Farmer Suicides in Maharashtra, 2001–2018
Trends across Marathwada and Vidarbha

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Farmer suicides are an unfortunate result of the agrarian distress plaguing the rural economy of many states of the country. Marathwada and Vidarbha regions in Maharashtra have recorded very high numbers of farmer suicides, and an attempt to calculate the number of suicides and the suicide mortality rate is the first step towards gaining an in-depth understanding of the prevalence and seriousness of the issue. An analysis of the data reveals the relationship between farmer suicides and issues such as monsoon failure, water shortage, drought, absence of social security, robust crop procurement mechanisms and increasing debt burdens.

For over two and a half decades, suicides by the farming community in India have become a cause for concern (Figures 1, 2a and 2b). At the all-India level, states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra have become the hotspots of farmer suicides (Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8). This issue in India has triggered academic discourse, but very few public policy initiatives have been put forth to redress a problem of this magnitude. By now, it is clear that suicide by farmers is a complex phenomenon. It is easy to quantify the suicide deaths; however, it is difficult to decode the reasons in their entirety. It is estimated that during the period between 1990 and 2010, the years of life lost on account of farmer suicides increased by 12%. During the same period, India moved from the 20th to the eighth position in the global index of life lost due to suicides (Mishra 2014).

As per the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) estimate of 2010, India accounts for 35.6% of the global years of life lost on account of suicides (Mishra 2014). It is more than double of its global population share. In India, the data on suicides is collected and published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). Information compiled by police stations goes to the respective state crime records bureau (SCRB)/criminal investigation department (CID) and then to the NCRB, which compiles information at the national level. However, in India, what is reported by the NCRB is just half of the GBD estimate. Shrijit Mishra (2014) links such poor reporting to the Indian Penal Code, which holds suicide as a criminal act,2 or to the society which often does not report a suicide to avoid social stigma.

Further, it needs to be noted that suicides by cultivators and agricultural labourers cannot be termed as farmer suicides. This is because in India cultivators and agricultural labourers are two distinct groups of the rural population. In some countries,
suicides by cultivators are included in suicides by agricultural workers. In Europe and North America, which have small population groups, suicide rates are computed for “farm population” that includes farm owners and workers (Mishra 2014). However, in the Indian context, cultivators and agricultural labourers being two distinctly large population groups cannot be clubbed together. Besides an economic dimension, such classification also has a social dimension.

Another vital factor that complicates the estimation of farmer suicides in India is that in states like Maharashtra, a large number of them are categorised as ineligible suicides. The classification as eligible and ineligible farmer suicides has a significant connotation, especially when it comes to the ex-gratia compensation of `1 lakh granted by the state government to the family of a deceased farmer. For the administrative machinery, a farmer who dies by suicide but does not possess the 7/12 abstract in their name (a revenue department land record stating presumptive title of land ownership), is not deemed eligible to be treated as a farmer. In Maharashtra, the proportion of such cases is one of the highest. Thus, farmer suicides at the state level and thereby at the all-India level are grossly underestimated.

Accordingly, this paper proceeds as follows. The following section articulates the methods of analysis and describes the sources of the data. The review of literature on farmers' suicides is discussed in the next section, while the regional profile of Marathwada and Vidarbha is given in the section...
following it. Moving further, an attempt is made to bring out the spatial and temporal analysis of the data pertaining to the various aspects of farmer suicides in the two regions of Marathwada and Vidarbha. The section after that focuses on the complexity of eligible and ineligible farmer suicides and the final section concludes the article.

Data, Sources and Methods

Village-level information on suicide is first registered at the nearest police station through a first information report (FIR). The information at the village level is then consolidated at the office of the divisional commissioner. The consolidated information is submitted to the SCRB, a separate branch of the state CID and further to the NCRB. Since 1995, the NCRB compiles the data on profession-wise and gender-wise suicides across states at the all-India level. Among agricultural professions, for those self-employed in cultivation and those who are owners or tenant cultivators but are not agricultural labourers, are termed as farmers. For computing the suicide mortality rate (SMR), this is normalised with an equivalent population category obtained by combining the main and the marginal category of workers in the decadal census.

Mainly, the district census abstracts are used to compute suicide deaths per one lakh cultivator population or the SMR from January 2001 to July 2018.2 The data for Aurangabad division are up to July 2018, for Amravati up to March 2018, and for Nagpur up to June 2018. The total of eligible and ineligible suicide cases comes to less than the total suicide cases because enquiry into the rest of the cases is pending. However, for the purpose of computing the SMR, I have taken into account the total farmer suicides for these farmers. During the 2017 rabi season, there was a bumper produce of chana, soybeans and tur (a type of pulse) in Marathwada. Naturally, the prices of these items hit rock bottom but the state procurement system was not in place.

By the time the officials of the state agricultural department arrived for panchanama (survey) for state compensation, in most of the cases, there were no standing crops as farmers themselves uprooted them before the state machinery arrived. Hence, many farmers were automatically excluded from the list of beneficiaries or had to offer bribes for the survey and recording the crop acreage. These cultivators are mainly small and marginal holders and face the unavailability of irrigation water with associated uncertainty in cash crops like cotton (Mishra 2006). Cotton is not the only cause of negative returns for these farmers. During the 2017 rabi season, there was a bumper produce of chana, soybeans and tur (a type of pulse) in Marathwada. Naturally, the prices of these items hit rock bottom but the state procurement system was not in place.

an average, the farmers receive a meagre share of 32.50% (ranging from 20%–45%) of the consumer's rupee paid for most commodities. Reduced margin realised by farmers from the market continues to be the cause of widespread indebtedness and farmer suicides in India (Narayanaamoorthy 2018). Even though crop failure leading to indebtedness happens to be the major cause for farmer suicides at the ground level (Shiva and Jafri 1998; Deshpande 2002), politico-economic issues, such as decline in rural and agricultural investments, market imperfections, infrastructure, and the absence of an effective mechanism to deal with the drastic fall in price of farm products, are factors that contribute to farmer suicides (Assadi 1998; Revathi 1998; Vasavi 1999; Mohankumar and Sarma 2006).

While many studies on Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra have attributed farmer suicides to cotton cultivation (Prasad 1999), others have attributed it to an increase in the cost of cultivation, mainly on account of integrated pest management (IPM) for the cotton crop and seed and fertiliser prices. This is mainly on account of an unprecedented requirement of IPM in the cultivation of the cotton crop and state-specific seed price difference (Vaidyanathan 2006). Invariably, cotton cultivators have resorted to cultivation of Bt varieties propagated for higher yield, but the crop performance of these varieties is crucially determined by the availability, adequacy and reliability of irrigation. In Gujarat, for instance, Bt cotton is cultivated under irrigated conditions with access to indigenously developed new varieties of seeds at a much lower price than the varieties developed and propagated by multinational companies (MNCs) in Maharashtra (Vaidyanathan 2006).

In the post-liberalisation period, there was a significant increase in the import of cotton. Further, the prices of cotton in the world market have been falling steadily while the increase in input prices has multiplied the cost of cultivation. Most of the cotton farming in Vidarbha and Marathwada falls under rain-fed conditions, and the seed prices are much higher than in Gujarat (Mishra 2006). In 2016, cotton farmers of both these regions had to face a severe pink bollworm attack that destroyed almost the entire crop of the season. More than 60 lakh acres of crop spread was abandoned due to the fake Bt seeds supplied by private seed companies in 2016 (Wadke 2017). As a result, the entire crop succumbed to bollworm attacks. Farmers uprooted the standing crops and burnt them.

Besides crop failures on account of bad weather and erratic monsoon, the rising cost of cultivation and drastic fall in prices during the glut are frequently experienced in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka (Mohanty and Shroff 2004). In 2016, the glut made prices slide much below the minimum support price (MSP) in Maharashtra. At the all-India level, on average, the farmers receive a meagre share of 32.50% (ranging from 20%–45%) of the consumer’s rupee paid for most commodities. Reduced margin realised by farmers from the market continues to be the cause of widespread indebtedness and farmer suicides in India (Narayanaamoorthy 2018). Even though crop failure leading to indebtedness happens to be the major cause for farmer suicides at the ground level (Shiva and Jafri 1998; Deshpande 2002), politico-economic issues, such as decline in rural and agricultural investments, market imperfections, infrastructure, and the absence of an effective mechanism to deal with the drastic fall in price of farm products, are factors that contribute to farmer suicides (Assadi 1998; Revathi 1998; Vasavi 1999; Mohankumar and Sarma 2006).

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In a way, it is true that suicides by farmers are not entirely the outcome of poverty. They are largely an outcome of disillusionment, mainly due to the large gap between the expected and the actual returns from cultivation. Reasons for such a gap range from natural calamities to human-made factors like corruption in market mechanisms and politico-economic negligence. This makes suicides a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Almost every study in the past has revealed that about half of the farmers in the respective study region were in debt (Suri 2006; Talule 2011), while 96.72% of the suicide-affected farmer households had strictly used their credit money for productive purposes (Talule 2013).

**Profile of Marathwada and Vidarbha**

Marathwada and Vidarbha together account for 52.31% (20.99% and 31.32% respectively) of the total state area with a combined share in the state population of 41.76% (18.74% and 23.02% respectively) (Kelkar 2013). Besides 27.84% (2.42% and 25.42% respectively) of the state tribal population, 33.87% of the state’s total drought-stricken population lives in these two regions (7.21% and 26.66% respectively) (Kelkar 2013). In comparison to the rest of Maharashtra, all these socio-economic characteristics of Marathwada and Vidarbha point out to a huge development backlog. Therefore, both regions need special attention for their development. All sectors taken together, the development deficit for Marathwada stands at 20.16%, while for Vidarbha, it is 48.30% (Kelkar 2013). While Maharashtra and Vidarbha together contribute 26.60% of the state gross domestic product (sgdp) of Maharashtra (10.10% and 16.50% respectively), the sgdp per capita of these regions is ₹40,824 and ₹52,282 respectively (Kelkar 2013).

Nearly 73.83% and 75.51% of the population of the respective regions depend on agriculture for employment and livelihood (Kelkar 2013). However, the irrigation cover of both regions is one of the lowest at 14.08% (Marathwada) and 12.82% (Vidarbha). This is far below the state average of 18%, which is already less than half of the national average of 38%. While the development gap for Marathwada is 37.27%, the same for Vidarbha is 38.83% compared to the rest of Maharashtra (Mitra and Shroff 2007; Kelkar 2013). Farmers of both these regions predominantly rely on cash crops like Bt cotton, soybeans and tur, and most of the gross cropped area under these crops is rain-fed. Public extension and institutional mechanisms in these regions have minimal presence or have failed to alert farmers about the high risk involved in cultivating Bt cotton under rain-fed conditions (Vaidyanathan 2006).

By any development parameter and the right to livelihood, suicide by 3.22 lakh Indian farmers in the last two decades is not a small number. A paradigm of development without a human face and the failure to recognise the right to livelihood has led to the overall agrarian crisis in the country that has precipitated suicides by farmers.

In fact, the NCRB started recording profession-wise suicide data from 1995. But the paucity of information prior to this limits the discourse and understanding of the problem. Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh topped the suicide lists at the all-India level (Figure 7). On an average, 63.13% of all suicides by farmers in India are reported from these five states (Figures 7 and 8). Other states affected by farmer distress are Chhattisgarh and Odisha. Chhattisgarh is a bordering state of Vidarbha. A common thread across all these states is that they are known for their development efforts and there has been a steady decline in agricultural outlays (Deshpande 2002).

**Extent of the Problem in Maharashtra**

The agricultural economy of Maharashtra is a typical combination of vast drought-prone areas. About 20,000 villages across 20 districts of the state are always drought-stricken. Most of these belong to Marathwada and Vidarbha region. Almost after every five years, there is a recurrence of drought in Maharashtra. Vast tracts of cultivable lands are unirrigated. This makes the cultivation vulnerable to drought. One need not repeat the reality of state irrigation cover, which is less than half of the national average. Rain-fed agriculture of Marathwada and Vidarbha coexists with regions, such as western Maharashtra, which have assured irrigation. Farmers of the state continue to face frequent distress conditions owing to the droughts and erratic monsoon.

Very often, crops like Bt cotton are lost due to fake seeds and inadequate irrigation facilities. One learns about fake seeds only when the crop is fully grown but does not yield or blossoms. By then, the entire cost is already incurred and the crop does not yield as expected or it is fully lost. Bt cotton was supposed to be bollworm-resistant, but now, it has become susceptible to it. The same was evident in 2016. This faltered the farmers’ expectations about yield and income flow and leaves them under financial stress (Deshpande 2002). Maharashtra accounts for about 80% of the area under cultivation of cotton (Mishra 2014). In 2016, thousands of fake Bt seed bags were sold in the market. The crop proved to be susceptible to bollworms. Almost every cotton ball was spoilt by bollworms. There were complaints from districts of Beed and Jalna in Marathwada and from western Vidarbha districts known for cotton cultivation. The state banned Mahyco seed company from selling its 12 varieties of Bt, but by then, due to the procurement of fake seeds from the market, farmers had lost their crops and incurred losses.

In 2017, when there was a bumper crop of chana in Marathwada, similar to the one for tur and soybeans in 2016, and the market prices for these crops nosedived, the procurement mechanism was not in place. By the time it was put in place, most of the produce was already sold to the traders at a price below the MSP. Owing to the absence of a handling mechanism at agricultural produce marketing committees (APMCs) like in Usmanabad in Marathwada, the farmers had to wait for days and weeks for their turn. This was the case of all other APMCs across Marathwada in 2017. Owing to such waiting time, farmers had to face corruption by crop traders and handlers. Crops like Bt cotton yield more under irrigated conditions, but its penetration in Maharashtra is mere 18%, which is half the...
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potential and the attainment of irrigation is one of the widest.

Suicides (%), 2001–15

Figure 9: Annual Share and Trends of Maharashtra in All India Farmer
Suicides (%), 2001–15

Figure 10: Division-wise Total Farmer Suicides from Vidarbha and
Marathwada Region of Maharashtra, 2001–18

Figure 11: Division-wise Annual Proportion of Farmer Suicides in
Marathwada Region of Maharashtra — 2001–18

Figure 12: Division-wise Annual Proportion of Farmer Suicides in the
Annual Total Farmer Suicides of Three Divisions (%), 2001–15

Figure 13: Division-wise Proportion of Farmer Suicides to Total Farmer
Suicides of Three Divisions 2001–15

Figure 14: Division-wise Annual Trends of Farmer Suicides in Marathwada
and Vidarbha Regions (%), 2001–18

Figure 15: Division-wise Annual Trends of Farmer Suicides in Marathwada
and Vidarbha Regions (%) 2001–18

national average. Most of the irrigation water is used by the predac-
tory sugar cane-farming community from western Maharashtra.

Despite the huge potential of Vidarbha, the gap between the
potential and the attainment of irrigation is one of the widest.
In short, unlike in Gujarat, the Bt cultivation in both cotton-
predominant regions of the state cannot be profitable. The hu-
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Source: Divisional commissionerate records.

1: For Amravati, the figures are up to July 2018, for Aurangabad up to March 2018, and for
Nagpur up to June 2018.
2: The total of illegible and ineligible suicide cases comes to less than the total suicide cases
because the enquiry of rest of the cases is pending.

Source: Figures 1 and 3.

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Source: Figures 11.

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Suicide Trends in Marathwada and Vidarbha

Between 2001 and 2018, a total of 6,154 farmers from
Marathwada died by suicide, while the number for Vidarbha is
17,547. The total of farm suicides from Amravati division for
the same period is 13,640 and for Nagpur division from east-
ern Vidarbha, it is 3,907 (Figures 10 and 11). This shows that
23,701 farmers from Marathwada and Vidarbha died by sui-
cide (Figures 12, 13, 14 and 15). Besides this, the possibility of
some suicide cases going unreported cannot be ruled out. Ag-
griculturally, both these regions are water-starved. Therefore,
often when the monsoon fails and there is drought, the death
toll on account of suicide increases.
During the drought of 2014, many rural families from Marathwada and Vidarbha migrated to Pune and Mumbai mainly for water and temporary employment. Back in the villages, they had sold almost all their cattle as there was no fodder and water for them. It was a prolonged period of crisis in the state agriculture. Moreover, the pink bollworm attack on cotton that destroyed huge tracts of crops across both regions. Almost every plant on the field was spoilt by bollworms. The erratic monsoon of 2014 and fake Bt seeds, followed by the glut and price decline in 2016 generated an unprecedented agrarian crisis across vast tracts of the state, including Marathwada and Vidarbha. In 2018, the fear of drought returned.

The availability of non-farm employment in both regions is a distant dream. Another part of the country with which the agrarian situation of these two regions is comparable is Bundelkhand in central India, where every drop of water is a luxury. The farm crisis of 2014–16 had two dimensions. One, the absence of drought mitigation mechanisms, and two, market failure, lack of timely state intervention, and the absence of an effective procurement system. The result was that the farmers had to sell at prices 10%–15% below the MSP. Agricultural development and rural livelihood are inextricably interlinked. In the absence of agricultural development, its negative impact on rural livelihood is a certainty.

**District-specific Suicide Trends**

According to the data collected, from 2001 to 2018, the districts of Marathwada that recorded the highest incidents of farmer suicides are Beed (1,681), Nanded (1,132), Osmanabad (824), Parbhani (670), Aurangabad (630), and Jalna (459). Based on the incidence of farmer suicides, there is a clear-cut distinction between western and eastern Vidarbha. Since the beginning of this problem, western Vidarbha districts have remained most vulnerable. During 2001–18, a total of 4,056 farmers from Yavatmal district alone ended their life through suicide. The districts of Vidarbha that recorded highest incidents of farmer suicides are Amravati (3,444), Buldhana (2,528), Akola (2,160), and Washim (1,452) (Figures 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20).

By now, it is a well-established fact that the predominance of cotton cultivation under unirrigated conditions has pushed these farmers into a low yield and debt trap. Wardha district of eastern Vidarbha recorded the highest number of 1,606 farmer suicides, and Nagpur district recorded 722 farmer suicides. Obviously, the districts of western Vidarbha also lead the figures of ineligible farmer suicides. The case of Yavatmal district is in striking contrast with other districts of Vidarbha and Marathwada, which are also known for their cotton cultivation, where the suicide rates are not as high as in Yavatmal, but the numbers are not small either. Suicides in all these districts across Marathwada and Vidarbha have been taking place mainly due to the rural and agricultural credit problems (Parchure and Talule 2012). Like the other suicide-affected states in the country, the agriculture of both these regions has been passing through a difficult stage. Crop yields for major commercial crops like cotton, soybeans, tur and sorghum cultivated in a district like Yavatmal have stagnated at 0.2, 0.56, 0.41, and 2.07 quintals per acre respectively (Parchure and Talule 2012).

Interestingly, the source of credit mix for Yavatmal district comprised of moneylenders and traders, followed by the institutional sources, and the average rate of interest charged by private sources ranged between 36% and 126% (Parchure and...
Talule 2012). This was paid mainly by the suicide-affected farm households. There are several reasons for the agrarian distress and the highest number of farmer suicides in Yavatmal district. The irrigation cover of the district is 5.12% in which 35.18% is contributed by state public investment, while the share of farm household level private investment irrigation is 64.82% (Parchure and Talule 2012). The case of Marathwada region of Maharashtra is also not different from Vidarbha (Figures 15 and 16). Districts of Beed, Nanded and Usmanabad from Marathwada are the most affected by farmer suicides. Most of the small and marginal farmers of the district migrate seasonally for sugar cane harvesting in western Maharashtra and the neighbouring state of Karnataka. The political economy of water in the state virtually starves Marathwada of drinking and irrigation water. Parts of this region come under the downstream riverine of Pravara, Godavari and Bhima rivers, of which most of the water is dam-stored in the upper riverine of western Maharashtra, and the release of water to Marathwada is opposed by the predatory sugar cane farming lobby of the upper riverine regions.

Barring a few exceptions, most of the districts both from Marathwada and Vidarbha face acute water shortage. Beed, Nanded and Usmanabad in Marathwada and Amravati, Akola, Yavatmal, Buldhana and Washim from western Vidarbha and Wardha from eastern Vidarbha are the most affected. Comparatively, the number of suicide cases is also more from these districts (Figures 21 and 22). Land, weather, irrigation and monsoon conditions of Beed are like Bundelkhand in central India. Rural connectivity is one of the weakest. In the cropping pattern of these districts, the glut in 2016. State farmers had by then experienced an unprecedented absence of meaningful and effective state intervention and procurement mechanism. Cotton has predominance in the cropping pattern of Beed, Nanded and Usmanabad in Marathwada and the western Vidarbha districts where irrigation is the weakest. In the cropping pattern of these districts, the Bt varieties have strong demonstration effect.

In Gujarat, where the Bt varieties are indigenously developed, the seeds are available at lower rates than in Maharashtra and are also cultivated under irrigated conditions, the yield is obviously higher which benefits the farmers there. Contrary to this, the farmers in Maharashtra are dependent on Bt seed
varieties developed and publicised by the MNCs, which cost more than the indigenously developed varieties. Most often, cotton crops are lost on account of fake seeds, bollworms and water shortage. This makes the crisis more complex and the cultivation uneconomic.

Eligible versus Ineligible Suicides

In India, the title to land is presumptive and not conclusive. The 7/12 land abstract is a crucial revenue department document maintained by the village-level revenue officer called patwari. The 7/12 abstract carries the landowner’s name. For the administrative machinery, this document is indicative of the ownership of land by a person. Only a person who has an authentic 7/12 abstract of land in their name and, hence, is a legal landowner is treated as a farmer. For police and revenue administration, those who do not enjoy such legal and presumptive ownership titles of land are not treated as farmers. Thus, if a farmer who dies by suicide does not possess the 7/12 abstract in their name, then their death is not recorded as a farmer suicide. There are cultivators who cultivate on leased land or the land could be in the name of some elderly person in the family like the father or grandfather. This is a common practice in rural households. Having land in the name of a female is almost impossible, but the district suicide lists are not exclusive of females.

This leads to the complexity of categorising farmer suicides in Maharashtra as eligible and ineligible. It is purely an administrative aspect. The legal title of the profession of a deceased person needs to be established as to whether they were a farmer or not. For this purpose, the only document used is the 7/12 abstract. Therefore, only the family of a deceased person who had a valid 7/12 abstract in their name is deemed eligible for the ex-gratia compensation of ₹1 lakh. Due to the precondition of 7/12 abstract, the proportion of ineligible farmer suicides in Maharashtra is considerably high. In other states, the suicide compensation amount is also higher than in Maharashtra. For example, in Punjab, the ex-gratia compensation is ₹3 lakh (Gill 2017).

The SMR of ineligible farmer suicides in Amravati division remains one of the highest (687.53), followed by Nagpur (203.28) and Aurangabad division (74.84) (Figures 23 and 24). For the period between January 2001 and July 2018, on an average, 32.76%, 54.77% and 47.99% of the total suicides from Aurangabad, Amravati and Nagpur divisions respectively were declared as ineligible farmer suicides (Figures 25 and 26). Families of such farmers were deemed ineligible for the state compensation of ₹1 lakh. Already, in India, many suicides remain unreported and in the case of Maharashtra, the figure appears lower because of applying such administrative logic of categorising the suicides as farmer and non-farmer. It is mostly to show low number of farmer suicides in the state and to save the amount of ex-gratia payments given to the family of a deceased farmer.

Terming a substantially large number of suicides as ineligible farmer suicides brings down the total number of farmer suicides in the state. This has two implications; one, that since the suicide is considered an ineligible farmer suicide, the family of the deceased farmer is stripped of the benefit of the ex-gratia amount of ₹1 lakh; and two, suicide being an illegal act, post suicide, the family has to face a police investigation. In several cases, even if the suicide is recorded as a genuine farmer suicide, the family has to pay some amount to process the case for the ex-gratia payment from the revenue department.

The SMR for ineligible farmer suicides for the district of Osmanabad in Marathwada region is the highest (132.60),
the young generation in the state has resorted to suicides in the recent past, during their agitation to get their demands fulfilled by the government. The Durkheimian analysis of suicide is valid for such cases (Durkheim 2013). In the year immediately after the debt waiver scheme of 2008, the suicide rate in the state had declined, only to increase in 2010, and rose to one of the highest levels in 2012. In 2012, the district of Yavatmal in western Vidarbha was at the top of the list at the all-India level. Again, as a result of the drought in 2014, the suicide rates for farmers in Marathwada and Vidarbha increased and continued during the glut of tur, soybeans and chana in 2016.

A total of 2.35 lakh farmers have ended their lives through suicide. Fluctuating trends underline the negative relationship between the tragedy and monsoon. Western Vidarbha districts of Amravati division remained one of the most affected by farmer suicides, which are followed by Beed, Nanded and Usmanabad districts of Marathwada. From January 2001 to July 2018, a total of 23,701 farmers from 18 districts of Vidarbha and Marathwada died by suicide. About 83.74% of the state's total farmer suicides were in the two regions of Vidarbha and Marathwada. Division-wise SMR for ineligible farm suicides was 126.15 (Aurangabad, Amravati and Nagpur) in Marathwada division, and 111.45 and 100.29 in Amravati and western Vidarbha division respectively (Figures 23 and 24).

A significant factor that adds to the complexity of suicides by farmers in Maharashtra is the categorisation of suicides as eligible and ineligible suicides, which deprives many families of the state compensation. To declare a legitimate cultivator who did not have the 7/12 abstract of the land record document in their name as a non-farmer and, hence, ineligible for state compensation, is brutal injustice. Suicide-prone areas of Maharashtra have relatively low irrigation support, and unlike Gujarat, the Bt cotton is cultivated under rain-fed conditions. Similarly, the Bt seeds in these areas are sold by MNCs for which the prices are higher than the indigenously developed varieties in the neighbouring state of Gujarat. The 33.87% of the state's drought-stricken population that lives in Vidarbha and Marathwada needs special attention.

Price distortions in the last 20 years on account of high subsidies by the United States and low import tariffs in India and the failure of procurement mechanisms in Maharashtra have made the conditions of the farmers even more pitiable (Mishra 2014). Poor state agricultural extension services and the predominance of non-institutional credit mechanisms in rural financial markets are evident of state withdrawal from the rural and agricultural scenario. To add to this, 2004, 2010, 2013 and 2018 were rain-deficient years. This was followed by the cotton bollworm attack and fake Bt seeds in 2015 and the market glut of tur, soybeans and chana in 2016, which nosedived the prices. Besides this, the burden of obligatory social and family expenditure continues. This requires a multipronged strategy to address such a larger agrarian crisis.

The state cannot withdraw from the rural and agricultural scenario. We have many examples of industrial credit rollover and the largest ever non-performing assets on account of industrial lending while no legal action is initiated. Adequate

Concluding Remarks

The concentration of suicides by farmers in certain parts of Maharashtra is a complex issue. Not only the farmers, but now the young generation in the state has resorted to suicides in the state compensation. To declare a legitimate cultivator who did not have the 7/12 abstract of the land record document in their name as a non-farmer and, hence, ineligible for state compensation, is brutal injustice. Suicide-prone areas of Maharashtra have relatively low irrigation support, and unlike Gujarat, the Bt cotton is cultivated under rain-fed conditions. Similarly, the Bt seeds in these areas are sold by MNCs for which the prices are higher than the indigenously developed varieties in the neighbouring state of Gujarat. The 33.87% of the state's drought-stricken population that lives in Vidarbha and Marathwada needs special attention.

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The state cannot withdraw from the rural and agricultural scenario. We have many examples of industrial credit rollover and the largest ever non-performing assets on account of industrial lending while no legal action is initiated. Adequate
attention on yield, price, credit, as well as weather, health, life, crop and cattle insurance, besides improving water availability and rural electrification, will facilitate diversification. Sale at a price below the MSP is not a new phenomenon. Therefore, timely intervention of a procurement mechanism during the glut would be a face-saving attempt on the part of the government. Public health centres with adequate staff and medicines treating facilities need to be given immediate attention. This is a must for the treatment of poisoning cases. Even the rural family set-up now has become nuclearised. Therefore, the socio-psychological support by non-governmental organisations would be a step forward in arresting the suicide death toll among farmers.

Agrarian distress in Marathwada and Vidarbha regions of Maharashtra in the last 18 years (January 2001 to July 2018) has taken a toll on thousands of farming lives. Thus, the problem needs to be tackled by helping agriculturists in suicide-prone areas in a way that would build productive and marketing capabilities. A mechanism to ensure greater share for the farmer in every rupee paid by the end consumer would be a step in helping not only the farmers in trouble, but it would also be a step forward in achieving the dream of doubling farmer incomes.

NOTES

1 Suicide was decriminalised in 2017 (NDTV 2018) but the data for this article pertains to the time period before this. Moreover, the stigma around suicide is still prevalent.

2 SMRs across categories for districts, divisions and the state are computed as per the following formulae:

   - \( \text{SMR for Total Farmers Suicides} = \frac{\text{Number of Farm Suicides}}{\text{Cultivator Population}} \times 100,000 \)
   - \( \text{SMR for Eligible Farmers Suicides} = \frac{\text{Number of Eligible Farm Suicides}}{\text{Cultivator Population}} \times 100,000 \)
   - \( \text{SMR for Ineligible Farmers Suicides} = \frac{\text{Number of Ineligible Farm Suicides}}{\text{Cultivator Population}} \times 100,000 \)

REFERENCES


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