

India: Most Farmers Who Died at Delhi's Borders Owned Less Than 3 Acres Land: Study

Monday 15 November 2021, by [GUPTA Vivek](#) (Date first published: 7 November 2021).

The study, carried out by economists associated with Punjabi University, implies that lives lost during the protest were of small and marginal farmers, and landless cultivators.

Chandigarh: Contrary to the claim that it is mostly 'big farmers' who are behind the farmers' protest at Delhi's borders, a study conducted by two economists associated with Punjabi University at Patiala has revealed that those who died during the protest cultivated no more than an average of 2.94 acres of land.

In all, 600 farmers have allegedly died in the protest that is now close to a year.

"The average size of the cultivated plot goes down to 2.26 acres if we include landless deceased farmers who were cultivating on the contracted land," revealed the study authored by Lakhwinder Singh, former professor of economics at Punjabi University, and Baldev Singh Shergill, assistant professor of social sciences at Punjabi University's Guru Kashi Campus in Bathinda.

The study, according to Singh, was based on data on 460 of the 600 farmers who died in the last 11 months of protest. The families of the deceased were contacted personally while conducting the study, Singh told *The Wire*.

The study implies that lives lost during the protest were of small and marginal farmers, and landless cultivators. It also mapped region-wise participation and deaths in Punjab, revealing that the Malwa region saw maximum participation in protests as well as the maximum deaths.

Punjab has 23 districts which are divided into three regions: Malwa has 15 districts while Doaba and Majha regions have four districts each. As per the study, 80% of the farmers who died were from Punjab's Malwa region that also has a relatively higher average size of cultivated area, followed by Doaba and Majha. The share of farm protest deaths of Doaba and Majha region were 12.83% and 7.39% respectively.

Impact of harsh weather conditions

According to the study, weather conditions contributed to the maximum number of deaths during the farm protest that completes one year on November 26.

The conditions were very harsh – protestors had to withstand severe cold wave when the movement was launched towards the end of last year. Later, the scorching heatwave in the summer was equally unbearable for farmers living in temporary shelters outside Delhi, the study said.

Food prepared in common kitchens may not have fulfilled the nutritional requirements to help

farmers maintain proper level of immunity which could have saved them from diseases, the study said.

"It is but natural that prolonged exposure to the natural environment such as heavy rains, scorching heat waves and severe cold waves had a far-reaching impact on the human body during the protest," added the study.

It further said that with the protest entering the second year, the fatality rate among protestors could go up further due to the continuous exposure to the natural environment.

Among other reasons that could increase deaths among protestors are road accidents and police action. Recently three women protesters were [mowed down](#) by a truck near the Tikri border.

Average age of deceased farmers stood at 57

Farmers who died during the protests had the average age of nearly 57.

The study also revealed that those who died in the movement belonged to lowest rung in the farming community. This means that poor farmers who died in the protest have left behind destitute families, many of whom have debt.

According to the study, several voluntary organisations had come to the rescue of families left behind by deceased farmers. Apart from NGOs, the Punjab government has announced compensation of Rs 5 lakh to affected families and a government job to a family member of a deceased farmer. But the study said this support is largely inadequate.

However, as per the study, on the whole, the measures taken by the government of Punjab and the NGO groups to support the families of the deceased farmers have had a positive impact on the farmer protest movement.

According to the study, the most important feature of the protest movement of the farmers is that it has followed Gandhian principles of peace and a high degree of consciousness for crafting the programme accordingly.

At the national level, it has given space for fearlessly expressing views against government decisions affecting the general masses adversely. It has also given support to institutions, such as the judiciary, to take independent decisions and protect the citizens' rights enshrined in the constitution of India, the study said.

In fact, this protest movement, the study said, has put forward an alternative agenda to the last 30 years of economic reforms implementation and has the consensus of diverse political parties of India. "The farmers' protest movement throughout has been able to keep a distance from all the political parties and never allowed them to occupy the public stage with them, pointing out clearly not only the maturity of the farmer leadership but also making the political leadership realise that they have lost the trust and faith of the farming community," the study noted.

Therefore, the ongoing protest movement of the farmers on outskirts of Delhi, the study said, has succeeded in generating alternative thinking regarding the change in the policymaking paradigm, while pointing out the deficiencies of deregulation, market liberalisation, and stakeholders participation in the decision making process. But the demand for the repeal of the farm laws still remain.

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