Chapter 4
Agrarian Problems with reference to Depressed Classes

4.1. Introduction:

Farmers are backbone of the Indian society. Indian economy development depends upon the farmers. Before the Independence of India the status of farmers was very precarious in the society due to the domination of the upper class jamindars. After the Independence of India our government has given preference for the development of agriculture. The government also took steps for the welfare of the depressed class farmers. When the “Bhoodana Movement (1951)” started at the same time the condition of the lower class in rural and urban areas was well below poverty line, and it was responded well for the progress of depressed class farmers.

Agriculture is an important sector considering the livelihood it generates for almost two-thirds of India’s population. It is also critical for ensuring food security and poverty alleviation and this sector needs to be seen as a single set of activities encompassing production, storage and distribution. As there is a seamless interconnectedness of the entire agriculture value chain, its impact on output, income and employment in rural economy is highly positive.¹

In depressed class farmers we may see different types of farmers. Those are small, marginal and big farmers but we can identify very few big farmers in India, in Karnataka and particularly in Gulbarga area. Small holdings agriculture is important for raising agriculture growth, food security and livelihoods in India. It may be noted that Indian agriculture is the home of small and marginal farmers (80%). Therefore, the future of sustainable agriculture growth and food security in India depends on the performance of small and marginal farmers. Agricultural Census data shows that there were about 121 million agricultural holdings in India in 2000-01. Around 99 million
were small and marginal farmers. Average size has declined from 2.3 ha. In 1970-71 to 1.37 ha. In 2000-01. Small and marginal farmers account for more than 80% of total farm area. But their share in operated area is around 44%. Thus, there are significant land inequalities in India. Following table revealed the share of agriculture in GDP and Employment in India.

Table No. 4.1. Share of Agriculture in GDP and Employment in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Share in GDP (%)</th>
<th>Share in Employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agriculture,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forestry &amp; Fishing</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-51</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>50.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-61</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-81</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As stated in Pairvi Occasional Papers Series, more than 650 millions of India’s 1.2 billion populations depend on small landholding for their sustenance. The proportion of marginal farms have increased from 36% (1960) to 47% (2004) and the small scale farms decreased from 16% to 11% during the same period. The average size landholding is 0.2 hectares and will be close to 0.11 ha by the turn of the century. The current 89 million landholdings will be fragmenting into 100 millions by the same time. Even though agriculture is contributing more for the increase in GDP and development of nation, still it is having problems. As such, the main contributors of the agriculture, small and marginal farmers are facing many problems.³

4.2. Agrarian Problems of Depressed Class Farmers:

Traditionally depressed class farmers are suffering from several disabilities or problems. These problems are discussed as below.
1. Social Problem:

These problems pertained to the concept of purity and pollution. The untouchables were given a very low position in the society. The high-caste Hindus maintained a social distance from them. They were denied many basic amenities of life which were accorded to the high-caste Hindus. They were dependent on the tradition of Hindus for items of food and drink.

2. Religious Problems:

These pertained to the denial of the right of entering temples which were exclusively served by the high-caste Brahmins. The untouchables were neither allowed to enter the temples nor served by the Brahmins. They had no right to worship the Gods and Goddesses in the temple.

3. Economic Problems:

They suffered from many economic problems. They had to face many economic hardships and they were not given proper reward for their service. Traditionally, untouchables were deprived of landed property of their own. They were not allowed to carry on any business. They were not permitted to engage themselves in the professions which were being carried out by the people of other castes.

The untouchables were not free to choose any occupation according to their own ability they had to clean the streets, remove dead cattle and to undertake heavy agricultural work. Mostly they were landless labourers. They worked in the fields of high-caste Hindus as labourers.

4. Public Disabilities:

Harijans had to face many public indignities because they were denied the right to use the services of public utilities like wells, public transport as well as educational institutions.
5. Educational Problems:

Traditionally the untouchables were deprived of getting education. They were not allowed to use public educational institutions. Even today most of the illiterates are untouchables. Describing the conditions of Harijans, K.M. Pannikar has remarked, their position, when the system functioned in its pristine glory, was in many ways worse than that of slavery. The slave at least was a chattel of the master and therefore, he stood in an individual relation to his owner. Considerations of economic self-interest and even human feeling modified the barbarism of personal slavery. But these mitigating factors did not apply to the system of untouchability, which was mostly perceived as a system of communal slave holding. Instead of an individual owning slave, each village held the untouchable families attached to it in a kind of slavery. No individual of the higher castes was supposed to have any personal relations with an untouchable. 4

The small farms must be at the centre of any strategy to tackle poverty and increase food security and productivity. They are vital for a number of reasons small farmers provide safety nets on subsistence living to the rural poor, small farmers tend to spend their income on local good and services boosting local economies and are more likely to employ people rather than adopt capital intensive technologies, small farms produce bulk of India’s food. There are innumerable evidences to show that small integrated farming systems can yield more per ha in the long run that large scale monoculture farms. They are ecologically sound managing large share of our water and vegetation cover, reducing soil erosion, use water more efficiently, protect biodiversity and preserve soil fertility.

There are commonly listed causes for the current distress of farmers in India: (1) globalization, resultant competition and exploitation by big capital and its minions; (2) peculiar banking practices in India and the non-availability
of loans from formal sources for farming operations; (3) social and cultural distress among farmers; (4) fragmented holdings of an unviable economic size; (5) absence of adequate appropriate research in new methods of farming and the exhaustion of current farm research to cope with contemporary circumstances; and (6) inability of the official machinery to provide appropriate services to the farmers and provide them with adequate succour. As such there is increase in farmers’ suicides in India as the records revealed as under.

Table No. 4.2. Number of Farmers’ Suicides and All-Suicides in India, 1997-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Suicides</th>
<th>As a percent of All Suicides</th>
<th>Number of Suicides</th>
<th>Suicide Rate (per 100000 Population)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>13622 (100)</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>95829 (100)</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>16015 (118)</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>104713 (109)</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>16082 (1118)</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>110587 (115)</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>16603 (122)</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>108593 (113)</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>16415 (121)</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>108506 (113)</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>17971 (132)</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>110417 (115)</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>17164 (126)</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>110851 (116)</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>18241 (134)</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>113697 (119)</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>17131 (126)</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>113914 (119)</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>17060 (125)</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>118112 (123)</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Suicides in the Period 1997-2006</td>
<td>166304</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>1095219</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Annual Compound Growth Rate (in Percent) between 1997-2006 | 2.5 | -- | 2.4 | -- |

**Note:** Figures in Brackets gives indices with 1997 as base.  
**Source:** Various Issues of Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (ADSI), National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

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Indebtedness is not new to Indian agriculture but suicides due to indebtedness are new phenomena. A combination of economic factors such as economic hardships of the pauperized peasant households, crop failures, unemployment and indebtedness has compelled them to commit suicides. This has happened due to decline of community sense/support mechanism as a result of the emergence of new production relations. The ongoing spate of suicides of farmers in India indicates that they are in great distress. The phenomena of suicides of poor farmers has been observed in various states of India especially where agriculture is highly commercialized. The suicides among farmers are regularly reported in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. This is harmful to the country’s agricultural prospects which further determine the food security of the country. The recently conducted situation assessment survey by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) in 2003 clearly brought out that the states where the incidences of suicides were high were the states where the proportion of indebted farmers’ households was also high, for instance, as in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Punjab, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. At the all India level, 48.6% of farmers households were reported to be indebted (NSSO 59th Round, 2005).

A popular peasant saying that “abundance of water destroys life; paucity of water destroys life” signifies agriculture’s link with monsoon. The vagaries of nature have been associated with ups and downs in cultivation. In addition, disease and pests can also affect crops. When the produce is good, a glut in the market can through low prices lead to poor returns from cultivation. Increasing cost can also adversely affect returns. Spurious inputs could also leave the farmer in a quandary. The increasing dependence on inputs from the market has also brought about greater demand for credit, which adds another important dimension to the difficulties. There are multiple risks in agriculture – income, yield, price, input, technology and credit among others. In recent years, one observes an increasing incidence of farmers’ suicides. Suicide being a
multifaceted and complex phenomenon, the risks are identified either in the neurobiological or socio-economic domain. The former are predisposing in nature and are internal to the individual whereas the latter are the precipitating ones and are external to the individual. A relatively higher suicide among a particular sub-group is indicative of a larger socio-economic malaise. The features of the current agrarian crisis are briefly elaborated as follows. First, there has been a decline in the trend growth rate of production as well as productivity for almost all crops from the mid-nineties. Further, the value of output from agriculture has been declining from late nineties. Second, there is an excessive dependence of a large section of the population on agriculture (in 2004-05 nearly 64 per cent of the rural persons were from households whose members major activity status was either self-employed in agriculture or agricultural labour). This also indicates that rural non-farm employment opportunities are limited. Third, with declining size-class of holding and an increasing preponderance of marginal holdings (63 per cent as per 2000-01 agricultural census) along with poor returns from cultivation indicates that income for farm households is very low. Fourth, the much talked about green revolution had a greater focus on rice and wheat under irrigated condition.

4.3. Welfare Schemes for Depressed Class Farmers:

The Government of India has started some of the programmes for the development of poor and as well as depressed class farmers of all the states.

1. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP):

An India life in its villages with this concept Government of India has Started Integrated Rural Development Programme in October 2nd 1980 to improve the socio-economic conditions of poor and as well as depressed class farmers at the village level. Integrated Rural development Programme focuses on this aspect.
As per this programmer 5 to 10 tribal and backward villages are adopted each year from different states. This programmer is carried out in association with Agricultural department, Zillah Parisaahads, District Rural Development Financial Institutions and NGO’s.

The major activities conducted:

1. **Basic Need Development Programmes**: This provides basic needs of the community like construction of community hall, drinking water facility, lift irrigation facility, shelter for small and marginal farmers, water shed development programmes, financial help to self-help groups etc.

2. **Public Health and Village Sanitation Programmes**: Medical camps, veterinary camps, vaccination camps etc. are organized. Appropriate sanitation facilities are created and use of Bio-gas is encouraged.

3. **Agricultural Need Development Programmes**: Aims at supporting the farmers to increase their productivity by providing them the latest development in agriculture. If necessary inputs like quality hybrid seeds, fertilizers, agricultural implements etc. are also provided. In addition to this fertilizer/crop demonstrations are conducted to show the effectiveness of scientific practices to the farmers.

4. **Subsidiary Occupation Development Programme**: Training and support is given to the farmers to develop subsidiary occupation to augment their income. Some of the areas where training has been imparted are weaving, Bee keeping, Tailoring, Dairy, Poultry, Goat keeping, etc.

5. **Farm Labor Training**: labors play a very important role in farm productivity and are trained to enhance their effectiveness.
6. **Social Forestry and Waste Land Development:** The denudation of forest is posing a serious ecological threat to the country. The forestation of waste land is achieved through plantation saplings.

7. **Youth and Women Development Programme:** This facilitates the formation of youth and mahilamandals at village level. Different competitions are organized in the village periodically. The youth are also imparted the training in sports/cottage industry etc.

8. **Social and Cultural activity:** Along with economic development, the company encourages the organization of social /cultural activities in the adopted villages.

During last 5 years of this programme government of India has adopted 27 villages in the state of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.\(^\text{13}\)

2. **Other Major Welfare Schemes:**

   India is projected to have a fiscal deficit of 5.5 percent in the year to March 2010, and government officials have said it needs to trim its welfare schemes to help cap this. Some of the major welfare schemes are that contributes to the fiscal deficit:

1. **Public Distribution System for Food:**

   India provides cheap food grains and pulses to nearly 180 million poor or low-income families, a scheme that will cost nearly $12.6 billion in the year to end-March 2011, about 1 percent lower than the previous year. It accounts for about 5 percent of the budget. The Public Distribution System is widely seen as inefficient, with food meant for the poor being sold off in the open market. India has considered providing food coupons instead, to plug leakages, but it is unlikely that this proposal will be implemented in the near future. The government is drafting a food security law that would provide the poor with even cheaper grain, estimated to cost an additional $2 billion each year. India shelved a plan to raise the prices of some of the subsidized grains it provides,
fearing political backlash at a time of high inflation.

2. Cheap Fertilizers

To help farmers and boost farm output, the government fixes the prices of some fertilizers and pays a subsidy to producers to compensate for selling below cost. The bill is pegged at $11.2 billion in the current fiscal year, an increase of 5.7 Percent on the previous year. It accounts for 4.5 percent of the budget. A coupon system has been suggested here too, but the chances of it being implemented are slim. The government eased controls on pricing of some fertilizers, but said it reserved the right to intervene to protect farmers’ interests. Farmers constitute a core voter base, so any change in the subsidy scheme would almost certainly be minimal.

3. State Set Fuel Prices:

India sets the prices of motor and cooking fuels, and partially compensates oil marketing firms for their losses. The fuel subsidy is seen at $697 million this year, below last year’s $3.4 billion, due to controversial hikes in fuel prices and the government passing on the fiscal burden to oil firms. A government-appointed panel has recommended dismantling of the administered price mechanism, but the government is unlikely to take this politically risky step.

4. Interest Waivers:

The government subsidies the interest costs on some farm and housing loans and for some pension plans, at a cost of about $1 billion.

5. Rural Employment:

Some of the programmes are running throw the Central government and State government those are helpful to avoid the unemployment in rural area. Those are namely, Swarna Jayanthi Gram Swarozgar Yojana (1999 April), Sampoorna Grameena Rojgar Yojana (2001 September), Prime Ministers Rozgar Yojana (1994-95), Pradhanamanthri Gramodaya Yojana (2000-01), National Food for Work Programme (14th November 2004), Rural Employment
Generation Programme (1995), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act-2005. The government guarantees each rural household 100 days of work in a year, a scheme that costs it just less than 1 percent of GDP, or 3.6 percent of the budget. The scheme is credited with returning it to power in 2009, but critics say it is inefficient and has not reached much of the people it is meant for. There is a plan to extend the scheme to include urban families as well, a proposal that might be part of the government’s agenda.

6. Housing for the Poor:

India has various programmes to build houses for the poor. Those are Ashraya Scheme (1991-92), Rural Ambedkar Housing Scheme (1993-94), Indira Avas Scheme (1999 April), Valmiki Ambedkar Awas Scheme (2001 December). The government has budgeted $224 million for these schemes in 2010-11.  

Apart from these a number of relief measures are already available in the schemes sponsored both by the Government of India and the State Governments. They include the Calamity Relief Fund, National Family Benefit Scheme, Raitha Sanjeevani Scheme, Pledge Loan Scheme, Rashtreeya Krishi Bhima Yojana, Minimum Support Price and ‘Sankata Harana’ Scheme implemented by the IFFCO. Agriculture in Karnataka witnessed rapid commercialization in crop choice and agricultural inputs though recent trends show a new direction in policy attention. It is one of the first Indian states to specify standards and implement pilot projects for organic farming in partnership with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

Government of Karnataka in 2006 introduced the Karnataka State Policy on Organic Farming (KSPoOF) in order to improve the sustainability of farm livelihoods. For smallholders in the state, organic farming mostly implies non-certified practices with self-reliance in most inputs.
A number of insurance schemes are available both for farmers and public. All these schemes are guided by the policies applicable in general to any insured persons. Some of the insurance schemes like (i) Janatha Rural Personal Accident Insurance, (ii) Rajarajeswari Mahila Kalyana Insurance, (iii) Bhagyashree Female Child Kalyana Yojane, (iv) Insurance for agriculture Pump Sets, (v) Horticulture/Plantation/Floriculture/Flower Insurance Scheme (vi) Insurance on Livestock, (vii) Insurance on Poultry, (viii) Insurance on Carts, (ix) Standard Kissan Package Policy, have all been offered by the Oriental Insurance Company, which directly aimed in covering the farmers and their families. The new India Assurance Company also has (i) Gram Arogya Yojane, (ii) Insurance on livestock, (iii) Insurance on Poultry, (iv) Insurance on Krishi Pump sets and (v) Janatha Rural Personal accidental Insurance offering some competitive premium range. The life Insurance Corporation of India also has Janashree Bima Yojana.

The Minimum Support Price is one of the important mechanisms developed and implemented jointly by the Central and State Government over years to avoid distress sale of agricultural produce. This implemented for mandated crops like Paddy, Jowar, Maize, Bajra, Tur, Green Gram, Black Gram, Soybean Groundnut Sunflower, Bengal Gram and Cotton. However, in Karnataka market intervention scheme for potato, onion etc. is in operation. Likewise, floor price scheme for selected commodities like tur, copra etc., is also being implemented.
4.4. Conclusion:

Lack of modernization of agriculture due to poverty and uneconomic land holdings of small and marginal farmers are the major problems, which has decreased the agricultural output. The poverty of the farmers led to borrow loans for agricultural production and in case of crop failure, the small and marginal farmers are not ready to bear the losses and also due to indebtedness the fall prey to suicides. There is need to study the different socio-economic problems of the small and marginal farmers and also encourage cooperative farming, contract farming, etc, so as to reduce the burden of the farmers.

Accordingly government has given the land to the depressed class farmers. Meanwhile the position of depressed class farmers are very poor, still they are suffering from many problems in the society. The different aspects of farmers in general and depressed class farmers in particular at the national and state level are discussed in this chapter.
4.5. Notes and References:


14. Ibid.