

Study on Antecedents of Cotton Growers' Alienation from Land in Distress Vidarbha Region of Maharashtra

S. M. Wasnik

Principal Scientist (Extension), Central Institute for Cotton Research, P.B.No.2, Shankar Nagar P.O., Wardha Road, Nagpur-440 010, India,

Corresponding author e-mail : wasniksm2012@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Development policies played a key role in cotton production in India during the last half century. The production of cotton increased from a meagre 2.79 million bales (170 kg lint/bale) in 1947-48 to a high of 17.6 million bales in 1996-97 and all time record of 36.10 million bales during 2010-11. India emerged as one of the exporter nation of cotton and cotton/textile exports account for nearly one-third of total foreign exchange earnings of India. However, agrarian crises in several parts of cotton growing regions of the country pose a great threat not only to cotton but agricultural crops too. Farmers in general have developed a negative attitude towards farming and serious to alienation from land. Alienation is a condition where the individual has lost control over the product of his labour, the immediate work process and hence the capacity to express himself in work, composed of four dimensions powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self estrangement. The data gathered from 600 farmers from distress and non-distress districts under Technology Mission on Cotton, Mini Mission-I project in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra was analysed for farmer's alienation from land. The study indicated that cotton farmers in the region in both distress and nondistress are having higher level of alienation from land. Alienation arises because of high degree of powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self estrangement exists among cotton growers. Farmers perception of no guaranteed remunerative price of the produce, vicious circle of uncertain rains and drought, repeated cotton crop failures leading to poor economy, non-availability of capital/credit, no economic support from friends/relatives during crisis, leading to a stressful life due to feeling of isolation from family, fellow farmers and community. Cotton grower's perception that their work as a farmer is not rewarded was among reasons quoted by majority respondent farmers for distress. Majority of the farm families in study area found indebted due to low income level and were of poor socio-economic status level due to a wide variation in income liability gap in majority respondents. The income from all sources was not even enough to meet the essential expenditure of the household hence these farmers were in severe distress. The increase in alienation levels among the farmers is due to agrarian distress and agrarian distress is the result of agrarian crisis, which cannot be solved only with fire fighting techniques. There is urgent need to declare immediately the remunerative prices for cotton and other crops, creation of subsidiary occupations and other income sources as well as creation of irrigation facilities. To deal with the situation policy makers have to think critically for agricultural development by bringing the change in economic condition of the farmers of Vidharbha. Hence, it is necessary to have distinct and sustainable extension efforts especially as poor farmer's extension. Further feeling of isolation and burden of indebtedness are depressing farmers which need to be addressed with collective efforts of social advisory counselling services in the rural areas to improve social support system of distress ridden farmers.

Key words: *Antecedents of cotton growers'; Alienation from land; Distress*

Cotton is one of the principal crops in India playing a vital role in the country's economic growth by providing substantial employment and making significant contributions to export earnings. The cotton cultivation sector not only engages around 6 million farmers, but also involved another about 40 to 50 million people relating to cotton cultivation, cotton trade and its processing. Cotton occupies largest area of 122 lakh hectares in the world, however, productivity is only 481 kg lint per ha much below the average yield of most of the cotton growing countries. Maharashtra though ranks first in the area (41 lakh hectares) amongst major cotton growing states of India but its productivity is lowest (310 kg lint per ha) compared to national productivity and also other cotton growing states of India (Anonymous, 2011). Despite a steady decline in productivity of cotton, its share to gross domestic product (GDP) remains the largest sector in the country's economic growth. However, an agrarian crisis in several parts of cotton growing regions of the country pose a great threat not only to cotton but agricultural crops of food security as well as to the economic well being of farmers and

nation as a whole. Farmers in general have developed a negative attitude towards farming and serious to alienation from land. Alienation is a condition where the individual has lost control over the product of his labour, the immediate work process and hence the capacity to express himself in work. Mottaz (1981) defined alienation from land as a lack of intrinsic fulfilment in doing agriculture. That farm work is an instrumental activity in the sense that it is not rewarding in itself but simply a means to some other end. In his initial article Melvin Secman (1959) attempted to clarify the meaning of the concept by identifying five dimensions of alienation, powerlessness, meaninglessness, normalness, isolation and self estrangement. However in subsequent literature normalness is not treated as distinct dimension (Mottaz, 1981). Literature on work related to alienation suggests that variation in technology, structure of agriculture and farm policies lead to variation in working conditions and working conditions in turn interact with individual factors to produce different levels of self estrangement in work. The reports of farmer's suicides in different parts of

the country particularly from cotton growing areas of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab have attracted the attention of social scientists to application of this concept of farmers in general and cotton growers in particular. Several studies found factors like total income, non-remunerative cotton farming, unable to repay debts due to drought and continuous crop failures were the major antecedents related to alienation for certain group of farmers. In this paper an attempt has been made to measure cotton grower's alienation from land, explore some of the antecedents of alienation and suggest how to deal with present crises in suicide prone areas in India.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study have been collected from three districts Yeotmal, Wardha and Nagpur in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. Out of six crisis-ridden districts two highly suicides prone districts one each in western and eastern region namely Yeotmal in western region and Wardha in eastern region where comparatively larger number of farmers suicides occurred were investigated. The sample was drawn by stratified random sampling from 500 farmers in 100 villages from twenty tahsils of distress districts where higher number of farmer's suicides cases recorded and noted larger area under cotton cultivation. Also 100 farmers from 20 villages from four tahsils of Nagpur considered being non-distress district were selected on the basis of relatively less number of farmer's suicide cases. Thus investigations were confined to 600 farmers under Technology Mission on Cotton, Mini Mission-I project 'Social dynamics of cotton production in distress areas' (2007-12). Data were collected by personal interview method with the help of structured interview schedule. In addition to personal interview, observations, discussions with respondents and his family members were used for data collection.

Concepts and measurement : The following dimensions of alienation from land were done following procedure of Mottaz (1981).

Alienation from land was computed on the basis of response to twelve questions covering four dimensions of the concepts : powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self estrangement. Each dimension was computed separately.

Powerlessness : Powerlessness exists when farmers feel that they have little control over agricultural produce once they harvest it. It has 4 items and the response categories ranged along a four point continuum consisted of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree

Meaninglessness : It exists when farmers feel that they contribute little to the overall cotton production process and hence do not see the significance of their

role in overall agriculture scenario of the country. It has 2 items and the response categories ranged along a four point continuum consisted of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

Isolation : It refers to the absence of sense of identification with the community and the country. It has one item and the response categories ranged along a four point continuum consisted of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree

Self estrangement : This exists when farmers feel their work is not self - fulfilling and intrinsically rewarding in it. It has 5 items and the response categories ranged along a four point continuum consisted of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analyses for alienation from land considering sub - construct dimensions like powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self estrangement shows that more than three - fourth of the respondents reported to agree and strongly agree for the statements of alienation powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self estrangement (Table 1). The data are a clear indication that they cannot influence the farm policies of government although they form more than 60 per cent of the voters and main pillars of the food security of the nation. Farmers seem to have lost control over their produce once they harvest it. Since, they cannot control the market; they are not able to get the remunerative prices.

The means and standard deviations determined according to levels of alienation from land have been presented in Table 2. The study indicated that cotton farmers in the region in both distress and nondistress are having higher level of alienation from land. It is apparent from the data that the majority 55.60 and 59.00 per cent respondents in distress and non-distress, respectively, were under high levels of alienation, while remaining 37.60 and 41 per cent of respondents were under medium level of alienation. Little percentage of 6.8 per cent respondents was under low level of alienation in distress district whereas no single respondent was observed under low level of alienation in non-distress district. Alienation arises because of high degree of powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self estrangement exists among cotton growers. Farmers perception of no guaranteed remunerative price of the produce, vicious circle of uncertain rains and drought, repeated cotton crop failures leading to poor economy, non-availability of capital/credit, no economic support from friends/relatives during crisis, leading to a stressful life due to feeling of isolation from family, fellow farmers and community. Cotton growers perceive that their work as a farmer is not rewarded

Table 1
Distribution of respondents according to dimensions of sub - construct of alienation from land
(N= 500)

Sr. No.	Sub - construct dimensions of alienation	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Powerlessness					
i	Perception that they cannot influence the farm policies of government although form more than 60 per cent voters and are the main pillars of food security of the nation	138 (27.6)	284 (56.8)	34 (6.8)	44 (8.8)
ii	Feeling that they have lost the control over their produce once they harvest it	95 (19.0)	286 (57.2)	64 (12.8)	55 (11.0)
iii	Feeling that they cannot control the market forces	88 (17.6)	296 (59.2)	58 (11.6)	58 (11.6)
iv	Feeling that they are not able to get the remunerative prices	111 (22.2)	266 (53.2)	63 (12.6)	60 (12.0)
Meaninglessness					
v	Farming provides very little opportunity to use their real abilities and skill	94 (18.8)	258 (51.6)	72 (14.4)	76 (15.2)
vi	Farming gets very little reward compared to the countless hours they and their families put on farm	122 (24.4)	257 (51.4)	55 (11.0)	66 (13.2)
Isolation					
vii	Feeling of isolation from family, friends, fellow farmers and community is growing	133 (26.6)	258 (51.6)	49 (9.8)	60 (12.0)
Self-estrangement					
viii	Feeling that their work as a farmer is not self - fulfilling	99 (19.8)	273 (54.6)	61 (12.2)	67 (13.4)
ix	Feeling that contribution to farm work is not intrinsically rewarding	108 (21.6)	258 (51.6)	65 (13.0)	69 (13.8)
x	Feeling that working in farming is simply means to survive in holistic environment	77 (15.4)	287 (57.4)	82 (16.4)	54 (10.8)
xi	Deteriorating financial conditions tend to increased indebtedness	102 (20.4)	252 (50.4)	86 (17.2)	60 (12.0)
xii	Due to increased dependency on others farmers life become measurable	92 (18.4)	275 (55.5)	57 (11.4)	76 (15.2)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Table 2
Distribution of respondents according to the levels of alienation from land

Sr. No.	Levels of alienation	Respondents Distress (N=500)		Respondents Non-Distress (N=100)	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1	Low	34	06.8	0	00.00
2	Medium	188	37.60	41	41.00
3	High	278	55.60	59	59.00
	Total	500	100.00	100	100.0
		Mean : 56.78, SD : 9.12		Mean:57.18, SD : 8.35	

was among reasons quoted by majority respondent farmers for distress.

A close look at the values of correlation coefficient Table 3 brings into light that the socio-economic variables, annual income and social support were observed to have high negative correlation while expenditure and income liability gap have high positive correlation in distress and non-distress districts whereas, socio-economic status had positive correlation with farmer's alienation from land. This indicates that with decrease in income and social support, the alienation from land is more prominent and hence presence of low income, low social support, and expenditure and income liability gap has been proved as one of the specified causes of farmer's alienation from land. Also socio-economic status is significant at 0.05 level of probability in distress

Table 3
Coefficient of correlation of selected socio-economic variables of the respondents with alienation from land

Sr. No.	Variables	Distress	Non-Distress
		'r' value	'r' value
1	Annual income	-0.2456**	-0.1980*
2	Expenditure	0.3234**	0.2341**
3	Income liability gap	0.2816**	0.3426**
4	Family problems	-0.0325	0.0599
5	Socio-economic status	0.1982*	0.1578
6	Social support	-0.2216**	-0.2113*

district indicating that with decreasing socio-economic status of respondents, there had been increase in distress level. The income of the family is most important basic factor in everybody's life for fulfilling family needs. Everything can be adjusted but not the money. The annual income of the respondents directly influences economic viability, expenditure patterns, stability and rational behaviour of the individuals and hence decreases in income levels increases alienation situation level of respondents that is quite natural. Jadhao (2010) and Mishra (2006) also identified certain social economic reasons of agrarian crisis in suicide prone areas.

Suggestions to prevent agrarian distress : Suggestions of the respondents about what action should be taken for avoiding distress level among the farming community as responded by the respondents were presented in Table 4. It is clear from the Table that majority (96.67%) family members of the respondents suggested for remunerative prices to their farm produce, creation of subsidiary occupations and other income sources (91.67) and creation of irrigation facilities (91.17) as most of the farmers were depending on monsoon for agriculture were the important measures suggested to prevent the agrarian distress level. A considerable per cent suggested providing knowledge about latest technologies (84.0 followed by complete waiving of old loans (83.33), family counselling for increasing self confidence through local leaders/social workers (83.0), timely employment by creating non-farm employment

Table 4
Suggestions to prevent agrarian distress levels of the respondents (N=600)

Sr. No.	Suggestions to prevent agrarian distress levels	Frequency	Percentage
1	Remunerative price to farm produce	580	96.67
2	Provision/creation of irrigation facilities	547	91.17
3	Family counselling for increasing self confidence through local leaders/social workers	498	83.00
4	Complete waiving of old loans	503	83.33
5	Provision of easy, timely and sufficient credit at low interest rate	492	82.00
6	Creation of subsidiary occupations and other income sources	550	91.67
7	Crop insurance	440	73.33
8	Timely employment by creating nonfarm employment opportunities	498	83.00
9	Vigilance of quality inputs in market	449	74.83
10	Providing knowledge about latest technologies	504	84.00

opportunities (83.0), provision of easy, timely and sufficient credit at low interest rate (82.0), strict vigil of quality inputs in market (74.83), were the measures to reduce farmers distress in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra.

Increase in alienation levels among the farmers is due to agrarian distress and agrarian distress is the result of agrarian crisis, which cannot be solved only with fire fighting techniques. Government should focus on suggestions made by the respondents. Majority of respondents suggested remunerative price for their farm produce, creation of subsidiary occupations and other income sources and creation of irrigation facilities. Therefore there is urgent need to declare immediately the remunerative prices for all crops. The government should focus more on creating other income sources and creation of irrigation facilities as income from farming is not adequate to meet their overall expenditure and secondly irrigation facilities are very poor in Vidarbha.

CONCLUSION

The study has revealed that the levels of farmer's alienation from land are increasing. The situation is typically correlated with a grave concern as increasing distress among farmers. The study has brought out prominent picture of socio-economic situation of the farmers. The situation reflects typical trend of livelihood, completely rainfed farming, heavy dependence on uncertain labour, very small

holdings, lack of subsidiary occupations. The cropping pattern is mainly dominated by cotton and soybean crops, which are mostly uncertain as regards their productivity in rainfed situation. Majority of the farm families were found indebted due to low income level and poor socio-economic status level. Indebtedness was not too heavy in general but in related context and beyond their capacity to repay due to non-remunerative farming. There was a wide variation in income liability gap in majority of respondents. The income from all sources was not even enough to meet the essential expenditure of the household hence these farmers were in severe distress. The production system is weak and uncertain. For every new venture and cropping season the respondents has to barrow and pileup the burden of debt. To deal with the situation policy makers have to think critically for agricultural development by bringing the change in economic condition of the farmers of Vidharbha. Hence, it is necessary to have distinct and sustainable extension efforts especially as poor farmer's extension. Further feeling of isolation and burden of indebtedness are depressing farmers which need to be addressed with collective efforts of social advisory counselling services in the rural areas to improve social support system of distress ridden farmers.

Paper received on : May 12, 2013

Accepted on : October 06, 2013

REFERENCES

1. Anonymous 2011. Area, production and yield of cotton. Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, *Government of India*, Ministry of Agriculture, New Delhi
2. Dodamani M, Rajur B. C. & Jayshree H. 2010. Study on antecedents of alienation of cotton production in Karnataka State. *Karnataka J. Agric. Sci.*, 23 (2) : 258-261
3. Mottaz C. J. 1981. Some determinants of work alienation. *The Sociological Quarterly* 22 : 515-29
4. Secman M 1959. On the meaning of alienation. *American Sociological Review* 24 : 783-91
5. Jadhao G.C. 2010. Factors affecting agrarian distress proneness in western Vidharbha. *M.Sc. Thesis (Unpub.)* Dr. PDKV Akola
6. Mishra S. 2006. Suicide of farmers in Maharashtra. Report submitted to the Government of Maharashtra, *IGIDR*, Mumbai