

Green Revolution: Distress of Peasantry

A study of Punjab's small peasantry by Sukhpal Singh and Shruti Bhogal has stated, "Punjab's farmers are reeling under debt. Of the sampled farmers, 88% had an average debt of Rs 218,092 per household. The amount of debt per hectare was inversely related to farm size. It was the highest among marginal farmers (Rs 1,70,184), followed by small farmers (Rs 1,04,155), and other farmers (Rs 44,069). In the era of globalisation, the rate of increase in the costs of cultivation has been much faster than that of farm produce prices. Therefore, the increase in income from farming was not sufficient to meet domestic and farm expenditure, which led a large proportion of farmers in Punjab into a debt trap."

This distress has reflected as thousands of suicides committed by peasantry. A census survey on suicides conducted in the most affected six districts namely Bathinda, Sangrur, Mansa, Barnala, Moga and Ludhiana revealed that 3507 farmers committed suicide in these districts during the period 2000-11. Out of these suicides 74 per cent were committed due to economic distress and indebtedness. 80 per cent of these suicides were by small farmers cultivating less than five acres of land. The average debt in such cases was Rs. 234541.

Baharat Dogra wrote: The extreme distress of marginal and small farmers has been accompanied by the no less traumatic distress of landless farm workers. The two categories are by no means mutually exclusive as many marginal farmers also toil as farm workers. In addition, several small and marginal farmers have been forced by indebtedness and economic distress to leave their land and turn into farm workers.

Despite the repeated studies that proved the failure of green revolution in increasing the yields of crops as well as ensuring the welfare of peasants, the successive governments continue to prescribe the same green revolution as a panacea. Mechanization of farm activities is one such medicine being prescribed by many state governments and subsidizing the sale of farm machines. On this count also, the experience of Punjab's peasantry is an eye opener.

At present there are 4,77,000 tractors, 6,24,000 thrashers and about 13,000 harvesting combines in Punjab as per information provided by Punjab State Farmers Commission. This mechanization had increased several times the burden of investment on peasants, while the yields continue to stagnate and exploitative trade practices eroded their income from agricultural produce.

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