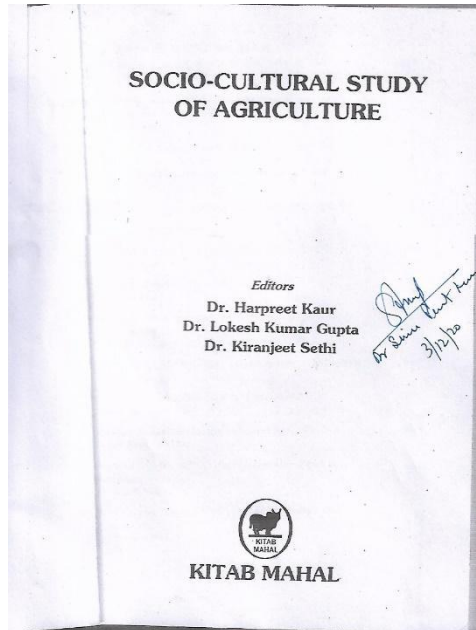


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AGRARIAN CRISIS IN INDIA: DISCOURSE VS. CHALLENGES

Dr. Simerpreet Kaur

Introduction

In the discourse on agriculture, stories of increasing farmer suicides (resulting from economic distress) are accepted as the primary proof of agrarian crisis in the country. Loan waivers and occasional one-time hike in MSPs (Minimum Support Price) for crops by governments are portrayed as the ultimate solution for dealing with this crisis.

Both these solutions have an enormous political as well as popular appeal even though they result in diminutive actual benefits. In reality, farm loan waivers do not prove beneficial to majority of farmers, as they do not cover informal loans, and have various exclusionary conditions even for formal sector lending. Increasing MSP does deliver immediate results, but without long-term developments its benefits could be short-lived. Hiking MSP also has inflationary effects on the economy, and could prove a burden on the government treasury.

The crisis engulfing Indian agriculture is systemic, and the solutions for this require an in-depth analysis which almost certainly lies beyond this discourse. Concrete and wide ranging structural reforms are needed to tackle this issue.

There is a wide income disproportion between agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. While the share of agriculture in GDP has declined sharply, there has not been a proportional decline in the dependence of the rural workforce on agriculture for employment. Another factor plaguing the agrarian economy is concentration of land within a small group and fragmentation of landholdings into smaller pieces.

This paper will try to understand the real challenges of agrarian sector beyond the popular discourse and the policy changes required to address the issues. It was formulated using secondary

sources of data, and interpreting the available dataset to understand the real problems that plague the agricultural sector in India, and then compare it with the popular narrative that the media has adopted.

Media narrative is very important in shaping and forming public opinion, which in turn influences governments' responses towards a problem. Many times in their bid to sensationalise a particular story or for increasing their TRP's, the media runs a story but ignores to provide a detailed background. Stories of farmers' suicides are run continuously, but the detailed analysis and reasons for them are mostly lacking. Visual images portrayed by media take the shape of a popular discourse in which farmers are troubled, mostly by economic burdens and swift response by the state in form of loan waivers or assurance on price of the crop are the logical things that should follow.

These images propagated extensively not just keep the real issues and challenges faced by agriculture sector at bay but also prove counterproductive towards finding real solutions to the problems which have now become innate in this sector.

Methodology and literature review

Many secondary sources of data have been used in this paper to substantiate the projected view. First and foremost the annual publication, "Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India", brought out by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India has been of great help to get the data on suicides in India. This report provided information on different features like distribution of suicidal deaths by sex and age, causes of suicide, and most importantly on number of suicides by profession.

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is a topmost development financial institution in India. In 2016-17 it introduced "NABARD All India Rural Financial Inclusion Survey" (NAFIS), which is a Survey on financial inclusion in the rural areas. It covers all dimensions and livelihood aspects of rural households.

The Centre for the Study of Developing Societies is an Indian research institute for the social sciences and humanities. It has published a report called, 'State of Indian Farmers: A Report', which

Sd/- Simerpreet Kaur
31/12/20