

# Desperate Farmers — Desperate Measures

BABA NANAK EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

*Suicide ends a life of despair for the victim but it only multiplies the distress for the victim's family.*

- S. Inderjit Singh Jaijee,

## A Grim Story of the Punjab We Don't Know



Sarjeet is in Class II. He is shy rather than other boys his age in village

Balran, District Sangrur. He stares at the floor and hides in the corner of his family's one bedroom home when visitors come to see him.

Sarjeet's mother, tired and misty eyed, recounts the all too common story of the debt trap that led to her husband and brother-in-law committing suicide. "Pee gaaye" (they drank it) she says which at first shot may be conflated with alcohol poisoning due to the

high rate of alcoholism in the area. "Kee pee gaaye?" (what did they drink?). Pesticide. She explained how two years ago Sarjeet had been playing around the cot on which his father lay, gulping down pesticide. Sarjeet had run up to the cot to see why his father was convulsing, only to be thrown to the ground where he watched his father commit suicide. "He keeps having nightmares...even during the day... seeing things," Sarjeet's mom explained, her own face revealing many sleepless nights.

Sarjeet's story is a common one in the poorer and lesser known 'suicide belt' of Punjab. It consists of districts that don't fall on

the Delhi-Amritsar route, or the more industrialized part of Punjab. Districts Muktsar, Bathinda, Mansa, Sangrur, and Patiala. In this belt, farmers are committing suicide in alarming numbers. BNES has recorded 1842 debt-related suicides in the 91 villages in which they are operating. These 91 villages are from only 2 sub-subdivisions of Sangrur, just one of Punjab's 20 Districts. Punjab Farmer's Commission estimates about 2000 farmer suicides each year.

In Sarjeet's village, 91 people have committed suicide by hanging, self-immolation, jumping in front of trains, but mostly by drinking pesticide.

Sarjeet's father and uncle both committed suicide as the family became burdened by huge debts. They were small landowners and were forced to take loans at high interest rates. After Sarjeet's father committed suicide, the younger brother found the accumulating debt on his shoulders, and he too committed suicide.

***Debt-ridden  
Punjabi farmers  
are increasingly  
opting for the  
extreme desperate  
measure of  
suicide.***

## Agriculture — A losing proposition in the "Wheat Basket"?

Government policies such as diversion of river waters from Punjab and requiring farmers to sell grain only to the Government at a price dictated by the Centre forces farmers into an impossible situation. The lowering water table makes irrigation water a costly commodity. A ma-

majority of farmers take loans for digging tube wells. Further, post-Green Revolution agriculture remains heavily dependant on expensive fertilizers and pesticides.

In sum, the inputs of agriculture thus greatly outweigh the outputs.

Farmers with small landholdings, are barely surviving. Any unexpected health issues, wedding costs, or irrigation needs force them to turn to loans from informal money lenders that charge heavy interest, sometimes up to 60%! All of these lead to a never ending cycle of debt.



# Rescue & Revival

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BNES Staff and Volunteers record family statistics, including sources of income, number of dependants, and children's education

## Reignite the Laughter of Punjab

The romanticized Punjab villages are supposed to have robust youth, hearty food, and laughter. Not 15-year-old girls with heads of gray hair due to mal-nourishment or orphans without slippers or sweaters in the bitter cold.

Since 2004, BNES has been running the "Rescue and Recovery" program for families where the breadwinner has committed suicide. Our aim is to bring children back into the mainstream in their own home environment. Sending children to orphanages and elderly parents to old age homes, would uproot them, thereby furthering the trauma. We adopt families where the children are school-age. Our aim is for the children to receive education and to escape the debt trap, thus preventing further despair and suicides in these families.

Thus, far, we have adopted 160 families.

***You can sponsor a  
family through BNES  
for Rs. 1200/mo.***



## Sponsor a Family

The program allows donors to sponsor a family for Rupees 1200 / month. The money is provided to the families on the condition that families continue to send their children to school regularly.

The money is an incentive to keep the children in school, pay for their uniforms, school supplies, and lunches. Otherwise children, especially girls, are withdrawn from school as soon as the family faces disruption and vulnerability.

***400 families are  
waiting to be  
adopted!***

**Donations** may be sent by crossed checks or bank draft in favour of BABA NANAK EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

Or directly to either of the under mentioned banks:

1. **Punjab Natl Bank**, Moonak, Punjab. A/C No.444300 .
2. **State Bank of India** Jakhal Branch, Haryana. A/C No. 30300348884 .

You can also provide In-Kind Assistance:

1. Computers: Old or new desktops and laptops will help us achieve our goal of re-opening a computer center for girls as well as strengthening the Computer classes in our College.
2. Clothes, Quilts, Blankets, Sports Equipment

**Donations are eligible for tax relief u/s 80G of the Income Tax Act.**