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PROBLEMS OF SMALL AND MARGINAL FARMERS IN INDIA

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Abstract:- Agriculture sector is important in India as it contributes more for GDP and development of the nation. Further, more than 99 million small and marginal farmers are actively engaged in agriculture. Still, there are many problems faced by these farmers and a few include small land holdings, poverty, lower output, poor irrigation, indebtedness, etc. Due to these problems, a few of small and marginal farmers have committed suicides. The paper discussed the statistical information about the small and marginal farmers and their problems.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is an important sector considering the livelihood it generates for almost two-thirds of India's population. It is also critical for ensuring food security and poverty alleviation and this sector needs to be seen as a single set of activities encompassing production, storage and distribution. As there is a seamless interconnectedness of the entire agriculture value chain, its impact on output, income and employment in rural economy is highly positive (Nair, 2012).

Small holdings agriculture is important for raising agriculture growth, food security and livelihoods in India. It may be noted that Indian agriculture is the home of small and marginal farmers (80%). Therefore, the future of sustainable agriculture growth and food security in India depends on the performance of small and marginal farmers. Agricultural Census data shows that there were about 121 million agricultural holdings in India in 2000-01. Around 99 million were small and marginal farmers. Average size has declined from 2.3 ha. In 1970-71 to 1.37 ha. In 2000-01. Small and marginal farmers account for more than 80% of total farm area. But their share in operated area is around 44%. Thus, there are significant land inequalities in India (Mahendra Dev, 2012). Following table revealed the share of agriculture in GDP and Employment in India.

Table No. 1. Share of Agriculture in GDP and Employment in India

Year	Share in GDP (%)		Share in Employment
	Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	Agriculture	
1950-51	57.7	50.2	--
1960-61	53.0	47.3	75.9
1980-81	39.7	35.8	--
2004-05	18.9	15.9	56.4
2008-09	15.7	13.3	--

Source: National Accounts Statistics of India: 1950-51 to 2002-03, Economic & Political Weekly Research Foundation, December 2004, Mumbai: Brochure on the New Series of National Accounts, Base Year 2005; K. Sundaram, (2001 & 2007)

As stated in Pairvi Occasional Papers Series (December 2009), more than 650 millions of India's 1.2 billion population depend on small landholding for their sustenance. The proportion of marginal farms have increased from 36% (1960) to 47% (2004) and the small scale farms decreased from 16% to 11% during the same period. The average size landholding is 0.2 hectares and will be close to 0.11 ha by the turn of the century. The current 89 million landholdings will be fragmenting into 100 millions by the same time. Even though agriculture is contributing more for the increase in GDP and development of nation, still it is having problems. As such, the main contributors of the agriculture, small and marginal farmers are facing many problems.

Problems of Small and Marginal Farmers:

The small farms must be at the centre of any strategy to tackle poverty and increase food security and productivity. They are vital for a number of reasons small farmers provide safety nets on subsistence living to the rural poor, small farmers tend to spend their income on local good and services boosting local economies and are more likely to employ people rather than adopt capital intensive technologies, small farms produce bulk of India's food. There are innumerable evidences to show that small integrated farming systems can yield more per ha in the long run than large scale monoculture farms. They are ecologically sound managing large share of our water and vegetation cover, reducing soil erosion, use water more efficiently, protect biodiversity and preserve soil fertility.

There are commonly listed causes for the current distress of farmers in India: (1) globalization, resultant competition and exploitation by big capital and its minions; (2) peculiar banking practices in India and the non-availability of loans from formal sources for farming operations; (3) social and cultural distress among farmers; (4) fragmented holdings of an unviable economic size; (5) absence of adequate appropriate research in new methods of farming and the exhaustion of current farm research to cope with contemporary circumstances; and (6) inability of the official machinery to provide appropriate services to the farmers and provide them with adequate succour (Government of India, 2007). As such there is increase in farmers' suicides in India as the records revealed as under.

Table No. 2. Number of Farmers' Suicides and All-Suicides in India, 1997-2006

Year	Number	As a percent of All Suicides	Number	Suicide Rate (per 100000 Population)
1997	13622 (100)	14.2	95829 (100)	10.0
1998	16015 (118)	15.3	104713 (109)	10.8
1999	16082 (1118)	14.2	110587 (115)	11.2
2000	16603 (122)	15.3	108593 (113)	10.6
2001	16415 (121)	15.1	108506 (113)	10.6
2002	17971 (132)	16.3	110417 (115)	10.5
2003	17164 (126)	15.5	110851 (116)	10.4
2004	18241 (134)	16.0	113697 (119)	10.5
2005	17131 (126)	15.0	113914 (119)	10.3
2006	17060 (125)	14.4	118112 (123)	10.5
Total Number of Suicides in the Period 1997-2006	166304	15.2	1095219	--
Annual Compound Growth Rate (in Percent) between 1997-2006)	2.5	--	2.4	--

Note: Figures in Brackets gives indices with 1997 as base.

Source: Various Issues of Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (ADSI), National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

Indebtedness is not new to Indian agriculture but suicides due to indebtedness are new phenomena. A combination of economic factors such as economic hardships of the pauperized peasant households, crop failures, unemployment and indebtedness has compelled them to commit suicides. This has happened due to decline of community sense/support mechanism as a result of the emergence of new production relations (Gill, 2005). The ongoing spate of suicides of farmers in India indicates that they are in great distress (Reddy and Galab, 2006). The phenomena of suicides of poor farmers has been observed in various states of India especially where agriculture is highly commercialized. The suicides among farmers are regularly reported in Andhra Pradesh (Reddy, 1998) and Karnataka (Assadi, 1998; Deshpande, 2002; Vasavi, 1998). This is harmful to the country's agricultural prospects which further determine the food security of the country. The recently conducted situation assessment survey by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) in 2003 clearly brought out that the states where the incidences of suicides were high were the states where the proportion of indebted farmers' households was also high, for instance, as in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Punjab, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. At the all India level, 48.6% of farmers households were reported to be indebted (NSSO 59th Round, 2005).

Welfare Schemes for Farmers:

A number of relief measures are already available in the schemes sponsored both by the Government of India and the State Governments. They include the Calamity Relief Fund, National Family Benefit Scheme, Raitha Sanjeevani Scheme, Pledge Loan Scheme, Rashtreeya Krishi Bhima Yojana, Minimum Support Price and 'Sankata Harana' Scheme implemented by the IFFCO. Agriculture in Karnataka witnessed rapid commercialization in crop choice and agricultural inputs (Purushothaman and Kashyap, 2010) though recent trends show a new direction in policy attention. It is one of the first Indian states to specify standards and implement pilot projects for organic farming in partnership with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (Giovannucci, 2005).

Government of Karnataka in 2006 introduced the Karnataka State Policy on Organic Farming (KSPoOF) in order to improve the sustainability of farm livelihoods. For smallholders in the state, organic farming mostly implies non-certified practices with self-reliance in most inputs.

A number of insurance schemes are available both for farmers and public. All these schemes are guided by the policies applicable in general to any insured persons. Some of the insurance schemes like (i) Janatha Rural Personal Accident Insurance, (ii) Rajarajeswari Mahila Kalyana Insurance, (iii) Bhagyashree Female Child Kalyana Yojane, (iv) Insurance for agriculture Pump Sets, (v) Horticulture/Plantation/Floriculture/Flower Insurance Scheme (vi) Insurance on Livestock, (vii) Insurance on Poultry, (viii) Insurance on Carts, (ix) Standard Kissan Package Policy, have all been offered by the Oriental Insurance Company. which directly aimed in covering the farmers and their families. The new India Assurance Company also has (i) Gram Arogya Yojane, (ii) Insurance on livestock, (iii) Insurance on Poultry, (iv) Insurance on Krishi Pump sets and (v) Janatha Rural Personal accidental Insurance offering some competitive premium range. The life Insurance Corporation of India also has Janashree Bima Yojana.

The Minimum Support Price is one of the important mechanisms developed and implemented jointly by the Central and State Government over years to avoid distress sale of agricultural produce. This implemented for mandated crops like Paddy, Jowar, Maize, Bajra, Tur, Green Gram, Black Gram, Soybean Groundnut Sunflower, Bengal Gram and Cotton. However, in Karnataka market intervention scheme for potato, onion etc. is in operation. Likewise, floor price scheme for selected commodities like tur, copra etc. is also being implemented.

Concluding Remarks:

Lack of modernization of agriculture due to poverty and uneconomic land holdings of small and marginal farmers are the major problems, which has decreased the agricultural output. The poverty of the farmers led to borrow loans for agricultural production and in case of crop failure, the small and marginal farmers are not ready to bear the losses and also due to indebtedness the fall prey to suicides. There is need to study the different socio-economic problems of the small and marginal farmers and also encourage cooperative farming, contract farming, etc, so as to reduce the burden of the farmers.

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