowering farmers.

**The Study Tries to Answer A Few Questions Like-**

- What are the benefits achieved by farmer through government programmes
- What are the problems in successful implementation of economic reforms
- What is the role of society to overcome this cries

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To analyze the impact of economic reforms
2. To find out the problems faced by farmer’s in Wayanad district
3. To assess the role of government initiatives in solving the farmers problems
4. To find out problems in implementing government programmes

**SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

In present decade, significance of clusters and their role in promoting economic growth has been increasingly recognized. Experiences show that successful implementation of the economic reform could help farms to improve their performance, adopt appropriate technology, improve quality and productivity, and increase turnover and export and management efficiency.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design**

Sample design is determined before data is collected. Random sampling method is used to collect the data from the population. The study is designed as a descriptive one on survey method. Simple random sampling method is used to collect data.

**Population and Sample**

Population comprises of farmers and other officials in Wayanad. Data was collected from farmers, planters and agricultural labours and officials like police stations, agricultural department, SHG panchayath members etc…. in wayanad for the period from January 2014 to April 2014.

**Sample Procedure**

From a population of wayanad district samples were taken. A face to face interview was conducted with the farmer, and other officials in various departments.

**Tools for Data Collection**

Both primary and secondary data are used for the study. Primary data was collected directly from the farmers, planters, social workers and officials through a structured questionnaire. Secondary data was collected from journals, articles, websites, blogs etc.
Tools for Data Analysis

Data was analyzed by using simple statistical tools like tables, bar diagrams and pie diagrams.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Major crops in wayanad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status- crops</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ginger</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubber</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data 2014

48% of farmer is wayanad Major crops in wayanad is coffee (48%)

Recent reports indicate a rise in farmer suicides owing to financial distress in the hill district of Wayanad. This happens due to fall in price of major crops.

Table 2. Reason of debt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status- price falling of</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ginger</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubber</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data 2014

Table 3. Reasons of financial distress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price falling</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High rate of interest</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drought</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour problem</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data 2014

FINDING OF THE STUDY

- Major crops in wayanad are coffee.
- Reasons of financial distress are price falling.
- Absence of co-operative farming.
- Many govt. schemes and programmes are not reaching in real beneficiaries.
- The NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) affects the small and medium farmers because labours go to many unimportant works.
Many planters do not care the coffee plants.

Small farmers do not get adequate financial assistance from bank.

Bank provides agricultural loans to business men. So the real farmer always depends on unscrupulous money lenders.

Middle men exploit farmers by providing low price to their products.

**SUGGESTIONS**

- It is better if the coffee board and agriculture department provide the good quality seeds and plants at reasonable price.
- Govt. should ensure that agricultural loans are issued only for agricultural purpose.
- Govt. should ban the activities of unscrupulous money lenders.
- Govt. should promote collective and cooperative farming.
- Govt. should ensure good marketing facilities.
- Govt. should ensure whether the agri promotional schemes reach in real hands.
- Govt. should promote agri co-operative societies

**CONCLUSION**

The Indian farmers are trapped in a vicious circle of crop-loss, low price and indebtedness, which lead to dilapidated conditions in agriculture. There have always been different opinions with regard to the causes of suicides, the number of suicides and the link between agricultural crisis and suicides. No two studies bring forth similar results. There is nothing strange to this phenomenon. It depends on the strategies employed and the tools used in collecting data regarding suicides. In normal parlance, the data available with the government often under estimates the number of suicides. While the data collected by the voluntary agencies or media houses are likely to be over exaggerative. Therefore, the study herein adopted a multiple edge method. For this study I visited local police stations and collected total number of suicides within their jurisdiction, and took care to separate suicides from other forms of unnatural deaths.

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