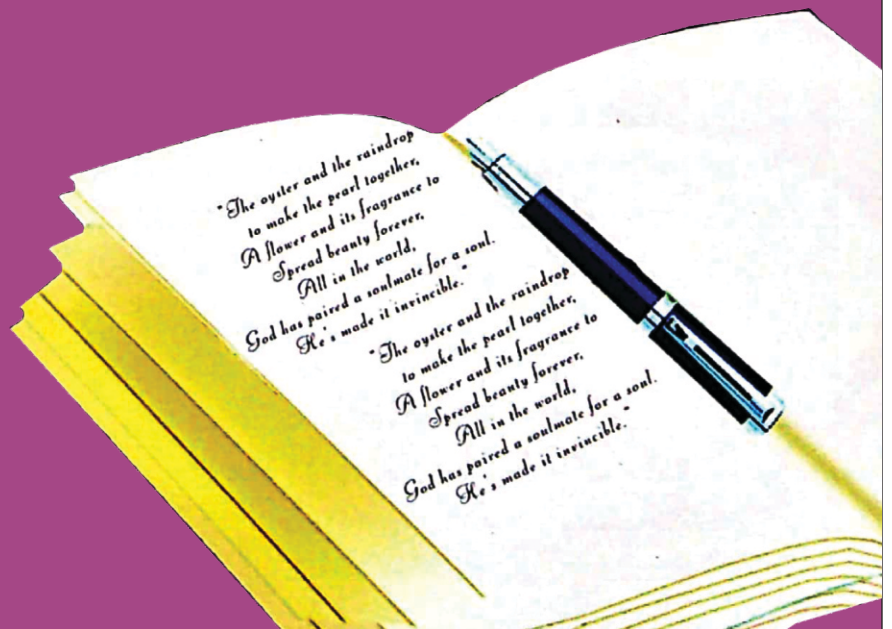


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अनुक्रमणिका

१. THE STATUS OF ENGLISH AS A LINK LANGUAGE IN INDIA TODAY: A REVIEW	Dr. Jobi George 7
2. Identity and Multiculturalism in Zadie Smith's, 'White Teeth'	Dr. Vinita S Virgandham 12
3. Identity, Displacement, and Resilience: Amitav Ghosh's Portrayal of the Colonial Experience	Dr. Raheel Quraishi 18
4. A study on Patent awareness among faculties of Engineering Colleges	Rajasree O.P., Mangala A. Hirwade, 22 Sunilkumar U.T.
5. An Overview of Indian Government Policies in the Agricultural Sector and Farmers' Suicides	Dr. Mangesh Kadu 29
6. Physical Fitness: The need of the Era	Asst. Prof. Aditya Sarwe 35
७. द्रारिद्र्य निमुर्लन आणि सरकारच्या कल्याणकारी योजना : एक दृष्टीक्षेप	प्रा. डॉ. सुनिल शिंदे ३७
८. महाराष्ट्रातील तमाशा : एक लोकनाट्य	प्रा. डॉ. मधुकर वि. नंदनवार ४१
९. मानवाधिकार और बुद्ध तत्वज्ञान	प्रा. डॉ. मोतीराज चव्हाण ४६
१०. नागपुर शहरातील औद्योगिक विकासासाठी कामगारांचे अध्ययन : एक अभ्यास	प्रा. डॉ. राजेश बहुरूपी ५०
११. आधुनिक काळात मूल्यशिक्षण व्यवसायाची खरी गरज	प्रा. डॉ. अनिता महावादीवार ५३
१२. धम्मपालनाची मानवी दृष्टिकोनातून वर्तमान उपयोगिता	सहा. प्रा. सोमेश्वर विनोदराव वासेकर, सहा. प्रा. भिमादेवी महादेव डांगे ५७

An Overview of Indian Government Policies in the Agricultural Sector and Farmers' Suicides

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Abstract:

This research paper presents an insightful analysis of Indian government policies within the agricultural sector and their correlation with the distressing incidence of farmers' suicides in India. Agriculture, a pivotal sector of the Indian economy, provides livelihoods to a significant portion of the population. However, Indian farmers face multifaceted challenges, including financial burdens and mental health issues, leading to an alarming number of suicides. The study scrutinizes various government policies, evaluates their efficacy, and emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to address the root causes contributing to the unfortunate phenomenon of farmers' suicides in the Indian context.

Keywords: Indian government policies, Agricultural sector, Farmers' suicides, Rural economy, Agricultural policies, Farmer welfare schemes

Introduction:

Agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy, employing a significant portion of the population and contributing substantially to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). It sustains the livelihoods of millions, making it a critical sector for social stability and economic growth. However, the Indian agricultural landscape is marred by a myriad of challenges that farmers endure. These challenges include mounting debts, crop failures, volatile market prices, inadequate access to modern technology and credit, and often, a lack of social and mental support systems. Among the gravest concerns afflicting the Indian agricultural community is the alarming rate of farmers' suicides.

Farmers' suicides have emerged as a tragic and

distressing phenomenon in India, presenting a deep-rooted crisis that extends beyond the farming households to affect the very fabric of Indian society. The reasons behind farmers' suicides are intricate, multifaceted, and deeply ingrained in the socio-economic, cultural, and psychological context of the agrarian community. The burden of insurmountable debt, failed crops, and a lack of safety nets contribute to the vulnerability of farmers, compelling them to take drastic measures.

In light of these pressing issues, this research endeavors to shed light on the interplay between Indian government policies within the agricultural sector and the distressing trend of farmers' suicides. Understanding this relationship is crucial to develop effective interventions and policy reforms that can mitigate the factors leading to this tragic outcome. The subsequent sections will delve into a comprehensive analysis of various government policies, evaluating their efficacy and exploring potential reforms to address this critical issue and foster a more sustainable and supportive environment for Indian farmers.

Objective of Research :

- 1) To evaluate the effectiveness of Indian government agricultural policies in addressing farmer distress and reducing suicide rates.
- 2) To investigate the correlation between agricultural policy implementation and the prevalence of farmers' suicides in India.
- 3) To propose evidence-based policy recommendations to improve the impact of government initiatives and mitigate

farmer distress leading to suicides.

Literature Review:

1) Mishra and Hazarika (2005) : Mishra and Hazarika studied the correlation between indebtedness and farmer suicides in India. They argued that the increasing burden of debt due to factors such as crop failure and lack of credit availability contributes significantly to farmers' distress and suicides.

2) Nagraj (2008) : Nagraj's work focused on the impact of globalization and agricultural policies on the agrarian crisis in India. He highlighted how policies like liberalization and reduced public investment in agriculture adversely affected farmers, pushing many towards suicide.

3) Kundu et al. (2010) : Kundu et al. examined the socio-economic factors influencing farmer suicides in Punjab, a state with a high rate of farmer suicides. They emphasized the importance of addressing issues like land fragmentation, lack of diversification, and inadequate support systems.

4) Kaur and Singh (2011) : Kaur and Singh investigated the role of agricultural policies in the context of farmer suicides in the state of Punjab. They suggested that a focus on diversification and appropriate policy measures addressing debt, crop failure, and market volatility could alleviate the crisis.

5) Dev et al. (2014) : Dev et al. discussed the efficacy of government policies and interventions in mitigating farmer distress and suicides. They argued for a holistic approach, including debt relief, crop insurance, market reforms, and social support systems to tackle the problem effectively.

6) Nath and Behera (2015) : Nath and Behera explored the relationship between climate change, agricultural policies, and farmer suicides. They emphasized the need for climate-resilient agricultural policies and integrated strategies that consider climate challenges and socio-economic realities.

7) Sainath (2018) : P. Sainath's extensive journalistic work, particularly in his book

"Everybody Loves a Good Drought," sheds light on the agrarian crisis and farmer suicides in India. He delves into the systemic issues, policy failures, and socio-economic factors contributing to the distress.

8) Borah and Sharma (2019) : Borah and Sharma evaluated the impact of agricultural policies on farmer suicides in the North Eastern states of India. Their research underscores the regional variations in the crisis and the need for tailor-made policies considering local realities.

9) Kumari and Kaushik (2020) : Kumari and Kaushik studied the psychological and social factors associated with farmer suicides. They stressed the importance of mental health support, community awareness, and government initiatives addressing the mental well-being of farmers.

This literature review provides an overview of various studies that focus on the relationship between Indian government policies in the agricultural sector and the distress leading to farmers' suicides. It highlights the multifaceted nature of the issue and the need for a comprehensive approach involving policy reforms, economic support, mental health interventions, and climate-resilient strategies to address the crisis effectively.

Research Methodology :

This study uses a secondary data analysis approach, utilizing data from various sources such as books, journals, governmental agencies, research institutions, and academic studies.

An Overview of Indian Government Policies in the Agricultural Sector and Farmers' Suicides:

Indian agriculture, often termed the backbone of the nation, employs a significant portion of the population. However, farmers face an alarming rate of suicides, reflecting deep-rooted challenges within the sector. This phenomenon, attributed to a combination of socioeconomic and environmental factors, has garnered attention globally.

Farmers in India face numerous challenges, including debt traps, crop failures, market

volatility, inadequate irrigation facilities, ineffective government policies, insufficient mental health support, land fragmentation, and socioeconomic pressures. The high cost of modern agricultural practices and unpredictable weather patterns often lead to crop failures, causing farmers to take loans and fall into a vicious cycle of debt. Climate variations, such as droughts, floods, and unseasonal rains, further exacerbate their economic condition. Inadequate irrigation facilities and outdated farming techniques further contribute to reduced productivity and economic instability. Government policies often lack effective implementation and reach, further exacerbating farmers' distress. Insufficient mental health support and land fragmentation further destabilize farmers' livelihoods. Socioeconomic pressures also contribute to the mental and emotional burden on farmers, as they struggle to meet societal expectations and fulfill family needs.

To address this crisis, a multi-dimensional approach is crucial. Reforms in agricultural policies focusing on sustainable farming practices, improving market access, debt relief, and effective implementation of welfare measures are paramount. Additionally, integrating mental health support into rural healthcare and promoting community-based initiatives can help alleviate the distress faced by farmers. Collaboration between the government, non-governmental organizations, and the community is essential for bringing about meaningful change and safeguarding the lives and livelihoods of Indian farmers.

Indian Government Policies and Agricultural Sector:

1) Credit Availability and Loan Waivers: Access to credit is vital for farmers to invest in seeds, fertilizers, and equipment. The government, through various banks and financial institutions, offers credit facilities to farmers. Periodic loan waivers are also introduced to alleviate the debt burden on farmers during distressing times. However, the effectiveness and

equitable distribution of these measures are subjects of debate.

2) Subsidies and Price Support : The government provides subsidies on fertilizers, seeds, electricity, and irrigation to reduce the input costs for farmers. Price support mechanisms like Minimum Support Price (MSP) are established to ensure farmers receive a fair price for their produce, promoting stability and economic security.

3) Crop Insurance and Risk Mitigation : Crop insurance schemes aim to safeguard farmers against losses due to natural calamities, pests, or market volatility. These schemes help mitigate the risks associated with farming and provide financial relief in case of crop failure.

4) Agricultural Extension Services : Government agricultural extension services disseminate knowledge about modern agricultural practices, technologies, and innovations to farmers. These services aim to enhance productivity, improve crop quality, and increase farmers' incomes by keeping them informed about best practices.

5) Water Management and Irrigation Policies : To address water scarcity and improve irrigation facilities, the government implements policies and schemes for water management. These policies focus on efficient water utilization, watershed development, and the creation of irrigation infrastructure to enhance agricultural productivity.

6) Land Reforms and Tenancy Laws : Land reforms aim to provide land security to farmers by addressing issues related to land distribution, consolidation, and tenancy. The government works on creating a conducive landownership environment to enhance agricultural productivity and farmer confidence.

7) Sustainable Agriculture and Environmental Policies : In recent years, the government has been promoting sustainable agricultural practices to preserve the environment and natural resources. Policies encourage organic farming, use of eco-friendly inputs, and adoption

of climate-resilient agricultural techniques.

8) Market Reforms and Agricultural Marketing : Government initiatives to reform agricultural markets aim to enhance market access for farmers, reduce intermediaries, and ensure farmers get a fair share of the market price. The introduction of electronic trading platforms and direct market linkages is part of this reform process.

It's important to critically analyze the implementation, efficacy, and inclusivity of these policies to address the underlying issues leading to farmers' suicides. Policy coherence, efficient distribution of benefits, and active engagement of stakeholders, especially farmers, are essential for sustainable agricultural growth and the well-being of the farming community. Additionally, considering the evolving dynamics of climate change and globalization, continuous policy adaptation and innovation are crucial to support Indian farmers effectively.

Analysis of Indian Government Policies and Their Impact :

Loan waivers are short-term solutions to alleviate financial burden on farmers, but may not address the root causes of the debt crisis. Minimum Support Price (MSP) is aimed at providing price security and encouraging crop production, but its effectiveness depends on timely implementation, coverage, and ensuring benefits reach intended recipients. Agricultural subsidies, such as fertilizers, seeds, and irrigation, aim to reduce input costs but face concerns about equitable distribution and sustainable agriculture. Farmer welfare schemes aim to improve living standards and well-being, but their impact on farmers' lives needs to be evaluated. Land reforms ensure equitable land distribution and tenure security, but their effectiveness depends on digitizing land records and resolving disputes. Crop insurance schemes provide financial security to farmers during crop losses, but their effectiveness depends on their reach, coverage, premium rates, and claim settlement efficiency. Market reforms, digitalization, and elimination

of middlemen are crucial for policy refinement and enhancement.

By conducting an in-depth analysis of these policies, their implementation challenges, and their impact on addressing the distressing factors contributing to farmers' suicides, a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing policy framework can be achieved. This understanding is fundamental for policy-makers to make informed decisions and implement targeted interventions to support the agricultural community effectively, ultimately reducing the incidence of farmers' suicides in India.

Challenges and Limitations :

1. Policy Implementation Gaps: One of the prominent challenges is the gap between policy formulation and effective implementation on the ground. The policies designed by the government may not always be executed efficiently due to bureaucratic hurdles, lack of resources, or inadequate coordination between different levels of administration.

2. Corruption and Leakages : Corruption within the system often leads to the diversion of resources and benefits intended for farmers. Funds meant for subsidies, relief packages, or welfare schemes might not reach the targeted beneficiaries due to corruption at various levels, undermining the effectiveness of the policies.

3. Inequitable Reach to Small-Scale Farmers : Many policies struggle to reach small-scale and marginalized farmers effectively. These farmers often lack awareness about available schemes, face difficulty in accessing credit, and encounter barriers in navigating bureaucratic processes, making them more vulnerable to financial distress and suicide.

4. Inadequate Financial Support : The financial allocation for agricultural policies may fall short of the actual requirements. Limited budgetary allocations for vital sectors like irrigation, research, and technology adoption can impede the progress and impact of policies, inhibiting sustainable growth in the agricultural

sector.

5. Insufficient Focus on Sustainable Practices : While policies often aim to increase agricultural productivity, they may not adequately emphasize sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. Overuse of chemical fertilizers, inadequate waste management, and deforestation can exacerbate environmental challenges and adversely affect farmers and their livelihoods.

6. Reactive Measures Over Proactive Strategies : Many policies are reactive, responding to crises rather than proactively preventing them. Reactive approaches can limit the policy's effectiveness and fail to address systemic issues that contribute to farmers' distress and suicides.

7. Lack of Integration and Coordination: Integration between various agricultural policies and coordination between different government departments are often lacking. A fragmented approach hinders holistic development and makes it difficult for farmers to navigate and benefit from the range of available policies and programs.

8. Technological and Digital Divide : Technological advancements play a crucial role in modernizing agriculture. However, a significant portion of farmers, particularly in rural areas, lack access to and awareness of these technologies. Bridging this divide is essential to ensure equitable benefits from technology-driven agricultural policies.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach, including policy reforms that enhance transparency, targeted support for small-scale farmers, investments in sustainable agricultural practices, and the integration of technology to streamline processes and ensure wider reach. Policymakers must also focus on efficient policy implementation, reducing corruption, and fostering collaboration between stakeholders for a more effective and farmer-centric policy framework.

Recommendations for Policy Reforms in India :

The rural healthcare system should prioritize

the integration of mental health support, focusing on counseling centers and helplines for farmers. Targeted financial support and debt management programs should be revised to provide targeted support for vulnerable farmers, particularly smallholders. Accessible farmer education and training should be promoted, collaborating with agricultural universities, NGOs, and industry experts. Comprehensive crop insurance reforms should be reviewed and enhanced to make them more accessible and beneficial for farmers. Sustainable agricultural practices should be encouraged, including organic farming, agroforestry, and water-efficient irrigation techniques. Market linkages should be strengthened through farmer producer organizations, cooperatives, and e-platforms. Research and development should be allocated to drive innovation and technology adoption in farming practices. Empowering women in agriculture is crucial, with policies ensuring their access to resources, credit, and information. Community engagement and farmer support centers should be established at the grassroots level to facilitate information dissemination, grievance redressal, and skill development. A robust monitoring and evaluation framework should be implemented to track the effectiveness of policies and adapt to evolving needs and challenges faced by the agricultural community.

By implementing these policy recommendations, India can significantly enhance its agricultural sector, prioritize the mental well-being of farmers, and create a conducive environment that minimizes the distress leading to farmers' suicides. A comprehensive and holistic approach is essential to address the multifaceted challenges faced by Indian farmers and build a sustainable and prosperous future for them.

Conclusion :

The Indian agricultural sector is facing significant challenges, including high rates of farmers' suicides, which are threatening the livelihoods of millions of farmers. To address

this, a holistic transformation is needed, prioritizing sustainable practices, technology integration, financial security, and addressing farmers' mental health needs. This includes embracing modern farming methods, empowering smallholders, fostering market linkages, and promoting women's participation. A comprehensive approach to reducing farmers' suicides should include strengthening mental health services, improving financial resilience, promoting sustainable practices, empowering through education, improving market access, and investing in research and development to drive agricultural innovation and reduce environmental impact. This holistic approach will help ensure a more sustainable and farmer-centric future for the Indian agricultural sector.

The distressing phenomenon of farmers' suicides in India necessitates urgent, proactive, and collaborative efforts from all stakeholders. The government, civil society, agricultural experts, healthcare professionals, and the community at large must come together to craft and implement policies that prioritize the mental and economic well-being of farmers. A sustainable future for Indian agriculture lies in a comprehensive approach that encompasses policy reforms, mental health support, sustainable farming practices, and empowering the agricultural community. The time to act is now, ensuring that Indian farmers thrive, and their invaluable contribution to the nation's prosperity is recognized and celebrated. Only through collective and determined action can we ensure the resilience, sustainability, and well-being of the Indian agricultural sector and its farming communities.

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