



PONDICHERRY UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY



International Seminar on Farmer Suicides in India

Sponsored by
Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi &
Pondicherry University, Puducherry

(February 10 & 11, 2011)

The current spate of farmer suicides across the Indian states is an accurate indicator of problems afflicting the rural economy and society. To go by reports of the National Crime Record Bureau (various issues of *Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India*), close to 150, 000 Indian farmers committed suicide in the nine years from 1997 to 2005. In fact, these suicides point to a crisis in the agrarian system as a whole and raise questions about the state of conditions of millions of farmers and the landless agricultural labourers in the sub-continent. Hence a comprehensive debate on the problem assumes importance, as it is an issue of major policy concern.

Recently social scientists of diverse intellectual persuasions have increasingly paid attention to this problem and one sees a flood of publications indicating causes of these suicides and policy prescriptions. Besides, several commissions, committees and study teams have also been appointed to look into the problem and provide feedback for suitable measures. However, as regards the causes of these suicides and the policy prescriptions, there are divergent views and arguments. While one group attributes these suicides to the agro-economic problems namely crop failure, rising cost of cultivation and indebtedness, the second strand points to the failure of the state and its economic policy which is influenced by the process of economic liberalisation. Yet another group of scholars argue that these suicides are caused by a complex set of social factors.

A review of these studies reveals that most of them have confined analysis to a specific state limiting to the methodological and theoretical expertise available within a particular disciplinary boundary. Though there are tremendous differences among the affected states and regions in terms of agro-climatic conditions, socio-cultural characteristics, the causes attributed to farmer suicides and policy suggestions recommended seem to be almost similar for all the affected states. Rare attempt has been made to view the situation in a comparative perspective which is essential to evolve a comprehensive policy perspective. Moreover, these suicides are not unique to India. Many other countries like United Kingdom, China, and Sri Lanka have also experienced such problem. Therefore, it is imperative to look at the Indian situation from a global perspective. In addition, the existing literature on farmer

suicides not only provides inadequate insights for policy formulation it also did not contribute significantly to the existing theoretical and conceptual discourses on suicides.

Hence, analysis of the farmers' suicides in a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective commands high priority, as it will contribute to the policy debates and enrichment of the existing knowledge.

Against this background it is planned to have a two-day international seminar on farmer suicides on 10th & 11th February 2011 involving the scholars and experts across the disciplines from India and abroad, who have been working on this issue. Besides the inaugural and valedictory sessions, the two days deliberations will be organized under the following five technical sessions:

I. Farmer Suicides: Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

The concept of suicide is one of those deceptively common-sense terms that everyone knows but the meaning and causes of which are strongly disputed. In social sciences it is one of the few concepts that are debated across disciplines, engaging as it does the attention of psychologists, philosophers and sociologists. Though Durkheim's classic work on suicide has been widely accepted and recognized across disciplines, it generated scholarly debates on conceptual as well as theoretical issues among the subsequent sociologists and psychologists. Hence, in this session examine how far the existing conceptual and theoretical debates on suicides explain the farmer suicides in India.

II. Farmer suicides in Indian States: A Survey of Trends

The incidences of farmer suicides have attracted nation wide attention in 1997 and initially states like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Punjab were known for these suicides. However, as per the data furnished by the National Crime Record Bureau, almost all the major Indian states report farmer suicides from 1997. While some witness rising trend of suicides others indicate complex trends. In this session an attempt will be made to analyse the trends of suicides at all-India as well as state levels and examine the distribution of these suicides across regions and various categories of rural population.

III. Agro-Economic Causes of Suicides

It is argued that crop failure, rising cost of cultivation and indebtedness cause agrarian distress and farmer suicides. Given the differences in agro-climatic conditions and the cropping pattern, this session will deliberate upon the experiences of various states in a comparative manner. More particularly, the nature, extent and causes of indebtedness among the farmers and their impact on suicides will be assessed. The incidences of suicides have been linked to the process of economic liberalisation not only India but also in other countries. It is viewed that the risks and uncertainty associated with modern agriculture multiplied recently following economic liberalization. The consequences of the economic liberalization lowered the prices of many agricultural products due to the pressure at the international market. The cost of cultivation increased many times as power tariffs hiked, irrigation rate

raised, fertilizer subsidy is withdrawn. Therefore, this session will analyse the implications of economic liberalization on farmer suicides, keeping in view the diverse impact of economic liberalization on different states. It will also link the Indian situation with the experiences of other countries.

IV. Socio-Cultural Determinants of Suicides

The socio-cultural characteristics of the rural society have undergone tremendous changes under the impact colonialism and planning. The caste relations, joint family and kinship ties, which was the predominant feature of agrarian economy has witnessed significant changes with the spread of urban values, education, etc. The disintegration of community and kinship support system, and rise of some kind of individualistic orientation are reported as the emerging characteristics of the rural society. Social problems like illness, old age, and caste-based social isolation, detachment from family and individualism in agriculture have also been observed by many scholars. Hence, this session intends to analyze as to what extent these socio-cultural changes generate tension and distressful condition among the farmers. The papers mainly based on qualitative micro level information on families of the suicide victims focusing on their social characteristics and practices will be discussed.

V. Farmer Suicides: Towards a Policy Package

Though several studies and the committees and commissions appointed by the union and the concerned state governments have provided policy prescriptions on farmer suicides, the problem continues unabated. It often hit the media reports generate frantic debates in the state assemblies and union parliament. Attempt will be made in this session to have a fresh look at the policies and to evolve a new state-specific as well as general policy package for the prevention of farmers' suicide in the Indian countryside in the light of the discussions in the proceeding sessions.

Call for Papers

The seminar invites papers in any of the above sub-themes. The paper writers are required to send the abstracts (in about 250 words) of their papers electronically by email attachment to bibhutimohanty@hotmail.com before 30th of December 2010. The decision regarding selection of abstracts will be intimated by 3rd of January 2011. The selected paper presenters should submit both hard as well as soft copy of their full-length papers (preferably not exceeding 8000 words) on or before 3rd of February 2011. All the submissions should be in MS Word format, typed in double space, Times New Roman font, 12 point size. It is planned to bring out a volume based on presented papers through a referring process.

Travel Support

Travel support will be extended only to the first author of the accepted papers as per the availability of funds.

Local Hospitality

The organizing committee will provide local hospitality to all the paper presenters and delegates. Boarding and lodging facilities will be made available from 9th (evening) to 12th (morning) of February 2011.

Institution/Locale

Pondicherry University, established in October 1985 is located in the sea side resort town of Puducherry. It has a unique ambience; a blend of spiritual aura, French colonial heritage, Tamil culture and the cosmopolitan flair of many nationalities in a small but varied town. The climate is generally tropical (between 18°C & 38°C) in nature and moderate during the seminar days. It is situated on the Coromandal coast, 160 k.m. south of Chennai (Madras) which is well connected with rest of the India by road, rail and air. The campus is spread over 780 acres of land some part of which is rolling down to the sea beach. The Department of Sociology (established in January 1993), is one of the emerging national centres for sociological teaching and research in India.

Important Dates:

Deadline for submission of abstracts: **30th of December 2010**

Intimation of decision on acceptance of abstracts: **3rd of January 2011**

Deadline for submission of full-length paper: **3rd of February 2011**

For more information Contact:

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