

Chapter 62

Farmer Suicides in India: A Case of Globalisation Compromising on Human Rights

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ABSTRACT

Indian farmers are facing a crisis of their extinction caused by their suicides. A suicide, every thirty minutes, reflects towards a deeply rooted structural and policy defect in the country. A defect so extreme that many call the same to be state genocide. The State has several obligations towards its farmers, both nationally and internationally. However, the pressures of globalization combined with the influence of bodies like the WTO and IMF has managed to defeat these obligations. This has resulted in a state where ideas like profit, free trade and removal of barriers are being forced upon 'sovereign' States, who have allocated their power to decide on economic issues to supranational bodies due to their inability to operate in isolation like a Westphalian State. The aim of this chapter is to explore and elaborate upon the adverse consequences of globalization on the lives of farmers in India due to enhanced competition and policies which have been influenced by MNCs such as Monsanto and capitalist, north dominated supranational bodies like the WTO and World Bank.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian farmers are facing a crisis, a crisis of their extinction caused by their suicides. The region of Vidharba in India is infamous for its suicide rate. In the two years preceding 2015, about three thousand farmers have committed suicide in the six districts of Vidharba itself (Purohit, 2015). Studies have found that over nine hundred, or nearly one in three farmers, had debts ranging between ten to fifteen thousand rupees. (Purohit, 2015). In the year 2009 itself, over seventeen thousand farmers had committed suicide (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2009). In other words, one farmer died every thirty minutes.

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Farmer Suicides in India

A suicide, every thirty minutes, reflects towards a deeply rooted structural and policy defect in the country. A defect so extreme, whether by way of active acts or omissions, that many call the same to be State genocide. The State has several obligations towards its farmers, both under the Constitution of India and under international conventions like ICCPR and ICSCR, which it is deplorably deflecting.

However, busy with crafting a pleasant picture of “shining” India, the media too, barring a few rural journalists like P. Sainath, has neglected its duty to report on the lives and livelihoods of the largest group of working people in India, the farmers. Agriculture has transformed into a negative economy which is reflected in the rapid increase in indebtedness faced by the farmers (Katakam, 2009). Policies of trade liberalization and corporate globalization are at the root of the farmer distress.

The pressures of globalization combined with the influence of bodies like the WTO and IMF has managed to defeat the human right obligations. The influence of these bodies on national economies so extreme that a Mexican farmer had to stab himself to death to hinder the world trade talks in Cancun in September 2003 (Watts, 2003). The farmer was protesting against the north’s efforts to open agricultural trade, whilst the global south wanted to deliberate on older issues that affected them the most, especially the impact of European and U.S. subsidies on their own agriculture and lack of access to those markets (Watts, 2003).

Globalization and liberalization has resulted in a state where ideas like profit, free trade and removal of barriers are being forced upon ‘sovereign’ States, who have allocated their power to decide on economic issues to supranational bodies due to the current trade scenario where a country cannot operate in isolation like a Westphalian State. The aim of this chapter is to explore and elaborate upon extensively the adverse consequences of liberalization and globalization on the lives of farmers in India due to enhanced competition and policies which have been influenced by MNCs such as Monsanto and capitalist, global north dominated supranational bodies like the WTO and World Bank.

II. BACKGROUND

Recently, a lot of reliable studies have reported the rate of farmer suicides in India. The rate of farmer suicides reported in the region of Vidarbha is alarming. The Indian Government compiled statistics for farmer suicides between 1995 and 2009 and according to the report, over two lakh forty five thousand farmers had committed suicide in that period of time (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2009). In the year 2009 itself, over seventeen thousand farmers had committed suicide (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2009). In other words, one farmer died every thirty minutes. The hypothesis of this chapter is that the problem of farmer suicides in India is a result of the policy of the Indian state which is influenced by global pressure. The globalization of agriculture has resulted in this situation of producers of our food dying of hunger. The problem of farmer suicides in India can be addressed by way of states asserting their sovereignty, the developing and under-developing countries asserting and negotiating their rights and not succumb to the pressures of the international bodies like WTO, IMF, World Bank and the MNCs.

III: INDEBTEDNESS: THE ROOT CAUSE OF FARMER SUICIDE

There is no dispute to the fact agricultural growth is required for overall economic development in a country like India where 2/3rd of the people are involved in the agricultural sector (Singh, 2015). Agri-

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