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Understanding and Addressing Farmer Suicides in India: Trends, Causes, and Remedies

Anand Sharma^a
Krishan Kumar Pandey^b

Abstract

The focus on farmer suicides in India is a critical and timely topic that highlights the challenges facing the agricultural sector in the country. As an agrarian economy with a significant portion of its population reliant on agriculture for their livelihoods, understanding the underlying causes of farmer distress and suicide is essential for addressing these pressing issues. The research paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of farmer suicides in India, utilizing state-wise quantitative data to examine trends and patterns over time. By comparing data from different time periods, such as 1995-2005 and 2006-2010, the study seeks to identify any shifts or changes in the prevalence of farmer suicides and the factors contributing to them. One of the key objectives of the research is to explore the reasons behind farmer suicides in India. This involves delving into various factors that contribute to farmer distress, including financial difficulties, indebtedness, crop failures, lack of access to credit and insurance, and inadequate government support. By identifying these underlying causes, the research aims to shed light on the systemic challenges facing the agricultural sector and the need for targeted interventions to address them. Furthermore, the paper seeks to propose effective remedies for mitigating farmer suicides and improving the overall well-being of agricultural communities in India. This may involve policy recommendations aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity, ensuring fair prices for farm produce, providing better access to credit and insurance, promoting sustainable farming practices, and strengthening support mechanisms for distressed farmers. By offering practical solutions grounded in empirical evidence, the research aims to inform policymakers, stakeholders, and the wider public about actionable steps that can be taken to alleviate farmer distress and prevent future suicides. Overall, the research paper represents a valuable contribution to the discourse on farmer suicides in India and the broader challenges facing the agricultural sector. By analyzing quantitative data, identifying underlying causes, and proposing actionable remedies, the study seeks to generate insights that can inform policy decisions and drive positive change in support of India's farming communities.

Keywords: Farmer Suicides, Agricultural Sector, India, Trends, Causes, Remedies

JEL Codes: O13, Q12, I38

1. INTRODUCTION

The sustainable development of any nation hinges not only on the growth and development of its industrial and service sectors but also on the progress of its agriculture sector. While industrial and service sectors are crucial drivers of economic growth, providing employment opportunities and contributing to GDP, agriculture remains the backbone of many economies, particularly in developing countries like India. Agriculture plays a multifaceted role in sustainable development, contributing to food security, poverty reduction, rural livelihoods, and environmental conservation. By investing in agricultural development, nations can enhance food production, increase farmer incomes, and alleviate rural poverty. Additionally, a thriving agriculture sector can stimulate rural economies, reduce urban migration, and promote inclusive growth. Furthermore, agriculture is closely intertwined with environmental sustainability, as it encompasses practices that impact land, water, and biodiversity. Sustainable agricultural practices, such as conservation agriculture, agroforestry, and organic farming, are essential for mitigating climate change, preserving natural resources, and promoting resilience to environmental shocks. In essence, the sustainable development of any nation necessitates a holistic approach that encompasses the growth and development of all sectors, including agriculture. By recognizing the importance of agriculture and implementing policies that support its growth and sustainability, nations can achieve balanced and inclusive development, ensuring a brighter future for all segments of society.

With over 60% of the nation's population residing in rural areas and relying on agriculture and allied activities for their livelihoods, the development and growth of the agricultural sector are paramount for their overall well-being and economic prosperity. The neglect of the agricultural sector by the Indian government and state administrations has far-reaching consequences, not only for rural Indians but also for the nation's economic development as a whole. When agriculture

^a School of Business, University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, Dehradun, India

^b School of Business, University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, Dehradun, India

suffers, it reverberates throughout the economy, impacting food security, rural incomes, employment opportunities, and poverty levels. Furthermore, the neglect of agriculture undermines the potential for inclusive growth and exacerbates inequalities between urban and rural areas. As rural communities struggle with stagnating agricultural productivity, lack of infrastructure, inadequate access to markets, and limited technological advancements, their standard of living deteriorates, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and deprivation. Moreover, the neglect of agriculture impedes the country's overall development trajectory, hindering efforts to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth. Agriculture not only contributes significantly to GDP but also serves as a crucial source of raw materials for industries, thereby driving industrial growth and fostering economic diversification.

To realize India's full development potential and ensure the well-being of its rural population, it is imperative for policymakers to prioritize the agricultural sector and implement comprehensive policies and investments aimed at revitalizing agriculture, enhancing productivity, and empowering rural communities. By fostering agricultural innovation, improving infrastructure, expanding access to credit and markets, and promoting sustainable farming practices, India can unlock the transformative potential of its agricultural sector, laying the foundation for broad-based and inclusive development. The focus on India's industrial and service sectors at the expense of agriculture has been a longstanding issue, influencing the nation's economic landscape and the livelihoods of its vast rural population. With agriculture serving as the primary source of income for the majority of Indians, neglect from politicians, industrialists, and policymakers has led to a range of challenges plaguing the agricultural sector. Despite its pivotal role in sustaining livelihoods, agricultural development has often taken a backseat to the rapid expansion of industrial and service sectors, particularly in the era of globalization post-1991. This imbalance in attention and investment has contributed to a host of issues within the agricultural domain. Productivity stagnation, fueled by insufficient investment in research, technology, and infrastructure, remains a pressing concern. The lack of modernization further exacerbates this, as farmers struggle to adopt contemporary farming techniques and technologies, leading to inefficiencies and suboptimal yields.

The repercussions of neglecting agriculture extend beyond productivity concerns. Many farmers face acute financial distress due to fluctuating crop prices, limited access to credit, and mounting debt burdens. Furthermore, environmental degradation, including soil erosion and depletion of natural resources, poses significant threats to the sustainability of agricultural practices. Market access remains a significant challenge, with farmers often grappling with limited avenues to sell their produce and inadequate infrastructure for storage and transportation. As a result, they often fail to fetch fair prices for their crops, exacerbating their economic vulnerability. Addressing these multifaceted challenges demands a comprehensive and holistic approach. Policymakers must prioritize agricultural development, allocating resources towards research, infrastructure, and rural development initiatives. Moreover, policy reforms aimed at supporting smallholder farmers, promoting sustainable farming practices, and facilitating market access are essential. By recognizing the importance of agriculture and implementing inclusive and sustainable policies, India can harness the full potential of its agricultural sector, ensuring the well-being of its rural population and fostering inclusive growth and development nationwide.

Since 1991, India's adoption of policies aligned with the World Trade Organization (WTO) and agreements like GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) has had far-reaching implications, particularly for its agricultural sector. While these policies were intended to foster global trade and economic integration, they have disproportionately favored developed nations like the USA, UK, Japan, and European countries, often at the expense of developing and underdeveloped nations. Consequently, the agricultural sectors of these countries have borne the brunt of adverse effects. For farmers, who serve as the manufacturers of food and industrial raw materials, these international and national policies have translated into financial hardships. The structural adjustments and liberalization measures mandated by WTO agreements have exposed farmers to increased market volatility, reduced price supports, and heightened competition from subsidized imports. As a result, many farmers struggle to sustain their livelihoods amidst declining profitability and mounting debt burdens. Moreover, the success of the agricultural sector is inherently tied to natural conditions. Favorable weather patterns and climatic factors contribute to good crop yields and high-quality produce. However, the unpredictability of nature means that farmers are vulnerable to adverse weather events such as droughts, floods, and storms, which can devastate crops and livelihoods.

Even in instances where natural conditions are favorable and production is abundant, farmers face challenges in ensuring fair returns for their products. The phenomenon of oversupply in the market often leads to downward pressure on prices, eroding farmers' incomes and exacerbating financial hardships. Despite their efforts to increase productivity and produce high-quality goods, farmers find themselves at the mercy of market forces beyond their control. In light of these challenges, it is imperative for policymakers to adopt measures that prioritize the interests of farmers and safeguard their livelihoods. This includes implementing policies that provide adequate price supports, access to credit, insurance against natural disasters, and market infrastructure improvements. Additionally, addressing inequities in global trade agreements and ensuring fair trade practices can help level the playing field for farmers in developing and underdeveloped countries, enabling them to thrive in a globalized economy.

2. ANALYSIS

The shift towards liberalization, privatization, and globalization in India at the end of the 20th century, in alignment with WTO and GATT norms, brought about significant changes in the agricultural landscape. One of the repercussions of this shift was the reduction of subsidies for farmers, which had profound implications for their livelihoods. With the cost of inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, insecticides, and pesticides on the rise, farmers found themselves grappling with increasing production costs. Despite the escalation in production costs, the selling prices or market prices of agricultural products failed to correspondingly increase, exacerbating the financial strain on farmers. Even the government-declared minimum reasonable prices (MRP) for certain products often fell short of covering the cost of production, leaving farmers unable to recoup their investments. This disparity between input costs and selling prices frequently resulted in farmers incurring heavy losses, pushing many into dire financial circumstances. Compounding these challenges, farmers often found themselves burdened by high-interest loans obtained from private money lenders and banks. The inability to repay these loans, coupled with the failure to meet family responsibilities such as education, marriages, and health security, exacerbated their financial distress. These mounting pressures and failures created a sense of hopelessness and desperation among farmers, driving some to resort to extreme measures such as suicide as a last resort. The grim reality of farmers' suicides across different states of India between 1995 and 2010 underscores the urgent need for comprehensive policy reforms and support mechanisms to address the plight of farmers and prevent further loss of life (State-wise data of farmers' suicides between 1995 to 2010).

Table 1: State-wise farmers suicide in India

Years	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total Suicides	1995 to 2005	Total Suicides
States								
Maharashtra	4453	4238	3802	2872	3141	18506	31975	50481
Andhra Pradesh	2607	1797	2105	2414	2525	11448	19672	31120
Karnataka	1720	2135	1737	2282	2585	10459	24594	35053
*MP + Chhattisgarh	2858	2856	3152	3197	2363	14426	26636	41062
A] Total	11638	11026	10796	10765	10614	54839	102877	157716
B] Other States	5422	5606	5400	6603	5080	28111	71086	99197
[A+B] Total Suicides	17060	16632	16196	17368	15694	82950	173963	256913

Table 1 illustrates a stark reality: between 1995 and 2010, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh collectively accounted for nearly two-thirds of farmers' suicides in India. During the period from 2006 to 2009, Maharashtra witnessed a gradual decrease in the number of farmers' suicides. However, this trend reversed in 2010, with the state recording 3,141 suicides compared to 2,872 in 2009. Notably, the total number of farmers' suicides in Maharashtra from 2006 to 2010 stood at 18,506, significantly surpassing the figure of 31,975 recorded between 1995 and 2005. Maharashtra emerged as the state with the highest number of farmers' suicides during this period. Similar trends were observed in states like Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh collectively reported 14,426 farmers' suicides between 2006 and 2010, comprising over 50% of the total recorded in the preceding decade (1995 to 2005). In contrast, the remaining 30 states and Union territories accounted for a total of 99,197 farmers' suicides between 1995 and 2010. When compared to the cumulative figures for Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh during the same period—50,481, 31,120, 35,053, and 41,062, respectively—it becomes evident that these five states bore a disproportionately high burden of farmers' suicides compared to the rest of the country.

Table 2: State-wise Farmers Suicide in India (in Percentage)

Years	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	1995 to 2005
States						
Maharashtra	26.10	25.48	23.47	16.54	20.01	18.40
Andhra Pradesh	15.28	10.80	13.47	13.90	16.09	11.33
Karnataka	10.08	12.84	10.72	13.14	16.47	14.16
*MP + Chhattisgarh	16.75	17.17	19.46	18.41	15.06	15.34
A] <u>Total Suicides in above 5 States</u>	68.21	66.29	66.65	61.99	67.63	59.23
B] Other States	31.79	33.71	33.45	38.01	32.37	40.77
[A+B] Total Suicides	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 2 highlights Maharashtra as the state with the highest percentage of farmers' suicides between 1995 and 2010, accounting for 18.40% of the total. Additionally, the top five states in terms of farmers' suicides collectively contributed to

59.23% of the total suicides recorded during this period. This concentration of farmers' suicides in a handful of states underscores the disproportionate burden borne by certain regions, exacerbating the severity of the crisis. In contrast, all other states combined accounted for 40.77% of farmers' suicides during the same period, emphasizing the widespread nature of the issue across the country. These statistics underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions and policy measures to address the root causes of farmers' distress and prevent further loss of life. By focusing efforts on the most affected regions while also implementing broader reforms to support agricultural resilience and livelihood security nationwide, policymakers can work towards mitigating the crisis and fostering sustainable development in rural communities.

Table 3: Data of farmer's suicide with compare to total suicides in states and total suicides in India

Particulars	Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total Population in India (in Lakhs)		11197.75	11365.50	11531.30	11694.40	11857.60
Total Suicides in India		118112	122637	125017	127151	134599
Total Suicides		15473	15206	14377	14241	15883
Maharashtra	Farmers suicides	4453	4238	3802	2872	3141
	% of Farmers suicides to Total suicides in India.	03.77	03.46	3.04	02.26	02.33
	% of Farmers suicides to Total suicides in Maharashtra.	28.77	27.87	26.45	20.17	19.78
	Total Suicides	13229	14839	14377	14495	15883
Andhra Pradesh	Farmers suicides	2607	1797	2105	2414	2525
	% of Farmers suicides to Total suicides in India	02.21	01.47	01.68	01.90	01.88
	% of Farmers suicides to Total suicides in Andhra Pradesh	19.71	12.11	14.64	16.65	15.90
Karnataka	Total Suicides	12166	12264	12252	12206	12652
	Farmers suicides	1720	2135	1737	2282	2585
	% of Farmers suicides to Total suicides in India	01.46	01.74	01.39	01.79	01.92
	% of Farmers suicides to Total suicides in Karnataka	14.14	17.41	14.18	18.70	20.43
M P	Total Suicides	10984	11160	12627	15004	15479
	Farmers suicides	2858	2856	3152	3197	2363
	% of Farmers suicides to Total suicides in India	02.42	02.33	02.52	02.51	01.76
	% of Farmers suicides to Total suicides in MP + Chhattisgarh	26.02	25.59	24.96	21.31	15.27
	Total Suicides	66261	69167	71385	71205	74702
All Other States	Farmers suicides	5422	5606	5400	6603	5080
	% of Farmers suicides to Total suicides in India	04.59	04.57	04.32	05.19	03.77
	% of Farmers suicides to Total suicides in All other States	08.17	08.11	07.56	09.27	06.80

Table 3 provides a comparative analysis of state-wise farmers' suicide data in relation to the total suicides in India and the total suicides for the specific period under consideration. For the period 2006-2010, the total suicides recorded in India were

118,112, 122,637, 125,017, 127,151, and 134,599 respectively. During the same period, Maharashtra reported total suicides of 15,473, 15,206, 14,377, 14,241, and 15,883 respectively. When examining the percentage of farmers' suicides in Maharashtra relative to the total farmers' suicides in India for the same period, it is observed that there was a decline from 3.77% in 2006 to 2.33% in 2009. However, this trend reversed in 2010, with a slight increase to 2.40%. In contrast, when considering the percentage of farmers' suicides in Maharashtra in relation to the total suicides in the state, there was a continuous decline from 28.77% in 2006 to 19.78% in 2010. These findings suggest a nuanced picture of farmers' suicides in Maharashtra during the period 2006-2010. While the percentage of farmers' suicides in relation to total suicides in the state exhibited a downward trend, the proportion of farmers' suicides relative to total farmers' suicides in India fluctuated, indicating varying levels of impact and response across different regions and demographics. It is crucial for policymakers and stakeholders to delve deeper into these dynamics to formulate targeted interventions and support mechanisms that address the root causes of farmers' distress and prevent further loss of life. By understanding the complex interplay of factors influencing farmers' suicides, efforts can be directed towards fostering resilience, promoting mental health awareness, and enhancing livelihood security in rural communities. Table 3 sheds light on the nuanced dynamics of farmers' suicides in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and the combined data for Madhya Pradesh (MP) and Chhattisgarh, offering insights into the interplay between farmers' suicides and total suicides in these states compared to the national level. In Andhra Pradesh, the percentage of farmers' suicides relative to total suicides in India witnessed a declining trend from 2006 to 2009, before experiencing a slight increase in 2010. Conversely, when considering farmers' suicides in Andhra Pradesh in relation to total suicides in the state, there was a continuous increase from 2008 onwards.

Similarly, Karnataka exhibited a similar pattern, with a slight increase in the percentage of farmers' suicides compared to total suicides in India in 2010, along with a corresponding rise in the proportion of farmers' suicides relative to total suicides in Karnataka from 2009 to 2010. Conversely, the combined data for Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh showcased a decline in farmers' suicides in 2010 compared to total suicides in India and the combined total for MP and Chhattisgarh. This divergence from the trends observed in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka suggests variations in the drivers and responses to farmers' distress across different states. Furthermore, the trends observed in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and the combined data for MP and Chhattisgarh underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of the issue of farmers' suicides. While certain states may experience fluctuations or divergences in trends, it is essential for policymakers to undertake comprehensive analyses and tailor interventions to address the specific challenges faced by farmers in each region. By adopting region-specific approaches and fostering collaboration between stakeholders, efforts can be directed towards mitigating the root causes of farmers' distress and promoting sustainable livelihoods in rural communities.

3. CAUSES OF FARMERS SUICIDES IN INDIA

The dependency of over 60% of India's population on agriculture and its allied activities underscores the critical role of this sector in the country's economy. However, the successful operation of agricultural activities hinges on access to capital, a challenge that disproportionately affects the majority of Indian farmers, who are marginal landowners and economically disadvantaged. The economic constraints faced by these farmers present significant barriers to the efficient functioning of agricultural operations. Despite their crucial role in food production and national development, marginalized farmers encounter difficulties in accessing financial support from nationalized banks. The lack of collateral or tangible assets often renders them ineligible for loans, leaving them without a reliable source of funding to invest in agricultural inputs, machinery, and infrastructure. Private money lenders, while an alternative source of finance, typically impose exorbitant interest rates on loans extended to farmers. The absence of collateral beyond their land further exacerbates the financial burden faced by farmers, compelling many to accept unfavorable loan terms or resort to informal borrowing channels.

Compounding these challenges are the pressing family responsibilities that farmers shoulder, including providing for the education, marriages, and healthcare needs of their family members. These obligations entail substantial financial commitments, further straining the limited resources available to farmers and impeding their ability to invest in agricultural productivity enhancements or cope with unforeseen economic shocks. Addressing the financial constraints confronting Indian farmers necessitates a multi-faceted approach that encompasses policy reforms, institutional support, and targeted interventions. Measures such as expanding access to formal credit through innovative loan products tailored to the needs of smallholder farmers, enhancing financial literacy and inclusion initiatives, and promoting alternative sources of funding such as cooperative credit societies can help alleviate the financial burdens faced by marginalized farmers and catalyze sustainable agricultural development. Additionally, efforts to improve market access, provide price stabilization mechanisms, and strengthen social safety nets can contribute to enhancing the economic resilience of farming communities and fostering inclusive growth in rural India.

The failure of both the Government of India (GOI) and state governments to provide effective economic relief to farmers exacerbates the challenges faced by agricultural communities. Despite the government's allocation of substantial financial packages aimed at providing relief to farmers, systemic issues such as corruption in distribution channels and flawed criteria for aid allocation undermine the intended benefits of these initiatives. Corruption within the distribution system leads to the misallocation or diversion of funds meant for farmers' welfare, depriving needy farmers of the economic support they urgently require. Additionally, the imposition of arbitrary or inappropriate criteria for determining eligibility for government

assistance further restricts access to relief measures for vulnerable farmers, exacerbating their financial distress. The consequences of these shortcomings are dire, as farmers who are unable to access essential support services and economic relief measures find themselves grappling with insurmountable financial burdens. Faced with mounting debts, dwindling incomes, and inadequate access to resources, some farmers feel driven to extreme measures, including suicide, as a last resort to escape their dire circumstances. The prevalence of farmer suicides serves as a grim indictment of the systemic failures and inadequacies within India's agricultural policies and governance structures. It underscores the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to address the root causes of farmers' distress and ensure equitable access to financial resources, social support systems, and livelihood opportunities. Efforts to combat corruption, streamline aid distribution mechanisms, and implement transparent and accountable governance practices are imperative to safeguard the welfare of farmers and prevent further loss of life. Moreover, there is a pressing need for policy interventions that prioritize the interests of smallholder farmers, promote sustainable agricultural practices, and foster inclusive rural development to create a more resilient and equitable agricultural sector in India. Natural calamities pose significant challenges to agricultural production and exacerbate the economic vulnerabilities of farmers. The success of agricultural endeavors is heavily reliant on favorable weather conditions, which are increasingly compromised by factors such as global warming, deforestation, and other human-induced environmental changes. Adverse weather events, including heavy rainfall, floods, droughts, delayed monsoons, and severe cyclones, disrupt agricultural activities and hinder farmers' ability to achieve optimal yields. These natural disasters not only damage crops but also cause extensive property damage and livestock loss, further straining farmers' financial resources and resilience. In addition to natural calamities, farmers also contend with man-made factors that impede their agricultural productivity and economic well-being. Reductions in government subsidies, incidents of fire, accidents, and other unforeseen events add to the challenges faced by farmers, compounding their financial hardships.

Furthermore, even when environmental conditions are conducive to agricultural production and farmers are able to harvest high-quality and abundant crops, they often encounter difficulties in realizing adequate returns for their products in the market. Oversupply of agricultural commodities leads to a decrease in demand, subsequently driving down prices and diminishing farmers' profitability. The inability of farmers to recover the cost price of their products perpetuates a cycle of financial distress and economic insecurity, forcing many to bear the brunt of mounting debts and livelihood uncertainties. Without equitable market mechanisms and support systems in place to ensure fair prices and market access for farmers, the challenges posed by natural calamities and other socio-economic factors will continue to undermine agricultural sustainability and rural livelihoods. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a concerted effort from governments, policymakers, agricultural stakeholders, and society at large. Initiatives aimed at building climate resilience, promoting sustainable farming practices, strengthening disaster preparedness and response mechanisms, enhancing market infrastructure, and providing financial assistance and social protection to farmers are essential to mitigate the adverse impacts of natural calamities and secure the livelihoods of agricultural communities. By prioritizing the well-being of farmers and fostering a supportive environment for agricultural development, we can work towards building a more resilient and sustainable agricultural sector that serves the needs of both farmers and society as a whole.

The discrepancy between the Minimum Retail Prices (MRPs) declared by state governments for agricultural products and the actual production costs exacerbates the financial challenges faced by farmers, particularly marginal and small-scale farmers who lack alternative sources of income. Despite their relentless efforts and investments in agriculture, the prevailing market dynamics often render farming a financially unsustainable venture. The MRPs set by governments fail to adequately account for the comprehensive cost incurred in agricultural production, including inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, labor, and equipment, as well as overhead expenses and debt servicing. Consequently, farmers find themselves in a precarious situation where the selling price of their produce falls short of covering the expenses involved in cultivation, leading to recurring losses and mounting debts. For marginal and small-scale farmers who rely solely on agriculture for their livelihoods, the absence of viable alternatives exacerbates their vulnerability to financial instability. Despite the inherent risks and uncertainties associated with farming, these farmers persist in their agricultural pursuits, driven by necessity and a deep-rooted attachment to their land and way of life. However, the persistent cycle of losses and indebtedness eventually takes its toll on farmers' economic well-being and mental health. The burden of insolvency, compounded by the inability to provide for their families' needs and fulfill financial obligations, breeds a sense of hopelessness and despair among farmers. Faced with dire circumstances and limited prospects for improvement, some farmers tragically succumb to feelings of desperation and take the drastic step of ending their lives.

The prevalence of farmer suicides underscores the urgent need for systemic reforms to address the root causes of agrarian distress and alleviate the financial burdens faced by farmers. This necessitates a holistic approach that encompasses policy interventions to ensure fair and remunerative prices for agricultural produce, enhance access to credit and insurance mechanisms, promote sustainable farming practices, and provide comprehensive social support systems for farmers in distress. By prioritizing the welfare of farmers and fostering a conducive environment for sustainable agriculture, governments can help alleviate the economic hardships plaguing rural communities and mitigate the tragic toll of farmer suicides. Moreover, empowering farmers with the resources, knowledge, and support they need to thrive can contribute to building a resilient and prosperous agricultural sector that serves as the backbone of India's economy and sustains the livelihoods of millions of farming families across the country. The escalating costs of agricultural production further

compound the challenges faced by farmers in India, contributing to their economic distress and driving some to resort to desperate measures like suicide. The agricultural sector demands significant investments in manpower for various activities such as plowing, soil maintenance, and pest control, as well as financial resources for inputs like seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides. Hybrid seeds, in particular, are essential for achieving high-quality and high-yield crops, but their prohibitive costs render them unaffordable for many marginal and impoverished farmers. The reliance on expensive inputs further strains farmers' already limited financial resources, making it increasingly difficult for them to cover the costs of cultivation and generate sufficient income from their produce.

Table 4 highlights the stark disparity between the costs incurred for wheat production per hectare and the income derived from the same. This imbalance underscores the financial challenges faced by farmers, as the income generated from agricultural activities often fails to offset the mounting expenses associated with cultivation. As a result, farmers find themselves trapped in a cycle of debt and economic insecurity, with diminishing returns on their investments and limited avenues for sustainable livelihoods. The inability to recover production costs and achieve profitability leaves farmers vulnerable to financial ruin and pushes them to the brink of despair. Addressing the issue of escalating production costs requires concerted efforts from policymakers, agricultural experts, and stakeholders across the agricultural value chain. Strategies aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity, promoting efficient resource management practices, and reducing input costs through subsidies, incentives, and technology interventions can help alleviate the financial burden on farmers and improve their economic resilience. Moreover, initiatives focused on diversifying income sources, enhancing market access, and providing comprehensive support services to farmers can empower them to overcome financial challenges and build sustainable livelihoods. By prioritizing the needs of farmers and implementing targeted interventions to address the root causes of agrarian distress, policymakers can work towards creating a more equitable and prosperous agricultural sector that benefits all stakeholders.

Table 4: Income Earned from and Expenditure Incurred for one Hectare of production of wheat

Expenses incurred	Amt. (Rs.)	Income earned	Amt. (Rs)
Land Plough	4500.00	38 Quintal X Rs.1500 per Quintal	57000.00
Cow dung (two Trolleys)	18750.00		
Hybrid seeds	5000.00		
Sowing of seeds	2500.00		
Chemical Fertilizers (1 st Dose)	3750.00	Loss Per acres	1575.00
Chemical Fertilizers (2 nd Dose)	5000.00	(Forecasted loss in rupees)	
With Insecticides & Pesticides			
Irrigation Cost (five times)	1875.00		
Electricity Bill (Four months)	0500.00		
Crop Maintenance	2500.00		
*Crop cutting (manually) (Rs. 3750 per hectare for crop cutting with Harvester)	8000.00		
Wheat bags (38 bags X ₹. 40 each)	1520.00		
Transport cost (farm to Home)	0400.00		
Transport cost (Home to market)	2000.00		
Selling cost (Commission etc.) (Rs. 56700 X 4 %)	2280.00		
	**58575.00		58575.00

Table 4 illustrates the persistent challenges faced by small and marginal farmers in India, who continue to grapple with losses in agriculture due to the disparity between government-declared Minimum Retail Prices (MRPs) and the actual cost of production. In Maharashtra, for instance, the MRPs set by the government for certain agricultural commodities represent only a fraction of the production costs incurred by farmers. Specifically, the MRPs declared by the government for pulses, wheat, jowar, and bajra amount to a mere 72% of the total cost of production, while for onions, garlic, cotton, and sugarcane, the MRPs cover only 84% and 92% of the production costs, respectively. This glaring mismatch between MRPs and production costs significantly undermines the financial viability of agricultural activities for small and marginal farmers, who struggle to break even and sustain their livelihoods. Moreover, the inherent volatility of agricultural markets exacerbates the challenges faced by farmers, as fluctuations in weather conditions and production levels can further impact the profitability of farming operations. Even in instances where weather conditions are favorable and production levels are high, the oversupply of agricultural products often leads to a glut in the market, driving down prices and diminishing farmers' ability to recoup their production costs.

Consequently, many farmers find themselves trapped in a cycle of indebtedness and economic uncertainty, unable to escape the grip of financial losses and struggling to make ends meet. The inability to recover the cost price of their agricultural

produce not only threatens the livelihoods of farmers but also undermines the long-term sustainability of India's agricultural sector as a whole. Addressing the systemic challenges faced by small and marginal farmers requires comprehensive policy interventions aimed at bridging the gap between MRPs and production costs, enhancing market access and price realization for farmers, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. By prioritizing the welfare of farmers and fostering an enabling environment for agricultural development, policymakers can help alleviate the financial burdens faced by small and marginal farmers and ensure the resilience and prosperity of India's agricultural sector.

Politics indeed plays a significant role in shaping the agricultural landscape in India, and the neglect and indifference of politicians towards the agriculture sector have contributed to the plight of farmers and the alarming incidence of farmer suicides. Despite being a crucial pillar of the Indian economy and the livelihood of millions, agriculture often takes a backseat in political discourse and policymaking, with politicians prioritizing industrial and service sectors. The failure of politicians to effectively address the challenges faced by farmers stems from their lack of understanding and appreciation of the complexities of agriculture and the needs of farming communities. Instead of formulating policies that prioritize the welfare of farmers and ensure the sustainability of agriculture, politicians frequently overlook the sector's concerns and prioritize short-term political gains. One of the key manifestations of political neglect is the discrepancy between government-declared Minimum Retail Prices (MRPs) for agricultural products and the actual production costs incurred by farmers. Despite the inherent risks and uncertainties associated with farming, politicians often set MRPs without considering the input costs borne by farmers, leading to financial losses and economic distress for agricultural communities. Moreover, the inconsistent implementation of relief packages and subsidies further exacerbates the challenges faced by farmers, as bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption prevent the intended benefits from reaching those in need. Farmers belonging to marginalized communities, such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Muslims, often bear the brunt of these disparities, as political biases and discrimination hinder their access to financial assistance and support services.

Additionally, the imposition of export bans on agricultural products, driven by international trade agreements such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), adversely affects the livelihoods of farmers, particularly small and marginal farmers who rely on export markets for income generation. The monopolization of politics by self-proclaimed superior groups further perpetuates biases in the distribution of financial aid and subsidies, exacerbating socio-economic disparities and deepening the marginalization of vulnerable farming communities. To address these systemic issues, there is an urgent need for political reforms that prioritize the interests of farmers, ensure equitable access to resources and support services, and foster inclusive and participatory decision-making processes. By empowering farming communities and promoting policies that foster sustainable agriculture and rural development, politicians can play a pivotal role in mitigating the challenges faced by farmers and building a more equitable and resilient agricultural sector in India. The adoption of Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG) policies by the Government of India (GOI) in 1991, along with its compliance with the terms and conditions of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and other international trade agreements, has had far-reaching implications for India's agricultural sector. While these policies were intended to promote economic growth and integration into the global economy, they have also exposed Indian farmers to a host of challenges and constraints that undermine their livelihoods and exacerbate agrarian distress.

Under the GATT agreement and related international trade agreements, India is bound by restrictions and regulations that often favor the interests of developed countries over those of developing and underdeveloped nations. These restrictions limit the freedom of Indian farmers to engage in various aspects of agricultural production, marketing, and export, placing them at a disadvantage in the global marketplace. One of the most significant challenges posed by international trade agreements is the issue of patents and intellectual property rights (IPRs) for agricultural products. Indian farmers often find themselves unable to access patented technologies and seeds, such as Bt cotton seeds, due to restrictive patent laws and licensing agreements. This dependency on imported hybrid seeds not only increases production costs but also undermines the sovereignty and self-sufficiency of Indian agriculture. The importation of costly hybrid seeds, compounded by import duties and other charges, further escalates the financial burden on farmers, making agriculture a financially unsustainable venture for many. Additionally, the imposition of trade barriers and tariffs under international trade agreements restricts market access for Indian agricultural products, limiting farmers' opportunities for income generation and export earnings.

Illiteracy, entrenched traditions, and cultural norms compound the challenges faced by farmers in India, contributing to the tragic phenomenon of farmer suicides. The pervasive lack of education and awareness among farmers undermines their capacity for informed decision-making and exacerbates their vulnerability to economic hardships. Limited access to education deprives farmers of crucial skills and knowledge, impairing their ability to navigate complex financial and agricultural landscapes. Without adequate education, farmers may struggle to adopt modern farming practices, access government support programs, or make informed decisions about crop selection, input utilization, and market opportunities. This lack of literacy and numeracy hampers their ability to effectively manage their finances, evaluate risks, and plan for the future, leaving them susceptible to exploitation and financial distress. Moreover, deeply ingrained traditions and cultural expectations impose significant financial burdens on farmers, further exacerbating their economic challenges. Traditional practices, such as elaborate wedding ceremonies and customary gift-giving, place immense pressure on farmers to meet societal expectations and uphold cultural norms. The exorbitant costs associated with these rituals, including dowries and

elaborate festivities, often push farmers deeper into debt and financial insecurity. To fulfill these cultural obligations, farmers may resort to borrowing from private moneylenders at exorbitant interest rates, exacerbating their financial woes and trapping them in a cycle of debt and despair. The inability to meet these societal expectations and fulfill cultural obligations can lead to feelings of shame, inadequacy, and desperation, driving some farmers to contemplate suicide as a perceived solution to their overwhelming burdens.

The advent of the Green Revolution and the introduction of new agricultural technologies have undoubtedly revolutionized farming practices and significantly boosted agricultural productivity. However, the benefits of these advancements have not been evenly distributed, and small and marginal farmers, who constitute a significant portion of India's farming community, continue to face formidable challenges in accessing and adopting modern agricultural technologies. While new hybrid seeds, insecticides, pesticides, and cultivation techniques have the potential to increase yields and improve farm efficiency, the high costs associated with these inputs pose a major barrier for small and marginal farmers. These farmers typically operate on small plots of land, often less than a hectare in size, and have limited financial resources to invest in expensive inputs. As a result, they are unable to fully capitalize on the productivity gains offered by modern agricultural technologies. The Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, known for its high incidence of farmer suicides, exemplifies the challenges faced by small and marginal farmers in accessing agricultural innovations. In districts such as Wardha, Yavatmal, and Washim, where a significant proportion of farmers fall into the marginal category, the financial constraints and resource limitations of these farmers are particularly acute. Despite the potential benefits of new technologies, the prohibitive costs prevent many small and marginal farmers from adopting them, perpetuating their cycle of poverty and vulnerability. The disparity in access to agricultural technologies exacerbates existing inequalities within the farming community, widening the gap between large landholders and small-scale farmers. Without equitable access to modern inputs and technologies, small and marginal farmers struggle to compete in the marketplace and improve their livelihoods, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and indebtedness.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis and interpretation of the data underscore a troubling reality that the Government of India (GOI) and state governments have largely neglected the agricultural sector and its allied activities, despite the critical importance of agriculture to the nation's economy and the livelihoods of millions of farmers. The high incidence of farmer suicides, particularly in regions like Vidarbha, Maharashtra, highlights the deep-rooted challenges and systemic failures plaguing the agricultural sector. The disproportionate burden of financial distress and indebtedness borne by small and marginal farmers underscores the urgent need for government intervention and support. The data reveal stark disparities in access to resources and technologies, with small and marginal farmers disproportionately affected by the prohibitive costs of modern agricultural inputs. Despite the potential benefits of innovations such as hybrid seeds and cultivation techniques, the inability of smallholders to afford these inputs perpetuates a cycle of poverty and vulnerability. Furthermore, the data shed light on the inadequacies of government policies and programs aimed at supporting farmers. Despite the declaration of relief packages and subsidies, the distribution mechanisms are often marred by corruption, inefficiency, and bureaucratic red tape, leaving many farmers without the assistance they desperately need. The neglect of the agricultural sector is evident in the widening gap between policy rhetoric and on-the-ground realities. While politicians may pay lip service to the importance of agriculture, the lack of meaningful action and investment belies their true priorities. The focus on industrial and service sectors at the expense of agriculture reflects a misplaced emphasis on urban-centric development strategies, neglecting the rural backbone of the economy. In conclusion, the data paints a troubling picture of governmental neglect and systemic failures in addressing the challenges facing India's agricultural sector. Urgent reforms are needed to prioritize the needs of farmers, promote equitable access to resources and technologies, and ensure the sustainability and resilience of agricultural livelihoods. Only through concerted efforts and genuine commitment to agricultural development can the GOI and state governments fulfill their responsibilities to the millions of farmers who feed the nation. The failure of the Government of India (GOI) and state governments to implement effective measures to address the root causes of farmer suicides has had devastating consequences, as evidenced by the alarming increase in suicide rates among farmers over the past 15 years. Despite the growing recognition of the severity of the crisis, the response from authorities has been inadequate and ineffective, exacerbating the plight of farmers and deepening the socio-economic inequalities within rural communities. The data clearly indicates a troubling trend of escalating farmer suicides, particularly during the period from 2006 to 2010. This period saw a significant surge in the number of farmers taking their own lives, reflecting the worsening conditions and acute distress faced by agricultural communities across the country. Despite the urgency of the situation, the government's response has fallen short of addressing the underlying factors driving farmers to despair and suicide. The GOI and state governments have failed to implement comprehensive and proactive measures to alleviate the socio-economic pressures facing farmers. While relief packages and subsidies may have been announced, their implementation has been marred by inefficiency, corruption, and bureaucratic hurdles, resulting in limited impact on the ground. The lack of targeted support and meaningful interventions has left many farmers feeling abandoned and hopeless, further fueling the cycle of despair and desperation. Moreover, the failure to address structural issues such as access to credit, market volatility, and land rights has compounded the challenges facing farmers, exacerbating their vulnerability to economic shocks and social pressures.

Without meaningful reforms and investments in rural development, the prospects for sustainable livelihoods and inclusive growth in agriculture remain bleak. In light of the persistent and escalating crisis of farmer suicides, urgent action is needed to prioritize the needs of farmers and address the systemic issues driving agricultural distress. This requires a concerted effort from the GOI, state governments, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to develop and implement holistic strategies that address the root causes of farmer suicides and promote the well-being and resilience of agricultural communities. By prioritizing the welfare of farmers, strengthening social safety nets, and fostering inclusive and sustainable agricultural development, policymakers can begin to reverse the alarming trend of farmer suicides and build a more equitable and resilient agricultural sector for the future. Anything less would be a profound failure of governance and a betrayal of the millions of farmers who feed the nation.

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