

FARMER'S SUICIDS IN KARNATAKA: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

Dr. Shashi Kumar

Associate Professor and Head

Department of Sociology

Government Women's First Grade College, Near Stadium, M.G. Road, Hassan.

Abstract

The renowned French Sociologist Emily Durkheim published a scientific study called 'suicides' in 1897. The study looked at suicides from a sociological angle and declared that suicides are a social phenomenon. This observation has become a fact of life for the farmers of Karnataka. Farmer's suicides in Karnataka have increased due to various social factors and have badly shattered their self confidence.

1. Introduction

India is predominately an agricultural country. Agriculture contributes 17% to the country's GDP and employs 58% of the people. The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) reports that as of 10 April 2024, the population of India is 140.crores. As per the 15th national population census conducted in 2011, the population was enumerated at 121 crores 19 lakhs 419. An increase of 18 crores, 80 lakhs 589 in just 13 years. The lives of farmers who provide food security to this huge population is a sort of gamble with nature. Every year, as May approaches, the farmers look up to the sky praying for rain. But uncertain rains result in droughts and floods resulting in crop loss for the farmers. Often times they are unable to recover even the capital expenses they have incurred forcing them into debts. Unable to repay their loans and debts, and even interest payments, they come under severe mental and physical stress and unable to bear it many commit suicide. The number of farmers in Karnataka hanging themselves from the trees on their fields is increasing day by day. This has created great anxiety in the society. Even though farmers contribute 17% of the national income and play a prominent role in providing food security to the nation, it is really unfortunate that the annadatas (food providers) are succumbing to losing their lives for no fault of theirs. This sorry state of affairs should make governments, bureaucrats, policy makers and civil society hang their heads in shame. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, New Delhi, every hour, a farmer is commuting suicide in India. The state of Maharashtra leads in farmer suicides in the country.

Indeed it is very unfortunate that Karnataka occupies the second position next only to Maharashtra.

1.1 Aims and Objectives of the Study:

The present study looks at the reasons why farmers are committing suicide in the state of Karnataka, which districts have the highest suicide rates and provides some suggestions for preventing suicides.

2. Review of Literature:

In Karnataka farmers are committing suicide due to various reasons. In order to address this issue, the Government of Karnataka, for the first time in 1998, appointed a Joint House Committee under the Chairmanship of Sri. Shiva Kumar. The terms of reference to the committee was not only to find out specific reasons for the farmer suicides in the state but also to provide some suggestions so as to prevent suicides. In 2001, a high level expert committee was formed under the Chairmanship of former Vice Chancellor of the agricultural university, Bangalore, Mr. G.K. Veeresh. Based on the recommendations of this expert committee, the Government of Karnataka issued orders for providing Rs. 1 lakh compensation to each of the families of the farmers who committed suicide. Also, the Government of Karnataka vide its order no. AD/ 57/ DAP/ 2015/ Bangalore part 1 dated 11/11/2015 declared a compensation of Rs. 5 lakhs to the families of the farmers committing suicide with effect from 01/04/2015.

As per the Government Order no. ED/ 31/ various/ 2015 dated 13/11/2015, the children of the farmers who had committed suicide were given free education up to the post Graduate level. Also, the monthly widow pension given to the wives of the farmers who committed suicide was raised from Rs. 500 to Rs. 2000 vide Government Order no. RD/ 164/ PSP/ 2015. And as per Government Order no. AD/ 77/ dated 20/ 08/ 2018, a compensation of Rs. 2 lakhs is provided to the families of persons who died of snakebites and other farm related accidents. In the year 2022-23, the Government of Karnataka had given a grant of Rs. 453 lakhs in support of crop loans of the farmers.

3. Research Methodology:

For the purposes of the present study, information is gathered from various sources such as news papers and analysis in the media, research publications, reports of the agriculture department and PhD thesis's. In special circumstances, Participatory observation method will be deployed. The data and information collected have been analysed and suggestions have been provided based on this analysis and the results obtained.

Table – 1 Total Number of Farmers suicide recorded during 2013 To 2023 in Karnataka.

Years	Number of Farmers committed Suicide
2013-14	89
2014-15	117
2015-16	1525
2016-17	1203
2017-18	1323
2018-19	1084
2019-20	1091
2020-21	851
2021-22	859
2022-23	107
Total	8249

Source: commissioner Department of Agriculture Govt of Karnataka .

Table – 2 : Total numbers of farmers suicide recorded in 31 districts of Karnataka during 2022-23

Sl No	Name of the district	Numbers of farmers suicide
1	Bangalore Urban	00
2	Bangalore Rural	02
3	Kolar	00
4	Tumkur	02
5	Mysuru	01
6	Chamarajanagara	00
7	Hassan	04
8	Mandya	02
9	Chikkamagaluru	11
10	Chitradurga	01

11	Davanagere	01
12	Shivamogga	03
13	Haveri	06
14	Raichur	00
15	Ballary	04
16	Uttara Kannada	01
17	Dakshina Kannada	01
18	Yadagiri	10
19	Gadag	04
20	Kodagu	01
21	Belagavi	15
22	Kalburgi	01
23	Dharwad	18
24	Bidar	02
25	Vijayapura	05
26	Koppal	02
27	Ramanagara	00
28	Bhagalkot	06
29	Udupi	00
30	Chikkaballapura	00
31	Vijayanagara	04
	Total	107

Source: commissioner, Department of Agriculture Government of Karnataka.

Table- 3 The list of 7th states in which the highest number of farmers suicide recorded in India's Agriculture sector.

Ranking	States name
1	Maharastra
2	Telangana
3	Karnataka
4	Chattisghar
5	Madhyapradesh
6	Tamilnadu
7	Andrapradesh

Source: Government of India, Department of Agriculture

When we examine the data in table above, it becomes quite clear that the number of farmer suicides between 2013-14 to 2022-23 in Karnataka has cast a dark shadow on the lives of

farmers in Karnataka. Several research studies have confirmed that the main reason for such a large number of such suicides are due to the indebtedness of the farmers. The various problems that farmers face in their lives, extravagant living and expenses, lack of forethought and financial planning, contingencies like droughts, excessive rains and flooding, unable to get proper market prices for their produce, fleecing of farmers by middlemen very high interest rates of agriculture loans, humiliation by lenders and farmers raising loans at high interest rates for wedding and other ceremonies are some of the reasons for farmer suicides.

Maharashtra occupies the top most position in the country, as far as farmer suicides are concerned. Unfortunately, Karnataka occupies the second position. Nearly 2680 farmers committed suicide in 2019 and 2567 farmers committed suicide respectively in 2020 in the state of Maharashtra. In the state of Karnataka 1331 farmers committed suicide in 2019, 1072 in 2020, 851 in 2021, 859 in 2022 and 107 farmers committed suicide in 2023. Largest number of farmers committed suicide in 2019. Though there are several reasons for the farmer suicides the main reason is indebtedness. Studies show us that nearly 86.92% of the farmer's suicides are due to indebtedness alone.

The consequences of such farmer suicides in Karnataka have been grave. The farmer's families have lost their bread winners and there is no one available to continue the farming activities. So farming activities have come to a standstill. Their families are haunted by financial insecurities and members of the family are suffering from depression and other mental illnesses. Many have lost their lives due to serious ailments. Most of them are staring at a bleak future. In many families, children are dropping out of school due to financial constraints. Some of them are selling off the small piece of land they own to make ends meet and their lives and livelihoods are shattered.

3.1 Findings:

The findings of the study titled "Farmer Suicides in Karnataka" are as follows:

1. Among the several reasons for farmer suicides in Karnataka, nearly 86.92% of suicides are due to indebtedness.
2. Farmers are being defrauded by middlemen.

3. Repeated crop loss and high interest loans and harassment by money lenders are other major reasons for suicides.
4. Low quality seeds, water scarcity, lack of electricity, droughts, floods are also reasons for farmer suicides in Karnataka.

3.2 Suggestions:

Farmer suicides are not only a black spot nationally but also internationally. This is nothing but the murder of the annadata, the backbone of our nation's food security. There is an urgent need to provide them succor and a feeling of security. A major purpose of this study is to put a stop to the farmer suicides. The study offers the following suggestions in this direction.

- When small and marginal farmers suffer crop loss, compensation should be reached to the doorstep of the farmer families without intermediaries and middlemen. The officials should visually document (videograph) the payment of compensation being made and the same should be sent to the government.
- Before sowing operations begin at the start of the south west Monsoons, banks should make preparations for advance loans.
- Rational and scientific pricing should be fixed for crops and should be accessible directly by the farmers.
- All subsidies should reach the farmers in time. Officials who delay the process should be punished.
- Strict action should be taken against agencies that sell spurious seeds to the farmers.
- Precautionary measures should be taken so as to prevent money lenders from charging exorbitant interest rates on loans to farmers. Government should strictly implement measures to extend loans to farmers at low interest rates through banks and co-operative societies.
- Government should ensure quality 24 hour power supply to the borewells in farmers' fields.
- All the 56 recommendations made by the high level expert committee headed by G.K. Veeresh, retired Vice Chancellor, University of Agriculture, Bangalore in 2003 should

be implemented speedily. Agricultural education should be taken to the doorstep of farmers. Measures should be taken to strengthen the financial position of the farmers.

4. Conclusion:

Farmers are the backbone of the country. They are the annadatas, providers of the food security to the nation. Compared to other states, there is no dearth of natural resources in Karnataka. It has several rivers. Yet, the farmers do not have a good life. They are heavily dependent on the rain. So every May they look up to the skies anxiously for the rain. The Government has to ensure irrigation facilities to the farmers. The government needs to assure the farmers that it is with them and give confidence to them that it will support them in all circumstances. And encourage them that they should not resort to suicide. The government should implement farmer friendly initiatives speedily so that it brings smiles to their faces.

Reference:

1. Durkheim, Emile: Suicide : “A study in sociology” Trans, Spaulding, John A. Newyork: The Free Press, 1979
2. Commissioner, Department of Agriculture, Government of Karnataka. Farmer’s suicide in Karnataka Statistics 2013 to 2023.
3. Hosathu, May 2015, Magazine, Nava Karnataka Publications, Bangalore.
4. Prajavani, Kannada News Paper September 15, 2015, Prajavani Publications, Bangalore.
5. Prajavani, Kannada News Paper 19.12.2023 farmer’s Suicide Page No.6 in Karnataka. Prajavani Publications, Bangalore.
6. Secretary, Department of Agriculture Government of India Farmer’s Suicide Statistics 2022.
7. Vijayavani Kannada News Paper August 20, 2015, Farmer’s suicide in Karnataka, VRL Publications Bangalore.