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AGRARIAN DISTRESS AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SUICIDE VICTIMS IN INDIA : A CASE OF PUNJAB

Abstract:

Over the past two decades, declining agricultural growth and rising cultivation costs have diminished farmers' incomes across India. Moreover, large scale adoption of commercial farming has amplified farmers' credit needs, leading to widespread credit defaults. Consequently, small and marginal Indian farmers have been compelled to borrow largely from informal sources at exorbitant interest rates, thus plunging themselves into a relentless debt trap. The acute agrarian distress due to indebtedness and other socio-economic factors has led to an alarming spate of farmers' suicides in several states (Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Karnataka) since the mid-1990s, including the prosperous state of Punjab (a disturbing phenomenon for agriculturally developed and role model state). The present empirical study was conducted in the highly distressed districts namely Sangrur and Mansa, which come under Malwa Zone of Punjab. Primary data were obtained from families in these suicide prone districts through personal interviews with the help of a well-structured questionnaire for the year June 2013-May 2014. The present study focuses on identifying the reasons of farmers' suicides. This will be studied by documenting the socio-economic profile of farmers; studying the extent of indebtedness; and it will explore whether suicide was caused by forces of economic distress alone or were due to the interplay of the forces of economic distress and social factors.

Keywords:

Agrarian distress, Indebtedness, Farmers' Suicide