

AGRARIAN CRISIS AND FARMERS' SUICIDE IN INDIA: DIMENSION, NATURE AND RESPONSE OF THE STATE IN KARNATAKA

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Farmers' suicide in different parts of India has become a recurring phenomenon over the past one decade or so, however it reflects the deep rooted agrarian crisis—the latter is entrenched in the path of capitalist development pursued by the Indian state. The beginning of a such crisis can be traced back to the decade of 1980s when farmers' movement in different parts of India began demanding remunerative prices, writing off loans, etc. What added to the crisis in recent years is globalisation. In fact, all these crises have translated in the form of farmers' committing suicide. It all began in Andhra Pradesh and later in Punjab, Maharashtra, Kerala and Karnataka. These are the farmers who can be called Market Oriented Autonomous Farmers, belonging to different social groups or backgrounds. Despite the best efforts of the government, the crisis is not over. A reworking on agrarian policy including addressing the larger issues of farmers would contain the spate of suicides. otherwise it may envelope the whole of India

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past couple of years the issue of farmers' suicide in different parts of the world, including India has slowly become a major issue in the academic narratives and policy prescription. This trend of committing suicide has sharpened with globalisation enveloping different continents or the countries. There is a direct connection between the severe economic crisis of African Continent, struggle of indigenous population of Latin America, farmers' committing suicide in Australia/ England, or in India—this connection is established with globalisation connecting each continent including different social categories within the larger framework of global capital or capitalism This is the reason why it is stated that ¹ the Australian hinterland is slowly becoming the centre for farmers' committing suicide- here in the rural side 17 people in every 100,000 committed suicide between 1988 and 1998. In total in Australia nearly 2,000 farmers have committed suicide in the last five years, "1,100 in just three provinces of the U.S. since 1999, and at least one in every month in the United Kingdom" (*The Hindu*, 2006). Here the apparent reasons are : ongoing drought and financial debts restructuring (Pirani, 2006), falling commodity prices, however the ultimate reason is the way the globalization has created the volatile economy and depeasantised/displaced large number of categories.²

In fact, farmers' suicide³ in different parts of India, particularly Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala and Karnataka over the past one-decade or so have completely changed the discourse on Indian agriculture. These issues of suicide have come at a time when the debate on agrarian economy was shifting from the debate on mode of production of 1960s (Thorner, 1982; Gough, 1980) to the growing crisis of the economy in the 1980s to the

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farmers' suicide in the recent years. It also came at a time when Indian agriculture was undergoing tremendous transformation: Indian agriculture is progressively acquiring the "small farm character"; focus is shifting from food grains to non-food grains; new inputs such as seeds occupy a prominent place in the inputs; agriculture is slowly but steadily being linked to the global market (CSD, 2005).

Nonetheless the suicide is the manifestation of a larger crisis—crisis of agrarian capitalism—an intrinsic characteristic of capitalism (Magdoff, 2002, p. 2). The beginning of such a crisis needs to be located much earlier to the decade of globalisation, particularly during the decade of 1980s when terms of trade was going against the agriculture (Swamy, 1987; Rudra, 1982); urban biased policies were dominating the state policies and farming was becoming a losing proposition. During this decade the crisis was manifested in the form of farmers' movement (Brass, 1995; Gill, 1995, pp. 195-211; Lindberg, 1995, pp. 95-125; Omvedt, 1995, pp. 126-194; Assadi, 1995, pp. 212-227 and 1997). In fact the farmers' movement adopted different strategies to express the crisis: long marches, strike, *chakka jam*, prohibiting the entry of bureaucrats, fasting, civil disobedience, etc. Secondly, the crisis was also reflected in the form of discourses, or debates—these debates or discourses were related to urban biased policies of the state, unremunerative prices, growing indebtedness, discourse on development paradigm, discourse on the politics of denial, discourse on the marginalisation of peasantry or farmers' within the overall politics of the state, etc. The agrarian crisis was further expressed by a series of farmers' movement in Maharashtra under *Shetkari Sanghatana*, *Tamiluga Vyavasaigal Sangam* of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka *Rajya Raitha Sangha* in Karnataka and *Bharatiya Kisan Union* in UP/Punjab, etc. Nowhere agrarian crisis translated into suicide form. This is because of the fact that agitation politics provided farmers' a sense of identity, a new discourse, a new vision about themselves and the world around them. A shift in the discourse came at a time when India was embracing a neo-liberal agenda, which in the final analysis went against the Indian farmers: it further sharpened the crisis of agrarian economy; it increased rural indebtedness (Deshpande and Prabhu, 2006); further marginalized the rural categories and trapped the rural categories in the larger network of global capital through the mediation of seeds, new technology, etc. In fact, it was a period when farmers' movements in different parts of India were undergoing internal crisis—they were vertically and horizontally divided on the issue of addressing globalization,⁴ they were internally becoming weak as their social bases were slowly but steadily shrinking.

II. PERSPECTIVES ON FARMERS' SUICIDE

Even though there are large number of scholars who understood suicide from the larger perspective of globalization⁵ (CSD, 2005) however there are debates which try to locate suicide or crisis from different perspectives or discourses.

The first debate tries to understand suicide as "ecocide" as well as part of multiple crises: these crises are ecological, social as well as economic. All these are not exclusive rather they are interrelated. This perspective is basically socio-anthropological in nature and tries to argue that "ecocide" is the result of intense use of hybrid seeds, chemicals, and pesticides. This has spilled over to economic as well as social life style too- too much of market oriented use of hybrids have ultimately created a situation of debt trap, leading to suicide (Vasavi, 1998)

Corollary to the above, there are others who tried to understand suicide as a consequence of deep-rooted agrarian rural distress as well as four important factors: technological, ecological, socio-cultural, and finally policy factors (Ratna Reddy and Galab, 2006, pp.1838-40). In fact, there are others who exclusively concentrate on one particular issue. One such issue is the issue

of state policy: policy on co-operative or institutional lending, fail to contain the private money lending category, policy on irrigation etc. All these had bearings on the suicide phenomenon.

One more important debate tries to locate the crisis or suicide to the negative growth of economy in recent past, including reaction to multiple factors in the larger context of globalization (Janaiah, 2005). Shiva (Undated) makes a major case for negative growth of agriculture in recent past. She comes closer to the Marxist critique wherein the latter located the reasons in the liberalization/neocolonialism or imperialist globalization⁶: "In the last five years India has witnessed unprecedented agrarian distress. The per capita production of food grains has witnessed a decline, but more than that rural India has experienced a massive deflation. All-India absorption of food grains per capita per annum has fallen by 22 kilograms between the three-year period of 1995-98 and that of 2000-03". On the contrary the argument of Shiva (Undated) is also to understand the larger linkages emanating from the globalization, which has created crisis of agricultural as well as the negative economy. She writes: "Farmers' suicide are a result of indebtedness, and debt is a result of rising costs of agricultural inputs and falling prices of agricultural produce. Both the rising costs of production and decline in farm prices are intended outcomes of trade liberalization and economic reform policies driven by agribusiness corporations. Farmers' suicide are therefore an inevitable outcome of an agricultural policy which favours corporate welfare and ignores farmers' welfare" (Shiva, *ibid.*).

Corollary to this argument, the fourth debate tries to locate the reasons for suicide in⁷ "aping the World Bank model of agriculture or what is called McKinsey Model of development" that created spaces for industry driven agriculture which ultimately translated into agribusiness development including Information Technology. This model of development has not only exacerbated the crisis leading to an environmental catastrophe but also destroyed millions of rural livelihoods (Shrama, 2004).

Fifth debate tries to go beyond the issues of globalisation. This debate on suicide as well as crisis tries to understand the growing phenomenon "in the wider context of several other changes that the social structural or rural (Punjab) as also the farming communities in the region have been experiencing during the last four or five decades". This particular debate comes from those who are working on the Punjab economy (Jodhka, 2005, p. 1) and tries to combine once again sociological as well as political economy approach to the issues

The debate goes beyond political economy approach and focuses on such complex factors as biological, genetic, psychological, social, cultural financial and environmental factors (Gyanmudra, 2005). Interestingly some of the reports of the state agencies or the government also attribute to such factors.

Another important discourse tries to locate suicide exclusively in one phenomenon: the phenomenon of increasing indebtedness (Deshpande and Prabhu, 2005, p.4663) or the debt trap.

One more perspective tries to understand the suicide interms of Durkhemian theory, particularly as an effect of "individualization, a process of socio-economic 'estrangement' from agrarian communities experienced by rural producers in the context of rapid economic growth" (Mohanty, 2005, p. 1).

Finally a discourse tries to locate the reasons in multiple issues. This discourse came from the state: the latter tries to locate suicide in such issues as incessant floods; manipulation of prices by traders; supply of spurious pesticides and seeds; decline in prices of agricultural produce; increase in the cost of agricultural inputs; increasing burden of loan, crop loss, psychologically stress, successive drought in recent years and of course, neglect of farmers by the previous state government (*Asia Times*, June 24, 2004).

All these discourse over look the larger context in which suicides are taking place. The larger context is the context of agrarian capitalism and the subsequent ambiguous path of capitalist development resorted to by the Indian state, including the state of Karnataka. This is the reason why the crisis in the final analysis becomes the crisis of agrarian capitalism in recent years. Towards this end the issues of identity are added.

III. AGRARIAN CAPITALISM/POST GREEN REVOLUTION

Unlike the western world, in Indian context agrarian capitalism was introduced or superimposed on the existing social relations or social structure. This path of development did not destroy different social structures or social relations—it allowed the presence of different social structures along with agrarian capitalism. This does not mean that state intervention was limited: its intervention was conditioned by such other factors as increasing the productivity, interlinking the local with the international market, bringing in large amount of land under capitalist development, removal of social categories who are “drag on the economy”, and finally creation of new social categories such as rich peasantry who can partake in the capitalist development. In fact, the latter case became important for the Indian state including its various units. Towards this end the Indian state introduced Green Revolution, which brought in global capitalist to enter into the domain of Indian agriculture through the means of seeds, new technology, pesticides, chemicals etc. Secondly, it was done through the means of land reforms- this is partial success in such states as Karnataka- most of the time it was defeated by means of “ambiguous” definitions etc. This particular reform brought in new social categories in the agrarian economy, which came from Backward Class/castes in the countryside. Interestingly these are the categories that are keen to enter into the larger economy/market and those they created spaces for themselves in the local/regional or national level on later date. Finally the state introduced financial institutions, however without destroying the presence of middlemen or the moneylenders in the countryside. This is in the ultimate analysis created a situation of ambiguous path of development in India- as the capitalist development in agriculture confined to certain areas, crops, and class—in other words it had class, crop, area bias.

This is the reason why the crisis began to emerge within one or two decades of the introduction of Green Revolution or the New Technology in agriculture which got translated when a series of farmers’ movement began to envelop different parts of India: in Punjab it began to manifest in late 1970s, similar is the case of Tamil Nadu, in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, they manifested in 1980s under different farmers’ movement. The crisis reflected in their demand for remunerative prices, writing off loans, declaring agriculture as an industry, increasing the subsidy to agriculture, parity of prices between agriculture and industrial produce, etc. This crisis however, brought the Indian State, Agrarian Classes as well as Industrial Classes in conflictual relations, or pitted against each other. It was during this time the issues of “loosing identity” was brought to the centrality – losing identity as specific social category etc were employed, including the fact that new theoretical discourses were employed to express the agrarian crisis. Joshi (Undated, p.2) for example employed such terms as “Bharat vs. India”—the latter represents the Industrialized India and can be located both within the agrarian society as well as outside in the urban/ metropolitan/industrialized cities. On the contrary, the “Bharat” represents, “mass of rural people”. “India”, he argues “, thrives by starving the peasant, procuring raw materials at unremunerative prices, etc.”. On the contrary there are others such as Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, the latter is vehement critique of globalization conceptualized the relations interms of “Halli Mattu Pattana”, i.e. “rural vs. urban”. Even the crisis was viewed in terms of

popular discourses such as "We milch the cow but who drinks it?", "We rear the chickens but who eats the egg?" "Farmers Mean Bharat", "Bharat means Farmers" We are not Indebted but the Government", "Farmers are the owners of the country, Bureaucrats are its servants"(KRRS, 2000, p. 16).

However what added to the existing crisis of agrarian capitalism is when India became a part of globalisation. Although, it created spaces for autonomous categories to emerge so as to par take in the larger market- be it national or global- however it did not checkmate the autonomous categories from the fear of "loosing distinct social identity" especially when market turned into volatile, and the crisis was becoming too sharp. This is one of the reasons why the crisis of 1990s was seen and located in the externalities- particularly the way the global/western capitalism was dislocating the locality or social categories from their locality. It is in this context that loss of identity becomes most important. Secondly, the fear of loosing identity emanated from the fact that new autonomous categories who derived their identity through such methods as leasing in land, or market even from the crop began to realize the fact that the crisis was ultimately engulfing their own identity. To retain their identity as "Market Oriented Autonomous Farmers"(MOAF) suicides becomes the last resort—it was but to escape from the intense crisis on the one hand and to retain their social identity on the other. Suicide, thus, became intense during the decade of globalisation.

IV. PATH OF DEVELOPMENT AND INCREASING CRISIS⁸

The path of development that the Indian state has resorted to has different consequences. One important consequence is that agriculture continues to receive raw deal in the hands of the Indian state. The public investment in the agriculture over the last one or the two decades has drastically come down. Even the budgetary allocation does not cross two percent of the total budget- this year it is just one percent. Even the average budgetary allocation for irrigation has remained more or less at 0.35 per cent.

The ambiguous path of development has not created debt free farmers. On the contrary debts⁹ of farmers have been multiplying. Long back in 1928 the Royal Commission reported that under the colonial rule, the peasant lives in debts and dies in debts. This particular argument still holds good even today, Before the onset of liberalization or globalisation, it is stated that twenty per cent of the peasants were indebted; the same trend has increased to 70 per cent, with highest per cent reporting from Andhra (70 per cent), Punjab (65 per cent), Karnataka (61 per cent and Maharashtra (60 per cent) (Kailash, 2006). The latest National Sample Survey reported that 48.6 per cent of farmhouse holds are in debt or 43.6 million of farmers are in debt; the incident of rural indebtedness is highest in Andhra Pradesh (82.0 per cent) followed by Tamil Nadu (74.5 per cent) Punjab stands third (65.4 per cent) followed by Kerala and Karnataka (64.4 per cent and 61.1 per cent respectively)(Narayanamoorthy, 2006, p. 471) In fact, the NSS data further showed that 50 per cent rural debt is mainly owed to capital intensive farming such as Bt. cottonseeds and agrochemicals. "The two most important purposes of taking loans were stated to be "capital expenditure in farm business" and "current expenditure in farm business". At the all India level, out of every 1000 rupees taken as loan, 584 rupees were borrowed for capital-intensive agriculture". Most interesting finding is the fact that the "highest proportion of indebted farmers are belonging to backward communities with 42 per cent"(Janaiah, 2005). It is stated that about 70 per cent of indebted farmers own less than two hectares of land (Deshpande and Prabhu, 2006).

In fact, earlier Reserve Bank in its report of 2003 has clearly stated that World Bank terms have had effect on the rural credit- rural credit to the small and middle farmers from nationalized

banks and from the cooperative societies have declined from 15.9 per cent in June 1990 to 9.8 per cent in March 2003. However if we take the short term and long-term loans advanced for agriculture and allied activities by the formal financial institution, the same trend is discernible (see Table 1). The short-term loan advanced to the agriculture, percentage to the total bank credit, has been declining from 1980 on wards. It declined from 13.3 per cent in 1980-81 to reach 8.6 per cent in 1990-91 and finally in 1999-00 it came down to 6.1 per cent. Similar trend is visible in the case of long-term loan too. : In 1980-81 it was 16.0 per cent to the total bank credit; this increased by 0.6 per cent in 1990-91 however; it came down to 8.3 per cent in 1990. However during the decade of 1990s- the decade of globalisation- a declining trend to advance loans to agriculture is very much visible. (RBI, 2001). It is now accepted that “that there was complete failure of cooperative societies in the villages. Only 27 per cent loans had been disbursed through cooperatives in the last one year, as compared to 62 per cent by commercial and regional banks” (*Financial Express*, May 19, 2006).

Table 1
Short Term and Long Term Loans for Agriculture and
Allied Activities by Formal Institutions

Year	Short term % to the total	Long term % to the total
1980-81	13.3	16.9
1985-86	10.4	18.5
1989-90	9.4	17.9
1990-91	8.6	16.6
1991-92	8.9	16.5
1992-93	9	14.8
1993-94	7.9	14.6
1995-96	7	11.1
1996-97	7.2	11.1
1997-98	6.6	10.2
1998-99	6.4	9.2
1999-00	6.1	8.3

Source: RBI, *Handbook of Statistics on Indian Economy*, 2001.

One more interesting observation is made by NSS data. This is pertaining to annual income from agriculture.-In fact, annual total income at the all India level comes to around Rs. 25, 380/ (\$500) this include cultivation, wages, farming of animals etc. Here the income from cultivation comes to around 45 per cent of the total income- this comes to around Rs. 11, 628 per household. Interestingly the annual income from cultivation is Rs. 8916 in Andhra Pradesh, Rs. 33864 in Punjab, Rs. 15,192 in Karnataka, and least is found in Rajasthan—Rs. 4032 (\$90) (Narayanamoorthy, 2006, p. 471).

Further, the path of development has not increased per capita income from agriculture, rather it has declined. In fact, According to Ministry of Agriculture report, “the income for West Bengal paddy farmers has fallen by 28 per cent since 1996-97. During the same period, the income of sugar cane growers in Uttar Pradesh had dropped 32 percent, while in Maharashtra, cane growers have lost 40 per cent”(Kailash, 2006).

The path of development has further widened the gap between different sectors, particularly between the urban and rural areas (Patnaik, 2006, p. 1766). The crisis has further sharpened with the economy is unable to absorb the rural population. The rural landlessness has increased over the past twenty years. It has increased from 35 per cent between 1987 and 1998 to 45

percent between 1999 and 2000 – this once again has increased to 55 percent within two years, particularly 2003 and 2005. This is where the failure of capitalist development in agriculture may be located.

The disparity is discernible even in the sphere of rural and urban population. It is true that poverty percentage over the past two decades has declined considerably between the urban and rural areas, however the disparity has increased. NSS for example argued that between 1977-78 and 1999-2000 the percentage of people living below the poverty line has declined from 51.3 per cent to 26.1 per cent. However the rural-urban disparity has further widened: for example the rural expenditure per month has declined from 213 rupees in 1989-90, but declined sharply by 5 per cent – Rs. 202. The annual rural growth fell from 1.54 per cent during 1970-89 to 1.17 per cent during 2004-05. Meanwhile the urban growth rate accelerated from 1.45 per cent to about 2.77 per cent during the same period.

The crisis was further accentuated with external linkages, particularly the way global capitalism resorted to the strategy of subsidizing their commodities at the cost of Indian farmers, including the opening up of Indian seed sector to global corporations such as Monsanto, Syngenta and Cargil. In the latter case it is argued that, “The global corporations changed the input economy overnight. Farm saved seeds were replaced by corporate seeds, which needed fertilizers and pesticides and could not be saved. As seed saving is prevented by patents as well as by the engineering of seeds with non-renewable traits, seed has to be bought for every planting season by poor peasants. A free resource available on farms became a commodity which farmers were forced to buy every year. This increases poverty and leads to indebtedness.” This is one of the causes for the increasing suicide. On the other this has not only created conditions for monoculture in agriculture but that it led to the disappearance of large number of different seeds¹⁰—leading to the loss of bio-diversity. It is further argued that when” Monsanto first introduced Bt Cotton in India in 2002, the farmers lost Rs. 1 billion due to crop failure. Instead of 1,500 kg/acre as promised by the company, the harvest was as low as 200 kg. Instead of increased incomes of Rs. 10,000 acre, farmers ran into losses of Rs. 6400 acre.”

In fact here one has to locate the “duplicity argument “ about the western capitalist. On the one hand the western countries highly subsidies their domestic economy, and on the other, they force the third world, including India to withdraw the subsidies. In fact the US has increased the subsidies to agriculture from 73.5 billion dollars to \$180 billion dollars during the period when global capitalism began to dominate the world market. “Global prices have dropped from \$ 216 / ton in 1995 to \$ 133 / ton in 2001 for wheat, \$ 98.2 /ton in 1995 to \$49.1 / ton in 2001 for cotton, \$ 273 / ton in 1995 to \$ 178/ ton for soyabean It is true that US government advance \$ 193 per ton to the soya farmers. including the fact that cotton growers in the US totaling 2500 have been a subsidy amounting to \$4 billion every year”¹¹. All these factors—subsidizing the agricultural products in the domestic front and the subsequent removal of Quantitative restrictions¹² in a country like India – have further sharpened agrarian crisis to the point of no return in the context of India, leading to the suicide of a large number of farmers.

V. KARNATAKA AGRICULTURE

Characteristics of Karnataka agriculture have changed over the past couple of years—it changed from non-capitalist path to agrarian capitalist path. Karnataka agriculture needs to be located within the larger framework of uneven capitalist development. Although some sort of capitalist development was introduced long back during the colonial period, however, agrarian capitalism received a boost with the introduction of Green Revolution, implementation of land reforms,

establishment of institutions such as cooperatives measures during the post-independence period. Interestingly this path of development also allowed large number of new categories to emerge and enter into the larger domain of agrarian capitalism. The agrarian capitalism can be viewed in the increasing use of New Technology-seed or fertilizer, fragmentation of lands, increase in the landlessness or laboring class, linkage of local with the national/international market, depeasantisation of categories, etc.

Nonetheless, it is true that Karnataka is one of the fastest growing states in which the agrarian economy contributes 25 per cent of States' GSDP and employees more than 75 per cent of rural population. During 1990s, particularly between 1993-94 and 2000-01 its real growth was consistently higher than that of the national average – it grew at an average of 7.9 per cent – it is 1.6 per cent higher than the Indian economy. However, the first few years of this millennium saw the deceleration due to the negative growth of the economy. Agrarian economy saw the negative growth of –14.5 per cent in 2001-02, 0.8 percent in 2002-03 and –1.8 percent in 2003-04- an average growth rate of –3.6 per cent. This is the period when the agrarian crisis was too sharp, reflected in the large number of farmers' committing suicide compared to any other period.

However the beginning of agrarian crisis once again required to be located during the decade of 1980s when issues of terms of trade going against the agriculture was taken up; They are also manifested in such issues as unremunerative prices, urban biased policy, declaring agriculture as an industry, writing off loans, etc. The crisis also manifested in the form of farmers taking out long marches, bundhs, rallies under the banner of farmers' movement. During all these years no farmer committed suicide neither farmers' movement advocated such a tactics. However this crisis continued to transgress the gender, caste, class, etc.

Likewise the all India level the beginning of crisis in recent past can be located in the larger politics of withdrawal of subsidy or rolling back of the state. The World Bank dictated terms have gone against the interest of the farmers. This is apparent when Karnataka government for example, went for World Bank loan, which granted Economic Restructuring loan in 2001. This loan came along with a condition that government should withdraw from the power sector as regulator and distributor of power. This led to the bifurcation of the Electricity Board and the subsequent creation of Corporation on the one hand, partial withdrawal of subsidy given to the farmers or to the agriculture-in the latter case the free power given to the agriculture was withdrawn and also the fact that it increased the power tariff drastically.

Secondly the agrarian crisis also accentuated with the growing introduction of new technology in agriculture. This is nothing but the politics of "bio-technology" (Stone, 2002). The Karnataka government is one of the first governments to allow the field trials of Bt.Cotton. In fact the attack on Monsanto by the farmers twice in Karnataka is but the reaction to the growing corporatisation of agriculture on the one hand, the larger consequences of new technology on the other. Its seeds in many places completely ruined the agricultural production-as they became spurious as well as the fact that the claim of surplus production was never realized-in the process the farmers' lost heavily.

Agrarian crisis was further accentuated with the sever draught in different parts of the state. In 2002 alone 143 *talukas* (Prajavani, 2002), which went up to 159 in the subsequent year, out of 176 *talukas* in the state, were declared as drought areas. Earlier 67 *talukas* in Karnataka faced "acute" drought, and 60 "moderate" drought". In total 29,193 villages faced drought. Out of which 4499 villages come under the category of "acute drought" and 2712 under " moderate drought. "(Prajavani, July 23, 2001). In some districts the drought was the reaction or the consequence of political inactivity, or the apathy. This is apparent in the canal areas, where the

tail Enders would be the one highly affected. For example in the case of Mandya district, the absence of judicious distribution of water for the tail ender ultimately ended up in a situation of drought and, consequently couple of farmers' committed suicide due to "man made drought". Nonetheless severity of drought reflected and manifested in different forms: peasants went on for a long marches (*Prajavani*, July 27, 2001) demanding relief (*Prajavani*, July 27, 2001), large scale migration of peasants from Karnataka to other neighboring states (*Prajavani*, July 26, 2001) and distress sale of domestic animals, including the fact that many of the farmers' chopped off or cut down the plantations grown on their land—such as the case of areca trees (case of Suresh in Baragur village Channarayapatna who cut down 500 yielding arecanut trees)¹³. Drought brought down land under sowing¹⁴—for example during 2003 out of 69 lakh hectares coming under sowing during Khariff only 16.84 lakh hectares were sown. The tapping of large-scale underground water further aggravated this drought. Even though the then regime came out with series of concessions or relief's such as exemption of interest on the loans (amounting to Rs. 127 crores in 2002) exemption of 66 drought affected taluks from land revenue, food for work programme, supply of fodder, the drought issue remain prominent¹⁵.

Despite the agrarian crisis one should not over look the fact that it provided the spaces for new social categories to emerge. These categories came from different social background: they came from the section of Other Backward Classes, partly *dalits*, and dominant castes as well. In fact land reforms, which coincided with the introduction of green revolution, translated the hitherto retrenched social categories into owner cultivators. However these social categories cannot be treated nor reduced to "gentleman farmers" as once described by Daniel Thorner. Rather they are a new entrepreneurial category that would not only like to partake in the larger market operation but also in the capitalist development. They are not averse to taking risk as well as trying to enlist themselves as capitalist farmers- their involvement in the agricultural production is also complete. For them the land becomes most important one: as the latter provide not only a new identity as farmers' but also it provided them a framework to enter into the larger domain of capitalism—both local as well as international. What changed the character of the categories in recent years is the entry of global capitalism into the agrarian domain on a large scale, particularly through the means of seeds, fertilizers etc. Its entry not only created new identities but also created conditions for volatile economy—it is here the larger threat of loosing "identity" is not only perceived but slowly becoming a fact. Suicide is an attempt to retain their identity as distinct social categories particularly as rural farmers' as well as "Market Oriented Autonomous Farmers"(MOAF). Agrarian Capitalism which once brought new identities and euphoria now translated agriculture into a sphere of suicide. It is here lies the paradox of path of development and the agrarian capitalism.

VI. SUICIDE: BEGINNING AND LOCATION

Farmers' movement particularly of Maharashtra for example would argue that suicide is "a gangrene due to wounds inflicted by the government over the years" (*Financial Express*, May 19, 2006). The suicide has slowly spread to those states where capitalist development in agriculture has come to stay. In Punjab¹⁶, an agriculturally advanced state, including the fact that agrarian capitalism has deep roots, the estimate about the farmers' committing suicide has varied. A recent "suicide census" conducted by the Movement Against State Repression has estimated that 40,000 have committed suicide between 1997 and 2005. It is stated "Andana and Lehra blocks of Moonak subdivision in Sangrur alone have reported 1,360 farmer suicides between 1998 and 2005. If all of Punjab's 138 blocks show roughly the same level of suicides, the number would

exceed 40,000 for the given period” (Kailash, 2006) This number might be slightly exaggerated. However the government estimated that in total 2,116 farmers’ committed suicide between 1998 and 2005.¹⁷ The number of farmers’ committing suicide was much higher during 1995-2002, In Andhra Pradesh it was estimated that more than 3,000 farmers’ committed suicide- in fact, in Andhra Pradesh the beginning of suicide started during the late 1980s than in 1990s. The Christian Aid estimated that in 2004 2,115 farmers killed themselves, which comes to around 4,378 since 1998. There are others who estimated that between 1997 and January 2006, over 9,000 peasants took their lives due to the failure of cotton crops. In one case it is estimated that within one-year (May 2004-September 2005) 2157 farmers’ committed suicide. In Maharashtra, the Vidharbha has become the centre of agrarian crisis- wherein the number of farmers committing suicide is much more. It is estimated that between June 2005 and May 2006 at least 500 farmers’ committed suicide in which majority of them are cotton growers. In fact, the Indira Gandhi Institute for Development Research in Mumbai, which was commissioned to investigate into the rural crisis in Maharashtra in its report, “Suicides of Farmers in Maharashtra” pinpointed that the Suicide Mortality Rate (SMR) for the male farmers had increased by three folds from 17 per 1,00,000 in 1995 to 53 in 2004.¹⁸ This is four times more than the national average. The suicide is now reported from Rajasthan¹⁹, Haryana, M.P, and Kerala too. Indian State now acknowledges the fact that between 1993 and 2003, 1,00,248 farmers committed suicide in India²⁰ (*Financial Express*, May 19, 2006) : “The most important factor is debt.”

In Karnataka there are no clear cut numbering. According to one estimate, 3,000 farmers committed suicide in Karnataka between 1998 and 2006 (Assadi, 1998 and 2005). Nonetheless, if we take the report prepared by the Crime Branch of Karnataka, the number of suicide under the heading “farming and agricultural activity” comes to 15804 between 1996 and 2002. Year 2000 saw the maximum number of suicide (2630) followed by year 2001—these are the years when agriculture saw the negative growth. Interestingly between 1996 and 2002 12 889 male farmers committed suicide followed by female—2841 (see Table 2). However this estimate has some problem. One of the problems is the fact that the Crime Branch report also includes suicide committed in cosmopolitan city such as Bangalore or Mysore under “farming and agricultural activity”. Secondly, in districts such as Dakshina Kannada the suicide is the reflection of another form of capitalism—it is the reflection of the crisis of metropolitan/cosmopolitan or Middle Eastern capitalism than the agrarian one. Clubbing such issues would make the counting or numbering the farmers’ suicide a difficult one.

It is in this context, the report of Agricultural Department is important, although its report does not give the complete picture. According to it between 2003 and 2006 (uptil March 29) totally 1003 farmers committed suicide. If we calculate the statistics provided by the Veeresh Committee report, including other press coverage one can estimate the suicide around 3,000 (Table 3).

The spate of suicide²¹ in Karnataka began in 1998 at a time when cotton-growing farmers’ of Andhra Pradesh were committing suicide. It all began in the Northern part of Karnataka, which is traditionally a non-irrigated area. These areas are Bidar, Raichur, Gulbarga and Dharwad. The first person who committed suicide had only two acres of land and had leased in eight acres of land from others. His debt amount was not much – Rs. 4500. The stories of Basavarj, of Kuntersirsi village, Prabhu Kosartogaon, Bharat of Dhannur of Hallahalli, Jijabai of Mruambi village were not dissimilar. Dilip for example, had 35 acres of land and had debt to the tune of Rs. 1.5 lakh from financial institutions”. Even though the crops might be different but the stories were the same: indebtedness, loss of crop, etc. In case of Northern district, majority of those who committed suicide were growing Tur Dal, however this shifted to other crops. Take

Table 2
Suicide Cases Reported under Farming and Agricultural Activity, 1996-2002

Year	Men	Women	No. of suicides
1996	1548	531	2079
1997	1509	323	1832
1998	1564	475	2039
1999	2002	377	2379
2000	2105	525	2630
2001	2153	352	2505
2002	2008	258	2340
Total	12889	2841	15804

Source: From the files of the Police Department.

the case of Dharwad. Here the chilli or paddy growers committed suicide." In 1996 Yellappa Gundankal of Kadapatti village in Dharwad District borrowed some money from the bank thinking that the yield would be good and he would clear all dues. But his calculation went wrong and the next year too the crop failed. Again he borrowed money from the moneylenders at a high rate of interest thinking that the crop would be fetching a handsome price. Again nature played truant and crops were ravaged. He could get just 4.5 quintals of chilli from 10 acres. Yellappa took the extreme step of suicide after he came to know that his debts had touched Rs. 70, 000-Rs. 80, 000" (Assadi, 1998, p. 747).

1. Nature

Initially suicides were confined to the northern part of Karnataka; later on it began to envelop other districts, which include the irrigation areas also. Between April 1 and September 19, 2000, in total 276 farmers' committed suicide; thirty came from Davanagere, followed by Hassan (29), Mandya (22), Shimoga (20), Bellary (19), Chitradurga (14), Haveri (14), Bijapur (12), Dharwad (11), Koppal (10), Mysore (8), Gadag (6), D.K. (2) Chamarajanagar (1) (*Vijaya Karnataka*, September 9, 2003) these are the districts known for irrigation.

This has changed in the year 2003. The number of cases increased to 708—it was the period of negative growth as well as acute agrarian crisis too. In 2003 in almost all the districts including the coastal belt suicides have been reported. The highest number came from Hassan (69) (district known for commercial cropping), followed by Chitradurga (55)- (a drought prone district), and Shimoga (50). Next year saw a decline in suicide rate. It came to around 271. Once again Hassan witnessed the highest number (37), followed by Belgaum (33) and Chickmagalur (22). However year 2005-06 (uptil March 29th) saw number dwindling to 124. Once again Hassan district in Old Mysore topping the list with 13 farmers committing suicide, followed by Coorg (12) and Belgaum and Koppal (10) each.

This shows that there is a clear-cut shift from North Karnataka to South Karnataka. Secondly it also shows the shifting trend towards the areas, which are known for plantation economy. Thirdly, it also shows that coastal belt continues to remain unaffected by the suicide.

Region-wise highest suicide rates were reported from Old Mysore areas, followed by Old Bombay Presidency areas and Old Hyderabad region. Old Madras Presidency area as well as Coorg also reported suicide, however their number is less. In fact, Old Mysore and Old Bombay Presidency areas are better known for canal irrigation. Here the suicide reflects the failure of the state to distribute the water judiciously. Most of them who committed suicide live in the tail end of the canal.

Table 3
Farmers' Suicides between April 1, 2003 and March 29, 2006

District	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
Bagalkote	24	6	3
Bangalore Rural	30	6	5
Bangalore Urban	2	0	0
Bidar	32	7	6
Hassan	69	37	13
Chamraj Nagar	10	2	0
Haveri	38	9	2
Uttara Kannada	7	0	6
Dharwad	31	9	0
Koppal	20	15	10
Mandya	46	11	0
Chickmagalur	24	10	3
Raichur	5	3	1
Tumkur	41	11	6
Shimoga	50	12	4
Kolar	18	10	3
Mysore	18	1	0
Udupi	3	1	0
Kodagu	12	12	12
Belgaum	41	33	10
Davanagere	39	12	5
Bellary	31	11	5
Chitradurga	55	19	8
Gulbarga	18	6	7
Bijapur	22	9	9
D.K	9	5	4
Gadag	13	2	1
Total	708	171	124

Source: Material from Department of Agriculture.

2. Debt and Farmers' Suicide

The debt of the farmers who committed suicide was not uniform; they varied between Rs. 5000 and Rs. 50000. There are cases wherein the amount of loan was more than one lakh rupees. Many of them had borrowed loan on a short-term basis (Table 4). Debt was due to multiple reasons. Interestingly state or the government would attribute the increasing debts to personal reasons such as marriage, gambling, illicit relations, festivals etc. However the reasons for the rural indebtedness may be located differently. It was due to cumulative crop losses, drying up of institutional credit for small and marginal farmers,²² sharp increase in the cost of production, declining prices of agricultural commodities, withdrawal of subsidies to agricultural sector, and the exclusion of large number of farmers from the safety net as well as from public distribution system. Interestingly, most of those who committed suicide had borrowed from the moneylenders, who would charge anything varying between 24 per cent and 60 per cent per annum. This shows that the institutionalized credit system had failed to address the issue of rural indebtedness.

In fact, in many places in Karnataka, the haphazard growth of capitalism has created spaces for the growth of private moneylenders. Moneylenders, some of them are from the rich peasant category as well, provide loans in advance and trap the peasantry in the vicious circle of exploitation. This money lending has given rise to different forms of absentee owners and has given rise to new

forms of tenancy in the rural Karnataka: "Palu", "Vara", and "Batya". In these cases the farmers have to pay not only the interest but also supply the agricultural commodities to the moneylenders. Unlike the earlier money lending class, the post-colonial money lending classes in Karnataka are averse to involve physically in the agrarian production. They try to avoid any physical labour in the agricultural production. This is the reason why moneylenders have transformed themselves into a form of sharecroppers or absentee owners. Many a time the agreement that the farmers entered into with the money lending class is either in oral form or in the written form, which has no legal sanctity. This has aggravated the problem, particularly for the families of deceased—the state would not recognize the loan taken from the moneylenders except the institutions. Despite the policy of the state government, the hold of the moneylenders has not minimized— the compensation given to the families of deceased is taken away in the name of "loan".

Table 4
**Indebtedness of Farmers Who Had Committed Suicide in
 Gulbarga District (1.04. 03 to 31.04.04)**

No Sl.	Name of the farmer	Loan disbursing institution	Amount	Term of loan
1.	Mallinatha	—	—	No
2.	Basavaraja	Canara Bank, VSS Bank	33266/- 26044/-	Long Term
3.	Sharanappa	-No	No	No
4.	Massanappa	S.B.H	1,694	—
5.	Basavaraja	P.L.D.B	3500	Short term
6.	Siddanagowda	S.B.H Bagyavathi Private	25,000 10,000	Short term
7.	Bamaranna	S.B.S	23,000	Short term
8.	Ramesha	P.L.D	70000	Short term
9.	Shri Prabhu	—	—	—
10.	ShriDharma	KGB	68,254	Short term
11.	Shri Banasu	—	—	—
12.	Shri Patru	—	—	—
13.	Kathalappa	KGB	11,000	—
14.	Sharanappa	KGB	18,000	Short term
15.	Shri Ramesha	SBH VSSN Sonna	13,500 7000	Short term
16.	Gundappa	KGB Private	81,300 5500	Short term Medium term
17.	Somanatha Reddy	SBH VSSN	150,259 2900	Medium Term
18.	Husanappa	KGB VSSN	8005/-	Short term

Source: From the Police Files.

3. Gender, Age and Caste

Majority of those who committed suicide are men, as the property is still controlled by men. However, there are exceptions too. In one or two instances even women committed suicide. However, suicide has further increased gender oppression and bias—now the women are not only oppressed by the family/community but also by other social parties such as moneylenders. Over night women are translated into agricultural workers or labourers to sustain their family including the burden of paying back the debts. There are even instances of mass suicide by the entire family²³ – this reflects the extreme agrarian crisis in Karnataka.

An interesting aspect of the crisis is the fact that large number of farmers' committed suicide largely belonging to the age group of 25 and 35 even though there are exceptions too. These young farmers' constitute "New Farmers" or "Market Oriented Autonomous Farmers"(MOAF) who are not only deriving their identity from the market opportunities provided by the agrarian/global capitalism but also through the land. They would personally involve in the land related issues- they would decide about the production, cropping pattern, market opportunities as well as new linkages with the larger market. Meanwhile they are not averse to taking the risks in the larger market. For them the "market constitute the site of new identities, site of competition, site of negotiation, site of rights, site of autonomy and site of freedom". These categories try to create their own spaces or identity through multiple means: leasing in land, borrowing loan to participate in the market; experiment with new technology or seeds, and finally autonomously decide the relationship between themselves on the one hand and the global capital on the other. When the agrarian crisis become too sharp, the fear of loosing everything makes them to take the extreme step of committing suicide. This is apparent in the large number of cases in Karnataka.

4. Caste and Social Categories

As we said earlier Karnataka agriculture has transformed over the years. Now capitalism has come to stay in a big way. That does not mean that other social formations are completely destroyed—they still work in the form of moneylenders, caste hierarchies, etc. The capitalist development in agriculture has helped in new social categories to emerge—these social categories belonged to different social groups such as Nayakas, Jains, Lingayats, Vokkaligas, Dalits, Kurubas, Lavanis, Ganigas, Bedar, Hadapas, etc. Two important policies of the state have helped the capitalist development as well as the emergence of different social categories in agriculture: Land Reforms as well as Green Revolution. Other than these two, the affirmative action of the state provided them new identity at the grass root level. These categories are one who believes in linking themselves with larger economy. In fact, suicide is not confined to any one particular caste or category. Majority of them who committed suicide came from Other Backward Classes including one or two minority caste/communities such as Jains, Muslims. In Old Mysore majority committed suicide came from Vokkaligas community. This shows that capitalist development or the agrarian crisis is not confined to any one particular category as such, rather it envelop different social categories as well.

5. Suicide and Commercialization of Crop

At the same time capitalist development has helped in the commercialization of crops as well as linking up the local market with the national/international market. Crops such as Tobacco, Sugar cane, Coffee, and Arecanut, etc. are now linked to global market. However there are variations in the way the different social categories responded to agrarian crisis. One such category is coffee growers

Unlike in the neighboring state, Kerala, the number of coffee growing planters committing suicide was less. Coffee economy is one such economy that was hit by the global recession or the global competition in recent years. There are reasons why coffee growers unlike others were able to withstand the crisis, despite the fact that loans that they owed to the banks and other financial institutions was much higher than any body else. One reason is that they are an organized lot—they have associations such as United Planters Association, which often acts as a pressure group. This has helped them to raise large number of issues afflicting the coffee economy. Secondly, there is a close nexus between the state and the coffee economy.

Right from the colonial period, the coffee plantation established a close nexus with the state apparatus. This has helped them at the time of crisis. Thirdly, their economy is completely entrenched with the global economy. Globalisation has not only made them autonomous categories to enter into the global market but also provided them a new identity as global actors. The prices of coffee is no more decided by the Coffee Board, thereby the state; now it is decided in New York or other global markets. Since the state is protecting them, the number of coffee planters committing suicide is very less. Similar is the case of Tobacco growers and arecanut²⁴ growers. They have larger markets as well as the fact that the state continues to protect them in a big way.

This is not the case with other social categories. First of all they are not an organized lot; secondly, their market is either controlled by moneylenders or outsiders including the "factories"—in that way their market is "geographically located"; In the latter case one can pinpoint the way sugarcane growers²⁵ respond to the crisis. Thirdly, they are the oscillating categories. They are the ones who would try to reap the benefit of market without understanding the nuances of it. This is apparent whenever social categories switch over to new crops thinking that it has marketability, without realizing that over production would have attended consequences: steep fall in prices, increasing loss, accumulate debt finally leading to suicide.

VII. STATE RESPONSE TO CRISIS AND SUICIDE²⁶

There are few²⁷ committees or commissions that the state governments including the central had appointed to analyse the reasons for farmers' committing suicide. The Punjab government for example, in recent days has been contemplating to introduce 1936 formula once advocated by the well known farmers' leader Sir Chotu Ram. This formula " envisages waiver of loans if farmers have paid as much interest as the principal amount. The formula, which became an act, is not applied any more."²⁸ The Maharashtra government in recent days has announced crop loans of up to Rs. 3 lakh at the rate of 6 per cent, which is 1 percentage point lower than the rate announced by the central government. Even the co-operative societies have been instructed not to levy penal interest for the outstanding loans. The recently appointed Swaminathan Committee²⁹ or what is called National Commission on Farmers by the federal government made series of recommendations in August 2005 which include a risk fund, promoting group farming, "initiating land reforms to facilitate joint ownership for women and denying permission for land to be converted from agricultural to non-farming purposes are some of the major proposals. Interestingly the Commission pinpointed the fact that price fluctuation is the major concern for the farmers; the latter is one of the major reasons for the distress sale of the production in the market. This is the reason why the Commission has recommended the Price Stabilization fund. Most important is its recommendation of what is called 'Hope Generation Teams', which specified the visit of agricultural universities to suicide hotspots, including counting the number of suicides³⁰

Central government has already announced Rs. 3750 crore a package for Vidharbha farmers³¹, focusing on broad areas such as interest waiver and debt rescheduling Quality Seed replacement (amounting to Rs.180 core), watershed development, check dam construction, rainwater harvesting, National Horticulture Mission (Rs. 225 crores³²) (*Financial Express*, May 19, 2006; *Business Line* June 26, 2006).

On the contrary the Karnataka government responded to the agrarian crisis differently. Initially³³ it treated 'suicide' or agrarian crisis as a "non issue" and on later it termed it as an "isolated incident" (*Indian Express*, March 24, 1998), an "act of individual" an act of "alcoholism",

“personal reason” (*Deccan Herald*, March 11, 1998), “it occurred for reasons other than debt”, “it was due to moneylenders” etc.

However on a later date the state government accepted the fact that the path of development pursued by the government has not been able to checkmate the growing agrarian crisis. This is the reason why it advocated a “paradigm shift”³⁵—the latter means opening up the Karnataka economy to the “agribusiness”. The beginning of “paradigm shift” can be seen in different policies that the Karnataka government introduced in agriculture. One such policy is the New Agricultural Policy—the latter aims at “spurring growth in the agricultural and allied sectors by taking advantage of opportunities opened up by trade at national and international levels, in an overall environment of economic liberalization” (Assadi, 1996, p. 3340). This is followed by introduction of Land Reforms Amendment Act. These two policies created conditions for “Corporate Landlordism” to grow and emerge in the countryside (*ibid.*).

Second important policy, which had had consequences in the countryside, is the “Millennium Bio-Technology Policy” which aimed to spread awareness about the investment opportunities available in Karnataka, encourage bioinformatics in Karnataka, provide concessions and incentives for the development of bio-technology. This policy instead of reducing the crisis further increased it.

The state government appointed two important committees to study the issues of farmer’s suicide as well as the issues of agrarian crisis. The first committee was a joint legislative committee appointed in 1999 to find out whether the suicide of farmers’ was related to crop failure or due to supply of bad quality of seeds and pesticides. Interestingly the committee after examining 60 cases came to the conclusion that except for one, the rest of the suicides occurred due to “personal and domestic problem (GoK, 2001, p. 9).

The most important commission or committee that created an uproar in Karnataka is popularly called Veeresh Committee. The report of this committee is seriously challenged or critiqued for its ambiguous understanding about suicide, too much stress on psychological issues than the agrarian one, simplifying the agrarian reality etc. This particular committee made socio-economic profile of the farmers committing suicide: suicide is largely a phenomena of north Karnataka than South; the larger number of suicide victims belonging to the age group of 28-47; many of them were unmarried farmers’, large number of suicide victims were “having low education and left schools well before high school”; many of the victims owned land between two and ten acres of land and in some cases the size of the landholding was more than twenty acres; many of the victims come from irrigated areas and had leased in lands. It also made few more interesting observations: “that the joint family tradition is breaking and majority of victims has a nucleus family. Family tensions and discords with spouse happened to be the important causes, and more often this originates from the break away of the joint family” (GoI, 2001, p.41). Most interesting observation of the committee is discernible in the understanding about the reasons behind suicide. It broadly divided the reasons into six neat categories: social factors, economic factors, behavioral factors, personal and health factors and finally “other factors”. In the first case of social factors it included domestic problem—quarrels, problems with children, wife or parents (12.32 per cent); marriage of daughters, sons or sisters (5.42 per cent); land and water related disputes/ property sharing/property sharing (3.94 per cent); love affairs and broken marriage (1.48 per cent), In the economic factors the committee include such issues as indebtedness (12.32 per cent), loss in business (5.42 per cent), neglect of agriculture/non cultivation (4.93 per cent), investment on non crop production activities—animal husbandry, house construction, purchase of luxury items etc. (3.94 per cent), chit funds/gambling/money laundering (2.96 per cent), well/bore well failure/crop failure/indebtedness (2.46 per cent), crop failure and

indebtedness(1.97 per cent). In the case of behavioral factors it included alcoholic related problems (13.79 per cent), criminal acts-misuse of funds/criminal case /bribing for job- (1.97 per cent); introvert (1.97 per cent). In the case of personal and health factors it covered the issues of chronic illness/disease of victims and or family members (11.82 per cent), family history with suicidal tendency (.26 per cent), Finally in the “other factors” the committee could not able to find out the reasons (4.93 per cent). Did not own lands (2.46 per cent), suspected homicide (1.48 per cent), accidental poisoning and drowning (0.99 per cent) and finally natural death (0.90 per cent)(GoK, 2002, pp.64-65). Although this committee had made larger number of recommendations such as establishment of farmers’ welfare fund, establishment of a nodal department for the welfare of farmers, social security measures, facilities for health care, broad basing *Raitha Sanjeevini* schemes, etc. but they have not able to tide the agrarian crisis as well as suicide.

To checkmate the growing suicide the state government introduced many policy measures. One of the policy measures was the abolition of money lending by the private people. Secondly reducing the interest on cooperative lending to 6 per cent; waiver of the interest and penal interest on the short, medium term and long term loans availed by the farmers, exemption to all farmers from the payment of registration charges while availing agricultural loans, interest subsidy etc. Now it is contemplating to keep aside 10 per cent of the budgetary allocation for the purpose of agriculture. Despite these policy measures there are times when government policy meant to compensate the families of suicide victims went against them. This is discernible in the following: For example in 2003-04 out of 708 cases only 205 cases were given the compensation, similarly in 2004-05 out of 271 only 113 cases were upheld by the government, and in 2005-6 out of 124 cases received only 65 cases have received compensation (Table 5).

Table 5
Number of Cases Receiving Compensation

Year	No. of suicides reported	No. of cases rejected by the State Government	No. of cases cleared and cheque issued
2003-04	708	503	205
2004-05	271	154	113
2005-06	124	37	65

Source: From the files of Agricultural Department, Government of Karnataka.

There are different ways the state tries to avoid giving compensation to the family of deceased. Many a time they are denied on flimsy grounds such as under aged, death due to other reasons such as electric shock, absence of any “patta land”, etc. At the same time the conditions that the state government imposed to disburse compensation also went against the farmers. This is apparent in the following: that the farmer who commits suicide should have agricultural land in his name; that he should have agricultural loan in his name; the loan should be from a recognized credit sponsoring institutions, that the loan borrowed should be for agricultural purpose; that the incidence of suicide should be due to inability to bear the burden of loan etc. (Commissionarate of Agriculture, 2006). Many of the conditions have gone against the farmers—for example farmers who lease in land, or take loan from private moneylenders, etc., benefit little from such policies. This is the reason why the state government has not been able to bring to a halt the growing agrarian crisis.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Farmers' suicide requires to be seen in the context of capitalist development that the regimes or the state introduced during the post-colonial/post-independence period. Capitalist development initially created euphoria; however later it translated into massive agrarian crisis. This is the reason why beginning of agrarian crisis should be seen or located much earlier to the decade of globalization. In fact globalization further sharpened the crisis, which led to the large-scale suicide of farmers in other parts of India, including Karnataka. Globalization also carried the inbuilt fear of loosing identity- the identity of "New Farmers or Market Oriented Autonomous Farmers" (MOAF). Suicide is the new technique employed by farmers. At the all India level more than one lakh farmers' have committed suicide. At present suicide is restricted to some states—there is no guarantee that it will not spread to such other states as BIMARU. It is here that there is a need to redraw preferences and rework on policy measures. The crisis now is not only manifested in the increasing suicide but also in other forms such as throwing up agricultural produce on the roads, demand to delink from the global market, demand to come out from the WTO regime, etc. However one cannot negate its political implications. It has already changed the regimes in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, etc. The change in the regimes in the final analysis is viewed as a referendum on "globalization and market reform" on the one hand and anti-capitalist "peasants' revolt" on the other.

Notes

1. For example in 2004 more than 1,600 men committed suicide, compared to 430 women. See ABC-PM, "Experts Discuss Escalating Suicide Rate", Tuesday, May 2, 2006, 18:45:00.
2. Interestingly they have formed, to overcome the mental crisis, Rural Mental Health Network in Australia, including the fact that they have framed a blue print to overcome the crisis. This blue print include, "improving access to crisis phone lines and counseling services, and holding public workshops featuring high-profile individuals with mental health problems to reduce the stigma that's often associated with mental illness". See *The Sydney Morning Herald*, "Volunteers Step in on Suicide Watch", May 3, 2006.
3. There are studies about the suicide among the farmers elsewhere at the global level. One of the studies is related to the suicide in Kentucky State in the US. It is stated that Farmers Kentucky state are at the high risk for suicide This is because of their social environment as well as "chemical exposure resulting in neurotoxin effects in the workplace" This study is conducted between the period 1979 and 1985. See http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=2385858&dopt=Citation. Another study conducted by in England between 1979 and 1980 and 1982- 90 on the issue of mortality of farmers and farmers' wives in England and Wales came to the conclusion that "Farmers and farmers' wives had high mortality from accidents and suicide and from certain respiratory diseases". See Inskip, H. et al., "Mortality of Farmers and Farmers' Wives in England and Wales 1979-80, 1982-90", *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, Vol 53, pp.730-735. There is one more study conducted which estimated that farmers and farm workers have higher than expected rates of suicide in UK. See Stark, C. et al. (2006), "Suicide in Farmers in Scotland", *Rural Remote Health.*, Vol. 6, No.1 January-March, p. 509.
4. This is apparent when we see Maharashtra movement under *Shetkari Sanghathana* supporting the globalisation, On the contrary Karnataka *Rajya Raitha Sangha* (KRRS) and BKU of Uttar Pradesh opposing it.
5. There are others who would argue that in the context of globalization, the diversification of agricultural production would help in overcoming the crisis. See, Joshi and Gulati (2004).
6. See Patnaik, Utsa at http://www.networkideas.org/feathm/feb2004/ft07_WSF2004_Agrarian_Crisis.htm
7. It is in this suicide that, Sharma saw the failure of Naidu model of development. See Devinder Sharma, Devinder(2004), "India's Agrarian Crisis, No End to Farmer's Suicide", at <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=32&ItemID=5790>
8. Interestingly, Sonia Gandhi, the President of Congress wrote a letter to the Prime Minister to go slow on the issue of free trade with ASEAN countries as they have the consequences on the agrarian economy, leading to

- the farmers' suicide. She stressed that government should "very carefully scrutinize" Free Trade Agreement. This particular letter has created political upheavals with the BJP asking or demanding the resignation of the Prime Minister. See *Central Chronicle*, May 10, 2006.
9. In Maharashtra it is stated by an NGO the lenders have even "demanded daughters of borrowers who've failed to repay loan". See *Cybernoon. Com*, May 15, 2006 at http://www.cybernoon.com/DisplayArticle.asp?Section=fromthepress&subsection=inbombay&xfile=May2006_inbombay_standard9676
 10. For example the district of Warangal in Andhra Pradesh used to produce different varieties of legumes, millets, and oilseeds.
 11. <http://www.organicconsumers.org/corp/india030105.cfm>
 12. In 1999, the Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP)-led Indian federal government allowed import of 1,429 agricultural products. These were earlier prevented from entering the local market
 13. Suresh had planted areca trees in his four acres land by taking loan from a commercial bank, Even he had sunk bore wells, but in vain. See *Deccan Herald*, "Drought Forces Farmer to Cut 500 Areca Trees", August 31, 2003.
 14. Even it revived superstition. This came to surface in a village called Budhikote in Kolar district. The villagers believed that the reason behind two-year consecutive drought was burial of an old lady in her land rather than the creation of the dead body. This led them to dug out the body once again and cremates the body. See *Deccan Herald*, "Drought Revives Superstition", July 22, 2003.
 15. Interestingly it was in 2003 the opposition parties tries to take mileage out of drought by bringing in or introducing amendment to drought motion. This particular motion was moved by the BJP seeking "double the budget allocation to horticulture, agriculture, and minor irrigation departments. Further it combined such other issues as waiver of interest on farm loans. Further they demanded Joint House Committee to go into the irregularities in the implementation of drought relief works. See *Deccan Herald*, "Assembly Rejects Amendment to Drought Motion", July 27, 2003.
 16. In one village alone particularly in Bhullan village of Sangrur district 49 Jat Sikh farmers have committed suicide. See *NDTV.Com*, May 17, 2006.
 17. Movement against State Repression has estimated that "over 1,300 farmers spread over 91 villages in just two blocks of Andana in Sangrur have killed themselves. The deaths occurred between 1988 and 2005". See *The Telegraph*, April 24, 2006
 18. See Zora (2006).
 19. Even well known singers like Lucky Ali have extended their support to the agitation against WTO and also against the suicide. See <http://sify.com/movies/bollywood/fullstory.php?id=14204830>
 20. The Minister for Agriculture, quoting Home Ministry's National Crime Bureau, has acknowledged this.
 21. Even suicide was attributed to on line lottery such as Play win which is a part of Pan India Network Infravest that runs Playwin, It office was ransacked in Karnataka. The company conducts only three of the 10 approved draws per day, makes daily sales of Rs 50 lakh and pays sales tax of Rs 15,000 per draw. During the license period, the company was supposed to pay a total of Rs 1,096 crore to the State. However it was banned on later date by the government. See *The Hindu Business Line*, October 31, 2003.
 22. *The Hindu*, September 14, 2003.
 23. Most pathetic is the case of mass suicide committed by the family of Kankappa Hujiya of Koppal district on July 31 2003. They starved for a week, they had huge amount of loan amounting to Rs. 2 lakhs; even they lived on borrowed clothes. See *Udayavani*, August 2, 2003.
 24. Take the case of Chandrappa, an arecanut grower who borrowed rs.2.5 lakh to save his three quarter acre of arecanut plantation, "The diseased had sunk a bore well about six months ago but failed to get water, Soon he sunk two more bore wells which too dried up soon. This apart the arecanut plantation s too started drying up". See *Deccan Herald*, August 18, 2003.
 25. Take the case of Manjappa of Kaidale village in Davanagere district. See *Vijaya Karnataka*, August 5, 2003.
 26. Different political parties responded differently. BJP in fact 2003 thought of reporting the matter to Human Right Commission, as the state government had failed to protect the right to life of the farmers. See *Udayavani* August 5 2003. Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, the Congress President after visiting the villages in Kanakapura Taluk and Chennapatna she advocated joint strategies of state as well central government to contain the increasing suicide. Her criticism was mainly against the then NDA government. See *Vijaya Karnataka*, October 1, 2003.

27. In 2003 a seminar organized by Sirsi Parisara Samrakshana Kendra and People for India Forum demanded compensation of Rs. One lakh to the families of diseased; crop insurance for all the crops, advancing loans at 6 per cent interest; support prices to the agricultural produce; development of irrigation tanks, a forestation and water conservation; See *Deccan Herald*, December 12, 2003.
28. *The Telegraph*, "Punjab Awakes to 40000 Suicides", April 24, 2006.
29. Interestingly during this time M.S. Swaminathan urged the formation of State Farmers' Commission which would be accountable to the state legislature – the commission, he felt should submit its report every year. *The Times of India*, "Panel Wants Fair Prices for Farmers", May 1, 2006, and *The Economic Times*, "Farmers' Suicides on the Rise in Vidarbha: Swaminatha", May 3, 2006.
30. Now the opposition leader L.K. Advani advocates the setting up of Joint Parliamentary Committee to study the reasons for farmers committing suicide. This statement came during the course of his "Suraksha Yatra" in Vidharbha region. See <http://www.chennaionline.com/colnews/newsitem.asp?NEWSID=%7B9D1C44C0-ED07-454B-8F5D-35D337F38BA4%7D&CATEGORYNAME=NATL>
31. In fact there are couple of NGOs, which argued that packages of the government would further sharpen suicide rates. One such NGOs is *Navadanya* and the Research Foundation for Science Technology and Ecology. See *One World South Asia*, "Indian NGO Says Govt. Package will Increase Farmers' Suicides", May 3, 2006.
32. The Indian state is now acknowledging the fact that cooperative system has failed miserably. Agricultural Minister, Sharad Pawar admitted, "that there was complete failure of cooperative societies in the villages. Only 27 per cent loans had been disbursed through cooperatives in the last one year, as compared to 62 per cent by commercial and regional banks". See *Financial Express*, May 19, 2006.
33. The farmers' movement however saw the suicide in the larger context of globalization. On October 2, 2003 Puttanaiah group resorted to sat in dharna against the suicide. It demanded the following: writing off loans, scientific price for agricultural commodities, simple and transparent loan policy, fixed market, appointment of anti-suicide squad, (See *Vijaya Karnataka*, August 9, 2003). Even the peasant organization belonging to left organizations also resorted to strike. Karnataka *Prantha Raitha Sangha* staged a dharna in Gulbarga, demanded immediate release of compensation, change in the economic policies, waiver of loans, etc. See *Deccan Herald*, August 16, 2003.
34. *Udayavani*, August 5, 2003.
35. www.Kar.nic.in/finance/bud2004j/bs-part04j.htm

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