

Farmers Suicides in Andhra Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT

Andhra Pradesh is called as rice bowl of India. The deltas formed by the most important rivers of the Godavari and the Krishna make up the central part of the plains, an area of fertile alluvial soil. Thus, agriculture plays an immensely important role not only in the economy but also for achieving the food security for the state and also for the country. Andhra Pradesh is one of the leading rice-growing states in the country and is a major producer of India's tobacco. The main challenges of agriculture are, growing water scarcity, degrading natural resources like land and decreasing per capita availability of land and water resources. The large number of suicides by farmers is perhaps the most distressing phenomenon observed in Andhra Pradesh over the last decade. The main reasons behind farmer's suicide could be lack of money, financial problems, carrying the burden of debt, extreme crop failure due to natural calamities etc. The paper presents the number of farmer's suicides, distribution in different districts and reasons thereof in Andhra Pradesh.

Keywords: Farmers, Suicides, Reasons, Andhra Pradesh

INTRODUCTION

Andhra Pradesh State is “the bejewelled rice bowl of India”. Agriculture plays an important role in the livelihoods of people as 63 per cent of the population in Andhra Pradesh lives in rural areas and depends on agriculture and related livelihood opportunities. Agriculture sector contributes 27 per cent share in State GDP. The agriculture plays an important role not only in the economy but also for achieving the food security for the state and also for the country. Our main challenges are, growing water scarcity, degrading natural resources like land and decreasing per capita availability of land and water resources. Andhra Pradesh is located in the southeastern part of the subcontinent and bounded by Tamil Nadu to the south, Karnataka to the southwest and west, Telangana to the northwest and north and Odisha to the northeast. The eastern boundary is a 600-mile (970-km) coastline along the Bay of Bengal.

Land

The state has three main physiographic regions: the coastal plain to the east, extending from the Bay of Bengal to the mountain ranges; the mountain ranges themselves, the Eastern Ghats, which form the western flank of the coastal plain; and, in the southwest, the plateau to the west of the Ghats. The coastal plain, also known as the Andhra region, runs almost the entire length of the state and is watered by several rivers, flowing from west to east through the hills into the bay. The deltas formed by the most important of those rivers—the Godavari and the Krishna—make up the central part of the plains, an area of fertile alluvial soil. The Eastern Ghats are part of a larger mountain system extending from central India to the far south and running parallel to the east coast. Interrupted by the great river valleys, the mountains do not form a continuous range. The Penneru River forms the main drainage system. As the

result of erosion, the plateau is a region of graded valleys, with red sandy soil and isolated hills. Black soil is also found in certain parts of the area.

Climate

A summer that lasts from March to June, a season of tropical rains that runs from July to September, and a winter that lasts from October to February constitute the three seasons of Andhra Pradesh. Summers are extraordinarily hot and humid, with maximum daily temperatures exceeding 95 °F (35 °C) and even surpassing 104 °F (40 °C) in the central portion of the state. Summer nightly minimums drop to below about 70 °F (20 °C) only in the far southwest. Winters are somewhat cooler, with January maximum temperatures between 86 and 95 °F (30 and 35 °C) in all but the north-eastern portion of the state. Winter lows drop below about 60 °F (15 °C) only in the extreme northeast. Annual precipitation, which derives largely from the southwest monsoon rains, generally decreases toward the south-western plateau area. Coastal areas receive about 40 to 47 inches (1,000 to 1,200 mm) per year, while the westernmost part of the plateau may receive only half that much. Rainfall totals in portions of the north-eastern mountains exceed 47 inches and can be as high as 55 inches (1,400 mm).

Economy

Agriculture, forestry, and fishing

Agriculture, dominated by the production of food grains, is a major, although declining, sector of the state's economy, in terms of value. Andhra Pradesh is one of the leading rice-growing states in the country and is a major producer of India's tobacco. The state's rivers—particularly the Godavari and the Krishna, but also the Penneru—account for its agricultural importance. For a long time the rivers' benefits were restricted to the coastal districts of the Andhra region, which had the best irrigation facilities. Beginning in the mid-20th century, however, great efforts were made to tap the waters of the Godavari, Krishna, Penneru, and other rivers by constructing dams and reservoirs that benefit both coastal and drier upland regions. Canal irrigation in the Rayalaseema region of the plateau has given rise to agro-industrial complexes rivalling those of coastal Andhra Pradesh. The Nagarjuna Sagar multipurpose project, diverting the waters of the Krishna for irrigation, has substantially increased the production of rice and sugarcane. Rice flour, rice-bran oil, paints and varnishes, soaps and detergents, cardboard and other packaging materials, and cattle feed are all produced from local paddy rice. Other agricultural commodities grown state-wide include other cereal grains, pulses (peas, beans, and lentils), peanuts (groundnuts), corn (maize) and cotton—all of which are processed locally as well—and a variety of fruits and vegetables. Animal husbandry has increased significantly in Andhra Pradesh, especially since the start of the 21st century. Livestock raising contributes roughly half as much in overall value as crop production. Animals raised include cattle, water buffalo, sheep, goats, pigs, and poultry. Dairy and egg production have grown dramatically. The woodlands of Andhra Pradesh annually yield high-quality timber, such as teak and eucalyptus. Non-timber forest products—including sal seeds (from which an edible oil is extracted), tendu leaves (for rolling cigarettes), gum karaya (a type of emulsifier), and bamboo—are also important. With its long coastline and many rivers, the state has a significant and expanding fishing industry.

Resources and power

The state's principal mineral resources are asbestos, mica, manganese, barite and high-grade coal. Low-grade iron ore is found in the southern parts of the state. Andhra Pradesh produces a major share of the country's barite. It is the only state in southern India that possesses significant coal reserves. In the

early 21st century, large deposits of natural gas were discovered onshore and offshore in the basins of the Godavari and Krishna rivers. The diamond mines of Golconda were once renowned worldwide for producing the Koh-i-noor diamond and other famous stones; efforts have been made to revive production in the area. Quartz, limestone, and graphite also occur. The state has established a mining and metal-trading corporation to lead the exploitation of its mineral resources. Most of Andhra Pradesh's energy is produced by thermal generators in the public sector. Hydroelectric power stations—notably those on the Krishna River along the Telangana border at Srisailem and Nagarjuna Sagar—provide an important secondary source of energy. In addition, the government has established several wind farms. A number of private companies operate generators powered by natural gas; they also have worked to develop wind, biomass, and other nonconventional power sources.

Manufacturing

Andhra Pradesh since the mid-20th century has become one of the most highly industrialized states in India. Industry—including mining, utilities, and construction as well as manufacturing—contributes roughly the same value to the state income as does agriculture, although manufacturing itself accounts for only a small proportion of the overall income. Industries such as shipbuilding, aeronautics, and the manufacture of electrical equipment, machine tools, and drugs have been established in the Visakhapatnam area. Private enterprises, many of them located in and around the urban agglomeration of Vijayawada and Guntur in the east-central region, produce chemicals, textiles, cement, fertilizers, processed foods, petroleum derivatives, and cigarettes. A number of important enterprises of moderate size, such as sugar factories, are scattered across the medium-size and smaller urban areas. There is a mammoth steel plant at Visakhapatnam, where raw materials and port facilities are easily accessible; an oil refinery also is located there, as is a large shipbuilding yard. The increase in power generated by hydroelectric and thermoelectric projects since the late 20th century has benefited industrialization and irrigation.

CAUSES OF FARMERS SUICIDES

The large number of suicides by farmers in various parts of the country is perhaps the most distressing phenomenon observed in India over the last decade. These suicides, which reached almost epidemic proportions in certain pockets of the country, were first recognised and reported by an alert press around the late 1990s. The public concern that these press reports created forced some State governments, such as those of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra, to set up Commissions to enquire into the phenomenon. The databases on which the press and the Commissions of Enquiry depended were somewhat uncoordinated and sporadic: they were either impressionistic, or based on information collated by activist sources and organisations such as Kisan Sabhas or small-scale surveys conducted by the Commissions of Enquiry. While the extremely useful role that the press and the Commissions of Enquiry played in informing the public about this distressing situation has to be recognised, these efforts could be — and often were — dismissed as the products of the fevered imaginations of some journalists and social activists (**Bhagwati and Panagariya, 2013¹; Jadhav 2008² and Kapoor 2013³**).

Increased Costs

From seeds to fertilizers, from tools to big equipment, everything has become extremely expensive for the farmers to buy and grow crops. On top of it the livestock industry also needs a good amount of expense to look after the animals, their health, their food, their hygiene and so much more. All these

increased costs may affect the purchasing value for the farmers which could lead in low production or low output.

The Debt

When the costs for equipment and other facilities increase, farmers may not have a choice but get a loan. Again, when the income is low due to the low production, then naturally paying off the interest and the loan amount is going to be challenge. The burden of increasing interest and low income to pay it off can be a lot to bear. Suicides due to inability to pay off the loans are high in farmers and the biggest cause that leads then to this path of taking their own life.

Loss of Family's Support

Loss of support from peers or family members could also be one of the major reasons for farmers' suicide. When we say 'support' it is not just financial support, but also emotional and mental support, which is equally important. When families of farmers go one step ahead and create an empathetic support for them, then the feeling of being understood or knowing that they aren't alone or they can fight and find ways out of the problem can help them to take a step back from think about suicide.

Lack of Awareness

If farmers are educated frequently about the loan facilities, subsidies, new ways of farming and much more than their problem-solving skills may develop and they may think of different ways to look at a problem and find different solution other than suicide. The various reasons include monsoon failure, climate change, high debt burdens, government policies, mental health, personal issues and family problems among the reasons of farmers' suicides in Andhra Pradesh.

The surge in input costs

A major cause of the farmers' suicides in India has been the increasing burden on the farmers due to inflated prices of agricultural inputs. The culmination of these factors is seen in the overall increase in the cost of cultivation, for wheat, the cost at present is three times than it was in 2005.

Cost of chemicals and seeds

Be it the fertilisers, crop protection chemicals or even the seeds for cultivation, farming has become expensive for the already indebted farmers.

Costs of Agricultural equipment

The input costs, moreover, aren't limited to the basic raw materials. Using agricultural equipment and machinery like tractors, submersible pumps etc adds to the already surging costs. Besides, these secondary inputs have themselves become less affordable for the small and marginal farmers.

Labour costs

Likewise, hiring labourers and animals is getting costlier too. While this may reflect an improvement in the socio-economic status of the labourers, driven primarily by MGNREGA and hike in minimum basic income, this has not gone too well with boosting agriculture.

Distressed due to loans

The NCRB data points out that in 2474 suicides out of the studied 3000 farmer suicides in 2015 the victims had unpaid loans from local banks. This is clear enough an indication for drawing correlations between the two. Whether or not the banks had been harassing them, however, is a long-drawn debate and needs more specific empirical evidence. Moreover, a shift away from usual trend also revealed that of the loans taken by these farmers, only 9.8% were loans from money-lenders. Thus the pressure or muscle-power of money-lenders could be far from being a major driving force, as is otherwise perceived. Another source of strong linkages between farmer suicides and indebtedness is reflected from

the spread of the two. While Maharashtra had 1293 suicides for indebtedness, Karnataka had 946. Note that both these states saw one of the highest incidences of farmer suicides as well as indebtedness.

Lack of direct integration with the market

Although initiatives like the National Agricultural Market and contract farming are helping integrate the farmers' produce directly with the market, cutting the role of intermediaries, the reality is still lagging behind.

Lack of awareness

The digital divide, as well as the literacy gap, has made the marginal and small farmers particularly vulnerable due to their inability to utilise the positives of government policies. This is reflected in the continued unsustainable cropping practices – like cultivating sugarcane in water-deficit regions.

Water crisis

The concentration of these suicides in the water-deficit regions of states like Maharashtra, Karnataka is a manifestation of how the water crisis and thereby failure to meet production demands have intensified the menace. This is particularly true in the backdrop of continued failed monsoons.

Interstate water disputes

What has added to the already prevalent crisis is the unwillingness to cater to each other's water needs amongst the states. A case in point is the recently resurfaced Kaveri dispute that saw Karnataka and Tamil Nadu battle out water shortage both in and outside the tribunal even to the extent of non-compliance with the tribunal award.

Climate change

The climate change has acted as the last nail in the coffin by resulting in furthering of the uncertainties associated with the already uncertain monsoon system and hence agricultural production. While incidents like flash floods have led to crop losses, deferred monsoons have seen production shortfall year-in and year-out.

India's urban consumer driven economic policies

The political economy of India is driven more by the urban consumers than the rural producers. This is reflected in the *urgency to impose price controls* in case of price rise (imposing Minimum Export Prices, bringing items under Essential Commodities etc) and a *lacklustre withdrawal* once the price is under control. Contrast this with how we have been imposing minimum import price to secure our steel sector. This differential treatment to primary sector also limits profit margin and thereby hinders farmers' chances of breaking free from the cycle of indebtedness.

Loan waivers instead of restructuring, re-investment measures

Our approach of handling farmer indebtedness and hence farmer suicides has been appeasement politics like the recent move by the UP government to waive off Rs 36000 crore worth of loans. Surprisingly this comes at a time when agricultural yield is expected to be better in the wake of a good monsoon. In essence, the factors sum up to crop failure, unsustainable production and subsequent farmer indebtedness leading to failure of strengthening the economic state of the farmer as the driving force behind these suicides.

The economy of Andhra Pradesh is mainly dependent on agriculture. Two important rivers of India, the Godavari and Krishna, flow through the state, providing irrigation. Paddy, Sugarcane, Cotton and Tobacco are the local crops. Recently, crops used for vegetable oil production such as sunflower and peanuts have gained favour. There are many multi-state irrigation projects in development, including Godavari River Basin Irrigation Projects and Nagarjuna Sagar Dam, the world's highest masonry dam.

Agriculture is the main occupation of 60 per cent of population and related activities. Rice is the major food crop and staple food of the state. Other important crops are Jowar, Bajra, Maize and Ragi. The state has 23 per cent area covered with forest. Agriculture has been the chief source of income for the state's economy. Four important rivers of India, the Godavari, Krishna, Penna, and Thungabhadra flow through the state, providing irrigation.

FARMERS SUICIDES IN ANDHRA PRADESH

The district wise and year wise number of suicides by farmers for bifurcated Andhra Pradesh are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Year-wise Farmers Suicides in Andhra Pradesh

| Sl. No | Name of the District | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | Total |
|--------|----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1 | Srikakulam | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 14 |
| 2 | Vizianagaram | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 3 | Visakhapatnam | 9 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 35 |
| 4 | East Godavari | 5 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 10 | 18 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 59 |
| 5 | West Godavari | 8 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 16 |
| 6 | Krishna | 24 | 13 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 74 |
| 7 | Guntur | 73 | 24 | 33 | 22 | 30 | 5 | 12 | 25 | 15 | 14 | 0 | 12 | 293 |
| 8 | Prakasam | 44 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 8 | 0 | 10 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 12 | 125 |
| 9 | Nellore | 6 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 23 |
| 10 | Ananthapur | 72 | 70 | 69 | 90 | 86 | 47 | 45 | 67 | 40 | 31 | 41 | 51 | 908 |
| 11 | Chittoor | 39 | 22 | 24 | 24 | 17 | 10 | 3 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 163 |
| 12 | YSR Kadapa | 21 | 17 | 9 | 26 | 20 | 11 | 4 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 131 |
| 13 | Kurnool | 76 | 62 | 75 | 85 | 75 | 71 | 42 | 44 | 26 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 610 |
| | Total | 381 | 232 | 230 | 267 | 244 | 157 | 143 | 187 | 97 | 56 | 48 | 101 | 2452 |

CV: Andhra Pradesh 2.04

Source: Commissionerate of Agriculture, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh, Amaravathi⁴

As per the data collected from newspapers and from the list prepared by Andhra Pradesh Rythu Sangam (before bifurcation) during the five year period i.e. October 1997 to September 2002, a total of 877 suicides by farmers were reported in the state. In 1998 a maximum of 353 farmers committed suicide. During 1990-99, 59 farmers and in 2000, 82 farmers committed suicide. Again in 2001 there was a steep rise in suicides, the number reaching 200. The year 2012 also saw a spate of suicides. By the end of August 2002, 112 cases were reported. Later the figure rose to 218 by the end of November (**Prajasakthi, November 21, 2002**).⁵ Of the total of 877 suicides, Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema

Regions accounted for around 13 percent each. Moreover in Ananthapur district 70 cases and 59 cases in Guntur district were reported.

It can be observed from the table that the number of suicides which was 381 in 2004 gradually reduced to 48 by 2014 in Andhra Pradesh. But in 2015 the suicides were reported to be 101, the reason may be attributed to the unexpected seasonal conditions and drought affects. During 2016, the suicides were reported as 79. This inferences that inspite of supplementary improvement programmes implemented in the state, the suicides are still continuing in the state. The reason may be attributed to the drought conditions and irrecoverable indebtedness. The coefficient of variation for number of suicides for the period 1998 to 2015 is estimated to be 144.22%. The log linear growth rates of number of suicides in the bifurcated Andhra Pradesh for the period 1998-2015 are found to be 0.97 percent for Guntur, 2.71 percent for Ananthapur and 2.04 percent for the state.

INTENSITY OF FARMERS' SUICIDES IN THE STATE

District-wise Details of Farmers

The district-wise details of farmers' suicides in the state (2015-16) are presented in table 2.

Table 2

District-wise details of farmers' suicide in Andhra Pradesh (July 2015 to June 2016)

| Sl. No. | Name of the district | No. of farmers' suicide | % to state total | No. of farmers' suicide per lakh hectare of Net Sown Area = (no. of farmers' suicides x 100,000) / net sown area in ha) | No. of farmers' suicide per lakh hectare of Gross cropped area = (no. of farmers' suicides x 100,000) / gross cropped area in ha) | No. of farmers' suicide per lakh farming farmers = (no. of farmers' suicides x 100,000) / no. of armers) |
|---------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------|---|---|--|
| 1 | Srikakulam | 0 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 2 | Vizianagaram | 0 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 3 | Visakhapatnam | 2 | 2.53 | 0.72 | 0.57 | 0.42 |
| 4 | East Godavari | 4 | 5.06 | 0.93 | 0.59 | 0.57 |
| 5 | West Godavari | 7 | 8.86 | 1.65 | 1.01. | 1.24 |
| 6 | Krishna | 0 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 7 | Guntur | 20 | 25.32 | 3.76 | 2.95 | 2.63 |
| 8 | Prakasam | 6 | 7.59 | 1.02 | 0.98 | 0.89 |
| 9 | Nellore | 1 | 1.27 | 0.23 | 0.22 | 0.22 |
| 10 | Ananthapur | 27 | 34.18 | 3.18 | 2.93 | 3.71 |
| 11 | Chittoor | 2 | 2.53 | 0.54 | 0.47 | 0.30 |
| 12 | YSR Kadapa | 9 | 11.39 | 2.65 | 2.27 | 2.04 |
| 13 | Kurnool | 1 | 1.27 | 0.12 | 0.11 | 0.16 |
| | Total | 79 | 100 | 1.30 | 1.05 | 1.04 |

Source: Commissionerate of Agriculture, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh, Amaravathi⁶

Suicide case of suicides reported in the state: During 2015-16 the cases of suicides reported in the state are 79. Of them 25.32 percent of the cases are reported from Guntur district and 34.18 percent are reported from Ananthapur district. Moreover the number of Farmers' suicides per lakh hectare of net

sown area is reported as 1.30, and the number of farmers’ suicides per lakh hectare of gross cropped area is reported as 1.05 in the state. On the other hand the numbers of farmers’ suicides per lakh farming families are reported as 1.04 in the state. Observing across the districts the number of farmers’ suicides per lakh hectare of net sown area are reported to be 3.76 in Guntur district and 3.18 in Ananthapur district. Similarly the numbers of farmers’ suicides per lakh hectare of gross cropped area are estimated to be 2.95 in Guntur district and 2.93 in Ananthapur district. Moreover the numbers of farmers suicides per lakh farming farmers are observed to be 2.63 in Guntur and 3.71 in Ananthapur. Observing across the districts of the state the suicides per lakh farming farmers varied from 0.16 in Kurnool district to 3.71 in Ananthapur district. No suicide cases are reported from Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Krishna districts.

Month wise Farmers’ Suicides

The details of month-wise farmers’ suicides in the state (2015-16) are presented in table 3.

Table 3
Month-wise farmers’ suicide in Andhra Pradesh

| Sl. No. | Months | No. of Farmers' Suicides | Percent to total number of farmers' suicides |
|---------|--------------|--------------------------|--|
| 1 | July 15 | 8 | 10.13 |
| 2 | August 15 | 9 | 11.39 |
| 3 | September 15 | 11 | 13.92 |
| 4 | October 15 | 15 | 18.99 |
| 5 | November 15 | 9 | 11.39 |
| 6 | December 15 | 9 | 11.39 |
| 7 | January 16 | 3 | 3.80 |
| 8 | February 16 | 8 | 10.13 |
| 9 | March 16 | 2 | 2.53 |
| 10 | April 16 | 5 | 6.33 |
| 11 | May 16 | 0 | 0.00 |
| 12 | June 16 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Total | | 79 | 100.00 |

Source: Commissionerate of Agriculture, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh

The table portrays that comparatively higher percentage of suicides was taken place in September and October months of 2015. Similar percentage of suicides was reported in August, November and December months of 2015. Moreover 10.13 per cent of suicides are reported in both July 2015 and February, 2016. No suicide cases were reported in May and June months of 2016. Observing across the months the percentage of suicide cases varied from 18.99 per cent in October 2015 to 2.53 per cent in March 2016.

CONCLUSION

Andhra Pradesh is called as rice bowl of India and 63 per cent of its population lives in rural areas and depends primarily on agriculture. The main reasons behind farmer’s suicide could be lack of money, financial problems, carrying the burden of debt, extreme crop failure due to natural calamities etc. The reasons why farmers commit suicide are varied and the methods they use to end their lives are also

different. The number of suicides which was 381 in 2004 gradually reduced to 48 by 2014 in new Andhra Pradesh. Observing across the districts of the state the suicides per lakh farming farmers varied from 0.16 in Kurnool district to 3.71 in Ananthapur district. No suicide cases are reported from Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Krishna districts. The percentage of suicide cases varied from 18.99 per cent in October 2015 to 2.53 per cent in March 2016. Farmer's suicide in Andhra Pradesh is a major issue and it should be dealt with seriousness.

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