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The Dark Harvest: Uncovering the Tragic Reality of Farmer Suicides in Punjab

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The Dark Harvest:
Uncovering the
Tragic Reality of
Farmer Suicides in
Punjab

- *Charankamal Brar*



The Dark Reality of Farmers Suicide in Punjab



Farmers suicide is a tragic and pressing issue that has plagued the state of Punjab for decades. According to recent statistics, Punjab has one of the highest rates of farmers suicide in the country. This is a complex issue with deep-rooted causes, and it demands our attention and empathy.

The reasons behind farmers suicide are multifaceted and often interconnected. Debt, crop failure, lack of government support, and unpredictable weather patterns are just some of the factors that contribute to this crisis. The situation is further exacerbated by the social stigma attached to suicide, which can prevent farmers from seeking help or support.

HANGED TO DEBT

Unveiling the Heartbreaking Truth: Unsettling Statistics on the Tragedy of Farmer Suicides

- Punjab's Tragic Toll (2017-2021): A shocking government report reveals that 1056 farmers lost their lives to suicide in Punjab during this period, painting a grim picture of the severity of the issue.
- Disturbing Figures in Six Districts (2000-2018): A staggering 9,291 farmers took their own lives in just six districts of Punjab over an 18-year span, as revealed by Punjab Agricultural University. This stark statistic underscores the urgent need for action.
- April 2022: A Chilling Snapshot of Desperation: In a single month, 14 farmers resorted to the unimaginable act of suicide, serving as a haunting reminder of the pressing need for urgent intervention.
- Grim Reality of 2015: According to the National Crime Records Bureau, a shocking 4,291 farmers in the state succumbed to suicide in just one year. On average, more than 11 farmers tragically ended their own lives each day, revealing the magnitude of the crisis.
- Escalating Crisis (2011-2015): The suicide rates among farmers soared by a chilling 40% during this period, indicating the alarming escalation of this distressing crisis.



Causes of Farmer's Suicide in Punjab

1. **Costly Inputs, Crushing Burden:** Farmers in Punjab heavily rely on expensive inputs like fertilizers, pesticides, and machinery, leading to financial distress and mounting debts due to high costs and unpredictable crop prices.

2. **Declining Profitability:** Traditional crops like wheat and rice are no longer profitable in Punjab, as stagnant or low crop prices combined with rising production costs erode farmers' profit margins, making it increasingly challenging to meet their financial obligations.

3. **Lack of Crop Diversification:** Overemphasis on water-intensive crops like wheat and rice has led to depleted soil fertility and water shortages. Limited alternatives for crop diversification reduce risk mitigation and stability of revenue for farmers.

4. **Inadequate Irrigation Infrastructure:** Punjab's canal irrigation system often falls short of meeting farmers' water needs, forcing them to rely on costly private tube wells. The resulting drop in water tables adds to the financial burden of farmers.

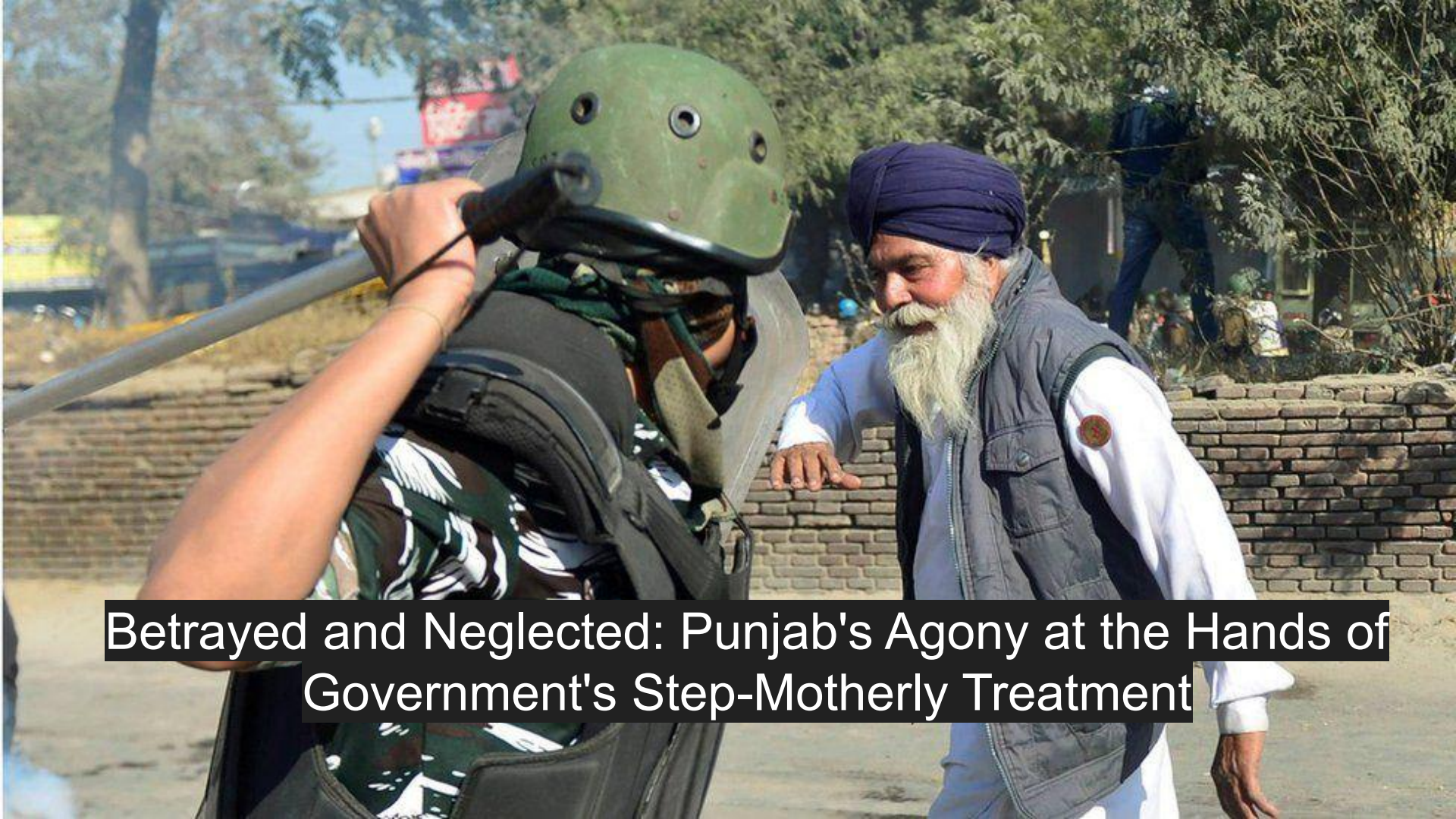




5. Limited Access to Institutional Financing: Many Punjab farmers lack access to formal loan institutions, compelling them to turn to informal sources with high-interest rates. Obtaining affordable finance becomes a daunting task, exacerbating their financial struggles.

6. Crop Failures and Natural Disasters: Unpredictable weather patterns, such as droughts, floods, and insect infestations, lead to crop failures, depriving farmers of income and making it challenging to repay loans.

7. Inadequate Social Safety Nets: The absence of comprehensive social safety nets and insurance systems leaves farmers vulnerable to financial shocks caused by crop failures, health issues, or unforeseen circumstances, further adding to their financial burden.

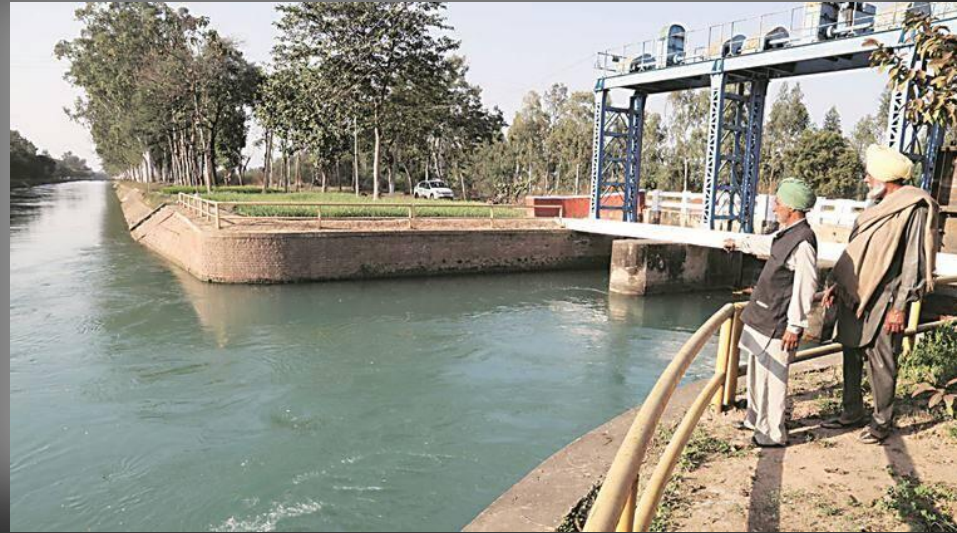


Betrayed and Neglected: Punjab's Agony at the Hands of Government's Step-Motherly Treatment

1. Minimum Selling Price (MSP) Disparity: The government's partiality towards a few crops like Rice and Wheat leaves farmers of other crops at the mercy of buyers, resulting in insufficient prices and heartbreaking scenes of crop dumping.

2. Water Woes and Depletion: Inadequate canal systems force Punjab farmers to rely on groundwater for irrigation, exacerbating the depletion of this precious resource. Meanwhile, the Indian government unjustly diverts Punjab's river water to other states, robbing the rightful water share of the land.

3. Broken Promises of Crop Insurance: Farmers are left vulnerable without any reliable crop insurance schemes, amplifying their financial risks and leaving them in distress. Corruption further hinders the few debt relief programs, depriving many farmers of the assistance they desperately need.



4. Puppeteered by Big Business: The introduction of farming laws, serving the interests of corporate giants, exposed the government's allegiance to powerful businessmen. However, in the face of historic farmer protests, the laws were eventually repealed after a year of relentless struggle.

5. Caste System Divide: The inherent bias within government policies that favor lower castes widens the gap for farmers, who often find themselves marginalized in the middle of the caste system. This leaves them struggling without the necessary support and resources.



The Devastating Ripples of Farmer Suicides on Innocent Families



The impact of farmers' suicide on families in Punjab is devastating. The loss of a breadwinner can lead to financial hardship, with many families struggling to make ends meet. Children are often forced to drop out of school to help support the family, perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

Emotional trauma is another consequence of farmers' suicide. Family members left behind may experience guilt, shame, and a sense of hopelessness. Suicide is often stigmatized in Indian society, which can further compound the emotional toll on those affected.

Farmer Suicides' Devastating Impact on Punjab's Community

Struggling Fields, Withered Harvest: Farmer suicides cast a long shadow over Punjab's agricultural sector, casting a pall of uncertainty over its future. The loss of seasoned farmers and their invaluable wisdom leaves fields struggling to yield, jeopardizing the very sustenance of the community.

Economic Consequences and Poverty: Farmer suicides lead to economic instability, plunging families into financial hardships and poverty. The loss of the primary breadwinner not only affects the immediate family but also has ripple effects on the local economy, with a decline in purchasing power and limited economic opportunities.

Mental Health Meltdown, Silent Suffering: The prevalence of farmer suicides sparks a silent epidemic of mental anguish within the community. Witnessing the torment endured by farmers weighs heavy on hearts and minds, fueling anxiety, anguish, and a sense of helplessness.





**Cultivating Hope: Transformative Steps to Uplift
Punjab's Farmers**



1. Empowering Prices, Thriving Markets: Unleash the potential of Punjab's farmers by ensuring fair prices for all crops and revolutionizing market systems for transparency and direct access.
2. Harvesting Diversity, Sowing Sustainability: Encourage a vibrant tapestry of crops and nurture sustainable farming practices, enabling farmers to embrace resilience and cultivate higher-value yields.
3. Flowing Waters, Flourishing Fields: Strengthen irrigation networks, ensuring equitable water distribution and liberating farmers from over-reliance on groundwater, while embracing efficient water management techniques.
4. Green Fields, Shielded Finances: Extend a helping hand to farmers by providing easy and affordable access to credit, coupled with comprehensive crop insurance coverage, shielding them from unexpected setbacks.

5. Nurturing Minds, Cultivating Well-being: Foster a culture of mental health support for farmers through dedicated helplines, counseling services, and powerful awareness campaigns, nurturing their well-being in times of hardship.

6. Safety Nets, Debt Relief: Forge robust safety nets and farmer-specific debt relief programs, offering a lifeline to those in need, while ensuring transparency and accountability in their implementation.

7. Farmer's Voice, Policy's Path: Put farmers at the heart of decision-making, crafting farmer-friendly policies that champion their interests and aspirations, as their wisdom guides the path toward a prosperous agricultural future.



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Illuminating the Path: How International Media Can Be the Beacon for Punjab's Farmers

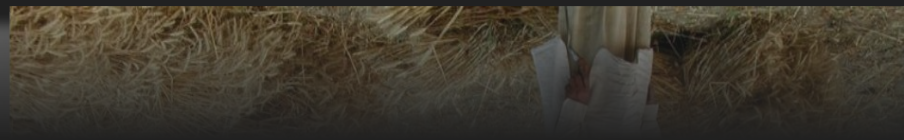
1. Amplify Voices: International media can raise awareness by sharing farmers' stories globally, igniting conversations, and garnering attention.
2. Foster Empathy and Solidarity: By presenting the human side of the crisis, media outlets can evoke empathy and inspire global support for Punjab's farmers.
3. Highlight Policy Gaps: Media can expose systemic issues and advocate for policy reforms that address the challenges faced by farmers.
4. Collaborative Reporting: By collaborating with local journalists and organizations, international media can gather comprehensive data and insights to deepen understanding.
5. Hold Governments Accountable: Media can scrutinize policies, expose corruption, and demand transparency, pushing for government action to support farmers.

Extending a Hand of Hope: Unleashing the Power of Compassion for Punjab's Farmers

The crisis of farmers' suicide in Punjab demands urgent action from all of us. We must recognize the gravity of the situation and work towards finding long-term solutions that address the root causes of this crisis.

This includes supporting small-scale farmers through investment in research and development, infrastructure, and financial assistance. It also means challenging the social stigma attached to suicide and promoting mental health awareness in rural communities.

By taking action, we can help prevent further loss of life and build a more just and equitable society.



Annotated Bibliography

Service, Tribune News. "Over 1,000 Farmers Ended Life in 5 Years in Punjab." *Tribuneindia News Service*, www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/over-1-000-farmers-ended-life-in-5-years-in-punjab-476310.

This source provides the statistics of the farmers that committed suicide in the past five years in Punjab. It also states that the reason behind these suicides was high debt that they couldn't pay off.

"Farmer Suicides in Punjab : Incidence, Causes, and Policy Suggestions." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18 June 2022, www.epw.in/journal/2022/25/commentary/farmer-suicides-punjab.html.

This news report says that 14 farmers committed suicide in just one month (April 2022). The reason behind this was the low yield of wheat. This could be used to show how serious things are in Punjab.

Gill, Sucha S. "Economic Distress and Farmer Suicides in Rural Punjab." https://Punjab.Global.Ucsb.Edu/Sites/Secure.Lsit.Ucsb.Edu.Gisp.D7_sp/Files/Sitefiles/Journals/Volume12/No2/12.2_Gill.Pdf, punjab_global.ucsb.edu/sites/secure.lsit.ucsb.edu.gisp.d7_sp/files/sitefiles/journals/volume12/no2/12.2_Gill.pdf.

This Report provides a deep analysis of how the Crop pattern changed in Punjab after Independence. How Rice and Wheat became the dominant crops to be produced in Punjab and what were the results of it?

Sharma, Yogesh. "Farmers' Suicide and Politics of Freebies." *Times of India Blog*, 18 Jan. 2019, timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/my-voices/farmers-suicide-and-politics-of-freebies-1355/.

This article provides information about how the government and society are neglecting the needs of the farmers and pushing them to commit suicide. It also talks about how banks and other financial institutions are also using them for their own profits.

Tiwana, Harlean. "Why Punjabi Farmers Are Protesting and Why This Requires Your Attention." *The Organization for World Peace*, 28 Dec. 2020, theowp.org/reports/why-are-punjabi-farmers-protesting-why-does-this-require-your-attention/.

This Article talks about the protest conducted by farmers in 2020 in India which was the largest protest in human history. This article gives a brief description of why were farmers protesting and what was the role of the Indian Government in that.

"Punjab, India." *Punjab, India | Columbia Water Center*, water.columbia.edu/content/punjab-India.

This blog post shares information about the depletion of groundwater in Punjab and how it has affected the farmers. It also shares some concerns regarding what could happen if something is not done to restore it. This could be used to show the importance of education and awareness.

"Robbery of Punjab Waters." *Punjab Monitor*, www.punjabmonitor.com/2013/04/robbery-of-punjab-waters.html.

This article sheds some light on how the water of the Rivers of Punjab is being robbed by Indian Government to give it to other states while Punjab gets nothing in return. Moreover, they are encouraging farmers of Punjab to use groundwater thus resulting in the depletion of groundwater.