



Physiography and Sequential Analysis of Farmers' Suicide: A Study of Kota Neelima's *The Shoes of the Dead*

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This paper tries to analyze how history of agriculture and the peasant life is reflected in the day to day life. It also exposes the positive and negative problems that peasants face in terms of their economy since post-independence times. As we turn the pages of history we would find nothing other than agriculture as the predominant source of Indian livelihood. But in the annals of the history that Indian livelihood, Cultivation has been facing serious problems. Pages of history would give us information on how our civilization came to exist, how farmers found their occupation, how a pattern of agriculture was distinguished and how cattle were reared and so on.

Key words: Farmers, Suicide, Livelihood, Politics,

India today spends half of her income total income on consumption of food and other half is roughly used for other expenditures. Majority of the workers in India rely on agriculture. As a result sustainability of agriculture is crucial yet, to a large extent, has been either lowered. Agriculture is has always provided unfailing support to the below poverty level groups and to the more vulnerable poverty class since the time it was born. The BRICS nations say that even one percentage increase in agriculture

has the ability of diluting at least two or three times of effective poverty. When agriculture is given priority there may be some sort of change in the economy as well as in the lives of the people as it acts an important sector that sustains the growth overall and development. The Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council (PMEAC) has stressed the need for agricultural reforms.

Apart from agricultural reforms, there are certain determinants that take care of the agricultural growth. Those are soil resources, productive infrastructure, and water conservation. Other than these reforms there are certain schemes by the government like NAIS (The National Agricultural Insurance Scheme), KCC (Kisan Call Center) and others go hand in hand with Agriculture. Today, as the sources have increased farmers do get immediate remedy for soil testing like Soil Organic Carbon (SOC) test and other various tests.

Quality of seeds and the efficacy of other input such as the usage of fertilizers, pesticides and the irrigation determine the production. The research says that a farmer gives to the seed. The other part of the production is taken care of by the agro-climate. For example, certain seeds do not grow under certain climate. Insufficient use of water may also cause problem. Today innovations in machinery and other instruments of agriculture have been increasing such that history is radically changing according to the very developments that are taking place.

Today, the condition is that, farmers in an average of at least one among each family quits farm work and goes in search of other employment. This unusual change is happening only in the recent years and the production is also on the decline. On the other hand, the cost of a produce is increasing to its peak. Farmers' as a whole play their own significant role in the economy of any country. Today groups that earn the highest income are increasing while groups that do agricultural work are decreasing because of the no income status. Most of the farmers depend on their yield to pay their dues, to pay bank loans, to give their daughters' in marriage, even for medical expenses depend on the yield (whatever it may be) that they get from the land. Without any sort of investment a farmer cannot do anything. Sainath reports on July 17th 2013 in his interview to Leelabai that "the cost of cultivation and the lack of proper price for the produce—that's killing" the farmer.

A few Indian authors who dealt with the issues of farm crisis, famine history and lives of farmers in their works as Kota Neelima in her *Shoes of the Dead*(2013) are Sourav Mishra in *Long Yarn, the story of Indian Cotton and Farmer Suicides*(2013) , Ranjana Padhi in *Those Who Did Not Die*, Anna da Costa in *India's Farmer Suicides: the women left behind*, Dr.KanakKantiBagchi in *Agrarian Crisis Farmers Suicide And Livelihood Security of Rural labour in India*, Vandana Shiva in *Earth Democracy: Justice, sustainability, and peace* (2005). They have brought the painful disaster of farm crisis through their novels and writings nerve center.

The data that each author produces is very much significant. Even the other book *Long Yarn* deals with the cotton farmers in vidarbha region of Maharashtra. Other regions like Punjab, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh became the cynosure for every humanistic writer. In the book *Agrarian Crisis and Farmers Suicide* by R.S.Deshpande and SarojArora they have clearly mentioned that these crisis and deaths occurred due to the poor economy and also due to crop cultivation yields that fetch low financial returns ever in the pre-globalization period.

According to her, the other main cause for the crisis is the increased dependence on commercial crop, reliance on ground water irrigation, informal credits, and price violation as a result of which the meagre yields that they produce become the ultimate cause for farmers distress. The plight of the cotton cultivators in Vidarbha region in Maharashtra, where the incidence of farmer suicides has been rather high is the main focus in Deshpande's work.

There is no denying that adequate supply of funds is given for the sustaining growth of farmers in that particular region. In the absence of effective help and support from the government to make farming a profitable enterprise, any increase in the flow of credit will only make the farmers to plunge deeper into indebtedness and this would only heightens the misery. Increased indebtedness is a consequence of the agrarian crisis where there is a shape decline in the profitability of farming.

The other book by RanjanaPadhi's *Those Who Did Not Die*, padhi describes how debt, crop failures, rise in cost of pesticides and other agricultural materials, ill health in families cause the farmer to worry

more than enough. A large number of peasants are giving up on farming as source of income for their livelihood is inadequate. So whether people are landless or have a small land, they migrate in search of other sources of income. The situation of agricultural communities is getting worse as today agriculture has become more expensive on the one hand and on the other it is not taken up to a mark by the government. Farmers are forced into deep distress causing many to sell their lands and to give up farming. On the other side expense is on the increase for agricultural inputs like pesticide, seeds and fertilizers with the proportionately and continuing decrease in the receiving output/produce which Anna da Costa refers to as indebtedness spiral.

Kota Neelima, through the character of Dr Videhi Jaichand suggests a few tips for the Government which can be implemented in real life.

- i. Agricultural extension services should be individual to each farmland. Often, fertilizers, pesticides and sprays are applied disproportionately to increase the yields. A separate corps of scientists, experts, even students, could make case studies in villages so that examples are set and solutions are found.
- ii. Subsidies for fertilizers and power should be withdrawn. The overuse of fertilizers is killing the soil and the overuse of bore wells is depleting the groundwater. These also add to the expense borne by the farmers and result in debt escalation. The subsidy withdrawals might have the added advantage of reducing pressure on the land so that it becomes sustainable for others and would encourage farmers to continue with agriculture.
- iii. The expenditure of farm income is connected to the increase in exposure of urban lifestyles such as television and cinema. To mitigate this the urban youth should be drafted to rural areas for a period mainly to interact with rural youth. This would help in the exchange of information on adapting to modernization and realization that life in cities is as much of a struggle as it is in villages.
- iv. Religion is an important support system for the rural society and spiritual discussions can yield solutions to many problems. This trend is fast fading away in many villages due to its

incompatibility with the modern age. As a result, lives have become isolated and have fallen a prey to unshared tensions.

Such suggestions are evident in Kota Neelima's both that directly or indirectly seem to evoke farmers out of despair. (Neelima 8, 9)

Besides that, the main protagonist of the novel Gangiri Bhadra makes a series of suggestions that could help considerably in bringing down the rate of farmer suicide.

- i. The repayment of both formal and informal loans taken by farmers holding five to ten acres in Mityala (that represents any place) can be postponed by one year without affecting their eligibility for fresh loans for the new crop. This will break the loan-debt repayment cycle and hopefully help the defaulters clear their due.
- ii. A combined list of defaulters from the bank and private moneylenders should be compiled. Those who have been on the list for more than two years must be supported through welfare schemes. This will also help in ascertaining the real cause for the farmers' financial trouble.
- iii. A failure proof guarantee on farm inputs from dealers should be made mandatory so that they do not sell low quality supply.
- iv. A law should be made that recovery agents who visit household do so only with the permission of the panchayat and in the presence of witnesses. Such suggestions in the course of the novel prove vital for a secure existence for farmers. (Neelima 123-124)

Agriculture in peninsular India depends on the rainfall except in some of the assured rainfall regions. Others depend heavily on the monsoon rainfall and its distribution. Peninsular India receives rain from both South West monsoon (June-sep.) and North East monsoon (Oct.-Dec.). Entire Maharashtra receives rainfall mostly from South West monsoon to an extent of 460 to 3164mm. Deficit in South West monsoon rainfall brings a great consequence of reduced production for the year. This is ardent in states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Maharashtra. Thus it leads to drought to a large extent and the frequency of drought even occurs once in 2.5 years. In Tamil Nadu, it is once in 5yrs, once in 4yrs in Vidarbha region of

Maharashtra. This break of the monsoon heavily affects the small farmers, marginal farmers and also the livelihoods of the rural poor. It also leads to deficit soil moisture condition during early or middle or at the end of late season.

Cropping pattern is one which is followed by farmers from ages together from generation to generation. Rapid growth of technological facilities, machineries and other agricultural products including hybrid seeds that give excess production in very few days evoke farmers to give way to the new arrival of technology in farming. The farmers' even follow certain tactics in sowing seeds in different soils like cotton in black soil, rice in red soil etc...And their crop cultivation is based on the soil varying physiography. The adversity of rainfall affects the flow of reservoirs, cause scarcity of water in wells, water bodies; reduce in level of ground waters contribute in late sowing and production. A Break in the monsoon causes prolonged dry spells and is responsible for early, mid and terminal droughts. These aberrant situations often lead to poor crop performance and or total crop failure. While the early season droughts have to be combatted with operations of re-sowing again mid and end droughts should be managed with giving the soil the necessary nutrient management and moisture concentration measures. Such drought not only affects men but also other livestock and the milk productivity of cattle coupled with other such loss.

Once in our India we had anti-money lenders protest, where farmers stood against them who looted the wealth of poor farmers in the name of interest. In the 1960's and 70's a major peasant movement rose and land reforms were taken into consideration. Three and half million acres of land were redistributed and 2.3million acres were given to the farmers of west Bengal. While in the 1960's and 70's this was a major peasant revolution and struggle. In contrast to this was the major peasant suicide. In his speech he also mentioned the role of State bank. He said that the state bank of India gives 48 cores to Mercedes bank on 7% interest and the same bank when it offers a lone for a tractor it lends money at the rate of 12.7 to 14%. Sainath questions why such discrimination is made even in providing loans.

The Indian system endlessly forms committees till somebody gives a trouble-freereport that is actually prepared at the instance of the government. For example, in Maharashtra finally the report of farmers' suicide came down to 13 a mere set report where the reports merely said what the government

actually wanted to be reported. This is how 'planning' in India works against farmers Sainath says. He also added that all three committee asked the government of India to revise it appropriately if the poverty figures in rural India sharply, steeply moved upwards.

The suicide rate of farmers is higher throughout the world than of the non-farming population. In India, at least one farmer commits suicide every 32 minutes between 1992 and 2005. Many farmers lack self-sufficiency and are thrown into despair. While the prices of crops have been pushed down often even below the cost of production- the prices of inputs such as seed, fertilizers and pesticides have gone up. With limited resources, farmers depend on borrowed money to purchase seeds and other inputs and also to cultivate their land. A drop in farm income could quickly lead to farmers to debt more than they own or earn. The main cause for farmers' suicide is due to financial stress where they undergo due to constant financial pressures related to farm crisis and some ongoing drought and flood situation which add to the economic problems. As a result they lose independence and control. These issues are obviously not under their control; likewise even some problems such as disease or weather is really not their making; yet a highly personalized thing that kills them is "Debt". These farmers also suffer an extreme sense of loss and hopelessness owing loss of crop, loss of land thereby loss of community and loss of what is called family farm. Another hidden reason could be debt related Depression or depression which could also arise from exposure to agricultural pesticides which may increase the risk of mood disorders ultimately leading to suicide.

- Farm lands are confiscated due to inability to pay back high interest loans.
- Harassment by corrupt money-lenders
- Widows are burdened to work and take care of the family.

The rural poor in our country are victims of the economic, social, cultural, political and bureaucratic system. The poor in the past did not suffer the pangs of poverty as much as they do today. This is because the society in the past was the integral part of the poor and had its own value system.

Poverty in the economic sense is defined as a state wherein an individual cannot satisfy his minimum wants for healthy living in a given social environment. This is mainly because of I in the law, the representative committee did not accept the inequality in the distribution of income and wealth.

Today we could see numerous farmers around the country are trying to raise their voice against the three farm acts that it has passed. The farmers and their representatives are demanding for the repeal of the laws and they seek for the compromise. The Supreme Court of India though have put a stay, the committee wants to eradicate the law fully. The conditions of the farmers are worsening day by day. Farmers have rejected the government's proposal and did not give way for it to proceed. More than eleven rounds of talk have been made with the farmers which ended inconclusive. The law which the government calls as Farm bill is been called as anti-farm law and the farmers claim that the law leaves the farmers at the mercy of the corporate.

The farmers also seek the government to create a Minimum Support bill to ensure that the corporate cannot control the price of the produce to an extent. Once this law was introduced, the protest began in the local Punjab and slowly spread to the nearby states. There was a many general national wide strike where more than 250 million people supported in order to oppose the government which was stubborn in getting back the farm bill. Later the movement was named as Dilhi Chalo (transl., *Let's go to Delhi*) and all marched towards Delhi, the Capital.

The protesters marched to Delhi and could see more and more coming in numbers. There was also a tractor rally which later turned into a violent protest. There was a clash between the police and the agitated farmers. The news channels repatedly showing a picture of a farmers who is been blood shedding and a few lying down on the earth. Resulting to that many protesters who were marching towards Delhi was stopped in the middle and they were diverted. The court also interfered and asked the government to put the law on hold and on the protester to hold back their protest. The leaders of the farmers other hand was not listening and said that they will not hold back until there is no solution for that.

The theme of the fiction focuses on the ill-fortune of the farmers such as, failure of the crops and monsoon rain. The farmer is said to be the backbone of a country like India. But no one suffers as he suffers and at the same time both the society and political system ignore the pain when the rain and crops fail. The poverty stricken farmer weeps day in and day out.

The farmer feels guilty when he sees his crop dying for lack of water or for lack of fertile soil. Sometimes it's very hard for him to even feed his cattle when he himself is in dire conditions. Slowly, he thinks of additional activity of spending money to recover the loss. Here is where he falls in the well of debt. Sometimes despite spending so much money there may not be the expected harvest. As a result, he has to take the heavy burden of paying interests for the sum of money he had borrowed. Women pledge their ornaments and sometimes even their farm lands; they go for bank loans and for private loans where the rate of interest is exorbitant. The illiterate farmer adopts his own ill-advised strategies to rescue his crops and falls into the ruthless pit of debts. Unable to recover himself in the final stage the poor farmer resorts to committing suicide.

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