

THE TRAGEDY OF FARMERS' SUICIDES
IN VIDARBHA:
A RAY OF HOPE

A STUDY BY THE PARTICIPANTS OF

THE MIT-SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT, PUNE

IN RESPONSE TO A CALL TO STUDENTS OF MAHARASTRA GIVEN BY

Hon'ble Shri BHAIRON SINGH SHEKHAWAT

THEN VICE PRESIDENT OF INDIA

Dedicated

To the memory of the face less farmer who lost his life in the lathi charge at Wani on 27th Dec '06, the day we visited Wani

And to the countless other farmers who are braving the odds with smiles on their faces

FOREWORD

Chennai
29 May 2008

This is a laudable effort that has come in the form of a report submitted by a group of participants of the second batch of the MPG course of the MIT School of Government. A study tour of Vidarbha for giving participants exposure and for honing their soft skills—together with addressing a noble cause—has produced a result far beyond the limits of an academic exercise. The report makes for good reading and the pointers in it indicate stark realities that have to be addressed and to possible solutions of high potential.

I would say that it is for the readers to think seriously and innovate means to take the process forward.

The political leadership is perpetually lost in a struggle for survival and is focused on the short term. Giving thousands of crores of rupees on loan waivers and giving a massive blow to the very financial sector that sustains farmers in the grassroots—and every political party supporting it—indicates the road to bankruptcy.

It is doubtful though whether the government would have the will to take on alternate suggestions... However that seems to be the challenge of an emerging leadership—to stimulate the people to think 'long term' and to make them look for a set of leaders of that alternative kind.

I entirely agree with the authors that the solution is finally with the people. Would financial empowerment, political empowerment and education of villagers lead to a better nation? ...definitely yes but the question is how? "Swagrami" is a thoughtful re-incarnation of a great idea... That the system should force brand identities onto the villages so that they can work together, like companies work together, is also a good idea... I am sure there are many more that are not covered in this report... However, if not anything this report does indicate some constructive directions in which we have to move.

The nation needs leaders who can read situations on the ground without any bias, have a holistic approach, who can think boldly and act innovatively. The MIT-SOG has been working since its inception to find new ways and means to make this learning. I am happy that this report is a first indicator of movement in that direction.

T.N. Seshan
Chairman MIT-SOG

Former Chief Election Commissioner of India
PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

The issue of the farmers committing suicide in Vidarbha has caused considerable alarm all over the country and we at the MIT - School Of Government (MIT-SOG) felt no different. There fore when the Vice President of India, urged the students of Maharashtra to make a study, the dean of MIT-SOG Mr. Rahul Karad made an offer to the participants of the MPG that he would sponsor a study and the management encouraged the participants to take it up. Eight of the participants took the opportunity and spent our Christmas vacations touring Vidarbha. A total of fifteen of us from the School of Government left for Vidarbha on the 23rd of December 2006 and returned to Pune on 30th December 2006. The week was spent mostly traveling from place to place in the college bus meeting a wide spectrum of people from different walks of life.

It is important to point out here that the participants of the school of government are committed individuals who look forward to contribute to the nation by joining the political process. Those that join the course have a decent amount of experience behind them and come from a wide spectrum of educational backgrounds. We have a Principal of a college and a Barrister in our team and the oldest participant is 47 years and the youngest is 21. The details are given in Appendix B of this report. The point we wish to make is that this adds richness of subject spectrum and experience to this report.

We were given a mandate to capture the tour on film; so that the real situation could be represented in a way it had not been done yet – a film. A set of armatures, working on what ever talent they possessed, using the services of the official photographer and videographer of MIT, and five other staff members: falling back on the strength of our enthusiasm, concern, and eagerness, and prodded on by the encouragement of the Institution, tried to do justice to the cause. The film "From Despair to Hope" resulted... indeed as the name suggests, the film does point towards a possible solution. In the meanwhile a written report was also to be made. A preliminary report was submitted by late April but due to un-avoidable reasons it was not published. This is an edited version of that report. The findings are more or less the same except that it has been updated and the presentation has improved.

Some of us thought we should have an aim that after we finally present the report the suicides should immediately begin to drop and reach zero in a matter of months... That was an impossible task even at the outset but it helped us focus on a

comprehensive analysis and a total solution. We constantly retained focused on the application dimension, looking out for any possible practical steps for relief.

There were incredibly touching stories which brought tears in our eyes. At times we felt utterly powerless being unable to offer any succor. Then there were instances where we felt a great sense of indignation, situations to which the common man in Vidarbha has become accustomed to; it being part of normal daily life for them now. All that we could do was promise that we would do our best to move things constructively and express our wish to get back to them some time in the future.

What is presented here is an analysis emanating out of numerous group discussions held amongst the members of the team before, during and after the tour, discussion with other participants of MPG-2, the instructors at MIT-SOG, other experts who we had the opportunity to meet, and most of all the common man and the intellectuals whom we met at Vidarbha. We also had the benefit of referring to other studies that had already been conducted before us. These have been indicated in the 'Appendix A'.

We are grateful to the following persons

Mr. Rahul V Karad: Dean MIT-SOG for having thought up the idea of the study and having provided us the opportunity to conduct it. He has been the chief patron for the effort.

Mr. Vishnu Swaminathan: Director MIT-SOG for his involvement in the conception and initiation of the project by laying down broad outlines. He offered his guidance and ideas from time to time.

Mr. Shivdatta Mishra from Sewagram, Devi from Paunar ashram and Mr. Aravind Nalkhande farmer leader for having shared their views with us...

Mr. Santosh Kolhe (Participant MIT-SOG), Mr. Prashant Sangle, Mr. Manoj S Chavan, Mr Adhinath Ahire, Mr. Arun Patil Gawande, Mr. Vaibhav Navadkar, Mr. Balaji Kolhe residents of Vidarbha who provided support and also shared with us their views.

Vidarbha --Ray of hope

Ms Rajul Joshi, Faculty MIT-SOG: for meticulously going through the draft and giving valuable inputs for structuring the study report, and for help in preparing the final report.

Ms Swati Shome who helped put the study team together and offered many suggestions.

Mr. Vishal Jadhav, Mr. Azhar Khan, Ms Vanishree Ramanathan, Ms Hemangini Shah, Ms Urmi Chanda, Ms Mukta Kulkarni(all Faculty members) Mr. Ajay Srivastava, Mr. Rajinder Singh, Mr. Abhay Agarwal and Mr. Bankim Shah (Participants), for having thrown light on issues they were familiar with, participated in discussions about our preliminary findings and for offering suggestions and assistance.

Mr. Sankalp Singhai (Institutional Relations) acted as manager for the trip. Besides working in a liaison capacity he ensured that the whirlwind trip went off smoothly. He offered many ideas. He was ably assisted by Mr. Gurinder Singh, who helped plan out the itinerary and accompanied the study team as administrator.

Mr. Deepak Khedkar and Mr. Santosh Botre: who covered the events on video and still cameras respectively. Mr. Shivtare (driver), Mr. Parmeshwar and Mr. Dyaneshwar (assisting staff)

We thank the other researchers and thinkers who made their findings and reports available to us. And most of all, thanks are also due to the many individuals who allowed us to take a peek into their lives so that we could make this possible...

Arun Kumar, K. M. Swaroop, M. D. Patil, Madhuri Apte, Nixon Fernando, Prabuddha Ahire, Priya Tayde, Rabi Narayan Patra,

INDEX

Foreword	3
Preface and Acknowledgement	4
Index	7

Section I: The Study

1.1 Introduction	9
1.2 Methodology of Study	10

Section II: The Gravity of the Problem and Backdrop

2.1 What Do The Suicide Statistics Say? Is There An Issue?	15
2.3 The Stake Holders	17
2.3 General Conditions of Farming in Vidarbha	19

Section III: Issues – 1 --- General

3.1 Is It The Corruption In The Cotton Federations?	21
3.2 Are High-Yield Seeds A Solution Or A Problem?	23
3.3 Over-Enthusiastic Marketing	26
3.4 Natural Calamities and Insurance.	27
3.5 Medical Problems	29
3.6 The Decreasing Margins of Cotton Production... And Increasing Risk	31
3.7 Is It The Ruthlessness of The Local Financial Markets?	34
3.8 Are Spending and Saving Habits of Farmers Healthy?	36

Section IV: Issues – 2 --- Government Policy

4.1 The Policy of Fixing Support Prices	37
4.2 The Policy of Fixing Minimum Wages	42
4.3 Deficiency in Expert Advice for Farmers	44
4.4 Government Policy, Rest of Maharashtra Vs. Vidarbha	47
4.5 Patch Work Relief and Development	48
4.6 The Ethics of Suicide Relief	51

Section V: The Impact of Capitalism and Globalization

5.1 Intra National Colonization	55
5.2 The Socio-Economic Impact of Capitalism on Families and Individuals	56
5.3 Loss of Caste Support	60
5.4 Capitalism And The Farmer: Fight, Flight Or Adapt?	62
5.5 Capitalistic Power and Farmers	64
5.6 Corporate Farming a Solution?	67
5.7 Disguised Unemployment and Co-Operative Farming / Joint Families	70
5.8 Employing the Excess Manpower	72

Section VI: Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings	76
6.2 Brief Summary of Solutions	78
6.3 A Fundamental Change of Strategy	79
6.4 It Is Real: The Window of Hope	81
6.5 The Solution: Action Plan for Policy:	82

Section VII: Appendix

7.1 Appendix A: References	84
7.2 Appendix B: Details about Participants and Support	85
7.3 Appendix C: Factors Covered In Interviewing Affected Families	88
7.4 Appendix D: Program of Study (23 rd Dec to 29 th Dec 2006)	89

SECTION I **THE STUDY**

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The issue of Farmers' suicides in Vidarbha has been in the limelight for the last 5 to 7 years now. For a decade before that the problem has been simmering in the background. But the causes of the problem seem to date back much before that.

Vidarbha is the eastern region of the state of Maharashtra in India and is part of the Deccan Plateau. This was supposed to be a once prosperous land growing "White Gold" (Cotton). Its reputation was such that getting a son-in-law from here was a matter of prestige for prospective in-laws. But that has obviously changed. What could be the reason for this change? Is it the cropping pattern? Is it the green revolution? Is it the induction of capitalism, is it globalization, and has it something to do with corruption in government? Or is it the decline in social values; is it alcohol abuse, use of chemical pesticides, costly seeds, lack of motivation, costly labor...? Or then is it something else all together?

At the face of it, looking at the December greenery of Vidarbha, it would seem surprising that suicides could be taking place here of all places... but indeed it is happening... how serious is the problem? Are suicides the heart of the problem itself or is it just an indication of something more deep? Where is the problem headed? Are the solutions being applied really solving the problem? Are there other solutions to it?

These are the kind of questions that would swarm the mind of a researcher. But trying to say this is the cause, or that is the cause, really does not pay dividends. It is like hunting for a scapegoat. The fact is that the individual cases, most of the times, represent a combination of several factors; the combination differed with the case: this is a finding from other studies too; which our study confirmed. However in the final analysis it can be said that the issue needs to be analyzed from a multiplicity of angles, including economics, politics, culture, social structure, geography, international trade, international law, caste problem, administrative structure... In fact suicides and their causes is merely an indicator of something deeply wrong; they represent the last straw that broke the camel's back. What we need to do is to look at that entire load that is on the farmer. And analyzing the problem through the multiplicity of angles gives us a good view of all the pressures that are exerted on the farming community. The problem of Vidarbha is

not disconnected from that of rural communities all over India. The observations on Vidarbha can easily be generalized for other parts of India.

A word about the presentation: The findings are being presented in a manner we found suitable to the problem at hand. For the multiplicity of parameters we found it best to pick up issues one by one and work out the statement, analysis, conclusion and recommendation in respect of each issue. The aim has been to keep the document simple so that it becomes user friendly for those who are dealing with the problem on ground; it should help them in taking informed decisions as they try to find solutions to problems they encounter.

This application oriented comprehensive nature is a USP of this study.

1.2 METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

This report is based on a field study and experiential learning of the Vidarbha area. The data collected consists of both primary and secondary data. Interviews were conducted of persons we met in the course of the tour of the affected districts.

Both formal and informal studies were referred to during the course of the tour and there after. Articles written by renowned specialists in various fields and by specialists on Vidarbha were also consulted. The formal sources have been listed in Appendix A.

Many group discussions were conducted later on; the outcome of those discussions has been presented in the following chapters.

IDENTIFYING STUDY AREAS: - At the outset, having decided to work on Vidarbha Farmers' Suicides, it was important to decide the area of study.

Content wise we did not put any restriction on what aspect we would like to study about Vidarbha, be it the climate, the people, the economics, geography, history, government... we wanted to look into anything that mattered so that we could look for the cause and suggest solutions...

As far as the geographical areas are concerned, having decided to set course for Vidarbha it was chiefly up to Mr. Prabuddha Ahire (one of the participants and member of the study team, who is familiar with the Vidarbha area) and Mr. Gurinder Singh (native of Nanded, bordering Vidarbha) to chalk out a program for the trip. The two of them had preliminary consultations by referring to maps, to reports and

Vidarbha --Ray of hope

by speaking to persons with personal experience of the place. Mr. Santosh Kohle a participant from our class is a resident of Vidarbha. His offices were also used. Contact was made with officials in various regions in Vidarbha to obtain lists of the suicide affected families. Other persons who had done studies on the issue earlier were also consulted. Based on all these inputs the team identified the villages that were to be visited. They also arranged for meetings at important institutions in the region so that we would have the benefit of meeting persons who have been churning these issues in their minds for years.

The places were picked up at random from locations that were highly affected. There was enough scope left for on spot decisions; we even followed leads offered to us by people we met as we toured. We also hit villages at random as we traveled and in some instances we hit upon interesting information by sheer chance. Arrangements were also made to meet officials from trade cooperatives, from the government and from banks. Some of these meetings were pre planned but much of this was arranged as opportunities presented themselves on the ground and in random as we traveled through; roughly in accordance with the original itinerary.

As for scholarly studies, the team made attempts to obtain all the formal studies that were available already. Some of the formal reports were downloaded from the internet. YASHADA made a copy of their study available to us. Articles pertaining to Vidarbha were obtained on the basis of availability, popularity and on the basis of recommendation of knowledgeable associates.



Fig1:On a mission: photo:Madhuri

Standing (L-R): Gurinder, Deepak, Patil, Priya, Ahire, Shivatare, Rabi, Sankalp, Santosh, Parmeshwar;

Sitting (L-R): Nixon, Arun, Swaroop;



Fig2: Maharashtra; The route taken

PRIMARY DATA: Field study report based on observation and interview of 130 persons approximately. The primary data collection was done with the help of technical aid in the form of video recording, still camera recording, and taking notes. A questionnaire was also used. (Refer appendix C)

In all we listened to 7 monologues of different lengths, interviewed 49 persons formally, had 32 more persons supplemented/added their views in these interviews, discussed the issue informally with more than 50 other commoners in this region.

SECONDARY DATA: (Appendix A) We referred to 04 major studies and obtained references of several others from them. Besides we went through 11 other scholarly articles from various sources, which were from popular media but written by reputed scholars known for their expertise on Vidarbha. We referred to various government and non government databases like CMIE and institutional research database like YASHADA.

We decided to interview persons representing as diverse a spectrum of spheres in society in Vidarbha as was possible. The spectrum of persons we

interacted with included Suicide affected families, Govt. officials, local leaders, affected farmers, farm laborers, proponents of Gandhian philosophy, Sarpanches, spiritual leaders, cotton federation officials, graders, students, youth, policemen, entrepreneurs, political leaders, lawyers, elected board members of marketing federations, officials of the federations and farmer leaders. We benefited from the informal studies that have been conducted by the 'Shetkari Sangathana': also an assembly of over a hundred farmer leaders and sarpanches discussed the issue at length and came up with their own analysis (which we obtained from Mr. Arvind Nalkhande). Then Mr. Shivdatt Mishra, chairman of the Nai taleem samiti from Sevagram, gave us a Gandhian perspective. So also did Devi from the Paunar ashram (Vinobha Bhave fame) who also added a spiritual angle.

Besides, participants and the research associates/facilitators of the School of Government and several eminent faculties who are known specialists in their respective fields contributed their knowledge and views in brain storming sessions and through lectures.

ANALYSIS OF DATA COLLECTED:

After primary and secondary data collection the team went about analyzing the data in the following manner

- A comprehensive study of the tapes was made through a couple of re-runs of the recorded camera footage and a film was made.
- The observations made by various persons were analyzed in the light of secondary data.
- Detailed discussions with the facilitators, other participants and experts both in this area and from related disciplines were organized and views were obtained.
- The reports made by other institutions were studied (Appendix A).
- A mind map analysis was used to brainstorm and arrive at the spectrum and depth of the problem.
- Solutions offered in the various sources and by different persons were discussed and finally compiled to offer what we found ideal in respect of each issue.

REPORT:

The results of the above said analysis has been represented in the report. The views were collected by Mr. Nixon Fernando, and with the assistance of other members these were organized into the report. Ms Priya Tayde and Mr. Nixon Fernando were also given the task of co-ordinating with media professionals to create the short documentary film. As referred to in the introduction the study takes on the problem issue by issue and offers suggestions in each case and then comprehensively at the end...

SHORTFALLS AND OPPORTUNITY FOR FUTHER DEVELOPMENT:

- 1) Most of the quantitative analysis presented in the report is from the secondary data.
- 2) Each issue that we have brought out can be further analyzed for better solutions and applications by experts in respective fields.

UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITIONS (USPs)

- No-holds-barred study
- Comprehensive in spectrum: Holistic
- Application oriented and facilitating leaders
- Real life – Field study based, and recorded on film



MIT School of Government
Government
Leadership

SECTION II:
THE GRAVITY OF THE PROBLEM AND BACKDROP

This section deals with the entire issue in general. What is the problem? Where is problem enacted?

2.1 WHAT DO THE SUICIDE STATISTICS SAY? IS THERE AN ISSUE?

Is the scenario of suicides as bleak as it is made out to be in the press? Some of the data reflected in the YASHADA study report compels us to think that the suicide problem in Vidarbha region is not as grim as is the case in Kerala. What do the actual numbers show?

The following table, constructed from figures reflected in the YASHADA report, drives a point in respect of the Suicide Mortality Rate (SMR) {which is average no of suicides for one lack of population per year}

Region	SMR
Maharashtra average	14
National average	10
Kerala average	33
Western developed countries	20 to 40

The figures point out that the figure for Maharashtra is certainly greater than the national average, however **the alarm bells should be ringing more loudly in Kerala and in other advanced nations of the world than in Maharashtra and that too by a wide margin.** There seems to be an even graver reason for suicides in these other areas which therefore need even more serious consideration... As far as Maharashtra goes, from these figures it **appears** as if the issue has been brought into focus out of turn and we could list a few possible causes for this.

a) Political activists are milking the issue of Vidarbha regionalism to generate an emotive issue that can make a difference in the political sphere. They are hence playing the suicide card to the hilt.

b) The farmers want themselves heard since they have some genuine problems. The discussion of the suicide trends is helping to bring the issue to centre stage.

c) Now that money is being doled out to suicide affected families, there is a distinct possibility that a normal suicide would be given a color of a 'farmer suicide'.

d) Is it a case of improved reporting to the police with the coming of better technology?

e) The media has found an emotive issue to highlight.

This makes us ask the question: **are all these factors together fanning hype?**

Hype it definitely is but it is not based on nothing. ANOTHER REALITY DOES RING ALARM BELLS.

The study conducted by Srijit Mishra (IGIDR) is comprehensive on the trends in suicide patterns over the decade 1995 to 2005. It has found that the number of suicides of men increased by around 3000 heads (from 6882 to 9903 cases ... page 40) and in the same period the increase in farmer deaths in particular went up by around the same figure (from 978 to 3799... page 49) meaning that the increase in the over all figures is almost totally on account of the increase in the number of farmer suicides. As the report states it, the increase of Farmer suicides in that period is close to 300%. In other words, **there is an abnormally high increase in the cases of farmer-suicides.**

This effect should have a cause. There must be some added pressure on the farmer (a large one at that) which is causing this effect. **There must be some major issues in the Indian hinterland which need to be looked into.**

We shall presently go into that but first of all there is a point to be made regarding the people who are involved and have a stake in the farmers' condition... It should give us an idea of the gravity and depth of the problem... and it does surprise one that there are so many stake holders in all.

2.2 THE STAKE HOLDERS

Though our study is limited to the persons interviewed in the Vidarbha area, the observations drawn during the course of the study also lead us to include other stake holders who might not be directly affected by farmers' suicide but none the less play a role in the process.

Agriculture belongs to the primary sector and a great deal rests on the success of the farmers.

- The farmers, the families of the farmers, the farmer leaders, and the close relatives of the farmers who live in the cities,
- Those offering personalized service to the farmers: cobblers, barbers, blacksmiths, jewelers, vendors, shopkeepers, mechanics, electricians, electronic repair...
- Those offering other commercial services: Pvt hospital workers like doctors, nurses... lawyers, buying agents, retailers for farm inputs, retailers for house hold items...schools, colleges
- Those from the finance market: The workers in the bank, (commercial and co-operative), the private money lenders.
- Religious: priests, temple institutions, ashrams, sanths (saints), sadhus (monks), dealers and manufacturers of things associated with religious practice, those offering services in socio-religious functions, publishers...
- Artists: folk artists, singers, dancers, temple dancers, story tellers...
- Caste leaders
- NGOs, social servants, donors,
- Local industries, entrepreneurs, laborers, marketing agents, advertisers, distributors
- Local political leaders, local village leaders
- Those from the government offering personal services: the police patil, the gram sewak, the teacher, the Talathi, the doctor,
- The elements of the state at the local level: the police, the courts, the other executives.
- The elements of the state at the national and state level: political parties, constitutional office bearers, the legislature, executive and the judiciary.

- The media: print, radio, television, advertisement, films, publishing and all those working in these.
- Industry, specifically consumer goods and indirectly others too
- And last and most important of all, the common citizen...

All these stake holders directly or indirectly affect the conditions in which the farmers operate. The common citizen, by exerting his simple consumerist right, to the extent that he wants the normal food items to cost as little as possible, is actually affecting the conditions of the farmers: in that he desires that the farmer should sell his produce at as low a price as possible. This gets imposed on to the farmer through the political and economic system.

The point we wish to make by listing this are basically two

1) The issue cannot be seen in limited frames... every one and every thing is involved.

2) It is a very complex issue; and it involves many factors. Each set of players listed above have some role to play and exert pressures of different kinds. The impact is total and therefore causes of suicide cannot be seen piecemeal.

All the studies, whether by YASHADA, or the IGIDR or by TISS (refer appendix A) or by so many others show clearly that it is always a cluster of factors, not mutually exclusive, and varying in combination from case to case, that pushes the farmers to commit suicide.

Some of the categories of stake holders listed above represent institutions/factors that also create that impact. **We found it preferable to do a force field analysis and try to identify the important forces that apply pressures to make life increasingly difficult for the farmers.** These deliver stress individually as issues by themselves and collectively too as a bunch of distressing forces. It is that totality which makes the situation grave.

We also need to take note that if the list of stake holders is indeed so huge then the issue of globalization, international laws, human rights, modern science and technology... all invariably play a part. Therefore when we get down to analyzing the issue we need to think globally. In finding solutions we need to involve the entire nation. It should reflect on to the thinking process that designs policy for the nation, and the thinking processes that runs the global system.

Finally it is apt to point out here itself that the most important of all these stake holders are the grass roots leaders in each of the fields, society, religion,

civics, caste, social work, artists, sports persons, educationists, local media, government, political... what they can do in the spheres of their influence is what is finally going to make the difference. When it comes to solving the problem it is they who will end up being the prime movers...

2.3 GENERAL CONDITIONS OF FARMING IN VIDARBHA

The region of Vidarbha is known for its rich black cotton soil. The land being where it is on the Deccan plateau it has its own typical features. Rain is in fact, high. According to the Central Ground water board, the annual rainfall in Vidarbha averages at 1400mm. This is lesser than the rain in the Konkan region of western Maharashtra where the average rainfall stands at 2000mm. But it is greater than the average of 600mm in the plains. In fact the rain in Vidarbha is more than in the infertile Marathwada region of Maharashtra and yet the problem of suicides in Vidarbha is more pronounced than in Marathwada. There is a high dependence on rain exclusively in Vidarbha; this means that a large percentage of the land is cropped only once a year. Indeed statistics show that the no of irrigation projects is lesser in this region; but the reason for this is not completely political neglect. There are some problems to this; it is also known that the soil depth is high and therefore there is a problem with storing water. Finally it lies in the saline tracts there fore ground water harvesting cannot be adopted here with great success.

MORE CASH CROPS: There has been an increasing trend towards the production of cash crops as against the safer bet, the cereals. This can be seen in the statistics compiled by government agencies. Over the years the general trend is that the percentage of cash crops has gone up from 35% to somewhere around 65% today. This does reflect, besides others, a social pressure towards trying to earn more. Pulses and oil seeds are grown. The grams grown in this region enjoy legendary status in far off places due to the light salinity which is special to it.

NO ALTERNATIVE FARM PRODUCE: There being minimal support for allied industries and marketing, it is found that the farmers do not take on to diversifying into alternative farm produce like animal husbandry, bee keeping etc. Infrastructure for these kinds of projects is definitely missing, for example we interviewed an

Vidarbha --Ray of hope

educated entrepreneur who experimented with setting up a small dairy unit and found that he had a problem marketing the produce. The dairy was eventually shut. One suicide case consisted of an educated youth facing failure with hatching chicken on account of electricity failure; this did contribute to the factors leading to his suicide. Further there seems to be a lack of practical experience in respect of these allied farm produce.

The average land holding is a little less than 3 Acres. The farmers are generally categorized into large, medium and small based on their land holding. The suicide rates are found to be distributed rather evenly across the spectrum in proportion. Awareness about farm is surprisingly good but whether they have the confidence to invest in new technology is the question. The small farmers find it hard to invest in technology and then again even if they can, there is a question of faith or confidence in the new ideas. Otherwise the farmer learns through tradition and even for an illiterate person he would surprise with the extent of his grasp and the understanding of both his farm and about the situation that engulfs him. However that does not mean that there is no scope to improve his level of awareness.



Fig3: Dhamodi in Dariyapur Taluk: A farm machine in operation: surprising awareness

SECTION III

ISSUES: PART I -- GENERAL

In this section several important issues mentioned in connection with suicide cases are taken for analysis. The attempt is to reflect the situation on ground, assess the impact, and suggest corrective measures were ever possible. Each of these solutions offered adds to the general sense of direction in which we need to move in our attempt to get out of the present state of affairs.

3.1 IS IT THE CORRUPTION IN THE COTTON FEDERATIONS?

ISSUE: The Cotton federations that are meant to ensure support prices for the farmers. Are these turning out to be the source of distress for the farmers?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE: Ideally the cotton federations have been set up to ensure that the farmer gets a minimum support price for his produce. The international cotton prices are not controllable; that is a different issue all together. Getting the best that the market has to offer on behalf of the farmer should ideally be the aim of the Federations. However, the manner in which the idea is actually executed results in its becoming a source of intense heartburn. Over a period of time, the whole mechanism is manipulated subtly in a manner that it serves all sorts of middlemen, politicians, ginning mill owners and thread mill owners.

In December '06 the max price stood at Rs1990/- per quintal. This is the price the best quality would fetch; a lower variety would fetch less. The maximum is subject to variation from season to season. The assessor at the ginning mill fixes the quality of the cotton the farmer has brought in. Further the cotton would contain seeds and some pod covers, which would be discounted from the earnings of a cartload. This is also fixed by the assessor.

A small game played here is that the assessor uses the privilege of determining the quality and the pod to indulge in favoritism. Also, sometimes, the assessor gets 'instructions' from above not to rate the cotton very high. However, in such an instance, as the assessor pointed out, the difference comes to anywhere between Rs.90 to Rs.150 per quintal. (about 5 to 8%)

There is another game: let's say the influx of the farmers to the market yard is about 200 carts per day. When the ginning mills restrict their intake to 50 or 60 or at the most 80 carts per day, it means that the farmers are left waiting in the waiting yard, with carts loaded with cotton. There were cases where the farmers had waited for 17 days when we visited and the process was still on. This implies that the farmer is constrained to park himself at the market yard, spending probably Rs50 a day for those 17 days for his meals, besides he would have to pay rent charges if the cart is hired and if he has used a tractor wagon then the halting charges for it are exorbitant. This takes another bite off the price he is to receive for his cotton. The alternative is to pay a small bribe. The person who issues tokens to the cart owners is a **temporary, daily laborer** who was appointed on recommendation by powerful persons. The farmers we met there were accusing him of taking bribes of Rs200 in order that he would allow people to jump the line. The official tried to convey to us that there are arrangements for farmers to stay and dine at subsidized rates... the farmers contested that claim there itself... 'he is lying' they said... there are no such arrangements... 'For such arrangements there is a partiality towards sugarcane farmers' they said.

The third and more subtle game played is this that, when the federation is stalling farmers in the yard in long queues and making them restless, the nearby private mills keep their gates wide open but offer say about Rs.100 or 200 lesser. They would also pay up immediately – in cash: unlike the federation where the payment is by cheque that can be realized may be two months later. (It matters to farmers who have taken loans from private moneylenders at high rates of interest). Under pressure from lending agents, and frustrated with having to wait it out for too long at the yard, the farmer sells his cotton to the private federations at a lower price and moves on.

Now that the private mill has the cotton in its custody, it has the right to sell it wherever it wants, even to the government federations. A telling fact is that the stockpiles of the two federations (private and government) were separated by less than six feet distance at a place we visited. So then we have a new middleman between farmers and cotton federations—private cotton federations...

In the place Wani, where there was a firing and a lathi-charge incident, there is a third federation complicating the game a little further. It is the central federation. And the strategy is somewhat similar here too. The state federation

offers Rs1990 the central Rs1900 and the private Rs1750. And cotton is known to move between federations.

A telling proof of the under hand things going on is this: In the week which we visited, the Wani federation was taking in about 200 cart loads a day, however the very same federation, when the Dy Chief minister/ Home minister Mr. R. R. Patil visited wani federation, unloaded a staggering 1000 cart loads!!! And why were they averaging only 200 now...? Because there was a deficiency of labour (sic) to unload.

It is also important to note that at the Maharashtra state government is giving Rs 1990/- per quintal where as the central government Cotton Federations give only 1900/-. At the same time the state governments of AP and MP can afford rates of Rs2400 and Rs2500 respectively. The farmers are unable to sell their produce in these states due to the heavy cost of transportation and due to increased risk in transport. And even if they are willing to take it, it is classified as smuggling.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:

Corruption is quiet rampant here, it is not in the goodness of things to hold farmers to blackmail in this manner. They are running on very small margins and this is a real squeeze and it really matters. The resentment felt is quiet natural and the firing incident at Wani was only waiting to happen.

Is it a cause adding to suicides? The answer is that it can cause it. Farmers are known to have taken poison on account of harassment, by those who are supposed to hand over a cheque but are delaying it with the hope that they would be made "happy" (sic). The squeeze on their profits, the difficulty encountered in their trying to come out of their loans and the harassment meted out to them, all are capable of causing grave distress. This is no excuse to commit suicide but it does add pressure.

Another dimension we eventually realized was that the rich Ginning and spinning Mills and the Cloth and garment industry in general have greater clout than wretched farmer. The net result is that industry maximizes its profits by also trying to squeeze the farmer on the raw materials side. It is able to influence the Government suitably. Is there some way by which the farmers can be taught to exert enough pressure to counter the clout which industry enjoys...? We ask, "Is there any other way other than strengthening their togetherness?"

SUGGESTIONS:

- i) The federation system needs to be made more transparent.
- ii) They should have a governing body consisting of elected village farmers who know the farmers' plight, rather than having nominees of MLAs and MPs, as is the case now.
- iii) There is need of a radical re thinking of the system to remove the loop holes which can be used to harass: how is it possible to ensure that the farmer gets the best price the market has to offer. Can he be spared all the harassment?
- iv) Could procurement be done directly with the Panchayats as the middlemen between Industry and the farmers?
- v) If a cash crop like cotton brings a better price in neighboring states, the government should arrange transportation for farmers so that they can take their produce across. Apparently here the protection has so far been for industry, which buys cotton. If we are to go by the principle that rural societies need to be reinforced then the government should help the farmers instead.



Fig 4: A loss making wait for the farmers at the cotton Federations: Example Wani

3.2 ARE HIGH-YIELD SEEDS A SOLUTION OR A PROBLEM?

ISSUE: Is the need of high yielding variety of seeds optional for the farmers? Are there any significant changes introduced due to this? Is it leading to additional pressures for the farmers?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE: The earlier trend was the use of traditional seeds. A part of the produce was retained by the farmer for the next sowing. This meant that he did not have to purchase seeds. Now the setting has changed, high yielding varieties have been introduced. Pest resistance, drought resistance and quicker harvest are possible added features in these new crops. With such positive qualities associated with the new crops it is but natural that they are preferred.

However there are problems to this, the produce is not fertile, in the sense that the produce cannot be replanted. Seeds have to be purchased all over again in the next season. This raises the input cost of farming. In other words, an expenditure that did not exist now comes into existence. And we now have an additional trader squeezing away his profits even at the input stage. In the study by Mr. Srijit Mishra from IGIDI, it is clearly established that under the very likely situation of going for a second or a third sowing in the instance of drought or flood situations the narrow margins available to the farmer gets squeezed out...

The second issue to this is that the new varieties of seeds require a different approach to farming in comparison to the traditional and that calls for additional training for the farmers. Besides in order to achieve efficient production there could be a need for additional technological and other inputs, all these add complications especially in the cases where farmers are still in the process of experimenting with the new.

The third related issue here is of corruption: there have been cases of swindlers passing off low-grade seeds as high grade ones. It is not uncommon for farmers to land up with low yields and bad crops. In fact, as we interviewed the farmers it was explained to us how sometimes the grader at the federation says to a farmer that the cotton he has brought in is of low grade; while the farmer is quiet certain that he had sown high-grade cotton. Here of course the official in the federation could also be using his powers and the element of mistrust about the seeds in the market to harass the farmer.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN: The need for good seeds is an inescapable part of agriculture now. The margins would be drastically low if ordinary seeds are used. But it adds a cost, which was earlier non-existent. As we shall see in the chapter 3.6, it adds to the risk factor. There is work to be done in the areas of training of farmers, insulation of farmers from spurious seeds, and availability of low cost seeds.

As to the question whether it is a reason for suicides... indirectly it is indeed so, because as it is, it is already exerting a pressure on his farm finances; and it can severely plunge him into the red in the case where he has to sow two or more times in a particular season. Or it could hit him if he has been duped with low quality seeds.

SUGGESTIONS:

- i) Can the research institutes come up with varieties that are fertile too...?
- ii) Is it possible for the government to expand seed operations?
- iii) Is it possible to provide subsidized seeds directly to the village panchayats according to an order placed by them to the government?
- iv) Risk in respect of having to sow more than once in a single season could be covered by insurance companies in tandem with the seed companies.

3.3 OVER-ENTHUSIASTIC MARKETING

ISSUE: Are the farmers being fooled into overspending on fertilizers, seeds and pesticides?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE:

A very interesting aspect of the present arrangement in the capitalist order is related to marketing. It is natural that the marketing agents of the fertilizer and pesticide companies market their products rather aggressively. If one is aware of the environment in which marketing targets are fixed and achieved; it would be easy to extrapolate that a nasty salesman would twist things as subtly as possible to mislead a farmer into buying and using too much. The result is that even if there have been good results initially; in the long run the result is reduced productivity and loss of fertility.

There is another instance cited by Mr. Srijit Mishra (IGIDR) as regards seeds. When two sowings failed due to flood followed by drought, the farmer went for a third chiefly due to advice of the men in the market. The result was poor crop and that resulted in greater debt.

There are other psychological pressures gradually exerted on the farmer by the marketing fraternity so that the farmer becomes willing to opt for high

investment despite the heightened risks; this of course is in the (misplaced?) interests of short-term high sales goals for agriculture inputs.

Failure while risk taking is certainly one of the important triggers for suicides.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:

The only way out is to be sure that the farmer is not fooled, and this is only possible if he has an alternate, reliable source of information, which he can keep as a reference. Tradition was one such reference, commonsense is another, friends, NGOs and acquaintances are another; government sources, formal education and the Internet are weaker sources. The point is that he should receive the right advice so that he knows where to draw that line. There is therefore need for work in the area of knowledge delivery to the farmers.

SUGGESTIONS:

i) The solution for this problem should be taken in conjunction with all the training and education that is required in all dimensions of life in the grassroots. However in respect to Vidarbha, and in specific reference to mis-information, NGOs operating in the area should come up with a consensus on the knowledge that has to be delivered in the priority areas and work on a participatory process to put the information across.

ii) 'Statutory information provision' during sales of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, which can attract punishment if the information given is incomplete or misleading, can be explored.

3.4 NATURAL CALAMITIES AND INSURANCE.

THE ISSUE: Are natural calamities a contributor to the trend of increased suicides in Vidarbha? Has it increased the probability of suicides?

ANALYSIS OF ISSUE:

A storm can wipe out an orange crop completely. A flood can wash out crops. A bad rain year can result in abysmally low crop production levels. Even a late rain year can cause losses to farmers. And indeed this is one of the reasons due to which farmers had pushed themselves over the edge. The question is whether the farmers are up to dealing with this.

As brought out by Mr Shivadatt Mishra in his talk to us, it is important to take note of the fact that farmers in Rajasthan are known to take on several consecutive years of drought. They know how to deal with such a calamity, but it is different with the farmers here. There fore the real problem is not the calamity itself but rather that of preparedness for the likelihood of these.

Crop insurance, as a solution has failed in Vidarbha in the sense that the idea has run out of steam. On inquiring we found that the criterion that is used to give compensation results in corruption at the point where the valuation of crop production levels is done. Some farmers who are patronized by insurance agents get compensated while needy ones are given assessment figures, which would ensure that they do not get relief. The net result is that the idea has been found to be unattractive to the farmers and they do not opt for it. Further, the increased risk in farming and difficulties in assessment would not be too attractive to insurance companies.

Another manner of tackling disasters is through 'Social Safety Net'; meaning that a bad year could be seen through with some assistance from society. Earlier the community, caste and large-family support mechanisms ensured that some resilience was built against such calamities. It was an integral part of the traditional practices and was incorporated in the moral obligations of the members of communities. This support mechanism is now suffering a process of decline and it has resulted in the greater vulnerability of people to disasters.

One other security was Gold. But with the consumerist pattern coming in, and with the low margins in farming it is more a question of making ends meet rather than investing in Gold.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:

There is a need for better resilience. There is a need to ensure that they would take on only calculated risks and have the habit of strengthening the 'Social Safety Net' for mutual support within their communities. There fore there is a definite need for better training of the population to be able to take on such disasters. Only education can help here; but unfortunately not the kind of education that is imparted in schools. This training is to be imparted into their living culture. In fact it may only take their re-sensitization to things they already have inherent in their culture.

Besides this, the direct support of government during times of disaster should continue: the only difference perceivable is that it has to be done in such a way that their togetherness rather than their individuality is given importance. The support should be extended through their village communities not to individuals.

SUGGESTIONS:

- i) The Nation should think out a policy of assistance to calamity-hit areas through the services of Village Panchayats, without having any mediators.
- ii) Reckless risk-taking tendencies should be discouraged through advertisement campaigns. Help of social, caste and religious leaders should also be taken. The formal education could also be used.
- iii) Encourage communities to develop 'Social Safety Net' (social mutual help with economic dimensions) consciously through rejuvenating their useful traditions.



Fig 5: My son was educated but everything conspired against his creative initiatives and investments.

3.5 MEDICAL PROBLEMS

ISSUE:

Do medical problems exert mortal pressures on the farmers? Are they potential causes compelling people to commit suicide?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE:

Needless to say, any estimation of the public health system would be made in comparison with private facilities available elsewhere. The comparison, frankly speaking, would be embarrassing. Therefore it is more when natural that what is available in rural India could hardly be considered of any worth. Unfortunately to obtain what is perceivably reliable (or is really so) farmers need to go to towns and cities and this can be atrociously costly for them. Take for instance the farmer who had a fracture, which led him to have a rod inserted in his shinbone. Unfortunately there were medical complications and surgeries had to be repeated. The wound did not heal and he could not work. He being the lone bread earner, the family had to sell off their properties, even their house. The man eventually committed suicide by self-immolation and his wife and two small children now squat on government land.

Dr Anbumani Ramadoss the honorable minister for health, in a talk to the students at MIT-SOG, outlined to us the new initiatives taken up by the ministry of health. We could see that he was actually thinking outside the box and was really on the path of empowering the panchayats in respect of health and hygiene. He also explained initiatives to be taken to revitalize the government hospitals across the country. However we find that even this, even completely implemented, is not likely to solve the problem. A vision like his needs committed persons in the doctors generated by the system. His insistence of extending rural tenures is therefore understandable. But in a system like ours, where those who benefit from Government subsidies in education consider it a prize for hard work done rather than a training process for obligatory service, this does not go down well. Doctors as it is take a little longer than others to settle, and still longer to establish a commercially viable service; dragging it even longer, by being compelled to serve longer in rural areas almost looks like injustice to them. Besides what is the logic in sending fresh graduates to rural areas? Does that not imply we are designing the system in such a manner that the rural folk will get sub-standard service: obviously because they cannot pay for it? It makes commercial sense but does it account for a caring system?

There is something wrong with the basic manner we are approaching the problem of health. Take this for example... 1) Is what we have a health care system or a disease fighting system? 2) Is the insistence on Allopathy really necessary? 3) If genuine medical care comes with a price tag, if people cannot afford it, if the

existing alternative health care system is not delivering, are we not giving a direct message to the poor that we don't care two hoots about their illnesses?

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:

There is indeed a problem with the vision behind the health care system in the country and it has to be reassessed on a radical footing; taking it on in such a manner that a practicable system gets delivered on the ground. Systems of sports, nutrition, disease fighting, hygiene, disaster management, epidemic control, vaccination program and education should be put together to deliver something that can produce a healthy population. There is need of creating a vision in which allopathic system gets healthy competition from other medical systems. This increase in alternatives should make medical care both available and affordable even to the poor.

SUGGESTIONS:

i) The Government needs to work on an alternate vision. It would require integrating the services of the various genres of medical treatment (Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Allopathy, Unani and others), health sciences (available in rural sports, mainstream sports, performing arts, yoga etc) and nutrition sciences into a complete package, and then bring in the factor of community, and socio-political systems so that a citizen will have both cheap and a costly options for medicine.

ii) Looking at it from the commercial angle, the possibility of giving access to the most advanced medical care should be arranged through some form of medical care insurance covering entire communities. The entire community of a village should be made responsible to give medical insurance cover to the members of that village. This will help to drastically reduce illness as a cause for suicide.

iii) Village sports and games and other rural competitions should be patronized on a revolutionary scale. This would ensure the sprouting of Akhadas and sports acharyas who end up becoming treasure houses of knowledge of Medicine, health and nutrition.

3.6 THE DECREASING MARGINS OF COTTON PRODUCTION... AND INCREASING RISK

ISSUE: The input prices have risen and the sale price has gone down; does this make cotton farming more risk prone? What is the nature of the risk?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE: When a farmer takes on to cotton farming the cost inputs consist of seeds, pesticides, fertilizers, and labor. Of late energy is also added in a significant way. Commercially available high yielding and high quality seeds come at a price. And it does not make sense to the company selling seeds to sell a variety that retains its ability to germinate even in the next generation. The seeds have to be purchased every season. The price may look small but it is a significant increase from having to pay nothing and there is no way back because the normal seeds produce crops at un-economic levels, which do not suit today's prices: high yielding varieties are a must.

Pesticides and Fertilizers are chemical based rather than organic based these directly add to the cost besides each bring problems of their own too. The study by TISS brings out that there is a tendency for over-use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The use of too much fertilizer actually reduces the produce and in the long run reduces the fertility of the land. This has been the experience in the case of other states like Andhra Pradesh too. The surprising fact is that these inputs which are now considered mandatory in the farms by the farmers actually increase the costs phenomenally. The studies by Swaminathan, the study by Goel, the study by TISS and the one by the Indira Gandhi institute all mention this problem.

And more significantly, partially on account of the fixing of minimum wages imposed by the government, labor has become rarer and it comes with a larger cost tag. One final addition in costs is the fact that having shifted from organic to mechanical farming there is a need for petrol/diesel to run those machines. All these inputs were not part of the cost about three decades back, they are additions to the cost. Besides in comparison to Gold, the sale price of Cotton, which stood equal to 8 grams of gold for a quintal, now stands at around 2 grams. This of course is offset by the increased productivity of the land... but as we have seen, it comes with the constraint that high yielding and high resistance varieties of seeds have to be purchased.

The increase in risk comes from the fact that there is need to invest heavily as compared to virtually no investment in traditional organic farming. A failure now

sends the farmer into losses and into the regressive spiral of loans, where as, earlier, he would at least grow enough to feed his family. The question then arises, why is the farmer still going for cotton then? And the answer is that it is still the best chance if one wants to make money in the given situation. The few other options are un-attractive. If the prices are right it does work, if the yield is good things turn out well. The problem is that sometimes (many times) the gamble does not pay off; there is a high possibility of crop failure.

One other problem why farmers take risks is that the politicians promise the skies in terms of procurement prices. Farmers are half misled by it. When it comes to delivering, that privilege is available to only a few and the market after all decides the price and it can be anything. The farmers set out with expectation and hope, but the calculations go awry when dismal prices ensue. There fore, of the people we came across, almost everyone asked merely for a good price and said that everything else would take care of itself.

The study by Mr Srijit Mishra from the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research gives three examples of such awry calculations that drive home this point. We found this to be a recurrent theme as we visited the farmers.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN: It is amazing that in such discussions we miss a very important point: that even if the farmer makes profits the small farmer would be hovering in and around the poverty line. Such a model would be disastrous for the rural community; it cannot sustain. And it has implications leading right up to global warming. This cannot last for long. The very model of economics as applicable to the villages of India has to be re-thought. If the idea is to bring rural prosperity, some real radical thinking needs to be done. The real problem is whether we want to visualize the future India as a land of prosperous villages or a nation of metros with stark extremes in living standards. If the trend continues then we are forcibly moving towards large scale mechanized farming, which would be a disaster for traditional India. No wonder then that the political leadership asks the farmers to send one son to farm and the other to the city. It is about time we make conscious decisions. If it is an issue of profits of cloth mills as against the profits of the farmers then there is definitely a little more tilt required towards the farmers' side.

And then it is appropriate to remember, when we take decisions, that there is an environmental dimension. But that takes us to another issue which we shall deal with later. *In respect to suicides it needs to be pointed out here that increased costs*

lead to high risks further leading to possible losses and debt traps. This creates a potent suicide triggering mechanism. It may be right, here, to point out that financial causes are one of the major components of suicides and therefore this needs to be addressed. The farmers need to be both protected against risks and should inculcate the mental and social qualities needed to withstand losses.

SUGGESTIONS:

1) The definition of progress and the strategy to achieve it, especially in respect of the future vision of Indian Villages, has to be re-assessed and thought out pragmatically.

2) A national debate on the issue of economics of small-scale farming has to be initiated.

3) In the meanwhile it is important that we should take immediate short-term measures as follows

- a) Help the farmers get the best prices available (Rs 60,000Cr)
- b) Vigorously take up research aimed at reducing input costs of farmers; since that would reduce risk even if price of Cotton drops.
- c) Think out-of-the box to find safety nets for farmers who take risks with crops like cotton. Help them develop resilience to withstand such likelihood.

3.7 IS IT THE RUTHLESSNESS OF THE LOCAL FINANCIAL MARKETS?

THE ISSUE: Are the methods adopted by the lending agents inducing the farmers to commit suicide?

ANALYSIS OF ISSUE: Financial difficulty is one of the main reasons for suicides and the lending agencies get inadvertently involved. The agencies involved here, in helping out with loans, fall in four major categories: Relatives, Standard commercial banks, co-operative banks and money lenders. When seen from the point of view of a village farmer looking out for loan, the following is the picture visible to him.

The following table is generated from an analysis of secondary data, articles, from interviews in the field and from group discussions.

	Relatives	Nationalized Bk	Co-operative	Money lenders
Ease of availing	Not easy now	Procedure locked	Manageable	Easy to get
Time factor	-----	Long delays	Delayed	Instant
Amount available	-----	By rule, less	Influence matters	Highest
Rate of interest	low	Up to 14% p/a	18% p/a average	60% to 120% p/a
Recovery method	emotional	Relatively mild	Severe	Harassment/sale deed

Whether one can get a loan depends a lot on the credit worthiness of the borrower. The problem with low interest loans is that it is generally untimely, corruption tainted, long delayed, of less value and selectively given only for certain commercial activities. The result is that, for other needs and for immediate needs the farmers are compelled to take loans at high interest rates. This surely eats into their already weak finances.

During recovery it has been found that the lending agents go about their job in the manner they find appropriate and effective. Even though Commercial and national banks are known to use indecent social pressure for payback they are restricted by policies and therefore are not too severe on processes of recovery. However the co-operative banks run by locals are known to apply severe strong-arm tactics due to political clout. As for the moneylender (many times close relatives too) the pressures are more community based, sometimes severe and surely collateral is required.

About a decade back or even few years ago the moneylender used to give loans keeping land as security but after bad experiences, with bad loans and with the ways of the law, they have now resorted to the method of a 'sale deed'. Here the land is not pledged, rather a sale deed is signed... the deed is returned when the loans are paid back.

The situation is such that farmers finally go to the moneylenders despite the high interest rates. Even though they face harassment people in general are not really willing to speak against the moneylenders out of fear. They do mention things anonymously though, and only come into the open about it when they are in conflict in the courts or they have nothing to lose.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN: *The broader picture shows that the lending institutions have their respective roles to play. They do what they need to do in order to achieve a win-win by serving and simultaneously surviving. Their availability is an aid in the process of better performance of farmers. If there is no alternative then at*

least these are there at hand. However we could hope for a greater degree of considerateness from them. **Writing off loans or interest is not a way out; it would kill the institutions and that does not make long-term sense.** But then could there not be some method else so that they could get timely loans, for a larger spectrum of activities and at reasonable rates of interests? And is it possible to round off the rough edges?

This issue is linked with the saving and spending habits of the people too. That is tackled later on in this study.

One villager suggested that NABARD should lend directly to farmers at their basic rates. That cannot work though, since it is logistically impractical.

SUGGESTIONS:

- i) The presence of the banks is a help any way, there fore all attempts should be made to keep the grassroots financial markets vibrant.
- ii) The corruption can only be dealt by better regulation through the participation of civil society. A watch dog initiative could be taken up in those areas, where there is need, in order to assist officials from the Anti Corruption Bureau.
- iii) **MICRO CREDIT:** This is possibly the best area to focus upon here. It has been found successful in pockets. (More in next chapter)

3.8 ARE SPENDING AND SAVING HABITS OF FARMERS HEALTHY?

ISSUE:

Is bad money management a cause of suicides? Would better saving habits inculcated in a farmer reduce incidents of suicide?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE:

Sudden eventualities in a family could send a family spiraling into debt. But there was a way out of it; since time immemorial gold and jewels have acted as cushions for the average Indian. The difference now is that margins are low, investment in agriculture is high and the spending habits have changed on account of the exposure to the consumerist culture.

There is the case of a farmer who lost two of his sons to suicide. He squarely blamed bad management of finances for the suicides. One of his other sons was a teacher and was earning a steady government pay. With that kind of money he could

afford a life style that is quiet grand for a village setting. The other brothers dependent on farming could not match it. One of them had taken a loan for some family and farming eventualities, which he could not pay back. The other had taken a loan and invested in a bore well which did not yield water. Both could not pay back and took the short way out. The father showed us some simple calculations indicating how, being a farmer with four or five acres of land to fall back upon, it was impracticable to pay electricity bills and there fore in his prudence refused a connection from the electricity board; his farmer sons did not refuse and it contributed to the tight corner they were in.

But this has much less to do with low incomes than with bad money management. We have mentioned elsewhere in this report that there are poorer pockets elsewhere in India and areas more badly hit by drought; the problem of suicide is not as grave there. It is a simple case of keeping expenses less than income and of being prepared for financial crisis. It is all about managing money prudently.

This characteristic though, cannot be seen outside the context of the culture in which one exists, the people who live around have a role to play and it can be destructive—or then constructive. That society which exists around can goad someone into spending and it could also drive sense into the person. The point is to create situations where the latter would happen.

There has been no known great tradition of money management in Vidarbha except in the trader community: which of course they handle pretty well. What about the farmers? If they learn the tricks of the trade will it help reducing the probability of suicides? We believe it will... This is an art and it can be learnt. The question is whether there is a system which can be used to impart this training.

The answer is the system of Micro Credit. In the Micro Credit system there is a requirement of support groups. This means that there is community participation in management of money and repayment of loans. This community pressure helps in better management of finances and better pay back to the lending agencies. The rate of interest is far lesser than what the farmers would otherwise have paid. It is also a strong empowerment tool and most of all it can stimulate small-scale industry. Small businesses in turn produce greater financial strength in families as their earnings are higher than usual

It improves the credit worthiness of the farmers on three counts; firstly the habit of saving and monetary prudence is already demonstrated. Second there is a

kind of co-lateral in the form of other members of the group and of course there is the case of increased earning from the side businesses.

Besides of course one of the successes has been that it is found to empower women.

Even commercial banks are found to operate with a high degree of success; that is the, repayment rate has been extremely good. The local money lender is bypassed, and the noble prize should be no surprise.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN: As a policy, micro credit can be encouraged here. But of course it has to come with parallel infrastructure and market support for the small businesses that may crop up.

SUGGESTIONS:

1) *The local leaders and banks need to push the idea of micro credit really hard... if nothing it will instill a better attitude towards money management. That is a great life saver...*

2) The government should work on the infrastructure required to support small scale and extremely small scale entrepreneurship initiatives; it should specially assist in marketing.

3) The local leadership should work on other ideas that encourage the farmers and especially their children to save. Each person having a bank account... that could possibly help



Fig 6: Mr. Shivdatt Mishra at Gandhiji's Ashram at Wardha, "why not a price commission for industrial products?"

SECTION IV

ISSUES – II: GOVERNMENT POLICY

The government is a decisive factor in the life of a farmer. There have been arrangements made by the government in accordance with the demands of the times. A government acts according to policy that it inherits and shapes new policy according to the current state of the various factors that dictate terms. These parameters are of diverse nature, varying in span from the local to the international levels and can date back ages. It is therefore important to understand government policy in the light of such influences.

In this section we pick out some factors related to the government that have contributed to building up pressure on the agriculture sector.

4.1 THE POLICY OF FIXING SUPPORT PRICES

THE ISSUE: Not all prices are determined by market forces. Prices of some commodities get artificially fixed in a democracy like ours. Does this really offer protection to the farmer?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE:

There are both vested and genuine interests in the government wanting to keep the prices low; especially of food items since it has the greatest impact on the poor and on political fortunes. The natural factor that affects food price is the issue of supply and demand. Excess supply keeps prices down naturally while in the case of reduced supply, either because of hoarding or low production, even though the prices tend to shoot up, it makes sense to governments to import stocks in order to keep the prices down. Therefore there is a very strong case for keeping the prices down and this works directly against the farmer's interests of earning profits. That makes it increasingly necessary for the farmer to work on the quantity and quality of his produce with his limited resource base in order to work his profits upwards. While this may be the condition with food crops, it also applies to cash crops.

If prices of cash crops are being suppressed, then it implies that the protection is being offered to industries that are based on the cash crops. The question there fore is this that if there is some kind of fixing of cotton prices whom is it actually benefiting? Is it the farmer, who would have otherwise obtained a raw deal in the open market? Is it the industry, which is getting farm produce at low prices; there fore it can survive or even thrive by value addition? Or then is it the middle man (and the vested interests of the parallel economy corresponding to that) who are laughing their way to the bank through manipulation and corruption?

In principle the support prices are a means to ensure some stability in the market. It is hoped that the farmer will get at least a basic price for his produce. The realities on the field concerning pricing policy, trade, transport, loans, politics, middlemen and other such forces dictate that there is an effective monopoly in operation there in Vidarbha. The farmers who have taken subsidy are supposed to sell at the federations. And as we have already seen, the federation structure adds to the problems. Agitators claim that there is a negative subsidy in operation. That is, the farmers would have profited if they would have rather sold in the open market.

The Indira Gandhi institute study shows that high support prices in the earlier years had helped make cotton farming profitable. Now the prices are too low to make cotton farming a viable option. Who actually needs more support today, is it the weaver in mechanized industry or the farmer? While we try to answer that question we should take note of the fact that the weaving industry can pull more strings than the farmer community.

In a very strong argument Mr Shivadatt Mishra from Sewagram Wardha demanded why there should not be a "Commission on Industrial prices" like there is "Commission on agricultural prices"? He suggests that we fix all prices through the same process so that the farmer would have stable input costs too. Rather, he now faces market driven pesticide and fertilizer prices, which industry gets to fix and hike arbitrarily.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN: There is a clear need of setting priorities right. There are two important points to be considered here.

Firstly if it is a matter of profits of industry against the profits of the farmers, where should the line be drawn? But before that, should the line be drawn? Surely yes, since otherwise it would spell disaster for a democratically elected government if food prices were to hit the skies, especially before elections. And yes, unless there is

a really safe safety net, we cannot go along the path of the absolute market; we do not want starvation deaths. So if that line has to be drawn, if prices have to be fixed, then it would have to represent a choice that is driven by a vision leading us to somewhere good, rather than towards the benefit of vested interests.

The second consideration is this: After liberalization we have commenced work on a model in which the government should ideally interfere as little as possible and let the market decide its own course. Eventually it is all going to stabilize at international prices. This movement towards free market international prices indirectly asks us a question: the question is whether small farms are sustainable? The entire process makes farming increasingly unprofitable for the small farmer. Are we therefore indirectly telling the farmers to give up and move into the other sectors? The movement of the economy and the market seems to dictate that the aim is to move towards industry and service sectors. Is it not time for the Government to come out with its projections for five or ten years (or twenty even) and state everything in black and white for the farmer? That clarity would help farmers develop alternatives rather than flog an old horse – agriculture.

SUGGESTION:

1) Provide subsidy directly to farmers rather than to the fertilizer or pesticide industry. Alternatively provide subsidized fertilizer and pesticide directly to panchayats and ensure a transparent process at the panchayat level. Another method would be to create membership groups for this purpose and use it as via medium to transfer subsidies. Membership to such groups could impose conditions on farmers that encourage disciplined and stimulate learning in them. For example chambers of commerce, just as they work for industries... so also something for farmers...

2) De-link subsidy from procurement. (will tackle negative subsidy problem)

3) Provide better access to markets (transport and other infrastructure).

4) *Specific to Vidarbha, arrange for more private players to procure. Break the monopoly.*

5) Disseminate vigorously information regarding the trends in the economy so that the farmers can see the problems clearly and adapt.

6) Assist farmers adapt to the new arrangements.

4.2 THE POLICY OF FIXING MINIMUM WAGES

ISSUE: Is the fixing of minimum wages actually reducing productivity of farm labor? Is it putting added pressure on the farmers?

ANALYSIS:

The farmers, especially farmers with small holdings, are finding it very expensive to hire farm labor.

An interesting situation is as follows (the case is extreme but it is indicative):-

The minimum wages, as fixed by the government, stood at Rs90 to Rs110. Farm laborers in the Akot area, basically of tribal origin, were found to work for seven to ten odd days in a month and they easily earned up to a thousand rupees. Since they found this is sufficient to splurge on their drinks for the rest of the month, they sometimes refused to work even on being offered high wages. This resulted in two problems for the land owning farmers: They found it difficult to find laborers (which was not a problem some time back), and the laborers they found turned out to be expensive. Both causes were detrimental to successfully pursuing farming.

In general, there is a distinct slide in the quality of the labor rendered. A lazy kind of attitude seems to have settled in and the farm hands work effectively for not more than five hours a day. The alternative is to rely on the members of their own families for labor. There is a distinct difference perceived between a home hand's work and a hired hand's work; the latter lacking in quality.

While this is the case on one side, on the other side, at Wadner, the farmers stated that the daily wages were being paid at the market rate of Rs. 60 to Rs. 70 for a man and around Rs. 25 to Rs. 40 for a woman for a day's work which is in any case lower than what the government hopes to fix. And even this was working out costly for the risk taking farmers.

The net result is that the option of hiring farm labor is both un-attractive and costly: especially keeping in mind the narrow margins available to farmers. There is an element of truth in the claim that, the labor price fixed by the government is on the higher side and the support price of farm produce is on the lower side. The result being that the farmer is being squeezed in between. And some times the best way out is not to cultivate at all: instead they prefer to give it on lease. Both, not farming and leasing are common in Vidarbha; there is statistical evidence for this.

Small farmers actually worked in others' fields as laborers to augment their incomes. In fact, speaking in financial terms, it makes more sense to be a laborer than to be a land owning farmer: at least there is no possibility of losses.

In an indirect sense all this discourages productivity. First, the farm laborer does not work as much so his productivity is down and second, the land owning farmer some times does not cultivate so in that sense productivity is down. By fixing the minimum wages as such we are destroying entrepreneurship/ownership in agriculture.

The simple way out seems to be this, that the small farmer should sell his lands to large corporations or co-operatives or to large farmers and then work in those very lands as labor. "Sell your lands, get out to the cities and earn your living there" that is what we seem to be telling the farmers; someone put it very well 'land owner yesterday, watchman today'. This in turn calls for a social revolution in rural India: remembering the concept of masked unemployment as popularized by Amartiya Sen, in such a situation of sell and move, the masked un-employment would be exposed and that excess labor would be driven to the cities to look for alternative sources of livelihood.

The question therefore is whether the government should interfere in setting minimum wages? Are we applying macroscopic world-level statistical figures to rural life without really understanding the internal mechanisms of life in rural India?

The recurrent theme here is this: as we visualize or project for 20 odd years ahead from here, do we really entertain the idea of sustaining small farms as the back bone of rural life in India? If indeed that is our aim then it is necessary to look into the economics of small farms and ensure that each can sustain at least a family successfully. There is need for protecting farmers even if it just to try and sustain an agriculture-centric work force.

If entrepreneurship can be supported in towns in respect of industries so that more jobs are created, in a similar manner it is important to encourage the farmer who takes the initiative and risk to grow crops. Since that forms the backbone of rural economy.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN: The issue of fixing of minimum wages is akin to fixing a square peg on a hole whose shape we really don't know. It is like a patch of new cloth to fix a hole in old cloth. When the new cloth shrinks after the first wash it

is bound to tear a bigger hole into the garment. Those who are talking in terms of liberalization, free markets and so on should make it clear as to what they think would be the rural society 10 years hence and they should be able to show how what they visualize would be possible.

There should be no doubt that the implied idea is of a nation of cities rather than one of villages. The leadership seems to be taking the nation towards a future where there will be large-farm farming so that the produce can compete fairly with the produce from western nations. Is it really what we want?

SUGGESTIONS:

1) Set up realistic minimum wages which are based on local conditions rather than dollar calculations made at international levels. Possibly all such estimation should not merely be restricted to economic considerations, rather there should be calculations based on holistic considerations in rural societies.

2) Alternatively the farmers should be offered direct subsidy of some kind, may be through high support prices so that they can pay for these farm laborers

3) Even these will only serve as stopgap measures. There is need for some radical re think on the entire issue of economy in rural India.

4.3 DEFICENCY IN EXPERT ADVICE FOR FARMERS

ISSUE: Has the system of updating farmers, on information required for their success, failed to deliver?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE:

To get the best from their farms and to keep abreast with the times there is need of farmers having knowledge of cattle, awareness of new crops, knowing the added precautions required, new fertilizers, new pesticides, their proper use... It is important from two points of view, firstly it is important that they adapt so that they can remain in competition in the changing scenario. The second is that when they are in a state of transition to a new technology, it is important that they pick it up correctly so that it really benefits them and they develop faith in it. Besides there are numerous other issues like learning not getting cheated, being prepared for risks, being prepared for sudden changes...

The cure to this, as envisioned by the government, is the village official also called the Village Development Officer (VDO) and the apparatus behind him called as Agriculture extension. The question is this, what is the reliability factor, as seen by the farmers and village dwellers in general, of this facility?

It has been found that the facility for agriculture extension, is not working in the manner that can be called exalted. For one thing, as it translates on the floor, farmers rely on their own means rather than the expertise of the expert. On several occasions, when we enquired about the help rendered through such sources, the criticism varied from 'some small use' to 'absolutely useless'.

A case to point is the policy of using fertilizers, as initiated in the green revolution. It did bring in its successes but then realizing that over use is delivering more harm than good, realizing that the farms were becoming less fertile, now the trend is towards suggesting that organic farming has its plus points. An extension program which clearly can go on to flip-flops like this, which relies on research findings and shifting opinions of researchers, has the distinct possibility of looking confused. It only goes to undermine the faith farmers have in the system. The tendency to go on flip flops is cited as an example to indicate that the advices really cannot be valued too much. This is the popular feeling.

The net result is that very often the farmers are unaware of possibilities, and are not sufficiently forewarned of outcomes, even if there is sufficient know how in the research institutes.

What really needs to be seen is this, is it the only way in which knowledge can be made available to the farmers? Trying to make the attention and effort of a single person as the channel for the salvation of a village does not make sense. Even if that person were an encyclopedia of information, he would still be a bottle-neck in the flow of information. You could just imagine if his beat is bigger than one village, how much more difficult it would be. And then at the starting level the VDOs are just graduates (with limited practical knowledge), at best empowered with distinction grade degrees from agriculture universities and having a genuine passion for helping villages. And at worst a student who has been pushed through with his agriculture degree and with the likelihood of an aversion for village life in contrast to being enamored by the glamour of life in a city.

This seems like one of the distinct top down solutions; where the whole idea is of a do-gooder coming and giving salvation to a village. The situation can be compared to a football coach training his wards: he stands at one point and taps the

ball to one player and then to the next and then to the next expecting each to tap it back to him. The person who gets maximum practice is he himself. A sensible coach would instead pair off players or put them in sets of three and encourage them to practice on their own in their own small groups ensuring that each set of players has a ball. The important thing is to see that if we treat each farmer and his abilities as a potential resource, a parallel processing of information can be initiated instead of cascading it through one external person.

This is the distinct advantage of the Gandhian approach... where the entire village becomes responsible for its salvation and not merely a single person.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN: The mechanism of agriculture extension as it exists now is restricted by an information bottleneck. Therefore a change in approach is required. There is need to explore the possibility of new institutions to achieve the desired results. The bottle neck has to be broken. With the coming of IT facilities more effective dissemination of information is now possible. A radical re-think is required here.

SUGGESTIONS:

- 1) An information data base focused only on the needs of the farmers has to be established centrally. Access could be granted through the net. The information base should be fed by research institutions and an education based program should ensure dissemination of that information.
- 2) There is need to explore creative alternatives for education; where even the illiterate could go through practical courses and gain expertise which a village could use.

4.4 GOVERNMENT POLICY, REST OF MAHARASHTRA VS. VIDARBHA

ISSUE: Is there a step-mother treatment for Vidarbha? If there is a problem, is the creation of a new state the possible solution?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE:

An issue that seems to be drawing a rather high pitch, when there is a need for political activity, is that of rest-of-Maharashtra Vs Vidarbha. The facts seem to show that indeed there has been some lopsided development owing to some neglect of the region. Over the years, the area once considered prosperous, especially in comparison to rain shadow Marathwada, now seems to have been left far behind.

Ulterior motives are being assigned to this. However there seems to be no reason to assign motives. It merely is a matter of due course of politics the way it happens in the nation. The politically active regions of Maharashtra seem to have been rewarded for their focused efforts. A combination of irrigation projects and agro based industries (like the sugar factories and milk diaries) are required in order to make the system work. As this combination has developed in the western regions of Maharashtra a strong political lobby has also developed. This has reflexively brought more funds into the area. This approach to politics is the dictate of the political trends of the time... even the best of leaders, Prime Ministers even, are known to nurture their own constituencies and areas on a preferential basis. Normal mortals like MLAs cannot be expected to buck the trend in this respect. The political leaders have done what is natural for them to do in the present political set up.

Then again, there is a difference of geological and geographical conditions and of composition of society and culture. And one wonders whether is really proper to compare the achievements of the two regions that differ in such a way.

Though this also makes a case for special sensitivity about Vidarbha to handle its problems, it still remains to be seen how carving out a state would create that sensitivity. Why would the leadership of Vidarbha not continue along the same lines in which the leadership in Maharashtra is carrying on now? Would a new government be able to lavish the kind of attention Vidarbha is getting right now?

In this respect it can only be said that the leaders of Vidarbha need to assert themselves more—even in the present set up. This they can do successfully only if they develop a focus and a vision – a well thought out strategy to work a way out of the present situation and into a better future. They need to work on a total plan, of

systematically tackling the problem, and not merely assess the situation in the political plane. In any case the current focus on Vidarbha is doing it good. There is only need to canalize the development suitably.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:

If a separate state is created it will make a difference but that difference could go one way or the other. If we go by economy of effort, it is better to invest in planning rather than involving in divisive politics. The work should be directed towards creating and taking forward a constructive program for Vidarbha rather than in extending a blame game in which an attempt would be made to replace the present 'responsible' leadership at the Maharashtra headquarters by another 'responsible' leadership in Vidarbha. What is more important is the substance of the delivery.

The solution for the problems in Vidarbha does not appear to be a top down process; rather it needs to be a down up process requiring peoples' participation. This we shall see in detail at the end of this report.

With the new transparency coming in, genuine leaders can really work at building up a consensus in Vidarbha. If a plan is ready at hand proper allocation of resources that are being pumped in at the moment both from Mumbai and Delhi can be put to best use. That is the need of the hour.

SUGGESTION:

The local leadership should immediately start prioritizing on their development programs. Discussions to build a multi-party and multi-level consensus should start as early as possible. And then they need to look out for avenues and resources to take the program forward.

4.5 PATCH WORK RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT

ISSUE: Is there a real consistent vision in the manner in which the issues of Vidarbha are being tackled? Are the inputs, in the form of doling out funds, producing desired results?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE:

The situation in Vidarbha is that sugar factories have closed down since there is no sufficient feed, an educated entrepreneur had to shut down his small scale milk dairy since he could not sell his milk, cotton farmers stand 15 to 20 days out in open spaces in the December cold with their produce at federations because the process is agonizingly slow. Most of the farming in Vidarbha is rain dependent and divest of irrigation even though the amount of rain it receives is rather high. These facts say that the development model is patch work and sufficient effort has not been put into long term planning and coordination. Indeed there does not seem to be an all inclusive planning linking industry, market, irrigation, farming, education, training, technology and politics of the local area. And all this cannot be seen out of the context of the local culture. There seem to be many agencies all working together in a haphazard manner. Everyone seems to be doing things in reference to his own context and struggling with it alone. The net result is that there is there is no all round development. All aspects need to form components of an integrated vision... and it is that integrated vision that has to be funded.

So what really happens to all the funds that are being pumped into the Vidarbha? A lot of it goes into 'compensation'. There is dissatisfaction with the entire issue of compensation. All deserving cases do not receive. Those that receive do not receive enough. Some farmers accused the government of favoritism. Further it goes by the principle of a-fish-a-day which is not a solution. Only the interest on loans has been waved and not the principle amount; and even if that were done there is no logic in destroying a financial market and rewarding imprudence in money management. And then we had the interesting case of a farmer who said this "My brother asked for a loan of ten thousand rupees, he ran circles for months, spent a few thousand rupees, and eventually committed suicide. After he committed suicide the government gave a hundred thousand rupees. Now what is the idea here? Is it their intention to pay for his funeral?" As far as development programs are concerned, effectively, as Mr. Shivadatta Mishra pointed out, most of the money goes from one ministry of the government to the other and/or the money lands in the hands of contractors and engineers leaving nothing for the farmers.

The tried and tested method of doling out funds from the centre has the reputation of delivering 17% at the grassroots, if then Prime Minister of India Mr. Rajiv Gandhi is to be believed; Mr. TN Seshan Ex-Chief Election Commissioner and a career Indian Administrative Service officer, points out in his book the "Degeneration

of India" that the percentage may be as low as 5% in Jammu and Kashmir. Further the whole idea that ministries at the centre and state levels will decide the co-ordination of the various aspects of development at the grassroots level for thousands and thousands of villages does not make sense.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:

There is need of localized planning, localized execution and localized control over development. This is the best way to develop responsibility at the lower levels, ensure transparency, and tackle the menace of corruption all at once.

SUGGESTIONS:

1) The solution is that a better planned approach needs to be taken.

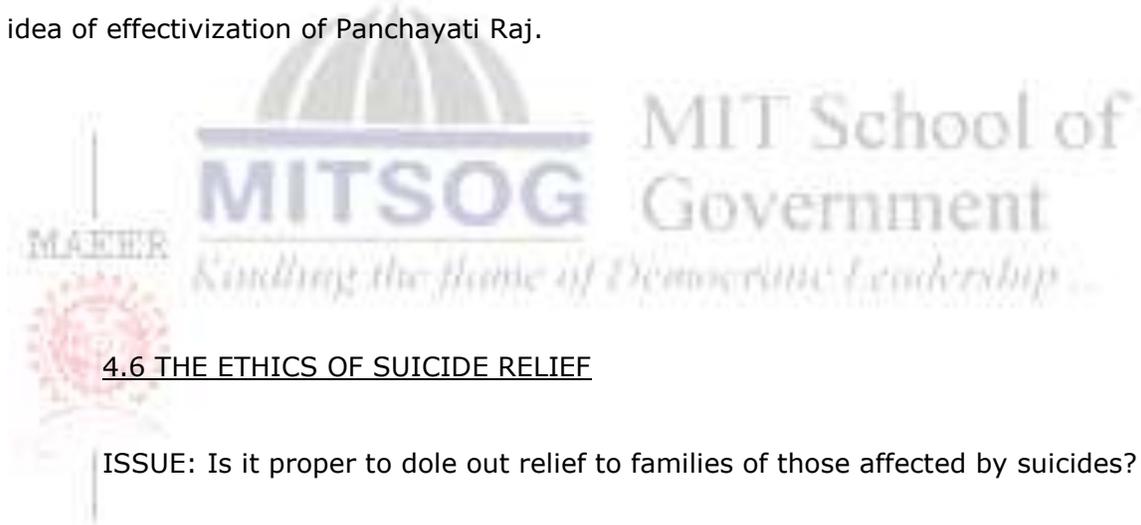
2) In fact the money that is being pumped into Vidarbha should be devolved directly to project task forces constituted and working under the aegis of the panchayats. This would ensure both, minimum siphoning of money and close monitoring of the works. **A model being tried out by the health ministry of supplying funds to the panchayats** could possibly offer suggestions to reduce corruption. And the possible projects are many, solar energy, wind mills, water harvesting...

3) In this issue, there is need for some visionary work at the grassroots. It needs some foresight to be able to cajole people into sacrificing their lands for a common cause, so that they see the benefits down the line and participate enthusiastically... it is here that leadership of the community, the political parties, the government all need to work together in order to sell that dream... Experiences of some of the participants in MIT-SOG shows that even a small water harvesting project can work wonders. There is an excellent example that we can take here.

In a project in Marathwada which cost about Rs20Cr, Dr M D Patil, one of the participants and members of the study team, who otherwise worked in the Maharashtra state irrigation department, took initiative to convince farmers to give up their lands for the project. There was resistance at the beginning, even to the extent of threat of bodily harm. However, eventually, owing to his deep conviction and determination, he was able to bring people around. The surrounding land which produced one crop a year for the farmers and sometimes gave losses now got converted into rich multi cropping lands. The farmers now claim they do not know

what to do with the money they are earning. And of course they look up to Dr Patil as worthy of worship...

4) There are instances of people coming together to solve their own problems: These were the oasis of hope that we saw in Vidarbha. Whether it was the village that took charge of rationing its own electric supply, the youth who were talking in terms of building a thread mill in their region, another group of youngsters who wanted to build their own ginning mill, the team that was experimenting with water management and pest traps, all of them indicated a capacity of the locals to plan ahead for their future. The administration on its part, instead of going on a collision path and trying to either discourage or discredit such efforts, should find pride in supporting, stimulating and spreading such initiatives. A government should measure its success on the success of such initiatives. This unfortunately does not go hand in hand with party politics, and so some in-depth re-thinking is required on the idea of effectivization of Panchayati Raj.



4.6 THE ETHICS OF SUICIDE RELIEF

ISSUE: Is it proper to dole out relief to families of those affected by suicides?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE:

A lady who met us at Vidarbha had this to say "All these government funds, and interviews, and attention and everything are for those who give up and commit suicide. They think nothing of us who even in worse situations are still braving the odds". If those others around her were embarrassed about her pointing this out it was only because they had this feeling 'why spoil what at least some others are getting in their hour of sorrow...'

But she indeed had a point... Is the government rewarding suicide when it should be actually imprisoning those that attempt it? It is important to note here that attempted suicide is a criminal offence. Some thinking should have gone behind that

law, else why should it be there? We have the unique case of 'reward' to the family members of one who has successfully committed that crime...

If money is being given in a case like this, the assumption is that the issue was about money. But even if it was the case of money being the chief factor of a particular suicide, then we need to once again take note that there are very poor pockets in the country where the people have much less on an average and still pull through. Then there is the hardy Rajasthan farmer who is known to take on several years of drought in sequence. There fore it is more a matter of adjusting to the situation and not giving up, rather than placing the blame on finances and giving up.

Besides, according to the theories on Suicide, one of the four main reasons for which people commit suicides gets a boost when the victim knows that he will leave a happier family behind if he ends his life. The point is whether this should be encouraged at all.

From the side of the government we can see that this is an age-old trick used by those in power. Whenever a calamity strikes or an accident occurs, monetary support is immediately declared. It diverts attention of everyone from the issue and takes the government out of blame-focus like nothing else can. Half the energies of the affected are diverted away from blaming anybody and towards the concern of whether the promised amount will reach them. It is a great psychological distracter... something like pricing an item at 399 rupees instead of 400. Who would not want a lakh of rupees doled out to them, especially if there has been bereavement of the bread winner in the family? Would they not be nice to the government and its officials till the money comes...?

But then even here a whole set of red-tape specialists are lined up, of whom it is possible that one odd would be waiting for his palms to be greased... We came across bereaved families that were subjected to this sort of corruption. So finally how many (un) deserving cases really receive that amount?

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:

One's sympathies do lie with the bereaved families, but this doling out money is no way out. For each one dead there are literally thousands more braving it out, this is no way to pay tribute to those that take life in their stride and still smile about it as they try to solve their problems.

This is one dilemma that needs to be addressed urgently. There is need for discussion on this issue in a focused manner so that the government can come to an

informed stand on it, rather than go on a knee jerk reaction on the basis of political correctness and escapism.

SUGGESTIONS:

1) The giving out of money for suicide victim families should be stopped. Or alternatively the law regarding suicide should be amended and suicide should be legalized.

2) The due course of law should be applied.

3) The communities where people live, have to gang together to look for solutions for such problems. Joint action can do wonders. At the least it can provide moral support of some kind. The village community should arrange loans for that family at almost inflation rates and facilitate the remaining members to stage a fight back. This should be done by the community making arrangements for their earning their livelihood—not the government.

4) Can the government not come up with a pre suicide solution rather than a post suicide one?



Fig 7: Most in my family had Chicken Gunia and govt. hospitals were no help. How do I manage with such a meager income?

SECTION V

THE IMPACT OF CAPITALISM AND GLOBALIZATION

The present trend of globalization has had a great impact on the whole world. While it is carried effectively by the revolutions in communication and transport technology, it finds its main engine in the capitalist thinking process which is driving global economics. This new 'engine' capitalism brings a lot that is desirable but also a lot that is not. With the coming of liberalization the nation has opened the gates to its fruits and thorns; and the impact is huge, its pace is quick and its spread is wide. As it sets its footprint on the Indian milieu, it comes into direct conflict with the local culture; the battle field for this conflict being the mind and society of the common Indian. But whether we like it or not, capitalism it is now inescapable, the communist block recognizes it too and even the intellectuals amongst the farmers seem to realize the inevitability of it.

Now whether Indian culture will get stream rolled by it is indeed a debatable question. A phenomenon at least four to five thousand years, will it withstand the onslaught or then will it turn around and add to globalization the strengths that it possesses...? That remains to be seen...

But then by a fair estimate it is probably prudent to think that a vision that thinks of displacing everything Indian is bound to fail in India. Thinking of solutions for local problems in terms of a model that has been successful (?) in the west is not completely correct. There has to be a synthesis – there is need for dovetailing what is new with that which is integral to this soil. It is not wise to jump into the bandwagon of liberalization and modernization without setting up the needed defense mechanisms in place.

As we have stepped into liberalization we encounter teething problems. The present trend is putting great pressure on the poorer component of Indian society. The farmers constitute a major chunk of this section of society today. It is apt now to see what these microscopic and macroscopic issues are, in relation to the context of our study...

5.1 INTRA NATIONAL COLONIZATION

ISSUE: Is the Indian hinterland being impoverished by 'drain of wealth'?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE:

As expressed by both Mr. Shivadatt Mishra and Mr. Arvind Nalkhande, there is an observation that money is being drained out from the villages and is being dumped into the cities. It does not take too much of thinking to see that it is a new kind of colonization.

There was once a time when the complaint against the British colonial masters was that they were procuring raw materials from the colonies at the least possible prices and after value addition were selling the produced goods, at the highest possible prices, back in the colonies. The net effect being that there was a flow of resources and wealth out from the colonies and into the colonizing nation. The same is being enacted in the nation today – the villages are the colonies now and the cities are the Colonizers. The produce of the villages is the primary produce; it is on the basis of this that many industries survive, on which the entire food processing and marketing industry and trade survives. There fore in food and in cash crops the farmers form the first link... the low cost end, the raw material so to say (which is taken cheap)... they also form the last link in the market for things like inputs for agriculture, for services like law and medicine, and for processed food and consumer durables (which are priced at the maximum); the consumer items especially are increasingly being aggressively marketed into rural India. There fore it is clear that a similar situation to that which existed before independence exists today.

But that colonization is subtle. There is no racial difference or open antagonism between the colony and the colonizer in this case. In fact 'freedom' and 'democracy' are quoted as that which every Indian possesses and therefore there ought to be nothing of the sort. But there are clear lines that can be drawn, on the basis of economics, education and the English language. Since most of the villagers, especially the downtrodden, do not understand the true significance of education, and since they don't capitalize on it, the rural urban divide becomes stark: and the English-vernacular divide accentuates that difference.

The evidence for the existence of this rural urban divide is in the grassroots peoples' struggles that dot the entire span of the Indian nation. If that is too long a

shot then there is only need to look into what is fueling the Naxalite sentiment; or may be, take a honest look at the 'other' India shown in the National media from time to time reflecting the demographic statistics of hunger, or malnutrition, or infant mortality...

The worst part of this issue is that there is ignorance in the farmer as regards the ways of the present system. As a result he has not adequately focused his energies on building in himself defense and thriving mechanisms. These are needed in order to be competitive in the modern egalitarian world of consumer sovereigns and intensely jostling capitalism.

At this point we could take note of the issue of suicide... the imbalances that this colonization brings in has added pressure on the farmer and this pressure has increased rapidly over the past decade, this means that it has done the job of pushing the farmers closer to the edge and that in turn has increased the chances of the farmer falling over. The defense mechanisms which the farmers need to possess have not caught up as quickly.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:

There is no doubt that this process of colonization is actually happening. It may be a consequence of bad planning or a result of uncontrolled market forces. But what ever it is, as of now there is need to take heed of it and take remedial actions if we find it undesirable for the future we contemplate for the nation.

SUGGESTIONS:

1) It is important to see what the future vision is and accordingly change policy. If the vision is city based then things have to be pushed towards rapid absorption of people into the cities in dignified services. If on the other hand the idea is to have a future with prosperous rural societies, something on the lines of PURA as suggested by Dr. Abdul Kalam, then there is need to work towards retention and generation of wealth in the villages itself. That is, there is necessity of setting up industries of production and services in villages.

2) In any case as of now, in order to counter the adverse effects of the high rate of change towards liberalization, it is important to sensitize the farmer on the issue; so that he knows what is hitting him and so that he is prepared.

5.2 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF CAPITALISM ON FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS

ISSUE: Capitalism has the inherent characteristic of producing individual-centricity. Is this characteristic wrecking havoc in a high-context society like India?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE: Capitalism is known to work subtly in devious ways. In fact Karl Marx says that, in capitalistic consideration, Money or 'capital' is personified and persons (i.e. labor) are 'dehumanized'. In fact it is not uncommon for successful advocates and participants in the capitalist order to speak of the human factor as one of the various dimensions of economics. As such, they can cut off the human factor completely while considering other dimensions. This was not the approach of the ancient thinkers who designed social institutions in India; in fact a humanized view of polity and economy is inherent in the ideals of Indian thinking.

Further, the new system engages in a continuous bombarding of consumers with messages about 'desirables' and why they cannot live without them. That is how one sells his goods, and that is how one can make profits, and that is how a company runs, and the economy runs, and there is work for everyone, and there is prosperity, and the nation flourishes (economically). Technically speaking this has a tendency of making people focus on their personal desires which produces individualism in contrast to an austere approach which produces social institutions. A study by the French social scientist of the late 19th century Emile Durkheim, (1893) explains that it is natural for a capitalistic system to break up social bonds and erstwhile social institutions and produce individualism.

It has also been explained in a report by Nixon Fernando (one of the authors) on human rights that the present arrangement of protection of individual human rights in comparison to rights of groups results in encouraging individualism and weakness of communities.

Clearly, like it is elsewhere, in Vidarbha too the tendency to go it alone is on the rise. There is a movement away from prioritizing on the finer aspects of interpersonal relationships and the arts and towards the perks money otherwise has to offer. The priorities are now being tuned by the new set up without it being obvious to them.

It is therefore important to understand these inherent weaknesses of capitalism and build up practical defenses so that it would still have a free run and yet it would not lead to social disintegration.

Now this individualizing effect of capitalism leads to a set of complications which we list below...

*Expenses on farming inputs are higher; and it is especially so after the green revolution.

*Expense on consumables is high since, to the new generation, consumables appear more of a necessity than a luxury.

*There is an increasing desire felt to go nuclear in the families. Having gone nuclear the pressure on expenses falls increasingly on one earning member. Even an event like a daughter's marriage, whose expenses would usually be shared by her uncles too, is now increasingly being burdened on the father exclusively.

*Peer pressures from society, mainly to do with individual and family prestige, ensure that a reduction in grandeur is not an option.

*Consumer durables like, TV, Fridge, motorbike and even computers are becoming integral part of dowry/Sthreedhan, these did not exist a few decades ago, therefore the expenses have risen over the years.

The net result is that while costs related to lifestyle have gone up, the burden of obtaining the income to match it is increasingly falling on nuclear families with possible single earnings.

Joint families are out of fashion and with the small family norm being encouraged in respect of family planning there is further movement towards nucleation. Social support institutions have not been generated in sufficient measure to provide support in the absence of mutual support present in large families.

Attraction for pleasures and conveniences offered by consumables has altered the thinking and approach of the latest generation.

*Young girls in the villages would prefer a groom from the cities rather than tug water over kilometers in a village setting.

*Young men do not want to carry on the tradition of farming of their parents.

While it seems only fair and natural that one would prefer better facilities, the assumption that the lack of facilities is a life of misery is a new feeling which does not jell with the austere high context ideals of the indigenous culture. And in that

sense there is a serious conflict which the social engineers have not got their hands on.

The scenario reflected in the points above is an index of great stress in the farming community and that definitely ups the probability on suicide. It is not going to be easy for a man who has his wife nagging for a better standard of living and it is hard for a wife who has to do with a husband who lacks the resources and skills to be competitive in the new context. With farm margins going from bad to worse the questions asked are these: where are the resources to fall back upon when there would be a sudden need to bear medical expenses, lawyers' fees? Where is the scope for good education of the children, a decent life style...? Besides where is the dignity?

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:

The essential conflict between the high context and low context societies being enacted in India has not found its logical conclusion. As on date the Indian indigenous learning is not credited with much weight by influential players in the world stage. This makes it difficult for our own indigenous planners to assert on the importance of an austere approach. This conflict of ideas cannot be resolved by simple political or media debates; there is need to assess the fundamentals at the level of civilizations. There fore this is an issue that is much beyond the limitations of Vidarbha and has to be dealt with at another level.

SUGGESTIONS:

1) At national and international levels, there is a need for dialogue and debate the importance of protecting local cultures in the face of the onslaught of the globalizing culture. The impediment to this mutual understanding seems to be that there are too many people shouting hoarse. They seem to be talking on the basis of faith, dogmas and on the basis of exclusive authority over texts instead of discussing issues on a common ground. A proper analytical dialogue, controlled by a rational process, is the need of the day.

2) As an immediate solution for Vidarbha, (and for other rural societies in India), there is a need for a new thinking process that can develop social institutions that would create mutual dependence and mutual help amongst the people. A remarkable example is Micro Finance in which 10 odd persons representing ten

different families get together to form a unit that delivers some strengths to the members... other such institutions that put people together to produce solutions could be imaginatively developed.

5.3 LOSS OF CASTE SUPPORT

ISSUE: Traditional caste groups have internal processes that provide support to its members. Has the loss of this support from traditional caste groups lead to greater pressures on individual farmers?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE:

The process of individualization that we took note of in the previous chapter has also affected caste groups. There is unfortunately a debate that is heavily weighed against the need for existence of caste groups and there fore the destruction of caste groups would be seen in good light. But it needs to be remembered here that everything about castes need not be useless. There are some good aspects within castes which do contribute to wellbeing at least for the well being of its own members.

Interestingly a current initiative in Tumkur district in Karnataka, south India, run by an organization Rural Education Development for Society (REDS), has managed to set up what they call Dalit Panchayats in hundreds of villages (<http://dalitreds.in>). It is an integration process of interdependence amongst members of a caste. The organization gets the Dalits to come together and act as a group so that they may take mutual care of their concerns and have a basic forum for resolving their internal conflicts. Their bargaining power as a group increases. And the very fact that it has spread to so many villages speaks of its success.

Even a few decades ago, caste panchayats had a big say in matters, they could excommunicate some one, hand out punishments, put pressure... Of late, with the coming of the present system of democracy, capitalism and the judiciary, these powers have been increasingly diluted and are virtually non existent: the caste panchayats have been more or less rendered inconsequential and have limited control on its members.

Because of this weakening, these caste groups do not provide the kind of social, psychological or financial support which they used to provide when they were strong. Since the support that the individuals received from their community is now reduced or missing, and the members have to increasingly brave the odds on their own.

This is a phenomenon that stretches across India, and Vidarbha is no exception. The direct impact of this on the subject of our study is this, that had the caste panchayats continued to be strong then there would be yet another buffer to fall back upon before taking an extreme step. Besides, a strong caste base opens up people to interaction with others from their caste and therefore to possible corrective measures applied by elders of the caste—when susceptible individuals are seen to be going astray.

However, a counter point to this is that, within an active caste the possibility of increased interference and pressure of 'others' in one's family could be a possible reason for suicides. The disappearance of castes there fore would seem to be a relief. This however can be seen as merely an argument for individualization; the counter argument to this being that unity is strength. A deeper reflection would show that the strength of a caste and its ability to survive would depend on the benefits it gave to its members. This would mean that for caste groups that have survived centuries, the goods in castes do provide strength rather than weakness.

It is important to note that on this account the support structure for an individual has decreased. An outlet vent is no longer there.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:

Caste support is definitely not at its healthy best. Another defense mechanism has been weakened and the farmer is hence worse off in comparison to earlier times. This adds to the pressure on the farmer. It is important to find substitutes. There is need for alternate psycho-spiritual release mechanism based on mutual support in communities (which could possibly also have economic support dimensions). It presents a great opportunity to build new fruitful traditions...

SUGGESTIONS:

1) Communities need to develop team solutions, possibly based on their secular oneness.

2) Social scientists should try to evolve solutions of mutual human support around village fairs, village games, folk arts, economic co-operation, village teams and political action.

3) Most grassroots movements have this element of mutual co-operation around projects that prove to be life saving. Is it possible to cash in on these to build solutions? Such initiatives need to be selectively encouraged.

5.4 CAPITALISM AND THE FARMER: FIGHT, FLIGHT OR ADAPT?

ISSUE: The farmer is apparently under tremendous pressure which has been added on recently. Can we roll back the capitalist model? What should the response of the farmer be?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE: The farmer's service is increasingly becoming unviable on economic grounds. There is pressure to spend on modern amenities. There is a tendency for isolation or individualization which causes erosion in his family and caste support base. His standard of living, in comparison with his relatives in the city, is dropping: or more correctly the contrast is becoming stark. He is increasingly vulnerable to the traps of natural calamities, medical expenses, loans and lawyers' fees. His children receive education of a lower standard. He faces corruption at the various institutions he deals with. The average burden of debt of the farmer is on the rise. Consumerist pressures tug at his peace of mind. And these are caused in a big way by the policies which the governments have adopted over the years in response to the challenges they and the nation faced; mixed economy is one such, and Liberalization is another.

The question is whether we can think of a roll back of liberalization? Or in other words, can we move in a direction that is in conflict with the globalizing trends of the world order? Is it possible to have a strong and resilient nation without going on the way of liberalization? Is there an alternative practical vision or goal that can provide the required energies and can tackle both security needs of the nation and

the needs of the poorest amongst us? If there is one, is there a way to get to it within the processes enshrined in the constitution—to which the systems in the nation are committed?

While thinking of alternatives, it is prudent to consider that the nation takes decisions through the political process established by the constitution. This is legitimate. Through such decisions we have committed ourselves along the way of liberalization since the early nineties and that is the way we are headed now. Two different teams of leaders have more or less taken us along the same lines. Even communist nations are tapping on the strengths that capitalism has to offer. The process of liberalization is commonly perceived as the best possible in the present circumstances.

But all is not hunky dory; we still have serious doubts about the sensibility and sustainability of the methods that we choose in its wake. There are concerns which this present trend overlooks: one is global warming which puts a question mark on globalization itself; then there is the logistic impracticality of a world with 'western affluence' for four and a half billion people. And then the fact that as on date, when we are talking about double digit growth rates in India, there are starvation deaths and suicides happening... And if we are to go by the trickle down theories of the planners it will take not less than a decade for the effects of "India Shining" or "Incredible India" to reach the poorest of the poor—to stem the rot that is.

Very honestly, the answers to these uncomfortable questions are not any were within radar range of governments. It has not been an easy decision for the national leadership, but liberalization it will be. Having taken the direction that we have, using our legitimate means—the parliament with all its limitations and shortcomings—it is now time to move ahead **tempered with enough concern for those who are loosing out**. It is a question of making the best of the opportunities that are on offer to achieve what we need.

When such be the case what is the farmer to do now? One way out is to sell out to those who are willing to buy and look for employment in the cities – **flight**. This is not a solution for India which we shall presently see.

The next is to turn around and make a case for undoing the capitalistic order, or may be ask for higher prices, lower costs, more doles, higher subsidies – **fight**. This it the predominant process as of now and it leads to conflict... and to no substantial solution.

Or then one can build strengths and **adapt**. This is possibly the best way to go, to beat globalization at its own game; to adapt quickly by empowering the farmer.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:

Wishing away the present trend of globalization does not help in any way. The energies have to be focused towards building defense mechanisms so that the farmers can adapt and thrive in the new setup.

Global solutions for the adverse effects of globalization would duly be worked upon by humanity. It would be most sensible to move in a direction of possible solutions which keeps the entire world in mind.

SUGGESTIONS:

1) *An all out effort to educate farmers on these realities is important because knowledge would help them focus their energies in the correct places; thus improving their chances of hitting solutions. Rather, floundering with indecisiveness adds unnecessary pressure on any individual: this enhances suicide chances.*

2) The established system needs to be focused towards blunting the impact of the globalization and afford protection until the required strengths are built in the rural communities. Some possible solutions are discussed in following chapters.

5.5 CAPITALISTIC POWER AND FARMERS

ISSUE: Do the realities of the life in the villages render the farmer powerless against the impact of Globalization? What proficiency should he possess in order to tackle problems that arise in the new capitalist set up?

ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION: The chief requirements to thrive in a capitalistic pattern of society can be listed as follows.

Possession of Capital: Capital has the capacity to earn by itself provided it is judiciously invested. How much does a farmer have, that he can invest in the capitalist system? And where could he invest it judiciously? Does he even have enough to invest in his own profession? And if he sells off everything how much would he have?

Credit worthiness: Even when having no capital, in the case an individual is credit worthy, he could approach banks or other lenders for loans and work his way out of difficult situations besides finding resources for investment. The question we need to ask is... How many banks would really like to lend to a farmer...and how much...? Credit worthiness of farmers is going down...

Economic power of produce for success in a market: Economic success in a capitalistic system depends on a product having a brand name that sells—which a farmer does not have. Besides the prices have been pushed down for the sake of public good, there fore he cannot benefit from supply-demand advantages that can give him profits.

Empowering Information for competitive efficiency: Knowledge is power, so the saying goes. In a capitalistic market place knowledge that is dug up in R&D centers gives the owner a distinct advantage. It implies that to be successful in a capitalistic system a producer has to be up to date with the best available in terms of knowledge so that he has maximum advantage. On an average the farmer does not have crucial information about the market, about crops, cropping methods, fertilizers, pesticides which he can use to his advantage.

Technological edge: Just knowing is not enough, it is important to have the technology that matters and to know how to use it effectively. He still does not have the ability to absorb technology effectively and adopt it for his local needs. And if he is a small farmer, a lot of this technology is out of his financial reach.

Education (more specifically, professional/technical education): This is a pre-requisite for doing well in a capitalist order; in fact it is considered a human rights violation if a child is not educated for the very reason that it is a vital component of the capitalistic order. The question is: are the farmers educated? If they are educated then how well are they and are they technically empowered by it? In fact, though the trend is changing, as on date, the understanding that education is vital to survival-and-success has not sunk into a vast section of society. Even if the idea has taken root, it still is way down in the priority list in poor India and rural India.

Skill sets that can be sold in a services market: Employers are interested in sets of skills that can be used in their firms. The skill sets of the farmers do not match with those required in a city or in industry. The result being that the position they are likely to attain in the new society in an industrial set up is not going to be any where remotely fulfilling.

Social adjustment to capitalistic globalized culture: Coming out of a traditional life, which has all the vivid colors of life painted on it virtually for free, and moving into a new setting of a city where there is close to no community life, and where anything that has to do with a better life has a price tag on it, is a big jump indeed. Would the attitudes required in such a capitalist set up provide him the warm comfort of life in a village?

Of the farmers we interviewed we could safely say that more than three fourths of them said that if they got the price it would solve their problems. The problem is that it would only set up a cycle where, even the next year, the farmers would be at the same point asking for hike in prices. This is indeed no solution.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:

It should be clear that from the hangover of 40 years of the socialistic pattern and the sudden introduction of liberalization, which is further accelerated by the technological aspects of globalization, the farmer has not developed the strengths to handle the challenges that arise. His financial calculations go for a six and he is probably still not familiar as to what is hitting him and how he should fight back. This is definitely a factor in Vidarbha that adds pressure.

If a farmer needs to thrive in the new setup, he has to develop strengths in respect of all the factors mentioned above. This is a process of education. It cannot be achieved through the efforts of the organs of the government machinery alone. There is need of involvement of the masses. The strategies thought of should be inclusive of the creative energies of people from all spheres of life.

SUGGESTIONS:

1) These matters of training, in order that farmers can adjust to the new set-up have to be picked up by various leaders and agencies in various spheres of life. Some of the possibilities are stated further down in the document.

2) The most important thing required here is to get the farmer to be aware that he needs to change, half the work would get done by that.

5.6 CORPORATE FARMING A SOLUTION?

ISSUE: Corporate farming rises as a topic of discussion while contemplating on possible solutions to the problems of Vidarbha. What is the significance of big corporate houses taking on to farming? Looking at it through the Gandhian perspective of Swadeshi, what are the implications?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE:

Corporate houses have advantages of scale, of processing ability and of marketing ability; the result would be that their efficiency at doing all this together would be remarkably high. Using technology and larger farms they would be able to mass produce like the farmers in the United States. Using preserving techniques they would be able to transport the products to far off places and at the same time keep crop losses at a minimum. Having in-house processing units they could also affect value addition. They would then sell it in their in-house malls or retail outlets. In comparison the chain which the small farmer's produce will follow will be relatively inefficient at every stage. If his produce has to compete in the same market as the corporate houses the small farmer would have no chances of survival. There would be no other option for him but to sell off his lands and look for alternative employment.

What would the impact of this be on the rural work force if we thus replace small farms by corporate farms? Knowing that corporate houses, in their pursuit of maximizing profits, would use optimum work force and would use technological inputs at each stage of the entire chain, a lot less people would be required to do the same amount of work. The masked un-employment would be exposed, and the profits in the business would go to sustain industries rather than rural societies.

There would be a great exodus of people from the rural areas and into the cities. And in the immediate future these farmers would end up being unskilled laborers, with very little education, floating about in the streets of the cities. One can only wonder what their status in the cities would be like...

We know that a vast majority of Indians are engaged in Agriculture (between 60% and 65%). How will all these people be absorbed in an industrialized India which, for its efficiency should encourage, in each of its individual companies, minimization of work force in order that there would be maximization of profits?

And even if we were to overlook the social issues that would crop up in putting people on this new arrangement, the idea itself is too far fetched. It would be a logistic nightmare by even the most conservative account. Think of the population in absolute numbers, do we have resources of that kind? To build so many industries, each of which would in turn want to employ only a minimum no of laborers? The impact on environment; what would it be...?

*****There is a different angle to this. In going the corporate way we would be moving exactly in the opposite direction of Swadeshi and Khadi which our freedom struggle stood for. The freedom fighters' use of Khadi in pursuit of Swadeshi had two temporal dimensions to it besides the social and the spiritual.

- i) It was assertively national and it stood for patriotism.
- ii) It stood for the concern of the poor man who had no means for earning livelihood.

While the first has been richly elaborated in political rhetoric of the present India, that we should patronize 'Lassi' and not 'Pepsi', the second aspect of Swadeshi is all but forgotten. In truth, it was the latter concern that was more primary to the freedom fighters. In fact if the British raj had governed India along the same lines in which it used to govern England, was a struggle for independence necessary? Nationalism was evoked because the rule did not deliver 'unto his own'. In fact Gandhiji had no rancor towards the British; he made it very clear when he visited the mill workers in England.. that he had nothing against them and their superior product, but he was concerned for the poor of India: and they (the mill workers in England) in turn understood him, accepted what he did and even admired him for it.

If we were to focus on the essence of Swadeshi and apply that principle to contemporary India, it becomes clear **that if Gandhiji were alive today, his concern would be for the class of Indians who have nothing of worth which could be called as employability, employment or income. The Swadeshi spirit would definitely reincarnate in a form which would give them a ray of hope to earn a livelihood even if what they produce is un-economical and of lower quality.**

Coming to think of it, the fact that politicians wear Khadi as uniform actually suggests that that they declare that they would use only those products that were hand made in the poor villages of India. That they would have nothing to do with Dabur honey, or Tata salt, rather they would buy these from tribal sources and from the salt pans from which Gandhiji picked up salt.



Fig 9: Wardha: Symbols of a glorious bygone era; The common Indian can rise... : Trying to understand the nuances

Though of course, we need **NOT** think of a perpetual future in which we would want to sustain uneconomical and low quality production. We would have to move away towards efficiency and quality and there are ways for it and it will happen; we will take that up later in this report. As of now we should not even contemplate the idea of applying technology in such a manner that we deprive the rural folk of what ever little they are surviving with. It is inhuman and cruel; because that would imply that we are serving them with slow death. *****

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:

How can you deprive someone of work and then expect to make him survive in a world that responds only to money? In taking up corporate farming are we not plotting to move people to the city by first possibly making them starve? This is no solution for Vidarbha. If we move anywhere in this direction we are creating worse situations for suicide in the immediate future and are planning for disaster there after.

We need to make some sacrifices of economic indices if it can make such a huge difference to such a huge population in the country. In certain areas, Indian industry can take a back seat for some time. We cannot desert the very essence that forged our nation together – which was the heart of our freedom struggle.

SUGGESTIONS:

- 1) The idea of doing corporate farming should not even be considered.
- 2) A study needs to be made as to how the advantages of large farms, efficient processing and transport and effective marketing be delivered to the farmers in their present setting.
- 3) **Swadeshi needs to be incarnated in a different form to ensure that produce of a village is encouraged through a Gandhian fervor.** "Swagrami" perhaps...

5.7 DISGUISED UNEMPLOYMENT AND CO-OPERATIVE FARMING / JOINT FAMILIES

ISSUE: Is the factor of disguised unemployment present in Vidarbha? What are the opportunities?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE:

Current studies by many agriculture economists have shown that there is a correlation between farm size and productivity in India. It has been proved that the productivity of a piece of land increases significantly if the size of the land holding is increased from two or three acres to may be 10 or more. But with families going nuclear the land is getting more and more subdivided and is resulting in reduction in the average size. This trend is not in the best interests of both rural economics and rural social health.

A known fact about Vidarbha is that the average land holding is of the size of a little over two Acres. It implies that there are many small land holdings, each with several mouths to feed.

Now if the farms are put together and larger units are created, if technology is introduced then without a doubt, we can see that the number of hands required to farm the same piece of land would be lesser than the total number that is employed in the small farms. This means that indeed there is over employment in farms. Besides we should also realize that farming labor requirements are seasonal and there fore in off season times a large chunk of population is sitting vacant. So we can safely say that indeed there is disguised unemployment in Vidarbha.

Now we have also seen that if this integration is done through corporate houses, the profits of the business accrue to these corporate houses. This will further aggravate the drain of wealth from rural India. There is need of an alternative and

this could possibly be co-operative farming. Farmers could pool in their lands, go for better technology and re-distribute the excess work force to diversify into other farm and allied produce or even free themselves for responsibilities other than only farming. But it should be restricted to co-operative farming... direct purchase of lands by large farmers should be discouraged at all costs... in other words the land ceiling acts need to be implemented judiciously after suitable review.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:

There is tremendous economic sense in having large farms. Large farms would be better disposed to take on the impact of calamities too. Large holdings are also well suited to adopt modern technology.

SUGGESTIONS:

i) The farmers should try to group together to set up co-operative farms and till the land together. In such a situation the excessive hands that form the hidden unemployed component can be taken out and put to use in other allied industries. Those working on the lands would receive salaries and those that contributed their lands would get a cut from the profits and would be free to take on other activities.

ii) The other alternative is to apply social pressure against sub division of land. The community, caste and religious leaders should encourage people to continue staying in joint families. This would help (a) a sharing of burden and hence better insurance against the pitfalls in rural life. (b) Such a situation goes well with our traditional ethos. (c) It has the potential to take care of children and the elderly without resort to care homes which will eventually come if we continue to aggressively globalize. (d) While the farming aspect can be taken care of by one or two members, the others would be free to work in industries and bring stability to the finances.

All in all it implies that there are great many pluses. If this can be sustained then it would provide tremendous strength in the fight against the disintegrating features of capitalism.

iii) The panchayats can work on acquiring modern technological amenities for common use (like tractors, threshers, automatic sowers and reapers) so that the small farmers can obtain the services of these on rent at a nominal cost.

5.8 EMPLOYING THE EXCESS MANPOWER

ISSUE: Can the human resources in the villages be put to good use? Can this be achieved by establishing industries there? How would these industries be able to sustain themselves in the competitive environment of the market?

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE:

In a recent public relations initiative Mukesh Ambani explained the thinking behind Reliance fresh. Incidentally what he said is based on a study which he commissioned and it is something interesting and relevant to our context. According to him, even in the area of foods there is a great potential for earning for the farmers, he points out to the fact that a kilo of potatoes sell at 4-5Rs for the farmer in UP and Bihar, but it sells at Rs110/- in a place like US. He suggested that we could take advantage of this difference (arbitrage), provided we could master the processes of preservation and transport of the produce. The two relevant technical term he used were 'Value Chain...' and 'traceability'.

1) He says that the value chain is "fragmented" and it needs to be "integrated". That is, the leaks need to be plugged; the efficiency of the various stages between production and use needs to be raised. That may include a lot of streamlining, using high technology and efficient techniques.

2) As for 'traceability', he mentions it as a virtue of a product in the market through which the common-man buyer has an assurance of quality of product and reliability of source. It is a kind of "certification and verification process" which would give credibility to goods in a market. The company would be responsible for quality checks of both the product and the source of the product. The marketed product would therefore bear the guarantee of the company and hence could be trusted.

The aim of taking this issue here is **NOT** to advertise for corporate houses, for we have seen in the chapter on corporate farming that it leads to a demographic catastrophe. But rather we could see if there is a scope for farmers to benefit from the vision of Mr. Mukesh Ambani.

It is also proper to take note here, in passing, that in the event of a retail revolution taking off, the farmer will initially gain; he will continue to gain until the common vendor on the street is finally squeezed out. It will not be long before the established retail corporate houses set up virtual monopolies and there is every

chance that the farmers will be squeezed for profits there after. This has happened to other industries in other established economies where retailing took off in a big way. **Thinking that a company, that is build for profits, will not try to maximize its profits and rather be generous to farmers, is like saying that tigers will eat grass.** This is an added effect over and above what would happen if there is corporate farming. The farmers then would have to sell and quit even faster...

A good brand name is that which brings in the money in a capitalist system. **If the traceability is based on the brand name of a corporate house then the profits would go to the corporate house. Though there is nothing illegal about someone earning profits, the truth is that the success of huge companies would cause the profits to drain out of rural India. But if the traceability is based on the brand name of the source of the product—the farmer himself—then the farmer stands to gain.** Therefore, in the interests of keeping the resources in rural India it is necessary that the persons who own the brand should be from the hinterland itself and is that possible?

Daryapur is a town in Vidarbha. It is part of the saline tracts hence the grams produced here have a salty flavor to it. This special feature has earned for the produce a name that is known as far away as Delhi which is more than a thousand kilometers away. Similarly Badige chilli from a village in Karnataka is famous in the entire region of south Maharashtra, AP and Karnataka.

What we see in these two examples is that the two products have earned for themselves a brand name that sells at far away places. Such sale-ability is a positive feature which we can capitalize on in the capitalist environment. A natural opportunity therefore presents itself...

How would it be if the other villages can also establish brand names for themselves for farm produce, for processed foods and other manufactured things? Can an arrangement similar to the two cases mentioned above be achieved in the case of other villages too? Kanjipuram silks, Banaras sarees, Kohlapuri slippers, Dharwad pedhas... all are examples...

Let us take a radical call. **Let us say that we inform all the panchayats in the country that the panchayat will own the brand name of the village. It will be protected just as brand names of companies are protected in the companies act. This would mean that any effort that the village would put into improving the quality of its produce would be reflected in its brand**

name. What ever innovations they adopt in their produce, packaging or marketing it will go into enhancing that brand name.

- a) Their success would pump money directly into the rural economy.
- b) The chances that panchayat sponsored industries will start making a presence in increasing numbers is bright.
- c) The dream of PURA will get a good boost.
- d) The industries can focus on preservation and primary processing so efficiency will rise in respect of preservation and reduction of losses.
- e) The increased flow of capital to the villages, concentrated in the panchayats' hands, will boost both the standard of living in villages and potential for investment on required common properties of the village.
- f) We know that there is some kind of energy that an industry taps into, which makes the members of that industry work for towards the success of that industry. We believe that when such focused efforts start happening in the villages, it will help better integration of villages.
- g) In some European countries fresh organic farm produce is fed directly into homes making the value chain and traceability factors clear as ever. There is also brand value attached to it. This goes by the term 'niche markets' and it is the best way to move for the future because that is one area where rural farms can really be competitive in a free market.

There is another option of using **geographic indicators** but that would be relevant as a bare minimum protection in a scenario where we would aggressively go into large scale retailing. It can be taken on right away.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:

There is a great opportunity. If we cannot load the cities any further in a meaningful manner, if we have global and Indian environmental concerns in mind, if we want to pump money, increase the flow of capital and improve investment in rural India, if we want to improve the standard of living of the rural poor, if we want to engage those that are surplus through masked unemployment, if we want to reduce the stress in the rural economy, if we want the villages to integrate and produce teams, if we want to tap the collective energies of the people in some form of economic activity, then for all this, giving **Panchayat Brand Protection** is one real good way to start.

The onus of maintaining high standards would naturally be on the village. They could possibly develop and maintain standards and a reputation that could

draw certificates from Standards Organizations. Once the consumer gets a taste for such produce, once he is assured of the quality he desires, the possibilities become immense. Direct retailing in cities, towns and suburbs can be explored. This would help the villages stand their ground in the capitalistic environment.

SUGGESTION:

The ministry of commerce should take up steps in consultation with the agriculture ministry and rural development ministry to start registering village communities that apply for this protection of trade mark under a new category of **“village community companies”**.

Aid and assistance should be offered to the panchayats to develop specialties for which they have a natural advantage.

There are technologies that have already been studied extensively which can be tapped upon; needless to say it is the potential for innovation which will take the process forward. There is a struggle but it is worth the fight.



MIT SOG
Kindling the flame of Democratic Leadership ...

MIT School of
Government

SECTION VI
CONCLUSION

In this section we take a comprehensive view of the issues we have so far discussed. This can be considered as the summary of the study.

6.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Q) Is there a problem in Vidarbha? If so, how severe is it?

A) Indeed yes there is; over ten years from 1995 the rate of farmers' suicides has gone up by 300% and it does not seem to be abating.

Q) Is it specific to Vidarbha?

A) The situation in advanced nations and specifically in Kerala (33 per lakh per annum) in India is remarkably higher, however it may be relatively high in comparison to other areas in India (14 in Maharashtra to 10 the National average) and the incidence in the case of farmers is unusually high. (2005)

Q) What is the reason for it?

A) We have concluded that for a particular suicide the reasons are usually more than one. It is usually a set of problems that together lead to an incident: Illness, bad loans, failed initiatives, affairs, natural calamities, failed crops, bad relationships... This has been the finding of most other studies. And our finding is no different.

However the best view to take of the situation is that the farmer is as it is in a tight corner due to the various stresses which we have listed in the report. It takes one or the other reason to actually push him over the edge and precipitate a suicide event, which would of course appear as the actual cause of the suicide.

But we also believe that the external situations, however critical, cannot be completely blamed for the occurrence of suicide. We need to consider the balance between pressure and resilience to fight back. Whether it is money, or accidents or natural disasters, there are ways to anticipate these things and build defenses against such occurrences: such resilience is seen in other parts of the country where adverse conditions have lasted for many decades and centuries and the people have been acclimatized. However in the case like Vidarbha where there is a condition of flux in the socio-economic-cultural context, there is every possibility that individuals

cannot cope with the changes or are not tuned to cope with it and hence can fall prey to occurrences of suicide.

Q) What is the reason that suicides are high in Vidarbha and not elsewhere?

A) This has not really been the subject of our study in a focused manner. But we have studied Vidarbha as we saw it and have compared it with our awareness of other areas. Besides that we benefitted from other studies too. Therefore, the reasons we suspect are as follows:

a) Development in terms of irrigation and allied industries are not in an advanced stage in Vidarbha as they are in other areas

b) The geographical setting makes it different from the other areas. The top soil depth is high so stopping water is a problem. There is rich black cotton soil conducive to the growth of cash crops. There has been a distinct shift in agriculture patterns from cereals to cash crops here, where the degree of risk is higher.

c) The once prosperous region of Vidarbha has a culture of affluence. There seems to be a deep sense of pride and a deep sensitivity here. There seems to be an imbalance in spending habits and a tendency to live on the edge; there is also a tendency for heavy risk taking without safeguards. But it needs to be confirmed whether it is a characteristic of high risk families or a general pattern in Vidarbha.

Q) What has been the approach towards solutions by the government?

A) Give him a fish... that is the best way to describe the solutions offered by the government.

One should not cast aspersions on the intentions of the government and we should allow for systemic weaknesses too. However there is need to point out that even with the system running sincerely, and into over time, it is not really going to achieve the required goals of emancipation. The scale of operations is really huge if one wants to carry it forward without involving the energies of the people in a more substantial manner. The solutions of giving relief, wavering loans, subsidies, support prices are all meaningless if they are merely stop gap measures and are not part of a forward movement towards a vision that makes rural societies self reliant, empowered and self sustaining.

Q) What then is the strategy for finding a solution to the problem at Vidarbha?

A) At the beginning of the analysis we figured out that a force field analysis was the best way to proceed in trying to analyze the problem. We then proceeded by listing out and discussing the various factors that are currently adding pressure on the farmer. In our opinion, the dissipation of all these pressures on the farmers would pull them out of the corner into which they have been pushed. That itself will provide relief that should reduce the incidence of suicide.

The idea is that the movers and shakers should push in the general direction indicated at the end of each issue: the solutions are briefly listed below.

6.2 BRIEF SUMMARY OF SOLUTIONS

The problems of the farming community in Vidarbha are similar as it is else where but with characteristics that are particular to Vidarbha.

It is our belief that we need to keep the vision of distributed settlements as against concentrated cities ahead of us.

We need to keep faith in a system which believes that austerity is a possible route to happiness rather than think in terms of consumerism being the exclusive route to happiness.

We need to empower the village communities to take on the problems of a village by themselves. The panchayat needs more control over finances.

A village centric planning and execution process needs to be initiated.

Minor irritants in the form of corruption and harassment have to be systematically rooted out.

We need to fine tune our approach to rural commerce so that the rural communities develop capitalistic strength.

We need to ensure that brand identities are developed by villages and they are suitably applied in the market

We need to re-create the spirit of 'swadeshi' into a new form 'swagrami' so that rural industries get a boost.

The trend towards individualization and nucleation of families has to be countered in a big way... it is the cause of great unrest in rural societies. Other grouping strategies have to be developed and encouraged.

The saving habit and development of safety mechanisms should be encouraged in the farmers so that they develop resilience.

The farmers should be shown the writing on the wall so that they can set their priorities right, so that they know what lies ahead and so that they can be adequately prepared for the eventualities.

But the ultimate solution to the problem is this that the farmer takes his destiny in his own hands through the strength of his team work in his rural community. This is elaborated further in the next two chapters.

6.3 A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE OF STRATEGY

The most substantial of possible solutions is possible if we understand the sense and direction indicated by the following passages.

I. Constitutional amendments have given us Panchayati Raj but it is now an established fact that no real power is given to the panchayats, none of the government employees really report to the panchayats, the judiciary really does not have an extension within the village and finally the laws that work in the villages are not the making of the people dwelling in the village... one cannot have lesser control over their own destinies...

II. What is inappropriate here is this that we are taking out a huge chunk of humanity from the development process... when a village finds itself responsible for what happens within its boundaries it will dig out from its resources and its creativity to add to the development process... and that is an opportunity which the system denies to them.

III. There is tremendous amount of human resource wastage in rural India. People with tremendous capacities are put on to little or no work. Even the solution to India not finding a place among the gold medals in the Olympics lies here. The point to think about is how this vast reserve of energies can be constructively tapped in the process of establishing economic parity, prosperity and national pride?

IV. Would things have been better if we had adopted a Gandhian mode of self service also? And the answer seems logically yes, because that would mean the unleashing the energies of the 35 million Indians of that time into the political field, as against merely the work of the government, the opposition and the government agencies. Today this translates to the possible output of a Billion Indians working on

the basis of inspiration as against the efforts of the state machinery that runs basically on salaries.

V. There are two distinct aspects in Gandhiji's solution for the problems of villages in India. One was the aspect of austerity and the other was of empowerment and self reliance. Both these ideas were reflected in his vision which he enunciated in respect of material goals and in terms of individual and collective action for the villages. We have been too carried away by the austerity angle but have not really been able to focus and tap on the strengths of collective use of the energy of the people.

VI. We know very clearly that the Gandhian approach made a sincere but elitist congress party into a mass movement in the teen years of the 20th century. It is also said about the Gandhian approach that owing to him women were empowered in such a manner that they came out and stood shoulder to shoulder with men in order to defy the British. That basic difference needs to be understood.

VII. When we achieved independence we took an approach which was not essentially Gandhian. The leaders of the freedom struggle took over the reins of government and tried to use its machinery to work downwards helping the common man in the way they could... Unfortunately there is nothing worse than telling the poor villager that he is not complete in himself and that he needs to be helped in order that he would be able to perform. The most horrible part of this is that we decline his right to hold power in a manner that he has control over his future. We say that he is un-educated and incapable of taking the government of his own village in his hands.

VIII. Processes initiated by grassroots leaders like Anna Hazare, Baba Amte, and so many others usually have a huge struggle ahead of them to establish themselves and then there are tremendous pressures which make them cave in after the inspirational leader is out of the picture. The point to be noted here is that, usually, if the government is not neutral in such instances, it is mostly part of the problem which these initiatives have to overcome. This is a systemic problem as much as it is a problem of attitudes. We need to see that this is on account of a very colonial system in place that pays no heed to strengthening grassroots process. If it

was governance, and not colonial rule, it would be doing the job of 'helping the various communities help themselves'.

IX. It seems very generous on the part of the leadership, ever since independence, and the Indian 'state' that they want to do so much for the villages, and that they seek to work hard for it. But then it is prudent to realize that in our historic past there have been many kingdoms that attempted this approach and have failed. The best of our ancient Indian systems which are examples of success—for example Chola period and later Seher Shah Suri which lead to the building of the Mughal Empire—which exhibited great stability peace and prosperity at its peak, had a different approach. These alternative systems gave freedom to the villages to govern themselves completely, making them responsible for their successes and failures; however the state would maintain a very strong audit system through which it would monitor all aspects of local governments on a regular basis.

Government the doer and government the auditor are two completely different approaches and we need to shift to the latter.

6.4 IT IS REAL: THE WINDOW OF HOPE

In Dariyapur taluk there is a village called Dhamodi. We would like to re-state what one of the leaders of that area Mr. Nalkhande said with full confidence "No one in Damodi will ever commit suicide". We can assure you that it was not a statement made in rhetorical flourish... of course, no one can give a 100% assurance on this... however it is not wrong that they have taken charge of their lives in a way which we found delightful to watch.



Fig 10: Mr. Nalkhande, farmer leader: "In Dhamodi village no one will commit suicide"

They had with them complete details of the land in the village... so much so that they could fill details of the land on a government form and the government official would just sign it. Such was the credibility they have established. In partnership with a NGO they have their land surveyed and analyzed. They have initiated a water stoppage project which now holds back huge amounts of water in the fields. One young enterprising youth of the village explained at length how they successfully went about setting traps for certain flies which would destroy the crops to a great extent... it was affected without using chemical pesticides.

The actual solutions on the ground are merely one of many possible... but what was unique about their effort was this that they were in charge, they were self reliant, they truly represented the spirit which needs to inundate the villages of Vidarbha and the country... If they are given an open canvas they would paint vivid colours that the nation can be proud of... however right now they are struggling for a piece of paper to write on.

And they were not the only ones; the youth at Asatpur village near Paratwada have got together, and through the efficient management of electric supply they are able to enjoy a sustained electric supply for 24 hours (this comes as a byproduct of a very empowering move made by the Maharashtra Electricity Board initiated by a very enterprising IAS officer) while in other neighboring villages there are heavy electricity cuts. These youths have also encouraged self help groups in their village in a big way. Still another set of youngsters in Dariyapur were thinking in terms of trying to set up their own ginning and threading mills. As on date, the ginning process has already taken off.

Illiterate he may be but he has tremendous potential... if only he can be given that space to tap all that potential... Responsibility should be thrust on him and he will take up the challenge... NOW...!

6.5 THE SOLUTION: ACTION PLAN FOR POLICY:

1) **Capitalistic power of the farmers to be enhanced.**

- Possession of Capital:
- Credit worthiness:
- Economic power of produce for success in a market: (Brand name)
- Empowering Information for competitive efficiency:
- Technological edge:

- Education (more specifically, professional/technical education): in fact it is considered a human right violation if a child is not educated for the very reason that it is a vital component of the capitalistic order.
- Skill sets that can be sold in a services market:
- Social adjustment to capitalistic globalized culture:

2) **Do everything possible to convert villages into teams and empower them.**

Knowing that when people are together they can tackle problems better all attempts should be made to make teams out of the villagers. Encourage joint families. Stimulate co-operate farming. Create village teams. Empower panchayats. Enhance collective goal setting and achievement in villages.

3) **Initiate processes to protect "village industries" through "Panchayat Brand Protection"**. This would serve two purposes; one it would encourage the villages to improve their brand recognition and for that there would be a conscious attempt to improve the image of the village in all ways. All efforts that they put in that direction would remain to their credit. The second is that this would result in earnings which would improve the prosperity of villages. The other benefits would be decentralization, de congestion of cities, move towards self sufficient villages and general empowerment of villages.

4) **Take on "Swagrami" as once the Indian resistance took on "Swadeshi"**.

As we have explained in the document, we believe that the situation is very similar to what existed during the time of the British rule when money was drained out of India and taken into England. The only difference now is that it is being drained out of the villages and into the cities. This is a problem because it is robbing village dwellers of their rights to earn a living. If 'Khadi' was the answer of the Independence struggle signifying 'Swadeshi' ... then 'Khadi gram udyog' should be the answer of the present India signifying 'Swagrami'. In any case the effort would be complete only if the Citizens of India patronize hand made goods made in villages but only of good quality. The villages should focus on producing products of better quality so that it reflects a human touch that is not available in machines. This, we should remember, should be a temporary solution only to meet the requirements of today. Eventually the village industries should grow well enough to sustain themselves in the market without being propped up.

SECTION VII

APPENDIX

7.1 APPENDIX A: REFERENCES

Studies:

i) Meeta and Rajivlochan, "Farmers Suicide – facts and possible policy interventions", YASHDA , ISBN81-89871-00-5

ii) Ajay Dandekar, Shahaji Narawade, Ram Rathode, Rajesh Ingle, Vijay Kulkarni and Sateppa Y D: "Causes of Farmer Suicides in Maharashtra – an enquiry", Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Final report submitted to the Mumbai High Court March 15 2005

iii) Abhijit Pratap Pawar and Sakal news network team. "shetkaryancha atmhahatya ek shodh" © Abhijit Pratap Pawar. 3rd April 2006.

iv) Srijit Mishra: "Suicide of Farmers in Maharashtra" Indira Gandhi Institute of Developmental Research, Mumbai: Submitted to the government of Maharashtra 26 Jan 2006.

Articles:

i) Bt cotton has failed in Vidarbha: study 'Its high input costs have increased farmers' indebtedness' Special Correspondent The Hindu, 16 February 2007,

<http://www.hindu.com/2007/02/16/stories/2007021617501300.htm>

ii) Low-cost cultivation can save Vidarbha farmers Indo-Asian News Service Amravati (Maharashtra), February 16, 2007
http://www.hindustantimes.com/news/181_1929334,000900040001.htm

iii) Shivam Vij: "Farmers' Suicides: Urban India Vs Rural India" readerlist.freelflux.net/blog/archive/2006/10/29/reader-list-summit-of-the-powerless.html

iv) V.S. Gopalakrishnan, Vidarbha and Farmer Suicides - Facts and Fiction, October 11, 2006, Copyright © 1997 - 2006 www.chowk.com.

http://www.chowk.com/show_article.cgi?aid=00007178&channel=civic%20center

- v) Anupama Katakam, "The Death Trap", Frontline, Volume 19 - Issue 26, December 21, 2002 - January 03, 2003, Copyright © 2002, Frontline
- vi) Sharad Joshi , "Malady of Yavatmal — Cotton turns a killer" , The Hindu Business Line. Wednesday, Aug 04, 2004, Copyright © 2004, The Hindu Business Line.
- vii) Sharad Joshi , "A chance to do justice by Vidarbha's farmers", The Hindu Business Line. Wednesday, Jun 28, 2006, Copyright © 2006, The Hindu Business Line
- viii) Emile Durkheim: "*Division of Labor in society*" 1893
- ix) Vidarbha Janandolan Samiti: "Vidarbha Suicides"
<http://andolan.blogspot.com/2006/08/vidarbha-agrarian-crisis-claims-110.html>
- x) Arun Kumar Bhatt: Vidarbha's farmers caught in a vicious cycle 'The Hindu' April 4 2006
- xi) Afsar H Jafri: "PM's Relief package for Vidarbha – Will it solve the farm crisis?" www.focusweb.org/india/content/blogcategory/0/27/9/54/
- xii) Somini Sengupta: "On India's Farms, a Plague of Suicide" Sept 19, 2006 New York Times

7.2 APPENDIX B: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND SUPPORT

Participants:

Mr Arun Kumar: BA. He hails from Bihar. He has extensive experience in running an NGO of his own in his hometown. He has spent his last two years honing up his skills of leadership and improving his understanding of polity. He is currently working with "Greenpeace" at Pune. He is also intensely collecting information about the various districts of Bihar and studying their problems. He is passionate about development of Bihar in the fronts of education, rural social development, and security.

Dr M D Patil: ME in Irrigation Water Management, PhD in Water Resources Development from IIT Rourkee. Has served for more than 20 years in water

resources department in Maharashtra and done close to 18 short term courses related to water resources management. He has several international papers to his credit and has presented a paper on interlinking of water ways at the US. He is currently serving as a principal of the Tuljapur Engineering College. His vision is to successfully execute the National river interlinking project.

Ms Madhuri Apte: (B.Sc., M.B.A., L.L.B) L.L.M. from university of leeds UK and B.V.C from The College of Law London. She is a Barrister of the Middle Temple in London and a member of the Bar Council of India. During the course of her studies she has worked as a management trainee with Standard Chartered Bank. For a year she was legal manager for Shriram Finance limited an asset management company. For a year she has worked as a junior reporter for a local news paper where she reported on prominent happenings in the court of law. She believes in improving her knowledge and sharing it to make the society a better place to live in.

Mr Nixon Fernando, MSc Physics, from Karnatak University Dharwad, NET qualified. Has authored a book 'Towards the Kingdom of Heaven' published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Has served as a lecturer in Physics at the National Defence Academy for ten years. He is currently assisting a leading personality of India with writing a book which is scheduled to be out by the end of 2008. Has extensively taken training in personality development and spiritual uplift. Passionate about a vision for empowering the villages of India.

Mr Prabuddha Ahire: BSc in Botany. He has a diploma in Journalism and a master's degree in Dramatics. He also has a proficiency certificate in German. He is currently pursuing his LLb. He hails from Marathawada region of Maharashtra. He currently works for JANWANI as project co-ordinator for slum rehabilitation authority MHADA in Pune. He is passionate about the problems of the dalits and hopes to work for giving social justice to them.

Ms. Priya Tayde: BA Pol Science, Has worked in the tourism industry for three years. In her college years she has picked up practical experience in the fields of tourism and travel management. She now currently works for Good governance on the Pilot Projects driven by JNNURN at Pune Municipal Corporation under the guidance of Mr. Ranjit Gadgil (lead India fame) at JANWANI (Which is an initiative by the Mahratta Chamber of Commerce Industries and Agriculture, Pune). She is passionate about developing a model for monitoring projects of all kinds and sizes right from the stage of conception to implementation and feedback and seeks to develop advisory capacity on it.

Mr. Rabi Narayan Patra: BSc, hails from Orissa. He has taken training in Disaster management under the aegis of the Commonwealth. He has deep interest in Indian Philosophy. He is passionate about working towards channelizing and tapping the potential of youth for the well being of the nation. His interests are towards working for co-ordination between NGOs. He is now working as an intern with the commonwealth youth forum.

Mr. Swaroop KM: BCom, MPG... He hails from Bangalore with roots in Andhra Pradesh. He has a brilliant creative spark and has a personality to match. He has excellent presentation and communication skills. His interests are towards Film and Advertisement world. He has been working on an internship as an assistant director at Hyderabad. He is also contemplating on openings in business. Right now he is immersed in setting up his own private business in Bangalore.

Staff of the MIT-School of Government:

Mr Sankalp Singhai. (MBA) Manager

Mr Gurinder singh (MBA) Administration

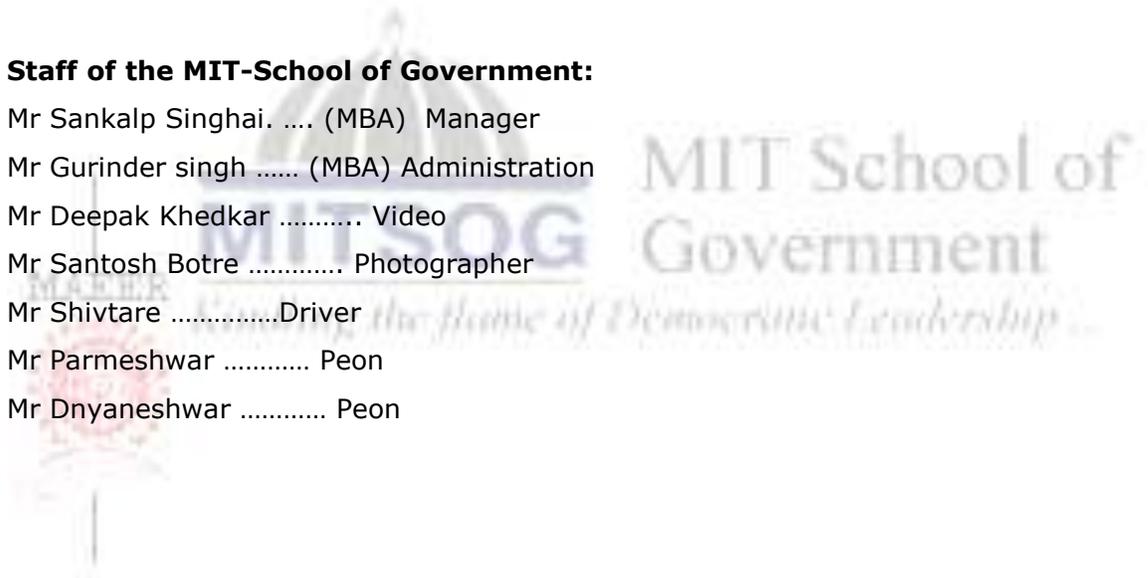
Mr Deepak Khedkar Video

Mr Santosh Botre Photographer

Mr ShivtareDriver

Mr Parmeshwar Peon

Mr Dnyaneshwar Peon



7.3 APPENDIX C: FACTORS COVERED IN INTERVIEWING AFFECTED FAMILIES

Instrument

Village:

Population:

History of suicides in village:

Name of the persons:

Members in the family:

Economic status of family:

Incident:

Type of farming:

Loan:

How much

Who was the lender

What pressure was exerted

Earlier history of loan and payback

Bad habits if any:

How is the family doing now?

What are the social pressures on the family?

NB: Unfortunately we did not have the opportunity to use it extensively. But it assisted the team in developing a coordinated strategy.

7.4 APPENDIX D: PROGRAM OF STUDY (23rd Dec to 29th Dec 2006)

28 Nov 2006 Press report of the honorable vice president's call appears.

29 Nov 2006 - 14 Dec 2006: Proposal for study was made and finalized. And the duration was fixed.

15 Dec 2006 - 23 Dec 2006: Finalization of list of participants; preparation of itinerary; Liaison with locals and institutions

23rd Dec 2006: Set course for Akot which is in Vidarbha, in the MIT SOG bus at 10.30 PM.

24th Dec 2006: Reached Paratwada at 1100AM: **Kasampur, Pathrot, and Asatpur villages:**

25th Dec 2006: Dariyapur, Agriculture product and marketing committee Dariyapur, Dhamoli Village and Sewagram Wardha .

26th Dec 2006: Wardha, interview of a group eight farmers from Parbhani, (Shetkeri Sanghatana), Paunar ashram. memorial of Mr Jamnalal Bajaj and Vinobha Bhave.

27th Dec 2006: Alipur, Wadner cotton federation, Jinning Mill wadner, Wani cotton federation, Yewatmal, Nanded.

28th Dec 2006: Tehsil office, Nanded, State bank Branch on the outskirts of Nanded town,

29th Dec 2006: Back to Pune via Yogeshwari temple at Ambajogai, Barshi and Indapur.

30th Dec 2006: Arrival at MIT Campus at 1.30AM

31st Dec 2006: 8th Jan 2007: Field study observation data and Recording analysis

Vidarbha --Ray of hope

9th Jan 2007: 15th Jan 2007: Collation and analysis of the secondary quantitative data and other scholarly research articles and trade/market reports.

16th Jan 2007: 1st Feb 2007: Report writing

18th March 2007: Submission of basic report after review

20th May 2007: Completion of film on Vidarbha

10th March 2007: Completion of initial report.

16th March 2008: Completion of final report.

