

NATURAL FARMING: A REMEDY TO STOP FARMERS' SUICIDES

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ABSTRACT : Even though agriculture is the backbone of Indian economy, number of Farmers' suicides in Maharashtra in general and Marathwada and Vidharbha region in particular have been increasing at alarming level in the last few years. This paper is a part of Ph.D. work wherein researcher has studied the role of natural farming in economic development of Farmers' in Vidharbha. This paper specifically deals with the question of Farmers' suicides and role of natural farming to stop it. For this, 106 respondent farmers' (who adopted natural farming technique) in Nagpur district were surveyed and asked if natural farming is an option to stop farmers' suicides. 89 respondents opine positively and said that natural farming can be an option to stop farmers' suicides, 06 respondents don't believe that natural farming would be able to stop farmers' suicides and 11 respondents were not sure about it. Looking at the examples mentioned in the paper of farmers' adopting natural farming and the cost of production, it has been found that natural farming can be a better option to stop farmers' suicides.

Introduction : Agriculture is the backbone of Indian economy. Approximately 85% population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture. Overpopulated country like India has adopted labour intensive techniques for economic development and employment creation because of scarcity of capital and availability of labour. 7lakh villages in India are backbone of this country. They are the godowns of human resources. Agricultural sector, which feeds 100% population in the world is found to be shallow when it comes to India. Because of various reasons Indian farmer is found to have caught in the net of negativity and bankruptcy that lead to increase in suicide tendencies among them.

Farmers' suicides in Maharashtra : In India, 2,56,013 committed suicides during 1991 to 2010 while 50,481 farmers committed suicides in Maharashtra for the same period. Maharashtra is at first place in farmers suicide in India, while Vidarbha and Marathawada regions are at first place in Maharashtra. Following table shows the numbers of farmer suicide in Maharashtra and Vidarbha.

Table 1: Number of Farmers' suicides in Maharashtra

Year	Maharashtra	Vidharbha
2001	3516	52
2002	3695	104
2003	3826	148
2004	4147	447
2005	3936	445
2006	4453	1448
2007	4238	1246
2008	3802	1268

(Source: Prof. K.Nagraj, National Records Bureau, Weekly Sakal, Date 02/04/2011)

The table shows that in the year 2001, 52 farmers committed suicides in Vidharbha while this figure has doubled to 104 in the very next year. The number of suicides has seen to be continuously increasing over the years. In 2006 this has increased to 1448. In the year 2007 and 2008 this has slightly reduced to 1246 and 1268 respectively. Wardha, Yeotmal, Amravati , Washim, Akola, and Buldhana are considered as suicide prone district in Vidhabha. As per figures revealed by The Indian Express, 1600 farmers committed suicides in Maharashtra in the year 2009 and 1740 in the year 2010. This number has gone down to 1495 and 1467 in the year 2011 and 2012 respectively. The number has again gone down to 1298 in the year 2013 which has increased to 1949 in 2014. In 2015 (for 9 months) the number of suicides has increased to 2016.

Methodology, Analysis and Interpretation : An exploratory study has been conducted to know the importance of natural farming as a remedy to stop farmers' suicides. Can farmers' suicides be reduced by applying Natural farming that reduces total expenditure and loan of farmers? 106 respondents doing Natural Farming from Nagpur district were surveyed and interviewed. They were asked whether they think that Natural Farming is able to stop farmers' suicide and the responses are given below-

Table 2: Showing responses whether natural farming can stop Farmers' suicides

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	89	83.96
No	06	5.66
Can't say	11	10.38

Above table shows that out of 106 respondents 89 i.e. 83.96% think that use of organic farming will be able to stop farmers suicide 6 respondents opine that farmers suicide cannot be stopped by the use of Natural farming while 11 i.e. 10.38% respondents are not sure whether use of Natural farming will be able to stop Farmers' suicide. It is therefore concluded from survey that 83.96% respondents say that the use of natural farming will be able to stop Farmers' suicide as it reduces cost of production. Therefore every farmer should stop using inorganic farming and use Natural farming to stop suicides. One of the respondent farmer opined to visit the family of farmer who have committed suicide and tell them the importance of Natural farming, train them about the technique of Natural farming and guarantee them for purchase of their products by the Government authority. This can be a great help to the family.

While doing research on "contribution of natural farming on economic development of farmers in Vidhabha," data is collected through questionnaire and interviews of the farmers using organic farming techniques farmer respondents were asked questions regarding reasons and remedies of farmer suicides. Total 106 farmer were interviewed and main reasons that came up behind farmers suicides (which are applicable to whole of India) are as follow.

Reasons behind farmers' suicide :

1) Uncontrolled expenditure of inorganic farming:

In inorganic farming, farmers are required to spends on costly hybrid B.T. seeds, high prices of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, high irrigation is required till the season ends. Due all these reasons, cost of production increases which requires heavy loan. This burden of loan recovery follows the farmers. Inability to repay the loan leads to suicidal tendencies among the farmers. From 2001 to 2010, 4427 committed suicides in Vidharbha due to bankruptcy.

2) Natural calamities-

Agriculture in India is mostly dependent on monsoon. It makes agriculture very sensitive towards changes in weather. Farmers get affected by natural calamities like cold waves, hot waves, floods, heavy rains, droughts. Sometimes seeds do not grow up because of late and early rains and large gap in rains which leads to unnecessary increase in number of insects dangerous to crops. Already grown up crops are sometimes gets destroyed by this which triggers suicidal thoughts among the farmers. It is observed that, number of suicides are more in Vidarbha and Marathwada region where non-irrigated and drought prone agriculture is more.

3) Market system:

Market does not provide proper price to the farmer's products which are grown facing difficult situations with high cost of production. Farmers get exploited in the market that is controlled by brokers and big traders. They do not get proper price for their produces and they become depressed. There is no place in the market for the farmers who grow traditional crops with higher price. He returns to the village with whatever meager amount he gets after selling the crops. Thus farmer is not able to recover his cost of production. This happens every season continuously demotivating him to commit suicide.

4) Government policies:

Government policies are also equally responsible for farmers suicide which makes them lazy and lethargic Debacle of agriculture sector started since the 1991 policies of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization of the Govt which decreased investment in the agriculture sector. Less availability of agricultural finance from financial institutions also made it more vulnerable.

Remedies to farmers' suicide:

1) Implementation of Natural farming techniques:

Natural farming is eternal and long lasting. Eternal farming is one which does not exhaust natural resources and uses the natural cycle optimally. Natural farming technique works according to nature depending upon nature. Crops are grown by using different factors in nature such as, sunlight, shadow, cow urine, cow dung etc. Farmers are not required to purchase anything from outside and therefore, Padmashree, Mr. Subhash Palekar, an

agriculture expert, rightly call it 'Zero Budget Farming'. Production cost for farmers goes down by using traditional seeds with the farmers, natural crop nutrients, natural insecticides. Thus, there is no need for farmers to take loan for sowing. Farmers become self sufficient and self reliant by using this technique.

2) Fighting Natural Calamities :

Multi crops are taken in a single land area instead of single crop to fight natural calamities. Instead of natural calamities like, floods, hot/cold waves, hail storm, only one crop bears the loss, saving other crops in inter crop pattern, generating income for the farmer. Traditional seeds are more immune to diseases and are not easily get affected by insects. Therefore, it becomes easy for farmers using multi crop pattern to fight natural calamities.

3) Improving market system :

There is need for positive change in agricultural marketing system. It is needed to form direct relation between farmers and ultimate consumer instead of traders and intermediaries. The system needs to be more flexible and decentralized by reducing the monopoly of intermediaries. Farmers are able to decide the price of their products in direct marketing system without intermediaries which makes them more confident and powerful. Ready market for the natural farm products with less expenses has increased the income for farmers.

4) Experimental farming by using natural resources :

One middle age farmer in Ramtek Taluka of Nagpur district gave very important suggestion while discussing remedies to farmer's suicide. According to him in vidarbha, where there is lack of water for farming, it is advisable to take fruits like guava, custard apple, myrobalan, rose apple etc. or other crops which requires less water. Farmers are tempted to grow crops which other farmers are growing. They are not curious to experiment new crops. The response will be good even if the experiment on small farmland. For example, an enthusiast farmer Mr. Abhay Jain (49 years) from Khaparkheda, 25 kilometer away from Khandwa in Madhya Pradesh, has purchased 300 acres of infertile land on hilly area. To make it fertile he dig farm ponds to raise water level he then sowed sandal in 300 acres of land with myrobalan plants. Sandal trees got support from myrobalan plants. Sandal trees get nutrients from other plants and nutrients of myrobalan are required for sandal trees. He managed to recover protection expenses of sandal trees by selling myrobalan. As per Mr. Jain, the price of every sandal tree would be Rs.6 lakh after 15 years. 0.75 liters of sandal oil can be extracted from its roots which is very costly i.e. Rs.2 Lakh per liter. This is how a visionary farmer Mr. Jain with his hardwork and will power able to grow paradise in infertile land and economic profit from it is an example for other farmers (India Today weekly date 05.09.2012).

5) Need of supplementary business :

Some supplementary businesses like, goat farming, honey bee farming, poultry farming, fisheries, agricultural tourism, silkworm farming are very important for farmers with farming as main business. Mr. Bhadsawale of Raigarh district is earning well through agricultural tourism. Mr. Choudhary of Nagpur district has improved his financial condition by doing dairy business with agriculture. Mr. Anantrao Bhoyar of Katol taluka in Nagpur district is producing variety of tasty and nutritional products from different non traditional crops.

6) Quality of agri products :

Agriculture products get destroyed if they don't reach in time to customers. Processing is needed to keep its quality intact for long time. Maharashtra has larger share in the production of sugar, cotton and onion. Maharashtra is ahead in fruit production as well which includes grapes, oranges, banana, pomegranate, mango and cashewnut. Only 2% agricultural products one process and there is vast scope for it in Maharashtra. Apart from fulfilling food grain needs of the country, income of farmers can be increased by value addition through processing. Consumption of processed food is increasing very fast in urban areas. Farmers, therefore, need to be a part of processing industry to go along with changing time.

7) Educated youths should take on agriculture :

According to Gandhiji "Rural India and agriculture has become handicapped because of division of labour and mind". As predicted by him before 100 years, now it is found to be true that rural development is not possible without integration of labour force, intellect and financial backing. Agriculture will benefit financially viable, educationally sound and agricultural interest these three factors come together. The examples of some of the determined individuals are as follows.

After leaving job, Mr. Dilip Kulkarni and Ms. Sadhana Kulkarni purchased small land in konkan and by using less and less external resources and energy living happily. Mr. Mandar Deshpande, 31 year of Latur is mechanical engineer from Latur is interested in farming. Even though he doesn't have farming in his home, he took experience from Dhirendra Soniji of Gujarat for one and half years and then purchased six and half acres of agricultural land near Wardha and started doing natural farming. He also started food processing industry based on agriculture. Mr. Suresh Waghdhare, a Krishibhushan, from Malinagar, Solapur helped his family as agriculture labour and industrial labour while doing B.Com. He then reached to Chief Accountant after accepting job. While on job he purchased 20 acres of infertile land @ Rs.2,000/- per acre. He left the job and devoted fully to agriculture, purchase 11 Indian cows and started doing natural farming on experimental basis. Manufactured biogas and electricity from cow dung. Due to this, agricultural expenses reduced drastically. He

succeeded in getting crops such as vegetables, fruits, flowers, sugarcane. He started Nursery to supplement agriculture and earns a good income.

It is also found that the well educated youths in Nagpur district have turned to agriculture. Mrs. Aurangabadkar shifted her carrier to natural farming instead of resistance from others. She closed down her office of well going Chartered Accountant. Mr. Prashant Dhote an engineer of Narkhed taluka left highly paid job and turned to agriculture, Dr. Pradeep Tekade, Industrialist, Mrs. Sanyal, an Engineer, Mr. Hemant Mohrir, Mr. Ambrish Thaokar, B.Sc. (Agri.) Gold Medalist, Dr. Verma of Parseoni. These are few names that have left their reputed jobs/career and started doing career in agriculture. Agriculture will get new dimension, new experiments will be done and efforts will be made to make agriculture financial viable by admission of such qualified youths in agriculture.

Conclusion:

Instead of going into depression and being dependent only on government, farmers are required to perform new experiments and cultivate crops that requires less water, use less external resources and start adopting natural farming techniques. Farmers themselves should do small processing on agricultural outputs and should supply it directly to consumers without intermediaries. They should start business supplementary to agriculture by using various resources available in agriculture. This reduces the cost of production of farmers and increases their income. These can be the remedies to stop farmers' suicides.

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