



Agrarian distress in India: Causes and remedies

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India accounts for nearly 17 per cent of world's population but only has 2.4 per cent of the land resource. India is an agro-based economy where agriculture (including allied activities) accounted for only 13.9 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP-at constant prices) in 2016-17 while it was 15.2 per cent during the 11th plan period. Nearly half of the population (48.6%) depends on the agriculture sector for their livelihood. Agriculture is the main livelihood for two-third of its population. The Indian peasantry, the largest body of surviving small farmers in the world, today faces a crisis of extinction. Fifteen years of economic liberalization have adversely affected Indian agriculture. The most prominent manifestation of this is in the drastic decline in the growth rate of food grains. The rate of growth of agricultural output was gradually increasing in 1950-1990 and it was more than the rate of growth of the population. In the 1980s the agricultural output grew at about four per cent per annum. Thus, India became self-sufficient in food and started exporting wheat and rice. But during the 10th year period after the start of liberalization, the rate of growth declined to two per. India has attained self-sufficiency in food grain production presently it is about 276 mt. But after liberalization and towards the end of the 90's the rate of growth declined to 2 per cent. The rate of growth of agriculture and allied sectors was just one per cent per annum during the year 2002-05. As a result, per capita availability of food grains decreased; the growth rate of population became higher than that of food grains and India started to import food grains at a much higher price than that in the domestic market. In general, the poor performance of agricultural production and food production is not a healthy sign for the economy. Again

Indian agriculture is currently passing through a period of severe crisis. Although some features of the crisis started manifesting themselves in certain parts of India during the late 1980s, the crisis has assumed a serious dimension since the middle of the 1990s. One of the tragic manifestations of the crisis is a large number of suicides committed by the farmers in some parts of India" (EGAI, 2007). Any stress on this sector will affect the vast working force of this labour surplus country and thus the national economy at a large scale. Agriculture is either overlooked



on the surface by the policy makers of the country. India is going through a transitional period and like other spheres of society farming community is also suffering from techno-cultural lag. There have been alterations not only in people's economic conditions but also in their social spheres, norms and values. With the dramatically changing scenario worldwide, emerges conflict between desire and reality, Imbalance between endless wants and ability. The fast-growing economy experiences a cruel

game of illusion and disillusion. Indian peasants are facing most severe challenges today's and are forced to live in distress. Problem is so grave that they are committing suicides, which is most unfortunate and tragic. The rapid increase in indebtedness, was at the root of farmers taking their lives. Debt is a reflection of a negative economy, a losing economy. The rising costs of crop cultivation and the continuously falling prices of the farm produce/commodities are the two most vital factor which has transformed the positive economy of agriculture into a negative economy for the small and marginal farmers. Above mentioned factor is rooted in the policies of trade liberalization and corporate globalisation. The global corporation has virtually established greater control over

inputs and charging the exorbitant amount for the same which is increasing the cost of cultivation, thus making their life more difficult.

Distress: Distress is a function of collective factors like economic condition, political dilemma, social structure and inner psychological conflicts. Stress is the process that occurs in us in response to events that disrupt or threaten to disrupt our normal physical and psychological functioning. Stressors are events or situations that cause the change in our internal balance and thus activate stress. Stress becomes distressed when it is beyond the control of the individual. Little stress is good for achieving the target in fact. Prolonged, uninterrupted, unexpected, and unmanageable stresses are the most damaging types of stress leading to distress.

Agrarian distress is as perceived intensity of stress in terms of sense of helplessness, uncontrollability and unpredictability experienced by farmers as a result of unexpected situations or events in farming as an occupation as well as their social life. With illiteracy, insufficient knowledge and extension services decision making becomes a major problem for the Indian farmers. Farming has become an extremely unrewarding, unattractive profession in India. The decline in the trend growth rate of production as well as productivity followed by declining value of output from the late nineties. Excessive dependence of a large section of the population on agriculture. Poor returns from cultivation leading to low income from farming. Green revolution had a greater focus on rice and wheat under the irrigated condition, bypassing crops and regions under rainfed or dryland conditions (which are three-fifths of the 141 million hectares of net sown area in the country during 2003-04). The neglect of agriculture in plan resource allocation has led to a decline of public investments in irrigation and other related infrastructure. Supply of credit from formal sources to the agricultural sector is inadequate leading to greater reliance on informal sources at higher interest burden. Farmers have been exposed to various uncertainties and thus become more vulnerable because of the changing technology and frequent price fluctuation of agro product.

Risk factors in agrarian distress: Agrarian distress is a complex phenomenon and is the collective function of a number of factors. These factors are again not mutually exclusive and one often accelerates the other. Following factors are responsible for causing agrarian distress:

- Ecological factors.
- Disaster factors.
- Policy factors.

– Socio-psychological factors.

– Economic factors.

Ecological factors: Introduction of green revolution farmers use the indiscriminate amount of chemical fertilizers, pesticides which drastically reduced soil health because of multi-nutrient deficiencies and declining soil organic matter. Increased degradation of natural resources, increased environmental pollution, the incidence of insect-pests and diseases, reduced sustainably farm production and profitability, reduced biodiversity that results create distress to the farmers.

Disasters factors: Disaster is the serious disruption in the functioning of the community or a society causing widespread material, economic, social or environmental losses which exceed the ability of affected society to cope using its own resources. The average number of reported disasters have been on increasing trend over the period of time as suggested by data which is causing enormous problems for affected farm families and region. Disaster majority can be categorized into two part *i.e.* Natural disaster and Manmade disaster. Natural disasters: drought, famine, flood, earthquakes, hailstorm etc. Bengal famine, the super cyclone of Odisha (1999), Gujarat earthquake (2001), Tsunami (2004) etc. are some of the very important examples of natural disaster. Manmade disasters includes technological mishaps, nuclear accidents, pollution, famine, war etc. India's 58.6 per cent landmass is prone to earthquake, 12 per cent is prone to flood and 68 per cent is prone to drought. Factors responsible for this serious situations are mainly population explosion, urbanization, industrialization, environmental degradation, climate change etc. The losses are in terms of private, community as well as public assets. Disaster is subjective, not objective. Eg. Hailstorm in Maharashtra in 2014 destroying Crop in more than eight lakh hectares. A Large quantity of crops including wheat, grapes, mustard and vegetables have been damaged causing loss of 5000 crores of rupees. Millions of tons of grapes in Nasik district destroyed right before the harvesting season. These factors cause heavy stress to our farming community.

Economic issues: Private money lenders charge high-interest rates between 25-40 per cent p.a., the higher rate of interest in the co-operative credit system e.g. upto 12.5 per cent to 14 per cent till last year. The poor economic condition often becomes the trigger for farmers' vulnerability to other risks. Inability to repay loan amounts and losses of income from agriculture often trigger farmer to take extreme step. Almost half (49%) of India's farm households are indebted. AIDIS indicates that from the

total non-institutional outstanding debt for cultivator households on end June 2012, nearly three-fourths carried the interest rate of 20 per cent or more per annum and more than half of these carried interest rate of 30 per cent more per annum. Cost of cultivation has increased by manifolds due to the steep rise in the cost of inputs, but prices of farm produce have not risen comparatively. One study of Vidarbha region shows the major reasons behind farmer's suicide are indebtedness (95.00%), hopelessness due to crop failure (82.50%) and drop in economic status (80.00%) (Ravinder, 2003).

Socio-psychological issues: Socio-psychological distress can be described as the unhappy, worried and depressed state of mind due to unusual happening in individual or social life. Distress is nothing but individual's unique cognitive appraisal of the stressor as being stressful. Vulnerability to distress depends on value orientation, Perception, social demands and attitude towards the event, priorities, cultural values, customs, social status etc. The sociological factors include the change in family orientation, breakdown of community structures, changes in values, norms, lack of social cohesiveness, ceremonial pressure like getting sister or daughter married off, addiction etc. The psychological factors are risk orientation, knowledge level, the extent of adaptation, perception, prior experience, innovativeness.

Policy issues: Some experts argue that the WTO has a negative impact on the Indian farmers. The prices of International Agricultural Products have become lower than the Indian agricultural prices as a result of heavy subsidization of agricultural products by developed countries. The seed sector of India was opened to global corporations like Cargill, Monsanto and Syngenta due to the World Bank's structural adjustment policies and it resulted in the increase in indebtedness of farmers. The crisis of agrarian economy during 1980s was expressed in different forms like opposing the state policies through long marches, rallies, fast unto death, chakka jam, prohibiting the entry of bureaucrats etc. It was largely led by the farmers' movements in different parts of India such as Shetkari Sangathana in Maharashtra, Vyavasayigal Sangam in Tamil Nadu and Rajya Raitha Sangh in Karnataka. This crisis manifests itself in different forms in contemporary India such as increasing rural violence in the name of Naxalism or Maoism. Farmers of many regions across the country do not receive due to MSP of the crops, crop insurance policies, lack of institutional credit, lack of regulated market, a high cost of input, and several government schemes that they grow and sell and

thus suffer from distress sale.

Coping strategy and remedies for agrarian distress:

Extent of coping depends on various factors such as ability of victim to adjust psychologically, capacity of community structure to adapt to the crisis and amount of help available, cultural psyche pattern, extent of contact with extension agencies, prior experience, Cosmo politeness, scientific orientation and exposure to alternative opportunities.

– Credit accessibility through financial institution timely and adequately and provision of micro credit.

– Agripreneurship- Encouraging towards Alternative sources of income through agri-preneurship and reducing too much dependence on external inputs and single enterprise.

– Promotion of judicious use of chemicals.

– Advise to reduce mono-cropping and to promote diversification.

– Stress on organic farming and recycling.

– Encouraging farmers to practice water harvesting,

– Encouraging farmers to use integrated nutrient management and integrated pest management practices so that cost of cultivation can be reduced since farmer spend a huge amount in managing disease and pest of the crops.

– Weather forecasting and dissemination of the forecasting information using appropriate ICT tools and technology. A good example in this regard is "Fisher Friend" venture by MSSRF in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. Timely and right information and advise to farmers on will be helpful in avoiding many kind of losses and also helps in taking right farming decision.

– Stress should be given on promoting indigenous technological knowledge and eco-friendly technology which in turn help in minimizing spending on modern agro inputs.

– Creating preparedness and contingency planning in case of adverse climatic situations.

– Extensive efforts of extension functionaries to provide information on important low cost-no cost technologies of farm cultivation to farmers.

– Strengthening extension service and transfer of technology mechanism which will be helpful in offering right advice to farmers personalized basis.

– Introduction of farmer-friendly policies that focus on farmers rather than inputs and technology.

– Institutional care on price stabilization, MSP, check on low import tariff on farm inputs and dumping, proper land reform acts, farmers friendly crop insurance schemes and market regulation.

– There must be some advisory council at district and state level to address farmers stress issues and advise to take measure to prevent tragic and unfortunate incidences of farmers suicides.

– Promotion of more agro-based industries and rural entrepreneurship which will provide an alternative source for income generation to farm families.

– Provision of livelihood security package and efforts should be made for the establishment of Agricultural risk fund.

Conclusion: Agrarian distress is not minor issue happening in remote parts of a few states, it is a reflection of the true state of the farming community and basis of economy *i.e.* agriculture in the country. Some analyst suggests that situation has become so grave that Indian farmers are no longer want to continue in the profession provided other employment opportunities. Policy makers and political class have not come up with something very concrete but they introduced superficial nature of the measures which are not sufficient to tackle the agrarian crisis. Most of the policy measures restrict at providing

relief package, reducing the interest rate, providing inputs. Emphasis should be on empowerment so that farmers can find out their own solutions. Going for Income insurance than mere crop insurance should be the future strategy. Like other employees, our farmers too need a monthly pension scheme of decent amount. Along with agri-clinics farm counselling centres are to be introduced with professional counsellors. Besides these measure regular training and awareness building programmes with non-farm activities are to be carried in collaboration with voluntary organization's and extension agencies which will help in skill development and capacity development of the farmers, resulting they can start some agribased enterprise. By helping farmers genuinely to help themselves, we can proceed towards a physically and mentally sound agrarian society which in turn will contribute to a strong national economy. If we want to feed the nation and ensure food security, the agrarian crisis should be taken very seriously and very comprehensive strategies needed to be introduced to manage the present crisis.

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