

# Beyond the Fields: Policy Gaps and the Persistence of Farmer Suicides in Marathwada

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**Abstract**—*The agrarian crisis in Marathwada, India, exemplifies the complex issues confronting rural populations worldwide. This study dives into the region's multiple concerns, such as agricultural debts, irregular weather patterns, and rising farmer suicides, all of which put a pall over its once-thriving agricultural environment. Despite its historical agricultural accomplishments, Marathwada is today dealing with structural issues that require immediate attention and a thorough understanding. The report methodically investigates the crisis's complicated dynamics, concentrating on the interrelated challenges of agricultural debt and farmer suicides but also recognizing local communities' resiliency. It sheds light on the crisis's underlying origins and repercussions by a thorough examination of socioeconomic, environmental, and psychological factors. This holistic approach emphasizes the need for evidence-based policies that address both current economic pressures and structural inadequacies. Furthermore, the study underlines the need of building resilience in rural communities and suggests long-term interventions to promote well-being. It promotes projects such as debt reduction, low-interest credit, and mental health support services. Furthermore, it emphasizes the ability of Corporate Social Responsibility programs to supplement government efforts and promote sustainable agriculture practices. This study aims to enlighten policymakers, stakeholders, and practitioners on the complexities of the agricultural problem and how to leverage community resilience in order to design comprehensive solutions. It aspires to provide vital insights that will pave the road for a sustainable and bright future for Marathwada's agrarian landscape and its residents, serving as a beacon of hope in the face of hardship.*

**Key Words:** *Hardships, Indebtedness, Legalities, Suicide*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In rural India's enormous tapestry, where the soil tells generations' stories and the fields resonate with the beat of agricultural labor, there is a somber silence that covers a heartbreaking truth. This article exposes the profound conflict that penetrates our country's rural landscape, bringing to light a subject that is at the heart of India's agricultural identity. Amidst the enormous fields that contribute greatly to the nation's nourishment, a painful story unfolds—one of despair,

financial difficulty, and the terrible culmination of hopes in the lives of people who tend the land. This introduction sets the tone for a look at the particular obstacles that Indian farmers face as they navigate the complexity of climate, economic swings, and societal expectations. It aims to bring into the limelight the muted agony that frequently goes unrecognized, urging readers to dig into the heartrending reality of agricultural suicide in the Indian context—an urgent cry to appreciate, empathize, and address a catastrophe that leaves an everlasting mark on the spirit of rural India. Agriculture has an unbreakable connection to India's history, culture, and economic structure. However, the beautiful image of an Indian farmer tending to his land conceals the numerous obstacles he faces. The agricultural crisis involves a complicated web of debt, declining returns, and vulnerability to natural forces. Farmers' economic struggles are a major cause of the crisis. Rising input costs, combined with variable market prices, create a precarious financial climate for farmers. Small and marginal farmers, in particular, are trapped in a debt cycle, frequently turning to informal lenders who take advantage of their fragility.

Climate change has become a foreboding presence in the lives of all farmers. Unpredictable weather patterns, such as heavy rains, droughts, and floods, devastate crops and worsen farmers' economic woes. The failure to anticipate and adjust to these developments adds an unparalleled level of stress to an already overburdened population. A considerable proportion of farmer suicides can be attributed to the debt burden that engulfs them. Loans made for agricultural objectives, typically with excessive interest rates, become insurmountable obstacles for many farmers. The pressure to repay, combined with a lack of realistic alternatives, drives people to the edge of despair. Beyond economic and environmental issues, the agrarian crisis has a significant impact on farmers' mental health. The stigma associated with financial failure, along with cultural expectations, produces a poisonous mix of stress and anxiety. Many farmers, feeling alienated

and helpless, succumb to the weight of their circumstances. In response to the mounting problem, the government has implemented a number of measures and welfare programs. However, the effectiveness of these efforts in addressing the underlying causes of farmer suicides remains debatable. Issues like adequate execution, accessibility, and long-term sustainability raise concerns about the success of these programs.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

India, encompassing 4% of global land, contributes 17% to global food security. However, shifts in Indian agriculture, marked by falling commodity prices, reduced market growth, and increasing farmer suicides, suggest a decline. Government efforts, though ongoing, struggle to address agrarian distress. In a neoliberal era, 75% of farmers consider leaving, aggravating the decline, while farmers' debt rises due to inadequate earnings. Crop productivity stagnates, compounded by market imperfections. Pre-globalization agriculture faced challenges, but the 1990s marked a decline. Despite government initiatives like the Green Revolution, White Revolution, and Operation Flood, post-globalization sees a negative impact on GDP contribution from agriculture. Globalization, emphasizing liberalization, privatization, and reduced agricultural budgets, hampers India's agriculture. Government apathy and low investment contribute to farmer distress, forcing reliance on high-interest loans. The unclear definition of farmers complicates the distribution of government schemes. Despite some recent budget increments for agriculture, challenges persist. The removal of customs duties and liberalized import policies increase competition and lower prices, affecting Indian farmers. Overall, globalization negatively impacts Indian agriculture, demanding serious attention and prioritization of the sector. In the state of West Bengal, where 70% of villagers rely on agriculture, the diminishing profitability in the sector, driven by privatization, globalization, and corporate involvement, disproportionately affects small-scale and marginal farmers. Globalization facilitates intermediaries to exploit farmers, particularly during the cultivation of 'boro and aman' rice, requiring substantial funds. Many marginal farmers lack cash and turn to moneylenders or private microfinance, leading to unethical land mortgages. The study investigates how intermediaries, taking advantage of farmers' vulnerability, contribute to their lifelong

indebtedness, pushing some to contemplate suicide. The findings emphasize the need for government initiatives to raise awareness, support farmers, and implement policies preventing suicides due to indebtedness. Additionally, it reveals that Purba Bardhaman District, known for its agricultural activities, faces challenges due to climate-dependent agriculture and the influence of intermediaries on farmers' financial struggles. Farmers often resort to non-institutional sources for loans, contributing to their financial complications, and sometimes loans intended for farming purposes are diverted to non-agricultural needs. Indebtedness, exacerbated by hidden charges and high-interest rates imposed by finance companies, significantly contributes to the distress of farmers, leading to alarming suicide rates in the farming community. This situation underscores the urgency for comprehensive governmental measures to address systemic issues affecting farmers and prevent the deepening crisis in the agricultural sector (Kumar, 2020).

A study done by Mukherjee (2009) found that the region's most severely affected by farmer suicides are Vidarbha in Maharashtra, Deccan and Hyderabad Karnataka in Karnataka (Northern Karnataka), Telangana and Rayalaseema in Andhra Pradesh, Wayanad, Idduki, and Kannur in Kerala, and Chhattisgarh, although fewer studies have focused on the latter. The prevailing climatic conditions, characterized by dryness and inadequate irrigation facilities, particularly in the mentioned regions except for Kerala, have exacerbated the challenges faced by farmers. Cash crops dominate the cropping patterns, with commercial crops such as cotton, oilseeds, sugarcane, and soybeans prominent in various regions. However, a shift toward monoculture, influenced by trends in commodity prices, has been observed, leading to increased vulnerability and indebtedness among small and marginal farmers. The major causes of farmer suicides, as highlighted by various studies, include indebtedness resulting from the mismatch between expectations and returns, climatic factors, low crop yields, neo-liberal policies, seed sector liberalization, and the shift toward cash crop cultivation. The lack of formal credit facilities, the impact of trade liberalization, and socio-cultural factors such as alcoholism and non-productive spending further contribute to the agrarian crisis, underscoring the need for comprehensive interventions to address these multifaceted challenges. The complex interplay of factors, such as low irrigation facilities, uncertain

rainfall, crop failure, and the absence of non-agricultural opportunities, collectively drives farmers toward the distressing phenomenon of suicide.

Bhise and Behere (2016) conducted psychological autopsy studies highlighting the multifactorial etiology, with mental illness playing a crucial role. The study sought to include 111 consecutive farmer suicide cases in Wardha District from April 1, 2007, to March 31, 2008. Out of these, 10 families were unreachable, and one household refused to participate. Two non-farmer suicide victims were excluded, resulting in data collection from 98 cases. Controls, matched for age, sex, and occupation, were selected in a 1:1 ratio from the same village, preferably the same lane. Controls were not blood relatives. Results showed that male farmers dominated suicide victims, with a ratio of 8.8:1 compared to the general population's ratio of 1.7:1. The prevalent methods of suicide involved pesticide poisoning, hanging, and self-immolation. Farmers, facing compounded stressors such as environmental changes and financial challenges, exhibit higher psychological morbidity. Indebtedness, a major factor in farmer suicides, is linked to economic difficulties, crop failure, and debt accumulation from various sources. Mental illness, detected in 60% of suicide victims, emphasizes the need for psychological interventions. While there are commonalities with suicide studies in high-income countries, the present study highlights distinct factors, such as higher economic difficulties among Indian farmers. Seeking help after a suicide attempt primarily involves primary health care centers and government hospitals, indicating a potential role for mental health professionals in prevention strategies. They recommend multipronged suicide prevention programs addressing socioeconomic and psychological aspects, early identification of at-risk farmers, and short- and long-term interventions, including method-specific measures and broader initiatives to uplift the farm economy.

Furthermore, another psychological autopsy research conducted by Hashim & Kumar (2017) in rural India found that economic concerns, psychiatric disorders, and stressful life events were major causes of farmer suicides. While European studies confirmed handgun use among farmers, Asian studies, especially those from India, revealed varying suicide methods, with pesticide poisoning being the most common. Despite media coverage of farmer suicides, research on suicide attempts among farmers is limited. This study

in South India seeks to close this gap by investigating variables such as gender differences, modalities of action, and direct precipitant causes of suicide ideation among farmers. The study, which ran from January 2013 to December 2015, looked at 426 cases of farmer suicide attempts in Karnataka. The results showed a male majority (83.3%), with a significant male-to-female ratio of 4:1. The majority were married, between the ages of 21 and 40, and from low-income families. There were significant correlations between gender and married status, as well as gender and socioeconomic status. Female farmers reported more past suicidal attempts, and men farmers were more likely to abuse alcohol. Pesticide poisoning emerged as the most common method, with gender disparities in suicide modes. Relationship troubles and marital conflicts were the predominant immediate precipitants, refuting the widely held belief that financial concerns are the leading cause of farmer suicides. While this study gives information on the characteristics of suicidal attempts among farmers in South India, it recognizes limitations such as the retrospective nature and the possibility of under-reporting of attempts. Nonetheless, the findings highlight the need for focused interventions that address the unique issues that farmers experience, rather than the widely held notion that financial concerns are the only cause of suicide in this demographic.

A comprehensive study by Kumar and Raghavendra (2019) previous data clearly indicates that while agriculture remains a predominant job sector in India, its contribution to the country's GDP has been steadily decreasing over the years. In 2004-05, it constituted 19.0 percent of the GDP, but by 2010-11, this share had declined to 14.6 percent. During this period, the growth rate in per farmer income was a mere 1.96 percent, the lowest from 1983-84 to 2011-12. The service sector has become a major contributor to GDP, while the industry sector maintains sustainable growth. Agricultural distress is evident in the rise of farmer suicides, with various factors contributing to these tragic events. Economic challenges, family problems, and issues related to farming practices play a role, especially affecting small and marginal farmers with less than 2 hectares of land. The decade-wise data reveals a significant increase in the population dependent on agriculture and allied activities, from 139.5 million in 1951 to 481.9 million in 2011. However, the percentage of the total population engaged in agriculture has reduced from 69.68 percent in 1951 to approximately

55 percent in 2011. Furthermore, Historically, the farmers' distress in British India has roots in uprisings, with significant movements such as the Sanyasi Rebellion, Orissa Zamindar's revolt, Mysore peasants' discontent, and more. After independence, the first five-year plan prioritized agriculture, leading to the Green Revolution in the third plan. The issue of farmer suicides is divided into two categories in the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report: 'Farmers/Cultivators' and 'Agricultural Labourers.' Major causes include bankruptcy or indebtedness, farming-related issues, family problems, illness, and drug abuse/alcoholic addiction. The NCRB data further highlights the impact of landholding status on farmer suicides. Small and marginal farmers, constituting 72.6% of total suicides, face higher vulnerability. The report suggests addressing issues like land division, implementing land reforms, and providing support to these farmers. Investment in agricultural research and development (R&D) emerges as a crucial factor for sustainable growth. The data indicates insufficient investment in Agri-R&D, with the need for increased funding and a reoriented approach. Implementing the Swaminathan committee's recommendations, including soil health management, water harvesting, credit and insurance reforms, technology dissemination, and marketing infrastructure development, is crucial for revitalizing the agricultural sector. In conclusion, addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by farmers in India requires a comprehensive strategy that encompasses economic, social, and policy dimensions. From securing the economic viability of small and marginal farmers to promoting agricultural research and development, a holistic approach is necessary for the sustainable growth of the agricultural sector and the well-being of farmers.

Thakur (2018) conducted an economic analysis of the farmer suicide crisis plaguing the country as the issue of farmer suicides in India is a significant concern, with glaring facts highlighting the severity of the problem. Seven states, including Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, account for 87.5% of total suicides in the farming sector. Both marginal and small farmers are affected, and even prosperous states like Punjab and Maharashtra witness distressing numbers. Reasons behind these suicides include the increase in input costs, rising prices of agricultural inputs, expensive farming equipment, and higher labor costs. Farmers are distressed due to loans, with a correlation between

unpaid loans and suicides. The shift towards cash crops, post-liberalization policies, and reduced public investment in agriculture have contributed to the crisis. The lack of market integration, limited awareness, water crisis, interstate water disputes, and climate change further intensify the challenges. Agrarian policies have not adequately addressed the issues, and the lack of proper irrigation, forecast information, and crop insurance aggravates the situation. The need for a concrete reorientation of policies to prevent farmer suicides is urgent. Immediate steps for the rehabilitation of affected families are also crucial. Addressing heavy indebtedness is identified as a prime cause, and the agricultural credit system must be strengthened to protect farmers.

According to Bhattacharyya et al. (2020), The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) is the main source of data on farmer suicides, although concerns about data quality and underreporting persist. They normalize farmer suicide rates across states and analyze macro-level data, revealing that certain states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh had higher rates in 2015. Decadal variations indicate a general decrease in farmer suicide rates since 2005. The paper also explores correlations with socio-economic variables, such as literacy rates, crop cultivation patterns, and per capita income. Micro-level studies reveal a complex interplay of factors contributing to farmer suicides, emphasizing the individualistic nature of this phenomenon. Policy suggestions include social and psychological support, diversification of income sources, and the establishment of Farmers' Counselling Centres in high-suicide-rate states.

The paper by Sadanandan (2014) explores the impact of liberal bank reforms and increased competition among banks on farm suicides in India, focusing on state-level variations. The author proposes several hypotheses, suggesting that in states with greater competition from foreign and private banks, there were fewer direct loans to farmers. This is attributed to the banks' pursuit of efficiency and profitability, leading to a credit crunch for farmers. The study also examines priority sector lending and argues that in states with more competitive banking, lending to agriculture as a priority sector was lower. The author links increased rural indebtedness to competition among banks, leading farmers to turn to private moneylenders for credit, thereby contributing to higher farm suicide rates. The paper adopts an

instrumental variables approach to analyze the relationship between competitive banks and reduced lending to farmers. The findings indicate that in states with competitive banking, fewer loans were extended to farmers, and credit was diverted away from agriculture to other sectors. The study suggests that structural attributes, particularly low levels of institutional lending to farmers, influenced farm suicide rates at the state level. The author discusses policy implications, recommending interventions such as the introduction of Credit Cards and irrigation to address the issue. Additionally, the paper highlights the broader implications of bank reforms in developing countries, emphasizing the need for careful consideration of the economic structure and potential consequences of financial liberalization.

As the issue of farmer suicides persists in India, various studies highlight the limitations of current solutions and propose diverse alternatives to tackle the root causes of this problem. Despite the implementation of social systems such as subsidies, loan waivers, and crop insurance, these policies have often failed due to poor execution and, in some instances, indirectly contributed to suicides. Flaws in the execution of loan waivers, sometimes driven by political motivations, pose a serious threat to the rural credit delivery system, as revealed by a report from the India Comptroller and Auditor General across twelve states. This raises doubts about the effectiveness of these initiatives in genuinely alleviating farmers' financial burdens. In response to the psychological distress faced by farmers, psychiatrists in India are actively exploring preventive strategies, emphasizing the need to reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues in farming communities. A study by Behere et al. (2021) indicates that a significant percentage of farmers would consider changing careers if provided with the opportunity and resources, underscoring the importance of tailored mental health awareness and support programs. Pesticide ingestion, identified as the leading cause of farmer suicides, can be mitigated by restricting access through locked storage boxes and providing psychoeducation on handling suicide ideation. This strategy aims to limit the availability of lethal tools, reducing impulsive self-harm. Addressing farmers' financial difficulties is crucial for suicide prevention, involving fair pricing for agricultural products, realistic farm loans, and improved crop loan policies. Initiatives like rainwater harvesting and resolving interstate water conflicts can help mitigate challenges arising from erratic

weather and irrigation. Secondary preventive measures include identifying high-risk individuals with psychiatric problems, involving individuals and gatekeepers in the referral process to higher-level psychiatric facilities. Tertiary measures involve rehabilitating suicide attempt survivors and supporting families of those who have committed suicide, combining monetary relief with psychiatric counseling. Despite existing challenges, various government programs aim to boost agriculture and improve farmers' socioeconomic conditions. However, their effectiveness depends on proper implementation and addressing concerns such as corruption and exclusion errors. The persistence of financial liabilities, diagnosable mental illness, and stressful life events necessitates a comprehensive effort involving lawmakers, mental health specialists, and farmers. Given the significance of India's agricultural sector to its economy, finding long-term solutions to farmers' predicaments is crucial for the country's well-being. A holistic approach, including continued research, effective policy implementation, and community engagement, is essential to address farmer suicides in India.

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### III. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The alarming issue of farmer suicides in India stems from a complex web of interconnected causes, each contributing to the dire circumstances faced by agricultural communities. Low irrigation facilities, dependence on rain-fed agriculture, and unpredictable rainfall patterns create an environment of uncertainty, leading to crop failures and low yields. The onslaught of pest attacks further exacerbates these challenges, leaving farmers grappling with financial instability.

The lack of institutional credit adds another layer to this crisis, as farmers struggle to secure financial support for their agricultural endeavors. The decline in subsidies, investments, and extension services amplifies the economic burden, pushing farmers into a precarious financial position. The impact of trade liberalization exposes them to intense competition with imports, resulting in a fall in output prices and an increase in the cost of cultivation. The pervasive influence of moneylenders and unscrupulous pesticide and fertilizer agents exploits farmers, pushing them deeper into debt. The use of inferior inputs and excessive fertilizers and pesticides not only diminishes the quality of crops but also contributes to the financial strain on farmers. Monoculture, driven by cash crop cultivation and hybrid varieties, often fails to provide the expected returns, intensifying the economic challenges faced by farmers. Beyond the economic factors, the absence of non-agricultural opportunities compounds the problem. Farmers, burdened by family and social commitments such as marriages, education expenses, and community obligations, find themselves entangled in a cycle of stress and financial strain. Alcohol addiction further exacerbates the mental health challenges faced by farmers, creating a toxic combination of economic hardship and personal struggles. The implications of this crisis are

profound, spanning physical, mental, and financial dimensions. Physically, the toll of agricultural challenges manifests in health issues, malnutrition, and overall deteriorating well-being. The mental health implications are equally severe, with stress, anxiety, and depression becoming pervasive among farming communities. Financially, the burden of debt and economic instability leaves families in dire straits, often culminating in the tragic decision to end one's life. Addressing this multifaceted problem requires a comprehensive approach that tackles the root causes and provides holistic support to farmers. Interventions could include improving irrigation facilities, promoting sustainable agricultural practices, and enhancing access to institutional credit. Government initiatives should focus on reinstating and increasing subsidies, investments, and extension services to bolster the agricultural sector. Trade policies need to be revisited to ensure that farmers are not unfairly competing with imports, and measures should be taken to stabilize output prices and control the rising cost of cultivation. Regulation and oversight in the financial sector can curb the exploitation by moneylenders, while promoting responsible practices among pesticide and fertilizer agents. Encouraging crop diversification, providing training on optimal agricultural practices, and promoting the use of quality inputs can enhance the overall productivity and resilience of farming communities. Non-agricultural employment opportunities need to be created, and awareness programs addressing the social and cultural aspects of farmer suicides should be implemented. Additionally, mental health support services should be integrated into rural healthcare systems to address the psychological impact of farming challenges. Community-based interventions, support networks, and counseling services can play a crucial role in alleviating the mental health burden on farmers.

### IV. CONCLUSION

The pervasive issue of farmer suicides in India stands as a complex challenge, rooted in economic, psychological, and systemic factors. It requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort from policymakers, mental health specialists, and the farming community. While government initiatives aim to provide financial support, their success hinges on effective implementation, addressing corruption, and rectifying exclusion errors.

The economic strain faced by farmers necessitates fair pricing, accessible farm loans, and improved crop

loan policies. Simultaneously, mental health awareness and support programs tailored to the unique challenges of agricultural life are imperative to reduce the stigma associated with seeking help. Stricter controls on pesticide access and psychoeducation can mitigate impulsive acts of self-harm. As India's agricultural sector remains vital to its economy, finding sustainable solutions is crucial for the well-being of the nation. Continued research, active policy implementation, and community engagement will play pivotal roles in developing and executing effective strategies to combat farmer suicides. By addressing the multifaceted aspects of this issue, we can work towards creating a more resilient and supportive environment for the farmers who form the backbone of India's agrarian landscape. Secondary preventive methods involve identifying high-risk individuals with psychiatric problems. Individuals and gatekeepers can play a crucial role in this process by referring people to higher-level psychiatric facilities for care and counseling. Tertiary measures include rehabilitating survivors of suicide attempts and providing assistance to families affected by suicide. While monetary relief offers temporary support, complementing it with psychiatric counseling helps family members develop effective coping mechanisms. Despite existing challenges, several government programs aim to boost agriculture and enhance farmers' socioeconomic conditions, including the PM Kisan Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Kisan Maan Dhan Yojana, and Kisan Credit Card Scheme. However, their effectiveness is contingent on proper implementation and addressing underlying concerns of corruption and exclusion errors. While these programs provide financial help and resources, the primary stressors of financial liabilities, diagnosable mental illness, and stressful life events persist.

In conclusion, the issue of farmer suicides in India demands a nuanced and comprehensive approach that considers economic, psychological, and systemic factors. Continued research, effective policy implementation, and community engagement are pivotal components of an overarching strategy to address this crisis. As India's agricultural sector remains integral to its economy, finding sustainable and long-term solutions is imperative for the well-being of the nation. By addressing the multifaceted dimensions of this problem, we can work towards creating a more resilient and supportive environment for the farmers who constitute the backbone of India's agrarian landscape.

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