

Research Paper

Globalization and Suicide of Farmers in Kerala – A Sociological Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Kerala achieved development in various fields and the major role played behind this development was internal and external migration of the labour class. Because of the migration the aged, children, and wives are physically detached from the care and concern of the relatives. When there was a problem nuclear families were not capable of providing a solution to the households. Consumerism, false pride of Malayalees, unemployment, family conflicts, alcoholism, dowry harassment etc., work together for the suicides in general. Because of globalization and free trade prices farmers have faced a financial crisis.

National news papers reported that debt as the main reason for the suicides of farmers. But in Idukki District the main reason for the suicides were family problems, alcoholism, mental illness, and chronic diseases. A serious study into the real problems of suicides reveals that financial crisis is not the main reason for the farmer suicides. Plurality of causes work together for the suicides in Kerala.

INTRODUCTION

Suicide is relatively rare in the general population still we have to take it seriously because it has devastating interpersonal and social consequences. Medical technology and improved public health have lowered the rates of many leading causes of natural death, but not violent death rates such as suicide and homicide. The incidence, prevalence, epidemiology, and etiology of suicide and suicide rates vary by race, nation, culture, and special groups among Andaman Islanders, the Tiv of Nigeria, the Yahgans of Tierra del Fuego suicide is nonexistent. Among black American females, Irish Catholics, Mexicans or Muslims in Egypt the rates of suicide are extremely low. At the opposite side Hungary, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Japan and Finland suicide rates are very high and it has become almost part of their national character. Although suicide tends to exist in all places at all times and in all peoples, suicide is still by no means universal.

STATEMENT OF THE STUDY

Kerala achieved development in various fields and the major role played behind this development was internal and external migration of the labour class. Because of the migration the aged, children, and wives are physically detached from the care and concern of the relatives. When there was a problem nuclear families were not capable of providing a solution to the households. Consumerism, false pride of Malayalees, unemployment, family conflicts, alcoholism, dowry harassment etc., work together for the suicides in general. Because of globalization and free trade prices farmers have faced a financial crisis. National news

papers reported that debt as the main reason for the suicides of farmers. But in Idukki District the main reason for the suicides were family problems, alcoholism, mental illness, and chronic diseases. A serious study into the real problems of suicides reveals that financial crisis is not the main reason for the farmer suicides.

OBJECTIVE

To analyze the globalization and suicide of farmers in Idukki district of Kerala state.

METHODOLOGY

Idukki District is a beautiful High range district of Kerala state. For the people of Kerala, Idukki is always associated with Power Generation. About 66 per cent of the State's Power needs come from the Hydroelectric Power Projects in Idukki. Idukki accounts for 12.9 per cent of the area of Kerala and only 3.7 per cent of the population of Kerala. The district consists of Devikulam, Udumbanchola and Peermedu taluks of the erstwhile Kottayam district and Thodupuzha taluk (excluding two villages Manjalore and Kalloorkadu) of the erstwhile Ernakulam district. At the time of formation the district headquarters started functioning at Kottayam and from there it was shifted to Painavu in Thodupuzha taluk in June 1976, where it is proposed to build a new planned forest township.

The economy of Idukki is mainly agricultural based economy. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood. Apart from this Dairy industry is the substitute source of income. With the advancement in techniques of agriculture some farmers with large areas have not started emphasizing on the production of floriculture, mushroom cultivation, medicinal plants etc. The district is blessed with the climate suitable for the agriculture especially for the crops like tea, coffee, rubber, coconut, cardamom, pepper etc. District stands on the second position as far as the agriculture production is concerned. Most of the agricultural holdings are owned by small and marginal farmers. In the high land areas farmers owing the large holdings are involved in production of tea and

cardamom.

This study aims at analyzing the globalization and suicide of farmers in Idukki district of Kerala state. Due to the insufficiency and discrepancy of secondary data, the researcher had to collect the primary information too for the amenable data. Totally, 133 farmer's suicide cases were registered in Idukki police station. The researcher has analyzed the suicidal deaths of 133 cases in Idukki District of Kerala. The primary data have been collected from the 133 farmer's suicide households through the well structured interview schedule. This study is completely based on census sampling method. The study has also used secondary data collected from District Police Station, District Statistical Office, published materials like Journals, News Papers, Periodicals, Books etc.

CURRENT SITUATION OF KERALA

In Kerala the situation is highly explosive. The highest number of suicides is taking place in this educated state and the number of family suicides has increased from two digits to three digits.

Amartya Sen is of the opinion that Kerala is a glittering example to the outside world in the areas of literacy, longevity, infant mortality, population growth and housing. In the health indices Kerala is better than the European Union. As per the UNDP report Human Development Index in Kerala is 0.638. But in India, it is only 0.472. Though we may see development in economic factors, suicidal rate of Kerala is the highest compared to other states in India. The social problems that put forward by the globalization have made a serious blow in the cultural well being of the people of Kerala. When Kerala achieved economic development, they forgot to include the development of human values too. India is a religious country. When we think about development we should take into our historical, religious and cultural and social background also. The recent trend is that development should be achieved at any cost. This attitude has caused serious imbalances in the mental well being of the people.

The political leaders promote three items; liquor, loans and lottery. And the income from these sources is considered easy and promising. In 2004 Kerala government got 613.78 crores from the sale of liquor. And the suicidal rates of alcoholic addicts are very high. So the government should not be proud of the income from the sale of liquor.

The use of mobiles is very high in the state. Formerly there were restrictions among men and women going outside marital relations. Mobile phones have facilitated unlimited opportunities for online sex and offline sex. Reports from Alappuzha District say that one of the major reasons in the suicide deaths is the uncontrolled use of mobile phones. The cheating cases that come to the cyber cell are increasing day by day. Kerala's development achievement is a product of its particular geographical and demographic context. Education of people in the state has contributed internal migration for employment to different parts of the country has made significant remittances to the state. The most important was the Gulf migration. In 1980s a large number of unskilled male migrated to Middle East. This resulted in the inflow of huge amount of Gulf money. And it accelerated the pace of disintegration of joint families and the subsequent proliferation of nuclear families.

In 1990s Kerala witnessed a huge return of migratory stream consisting of unskilled workers due to the enactment of new laws in the Gulf. This led to a problematic social situation in the state. Because overburdened stagnant

economic structure receives more jobless youth. Moreover, the social and psychological trauma that these migrants face due to the lack of employment opportunities is pushing them to depression. The disintegrating agricultural sector, virtual absence of adequate employment, high inflow of cheap labour from other states, all these created lot of hardships to carpenters, and construction workers who were engaged in these occupation for generations. The difficult social position became obvious when there were no jobs corresponding to their educational status. It is observed that the educated-unemployed and the elderly are some of the most vulnerable categories in the state in terms of suicide rates.

The senior citizens of the state constitute nearly 10 percent of the population, with an average life expectancy of 72 years. The aged citizens seem to have increasingly alienated from the present day value system. When a huge number of educated Malayalees were forced to migrate to different parts of the world, it has resulted in a physical detachment of the elders with their children, but also led to the legitimization of old age homes. And now, depression, loneliness and social exclusion of the elderly have led to a high number of suicides among them. It is seen that the major sufferers of the 'troubled development model' were, in fact, the social categories who had benefited from the social achievements of the 'model' i.e. women, lower classes and the elderly.

Apart from the economic causes, socio cultural and familial problems have also played a major role in the increasing rate of suicides in the state. A plurality of causes work behind most of the suicides, and any attempt of social theorization of suicides without looking at the socio-cultural background of the incident, will be incomplete. The recent phenomenon is the increasing number of family suicides. Family problems constitute the largest single cause of suicides in Kerala. A combination of familial conflicts, mental frustration, alcoholism and economic crisis worked jointly for the suicides.

The Kerala development model created a gulf between the social aspirations of Malayalees shaped through Kerala's development achievements, and the actual individual achievements. The 'false pride' of Malayalees, constructed through their educational and social status often ends up in deep frustration and suicides. Kerala society still seems to hold its traditional values and conservative outlook although it has achieved much in terms of material benefits especially through educational attainments, migration and consumerism. The traditional familial and patriarchal values often clash with the material culture which creates a disturbing social and cultural lag. Lack of social and economic support and inadequate integration to society may create a situation where they lack social capital and community support. The gap between socio political achievements and their actual economic condition among the society may be attributed to the disturbance created in development equilibrium of Kerala. The recent instances of family suicides in the state could be attributed to this category. In many of the family suicides the real social and community support at the time of acute social and economic crisis is seriously lacking. The elderly people isolated from mainstream culture and practices are more prone to committing suicide. They seem to have increasingly alienated from the present day value system.

Farmer's suicides reveal a social link with the economic disturbances that emerged from the gap between estimated productivity from their agricultural fields and the actual output obtained. In the agrarian areas economic and

familial conditions are still at risk. As agricultural production declines and alternative job opportunities are nearly absent. Gulf returnees do not find any alternative job opportunities in the state. If they want to work at home they expect the same income that they received in the gulf. Since it was not possible they idle away their time. This leads to various psychic problems. High economic aspiration, family problems, and excessive alcoholism lead to more frustration and suicides.

A relative absence of religious and community sentiments sometimes work as a source of relief from social disturbances, and other strong associational settings can be another explanation for the high rate of suicides among the weaker sections. Dowry harassment and physical detachment of their husbands due to large scale migration subsequent loneliness and suspected illicit relations are said to be some of the explanations for the high rate of suicides among women.

GLOBALIZATION AND SUICIDE OF FARMERS IN KERALA

In 1991 India adopted the New Economic Policy and in 1995 the World Trade Organization came into being. Many strikes were started all over the world against Globalization, Liberalization, and Privatization. Because of free trade, prices of agricultural products have gone abysmally low. The farmers suffered a lot because of the price crash. The farmers were in distress. The reports about the suicides of the farmers widely published that the deaths were because of the debt trap. It may be true in some parts of the country. The following is an empirical study about the reasons underlying in the causes of suicides in the District of Idukki in Kerala.

The researcher has analyzed the suicidal deaths of 133 cases in Idukki District of Kerala. The major reason for committing suicide is family problems. There emerges a big fight between husband and wife. Very often the problem will not be solved. It leads to a gulf between the two persons. Absence of communication leads to worsening of the relationship. When family becomes a hell they lose meaning of life and it results in suicide. More than 50 cases of suicides are because of family issues.

When there is a problem between parents and children, the youngsters think of committing suicide and they take the extreme steps. When the parents get angry and make corrections the youth take it antagonistically and commit suicide. It is after several attempts that they succeed in the act. When there is a fight among brothers, one feel cheated and he commits suicide. Men in their advanced ages feel neglected by their sons and daughters in laws. This causes mental depression and stress. When these senior citizens were in the prime of their age they had looked after their parents with love and care. They gave utmost care and respect to their parents. In modern times they understood that their words are not heard or their questions are not answered. Their minimum needs are not met. They understand that they are a burden to their family. When they think about the contributions made to the family as land construction of house education of children they cannot bear the negligence and they commit suicide.

Suicides are more among the males compared to females. No woman above the age of 50 has committed suicide because of family problems. 27 people have consumed poison to die. Since Idukki is an agricultural area chemicals and pesticides are easily available. 17 people have died by hanging themselves. Only one person has used

explosives to kill himself.

Pessimistic attitude to life and dismal state of mind have led to the suicide of 39 people. They lost all hope in life. For them there was no reason to live. So they decided to end their life. Out of 39 persons who committed suicide seven were women. Four women consumed poison to commit suicide. Two women hanged themselves and another burned herself. Three ladies were more than 50 years old and four were comparatively younger. Of the 32 men who committed suicide 18 have hanged to death and 13 have taken poison and one young man burned himself.

There are 29 cases of suicide because of chronic disease. When they realize that they are ill, they approach the government hospital and they are referred to the private hospital for expert treatment. But expensive medical treatment bills deter many patients from going for treatment in specialized hospitals. They resort to suicide when they understand that their life is at stake. They choose death to save their property for the children's future. So the conclusion is to sacrifice their life rather than sacrificing their family. Twenty one men and eight women have committed suicide because of chronic disease. Fourteen persons have taken poison and 13 persons have hanged themselves. One lady burned herself and a man cut his vein and died. Twenty people who were suffering from mental disease have committed suicide. They were under treatment for depression. Because of the mental disturbance 10 people have hanged themselves and seven people have consumed poison and died. One woman burned herself, a lady jumped from the height and another lady jumped into the well and ended their lives. Loneliness resulting from the death of the spouse has also led to suicide among men. A man committed suicide consuming poison, because of the death of his loving wife.

CONCLUSION

It was said that the suicides among the farmers were because of the economic reasons. From the above analysis it was found that the suicides have taken place not because of economic reasons but purely social, and psychological. So any economic solution will not suffice to solve the problem of suicide among the farmers. Plurality and multidimensionality of causes work behind most of the suicides in Kerala.

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