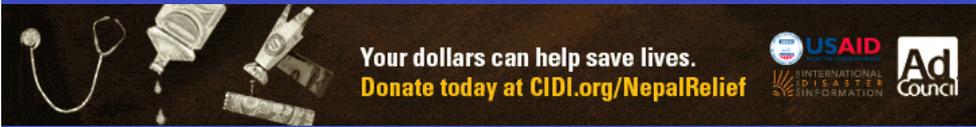


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India must act fast to stop farmer suicides

BY [GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN](#) on MARCH 30, 2016 in [ASIA TIMES NEWS & FEATURES](#). [INDIA](#)

Even as the western Indian state of Maharashtra is worried about security for an upcoming Rs 20,000 million (\$302 million) gigantic statute of the local 17th century warrior king Shivaji, thousands of drought-hit, debt-ridden and starving farmers are killing themselves in the parched regions of Vidarbha and Marathwada.

Instead of preventing such deaths by lowering the seed price, raising the prices of farm produce and waiving their agricultural loans, the Maharashtra administration is busy with work related to erecting the Shivaji statue in the Arabian Sea off Mumbai, India's financial capital.



Indian farmer is at the mercy of monsoon, market and moneylenders

Maharashtra is not the only state insensitive to the grinding deprivation of farmers.

The newly emerged southern Indian state of Telangana — another region plagued by farmers' suicides — has recently given huge hikes to its ministers and lawmakers. While the monthly salaries and perks of lawmakers have gone up from Rs 96,000 (\$1,451) to Rs 250,000 (\$3,780) each, ministers will be earning Rs 400,000 (\$6,048) instead of the current package of Rs 250,000 (\$3,780). This will make them the country's highest paid lawmakers and ministers!

This fat hike comes during Telangana's most dismal times. Over 2,000 farmers have killed themselves in Telangana since May 2014 when the state came into existence, carved out of the larger Andhra Pradesh.

Telangana chief minister Chandrasekhara Rao tried to explain to the angry media the reason for the pay hike.

"Legislators have to attend a number of official meetings, take care of visitors and tour their constituencies...All these cost a lot of money," he said.

To many, this could have sounded as hollow as the words of the French queen who asked

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peasants to eat cake if they did not have bread.

In Maharashtra, probably the richest state in India, 124 farmers committed suicide between January 1, 2016 and February 15. In 2015, 1,000 farmers ended their wretched lives.

In Gujarat (a western Indian state and home of Prime Minister Narendra Modi), almost 300,000 peasants committed suicide between 1995 and 2011.

In the past decade, thousands of farmers in India — mostly in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat — have hung themselves or taken pesticide. Over the past few years, Maharashtra has topped the list of “suicide states”.

The suicide numbers have varied with the government often fudging the figures or under-reporting them, but one estimate says that at least 10 farmers end their lives every day in India.

The picture is so terrifying that the Bombay High Court recently heard a public interest litigation which urged the Maharashtra government to take emergency steps to stop this mass suicide.

“The figure is very alarming...in the last one-and-half months, 124 farmers have killed themselves. We would like to know from the government what steps are being taken to stop this,” said Justice Naresh Patil, who headed a division bench that examined the petition.

The reasons for the gloom on the farm are all there for everybody to see. Frequent droughts (irrigation is still non-scientific) — which lead to crop failure — the struggle to get fair prices for agricultural produce and the high cost of seeds are the main factors that have been pushing farmers into the darkest of pits.

Farmers borrow loans from moneylenders at punishing rates of interest. The peasants hope for a better yield in times to come, but this never happens, and they find themselves in a debt trap. Unable to pay the interest, let alone the principal, they borrow more and more till they find themselves cornered and at the mercy of money-lenders, who are no better than sharks. Shylock demanded only a pound of flesh. But the moneylenders of Maharashtra and elsewhere bay for blood.

Added to this is administrative apathy and corruption. Activist Kishore Tiwari, who is heading a mission to reduce farm distress, said: “The problem has got acute given that proper attention was not paid to it in the past 15 years. The government machinery, which was supposed to be looking into the matter, has been riddled with corruption.”

Finally, the Indian farmland distress can be linked to the World Bank’s policies in the mid-1990s that forced the country to open up its seed sector to global corporations like Cargill, Monsanto and Syngenta.

These conglomerates made sure that the Indian farmer bought seeds from them, and these seeds needed fertilizers and pesticides. The cost of farming shot up, and the poor farmer, who had till then used his own seeds — those saved on the farm — had to buy them from big companies. The seeds supplied were engineered in such a way that they came with “non-renewable traits.”

As writer Vandana Shiva said in one of her papers: “A free resource available on farms became a commodity which farmers were forced to buy every year. This increased poverty and led to indebtedness.”

The man ploughing the field was so distressed that at first he sold his kidney to notorious gangs — which included doctors and hospitals and which sold the organ to a desperate patient for an insane amount. When the farmer found that the price of his kidney could take him only this far, he had little choice but to tie a noose around his neck.

The picture has gotten so bleak that it will require tremendous will and hugely honest efforts on the part of governments to help the farmer escape the debt trap, nay death itself.

Gautaman Bhaskaran is an author, commentator and movie critic, who has worked with The Statesman in Kolkata and The Hindu in Chennai for 35 years. He now writes for the Hindustan Times, the Gulf Times and Seoul Times.

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 Strange that this has been ongoing for decades without a peep from Amnesty International, IMF, World Bank, BBC, AFP, etc.

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 Alex Wijaya · 2 days ago
and here I thought democracy is a cure for all social ills, apparently not

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 berger friedrich-wolfgang · 2 days ago
Now , As the "GENOCIDAL SEEDS" of the "Civilizational CONSEQUENCES" of Britain's Profitable COLONIAL EXPLOITATION of "Human & Economic RESOURCES" , Bubble Up and REVEAL the "TOTALITARITY of WILLFUL Operated DESTRUCTION" , "It's RULING ELITE" Still Leads a "Luxurious LIFESTYLE" , While the VICTIMS of their "Colonial ENTERPRISES" Starve to "DEATH" !!! Seems , their "DEITY" has a "TORT With HUMANITY" !!!

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 Tickertapeguy · 2 days ago
Every day 47 Indian farmers commit suicide. That is around 17 thousand, 155 farmers per year.

India has 37 million farmers. If this was an independent nation the suicide rate for 37 million is very high.

This does not take into issue death by any other means. With each suicide of a Farmer goes all the skills and life time talent. One cannot simply replace that farmer with anyone. In many cases the reasons for suicide destroy the entire family.

one example: An Indian farmer growing grapes, committed suicide because he had a debt of around 47 thousand US dollars that he could not pay and a sudden burst of rain affected his crop. His son found him while he was dying among the orchard. Even if his son is capable of taking over, he did not have the means to pay the loan. The family became destitute.

New laws in some Indian states will not compensate farmers who commit suicide fearing that this practice actually encourages farmers to take this ultimate route so that his family will have some money.

But that has not slowed down the suicide rate as a variety of issues ranging from loans that cannot be paid, failing crops, pests and crop diseases resistant to pesticides and herbicides to a plethora of other social issues.

The biggest problem is that 60% of India's population is engaged in the farming sector. Then the impact on India is much greater than in nations where the farming sector plays a small role in employment.

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 Ilmunc Makesuill → Tickertapeguy · 2 days ago
India has population of 1.2 billion, if 60% are in agriculture that means 700 million farmers. If you remove children and old people, around 50% population will be working age population so around 350 million people. So your number 37 million is off by factor of 10.

Secondly Indians are in general very suicide prone. Most of the suicide actually occur in Southern and eastern states, which are not part of discussion here.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 Tickertapeguy → Ilmunc Makesuill · a day ago
One more issue. You start your comment with a quote of India's population at 1.2 billion. The 2010 census of India's population is 1,210,193,422 (I copied and pasted that from the Wikipedia of India's population census).

India grows at 29 babies per minute, 41,760 per day, or 15, million 242 thousand 400 people per year. that would bring the Indian population in 2016 to 91 million 454 thousand 400 + 1, 210, 193, 422 = 1 billion, 301 million, 647 thousand, 822. That is why I keep quoting 1 billion 300 million. Please update your facts.

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 Tickertapeguy → Ilmunc Makesuill · 2 days ago
The number "37 million", the number of farmers who commit suicide per day, and the percent involved in Agriculture "60%" came from articles in the Deccan Herald

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and
The Hindustan Times
both are Indian website papers that are well known. Both had the same numbers and percentage. You may want to take this issue up with the editors of these magazines.

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berger friedrich-wolfgang → Ilmunc Makesuill · 2 days ago

Thanks for Putting Facts right !

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Ilmunc Makesuill · 2 days ago

At fear of sounding insensitive, I must still say it is good problem! This is not a new problem but as someone who actually spend money to learn the problem. Here are some of my findings, which were valid five years ago, but most are valid today.

1. It is problem afflicting rich areas of the country: Gujarat, Maharashtra and AP. The farmers in these areas are actually rich with per capita income of around Rs. 100,000 per annum which is equivalent to most of what poor people earn in urban areas.

2. They have converted agriculture to business. But unlike other businesses it is uncertain and like most of business agriculture business fails because of drought, price fluctuations, diseases, pesticides, etc. Now when the business fails people can declare bankruptcy and walk out but it is difficult to do it in agriculture. You don't want to give up land.

3. There are really very few successful businesses, most people just work for other. But in places like Maharashtra there is either feeling of pride or entrepreneurship or whatever, every wants to be in this business. So the fail rate is very high.

4. Unlike talk of money lender, it is actually banks that screwed people up. Farmers initially got easy credit, when they could not pay because one year crop failed, they went again and again to other banks to get loan and some of them ended up with moneylender. Since money

see more

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berger friedrich-wolfgang → Ilmunc Makesuill · 2 days ago

Isn't DESCRIBED PROBLEM a Direct Consequence of Superior English "MAGICAL / IDEOLOGICAL // KNOW HOW" "Thinking" ? It's Easy for "INTELLECTUALS (Western Style)" , to "Analyse the Problem" in it's Nuances , but an Impossibility for Traditional "Small Farmers" , to Say "Simsalabim - Problem Solved" !!! "It took Us Westerners Centuries to Develop Something" like a "Scientific METHODOLOGY" ! This Problem is No Economical One , but a Political !!! IN GENERAL - "NEPOTISM" , Or as Practiced in the "Western WORLD" -- "CRONY CAPITALISM" !

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