

## **Consumption Dreams, Rural Deaths: Sociological Reflections on Farmers Suicides in India**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Situating within the broader context of socio-economic transformations led by liberalization, the present paper explores the epidemic of suicide among farming communities in India from a sociological lens. While general discussion on farmer suicides primarily emphasise on lack of yield or production led indebtedness as the cause of farmers suicide , this paper aims to understand this issue from the perspective of consumption led economic transformations in the context of India post liberalisation. Drawing on existing literature , the study contends that indebtedness is not merely an economic phenomenon but a symptom of societal pathology which has been intensified liberalization process. The liberal economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, followed by the influx of global consumer culture has disrupted traditional agrarian life and widened the gap between aspirations and achievable realities, particularly for the marginal farmers who struggle to hold on to their produce every year amidst seasonal variations. It concludes that the suicides of Indian farmers must be understood as a tragic consequence of anomic living conditions led by the contradictions of a market-driven economy.*

**Keywords:** Farmer's Suicide, Capitalism, Consumer Culture, Liberalisation

### **Introduction**

**Two tenant farmers 'end life' due to mounting debt in Andhra Pradesh:** The death of two tenant farmers by suicide in two villages on Tuesday in Nadendla mandal of Palnadu district reportedly due to mounting debts over the last three to four years created a panic-like situation among the local residents(The Hindu, June 18<sup>th</sup> 2025).

There exists an epidemic of suicide among farming communities in the regional provinces of India. The increasing death tolls of farmers in individual states provide sufficient indication of a

pathological condition within society. Nearly 400,000 farmers have committed suicide in the country between 1995 and 2018 (NCRB 2019). This implies that approximately 48 farmer suicides occur every day( Kannuri & Jadhav 2021). According to the National Crime Records Bureau of India, there were nearly 400,000 reported cases of farmer suicides in between 1995 to 2018. Most official reports, academic studies, and journalistic accounts have identified indebtedness and the burden of loan defaults as the primary reasons behind these tragedies. This paper argues, however, that indebtedness is far from being a purely economic condition. Rather than being a direct cause of suicide, it reflects a deeper social condition—a symptom of societal ill health that has been exacerbated by the capitalization of society, which has detrimentally impacted marginal farming communities. The penetration of mass consumer commodities from the Western capitalist world, facilitated by liberalized trade and market policies, intensified aspirations among millions of Indians—rural and urban—thereby transforming everyday consumption patterns. This paper argues that the increasing instances of suicide, particularly among farmers, must be viewed as consequences of the contradictions and disruptions inherent in a money-driven economy. To fully comprehend the phenomenon of suicide, it is essential not to separate economic changes from the cultural lives of individuals. Within this broader context this paper seeks to understand the nature of farmer suicides in India, particularly in the era following economic liberalization. It contends that the liberal policy regime initiated in the 1980s and gaining visible social and cultural impact in the following decade has adversely affected the Indian peasantry by generating an anomic condition of life. In other words this paper aims to provide an analyse of Farmer's suicide in India from a consumption perspective by using the existing literature.

### **Methods of Study:**

Within this broader context, this paper aims to examine the phenomenon of farmer suicides in India, particularly in the era following economic liberalization. It adopts a qualitative, interpretative approach rooted in secondary literature review. Rather than conducting fieldwork or quantitative surveys, the paper draws on existing literature such as government reports (such as NSSO and NCRB data), scholarly articles, empirical studies, and theoretical frameworks to critically examine the structural and cultural conditions contributing to agrarian distress in India. The paper is primarily informed by a sociological perspective to understand the breakdown of social norms and collective life within farming communities under market-driven pressures. The methodological orientation situates farmer suicides not merely as economic failures arising out of indebtedness, but it exists as a social symptom of disintegration caused by consumer-oriented, liberalized markets.

By analyzing literature that links economic liberalization, capitalism changing consumption patterns, and agrarian crisis, the paper explores how the spread of new forms of market driven

pleasure and rising aspirations especially in post-1990s has created a culture of systemic vulnerability among marginal and small farmers. The method thus involves a thematic and theoretical synthesis of secondary sources to develop a cultural-political understanding of farmer suicides in post-liberalization India.

### **Capitalization of societies and Changing patterns of Consumption: From Marxian to Foucault**

As for Moore, so for us—capitalism is now all around us. The incentive to study it has never been more compelling than now, as individuals and communities across the world are experiencing, negotiating, and living in a market-dominated world by reforming their production and consumption patterns. Marx's analytical concepts have, over the years, remained an intellectual foundation for analysing modern capitalism. Karl Marx provided both a theoretical and an empirical model for understanding industrial capitalism. His early and later writings contain profound philosophical insights. When considering the process of consumption under modern capitalism, its moral and philosophical dimensions cannot be ignored. In this context, it becomes necessary to revisit Marx's writings on alienation and capitalism to assess their relevance in understanding modern consumption.

Capitalism, according to Marx, refers to a mode of production in which capital becomes the dominant means of production, first emerging in Europe. The Industrial Revolution in England spurred technological growth, paving the way for capitalist economies. Mass consumption, as it developed in the late twentieth century, was, of course, unknown during Marx's lifetime. He neither experienced the birth of the consumer society nor directly addressed consumption and culture—topics that are central to our concerns today. Yet, Marx's work leaves us with a rich legacy of philosophical and conceptual tools that help us make sense of the complex forces shaping contemporary consumer society.

Marx's analysis of modes of production suggests that transformations within these modes have led to the emergence of a distinct consumer culture in modern societies. Modern consumption, as a product of the capitalist mode of production, brings about the objectification of consciousness through commodity production. While Marx did not witness the rise of consumer culture, he did recognize certain characteristics of commodities that later thinkers would identify as central to understanding consumerism.

Today, it is argued that consumption is intimately tied to commodity production, to the extent that it commodifies human relationships. For Marx, a commodity is a product not created for direct use or personal consumption, but for sale in the market. According to him, workers in industrial capitalism produce goods that do not belong to them, using tools and machinery that

also do not belong to them. In this process, Marx suggests, a social relationship between people is transformed into a relationship between things. Commodities come to represent human relations, turning them into market relations. As Marx puts it:

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour(Marx, 1974[1867]: 77.)

In this context Marx also used the term fetishism of commodities to describe the disguising or masking nature of commodities. It means in other words the appearance of goods hides the story of those who made those commodities. Thus, process of consumption is reduced to an animal level. Marx writes in this regard:

Man (the worker) no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in his dressing-up, etc: and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but animal. What is animal? Certainly eating, drinking, procreating, etc, are also genuinely human functions. But in the abstraction which separates them from them the sphere of all other human activity and turns them into sole and ultimate ends, they are animal (as quoted in Bocock,1993:49).

This is how, in modern market society, commodities not only conceal but also come to stand in for—or even replace—relationships between people. In other words, they reify social relationships. *Reification* refers to the process of making a product or object appear thing-like. As a result of this process, the social relations embodied in an object come to seem fixed, natural, and beyond human control.

Although the capitalist system has undergone significant transformations over the years—many of which were unknown during Marx's time—his analysis of alienation and commodity production remains crucial for understanding modern consumerism. His insights into commodity production continue to be effective tools for making sense of today's consumer society.

Max Weber's work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* continues to provide a sophisticated foundation for the theory of capitalism, even today. While at first glance Weber's perspective may seem to have limited relevance to the study of consumption, his thesis proves valuable in understanding the nature of early capitalism and the emergence of status groups—groups that, in later phases, contribute significantly to the development of consumer society.

The primary objective of Weber in writing *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was to demonstrate how social actions are shaped by belief systems. He proposed a connection between religious values and the growth of capitalism. According to Weber, “Western capitalism is motivated by two kinds of contradictory activities: on the one hand, a devotion to amassing wealth beyond the personal needs of the individual, and, on the other, the avoidance of the use of wealth for the purpose of personal pleasure or enjoyment” (Morrison, 1995:245). In this way, Weber identified asceticism as a driving force behind the rise of capitalism.

Asceticism refers to religious self-denial—a deliberate rejection of worldly pleasures in pursuit of a higher moral purpose or valued goal. In this respect, Morrison writes:

Weber reasoned that the spirit of capitalism can be identified by three overriding imperatives or demands: first, the devotion to amassing wealth and profit beyond the personal needs of the individual; second, the commitment to unrelieved toil and work coupled with self-denial; and third, the avoidance of the use of wealth for purposes of personal enjoyment. It is this ‘spirit’, according to Weber, that forms the special nature of western Capitalism (Morrison, 1995:245).

According to Weber, cultural factors function as a set of values that provided certain groups of people with the motivation to work diligently, build enterprises, reinvest in them, and—crucially—not to consume the surplus value or profits in luxurious living. The driving force behind this ethic was the religious values of Calvinism, which instilled a rationalistic value system among early bourgeois capitalists. These early Calvinist capitalists became successful entrepreneurs because they adhered to an ethic that limited their consumption of luxury goods and emphasized saving for investment.

Thus, it becomes evident that “economic actions, such as the rational pursuit of profits by making and selling commodities for a market, as well as consumers’ desires and ability to purchase such goods and services as modern capitalism provides, take place in a wider social, cultural context”(Bocock, 1993:40). However, Weber—like Marx—did not witness the rise of consumer culture, which is fundamentally based on the principle of *more* consumption. Nonetheless, his analysis of capitalism offers valuable insights into the role of cultural or ideological stimuli in the emergence and persistence of social formations.

Contrary to the archaic modes of consumption, “capitalist consumption is very much an individual consumption rather than one involving the whole community or social order” (Mei-hui Yang, 2000). Individuals and groups now consciously pursue alternative lifestyles through the consumption of vast quantities of goods and services. In the contemporary period, the process of consumption has become so pervasive that it shapes our everyday lives and daily practices. In

contrast to pre-capitalist societies, 20th-century consumer capitalism, as Baudrillard illustrates, is characterized by a “political economy of signs,” where media and advertising make production increasingly dependent on consumption—or more precisely, on the culture of needs and desires.

Foucault’s concept of Biopolitics is important here to understand the new phases of capitalism and its effects on individuals. Biopolitics is a system of government that regulates populations through the tactical uses of power. The techniques of biopolitics are applied to the aggregate population literally everything starting from birth, death, production, and illness is being controlled through that power (Foucault 2004, 243). Biopolitics was thus a necessary condition for the survival and revival of capitalism as it responds to the process of governance of people under capitalism. This mode of governance has serious consequences not only for the production but also for the reproduction of social life of individuals.

### **Post-Liberalization India: Shifting Patterns of Consumption**

With the globalization of the world economy, consumer culture has truly become an international culture (Lury, 1996). It is argued that the culture of consumption, which originated in the West, has over time taken deep root across the globe (Venkatesh, 1994), shaping human behaviour in unprecedented ways (Bauman, 1996). This process has begun to unfold in India as well, with the integration of its economy into global markets.

Consumerism is no longer perceived negatively in India, in contrast to the ascetic values that once defined traditional Indian culture. The acquisition of material goods is no longer seen as contradictory to Indian identity. India—once the land of history’s most renowned ascetic, Mahatma Gandhi—has undergone a significant transformation. Gandhi’s ideal of asceticism has, in many ways, been replaced by a new form of *consumer asceticism*.

As a symbolic reflection of this shift, individuals like Tarun Narula now find meaning in celebrating Gandhi’s birthday in shopping malls. As Waldman writes:

Tarun Narula, a 25-year-old computer instructor, celebrated Mohandas K. Gandhi’s birthday on Oct. 2 by going to the Metropolitan Mall. So, did so many thousands of others that the parking lot was full, as were those of the other two malls across and down the street. Indian-made sport utility vehicles, cars and motorcycles fought for space, choking the roads of this satellite city south of Delhi. Inside the malls, young people sipped coffee at Barista Coffee, the Starbucks of India. They wandered through Indian department stores, Marks and Spencer, Lacoste and Reebok. Families took children to McDonald’s, or the Subway sandwich shop (Waldman, 2003).

Something significant is happening in our everyday lives, as is evident in the world around us. We are witnessing changes not only in material culture but also in non-material culture. New lifestyles now dominate our daily realities, centred around shopping malls, enticing commodities, nightclubs, and more. Observing the intensity of these changes, it is argued that a culture of consumption has firmly taken root in India. For some, the very definition of 'life' has transformed—equated with luxurious consumption.

“Life is short, madam,” said Sanganagouda Patil, a politician and landowner, explaining why he felt compelled to buy a new car model every two years. He was at another Toyota showroom, about 1,000 kilometers away in Karnataka, inspecting the Innova—even though he already owned four cars. Proper vehicles were expected of VIPs, he said, “even if the roads near his home district were not yet good enough to drive them” (Waldman, 2005).

Thus, commodities today are viewed through the lens of pleasure and lifestyle, particularly as the process of commodity production has intensified in the post-liberalization period. Millions like Sanganagouda Patil are either craving or dreaming of acquiring more, driven by the principle of “the more, the better.” On the other hand, there are those who, though influenced by the allure of consumerism, still struggle to afford it. Therefore, the changes in consumption patterns have been far from unilinear. The economic transformations ushered in by liberalization have had diverse implications for different segments of the Indian population.

For sections of the urban middle class and the affluent, the new economic policies have been highly rewarding. As Chaudhuri observes, “The entry of a large number of transnational companies at the beginning of liberalization led to a real possibility of young men and women entering the corporate sectors at salaries that their parents could not dream of even at retirement” (Chaudhuri, 2000:376).

Changes in average household expenditure on consumer commodities further illustrate shifting consumption patterns. According to the National Sample Survey (NSS) 55th Round on household consumer expenditure (1999–2000), there has been a continuous increase in household consumption expenditure across the population.

The common logic of market capitalism is to promote a culture of consumption. Everything is available for consumption to anyone who can pay for it—it is indifferent to whether people actually have purchasing power or not. If consumer capitalism is fundamentally about exercising choice through consumption, then it is clear that poverty imposes severe constraints on the ability to participate in this culture.

However, empirical studies on poverty have shown that the relationship between economic wealth and participation in material culture is highly complex and historically variable. There is

no straightforward correlation between an individual's economic status and their ownership of goods, perceptions of what constitutes necessity or luxury, understandings of needs versus wants, personal tastes, or sense of style.

As Bauman points out, "consumer inequality is felt as oppression and a stimulus at the same time. It generates the painful experience of deprivation, with ...morbid consequences for self-esteem... it also triggers off zealous efforts to enhance one's consumer capacity—efforts that secure an unabating demand for market offers" (1990:211). While poverty may limit the possibilities for consumption, it does not necessarily exclude people from consumer culture; on the contrary, it may actually incite participation in it (Lury, 1996:6).

Thus, poverty and consumerism can—and often do—coexist in society. The notion that poverty implies a lack of consumption, and that consumer culture implies an abundance of it, has been disproven in the Indian context.

### ***Changing 'Bharat': exploring ruralities in the Neoliberal times***

In recent years there has been a change in the attitudes and manners of consumption across rural areas. Rural marketing has topped the agenda of the marketers. Giridhardas(2005) writes:

India's 700 million villagers now account for the majority of consumer spending in the country, more than \$100 billion a year. Millions step into consumerism each year, graduating from the economics of necessity to the economics of gratification, buying themselves motorcycles, televisions, transistor radios and pressure cookers.

"Basically, what we are observing is the impact of liberalization, which started in 1992," said Rajesh Shukla, an economist and senior fellow at the research council. "The impact on the smaller towns and rural areas is happening now.

This transformation has become possible due to revolutions in mass communication brought about by liberalization. Advertisements have increasingly turned their attention to rural populations, who constitute the majority of India's population. No longer rooted solely in urban sensibilities, advertisements have shifted their focus to appeal to the hearts and minds of rural consumers. For example, Coca-Cola, through its Aamir Khan ad campaign, successfully tapped into the rural market. The company introduced bottles priced at ₹5 and promoted them through regionally resonant advertisements, making a significant impact.

Companies have also been steadily investing in infrastructure to meet the growing demands of rural markets, underscoring the realization of rural India's immense potential. The case of pouch shampoos is particularly noteworthy. According to a *Hansa Research* report on rural

consumerism, shampoos have experienced some of the most "astounding" growth rates compared to other product categories in rural India. From a penetration level of 13% in 2000, usage rose to nearly one-third of the rural population—31.9%—by 2005. While the northern and western zones tripled in penetration, the southern and eastern zones doubled between 2000 and 2005. States like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu now have over half of their populations using shampoo. Remarkable increases were also observed in states such as Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat, where usage more than tripled within just five years (Chatterjee, 2006).

Even in poorer states, where affordability remains a concern, participation in consumer culture continues. A person may not have the money to buy a full bottle of shampoo but can afford a ₹1 pouch. Similarly, they may not be able to purchase a one-liter bottle of Coca-Cola, but they can buy a ₹5 serving. This has been made possible by the innovative marketing strategies of modern business firms, which have introduced affordable consumer items in smaller quantities, thereby encouraging rural participation in consumption.

In addition, advertisers have developed new ways of presenting content, keeping in mind the rural-urban divide and the varying educational backgrounds of their audiences. Nearly 40% of India's population is illiterate, with illiteracy being more prevalent in rural areas than in urban ones. This raises the question: how will illiterate rural consumers make sense of advertisements presented in Western styles and languages? To address this, advertisements are now frequently translated into various regional languages, ensuring that they are accessible and relatable to a broader spectrum of the population.

Purvita Chatterjee's analysis of the penetration of consumer products in rural markets is particularly relevant here. She discusses the spread of various consumer goods—such as skincare products and food and beverages—across different regions and states, regardless of their economic capacity to participate in consumer culture. Her analysis highlights the fact that poverty is not necessarily a barrier to people's participation in consumer culture. She writes :

In the Household product category, the overall penetration of utensil cleaners has gone up by 40 per cent in the last five years. Rural India is now buying specialized, branded utensil cleaners and moving away from the typical ash/soil usage in the past. Also, households that use toothpaste or tooth powder have seen an increase of close to 5 per cent in penetration.

The rise is more marked in the south zone, which continues to be the zone with the highest penetration in this category. While the penetration of consumer durables is low in rural India, colour TV penetration has risen by 200 per cent, followed by motor cycles at

77 per cent, refrigerators at 31 per cent, tractors by 28 per cent and Bicycles by 17 per cent (Chatterjee, 2006).

The process of rural consumption, though gradual, is gaining momentum with the increasing penetration of mass media. It is argued that “due to the increase in literacy rates and the penetration of conventional media, the perception and attitude of the rural consumer is changing, moving towards proper consumerism. The attitude and consumption habits of rural consumers are also changing and becoming more modern in an urban sense” (Kanjilal et al., 2006).

Rural India is also experiencing a transformation in lifestyles. Changes in consumption patterns are visible in nearly every aspect of daily life. LPG cylinders are replacing traditional wood-fired *chulhas*; Coca-Cola and Pepsi are increasingly replacing *nimbu pani* and *lassi*; telephones, color televisions with cable connections, and newspapers are no longer the exclusive possessions of the urban elite. Even in terms of clothing, traditional hand-woven garments such as the *lungi*, *gamchha*, and *dhoti* are gradually being replaced by standardized, machine-made Bermudas, trousers, and T-shirts.

Although rural consumers are increasingly resembling their urban counterparts, one fact remains: compared to urban society, the rural consumer continues to be driven primarily by necessity and remains cost-conscious and thrifty in spending habits. Decision-making in rural communities is still a careful and deliberate process. Nevertheless, multinational and corporate firms have recognized that the future lies in rural markets. With the rural market expanding at a steady pace, rural consumers are participating more actively in consumerism.

As seen in earlier discussions—such as the cases of shampoo sachets and Coca-Cola—affordable, low-priced packaged products have enabled the rural poor to access multinational goods. The rate of this consumption is steadily increasing, drawing the less affluent into the fold of the new consumer culture. As Gorz (1967: 82–83) rightly points out, high levels of consumption among contemporary consumers do not necessarily indicate higher levels of affluence.

In this context, the role of media is crucial. Through advertisements, media has the power to draw consumers from all social classes into the web of consumption. While changes in consumption patterns may not directly explain the rise in farmer suicides, the evolving consumption habits of the rural poor can certainly be identified as a contributing factor to increasing levels of indebtedness among farmers.

### **Agrarian crisis and the fate of Indian farmers in Neo Liberal times**

The "new" economic policy introduced in the 1990s emphasized the withdrawal of the state from the economic sphere, leaving it to the logic of market forces. According to many scholars, this shift had a detrimental effect on the agrarian sector. The introduction of liberalization and globalization in the early 1990s further intensified pressure on the agricultural economy. While it may have been beneficial for industry to freely import the latest technologies and operate in a competitive environment, allowing the agricultural sector to be subjected to the uncertainties of the free market proved to be problematic.

In India, most of the land is cultivated by small landholders who often rely on borrowing to invest in the cultivation of cash crops. In a completely free and open market, these indebted small farmers are at a disadvantage when negotiating with powerful traders. The minimum support price (MSP) regime for food grain crops, therefore, had been a crucial form of protection for farmers in the pre-liberalization era.

The current agrarian crisis is widely seen as a direct consequence of the shift in policy priorities during the early 1990s (Jodhka, 2006). The emergence of a "new economy," characterized by the rapid spread of information technology, the expansion of media, and changing patterns of consumption, led to the marginalization of rural areas and the communities dependent on agriculture. The policies of economic liberalization, from this perspective, also compelled the state to open all sectors of the Indian economy to global markets.

Following this line of argument, Chandrasekhar and Ghosh write:

Public agricultural extension services have all but disappeared, leaving farmers to the mercy of private dealers of seed and other inputs such as fertilizer and pesticides who function without adequate regulation, creating problems of wrong crop choices, excessively high input prices, spurious inputs and extortion. Public crop marketing services have also declined in spread and scope, and marketing margins imposed by private traders have therefore increased. All this happened over a period when farmers were actively encouraged to shift to cash crops, away from subsistence crops which involved less monetised inputs and could ensure at least consumption survival of peasant households (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2004).

The declining significance of agriculture may appear to be quite "natural," and perhaps even a desirable process. In many parts of the world, the growth of industry and modern service sectors has led to a similar shift. However, the Indian experience is somewhat unique. India has witnessed growth in the service sector and the emergence of large-scale consumerism without a corresponding increase in industrial production.

***Capitalist Aspirations and Suicidal Realities in India's Farming Communities***

The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) conducted the Situation Assessment Survey (SAS) of farmers in 2003 (January–December), covering 51,770 households across 6,638 villages nationwide. The survey provided substantial evidence of the agrarian crisis and the measurable conditions of farming communities. The results revealed the grim realities faced by farmer households in terms of income, expenditure, and indebtedness. It offered a comprehensive picture of farmer households at the pan-India level, examining both production and consumption dimensions.

According to the survey, the average annual income of a farmer household at the all-India level was ₹25,380, which included income from cultivation, wages, animal husbandry, and non-farm business activities (Narayanmurthy, 2006). Of this, the income from cultivation alone amounted to only ₹11,628 per household annually. The situation in individual states was not significantly different from the national average. The highest average annual income—₹65,856—was reported in Jammu and Kashmir, followed by Punjab and Kerala. The lowest income was reported in Odisha, with Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh just above it. Surprisingly, relatively developed states such as Tamil Nadu and West Bengal also reported average incomes below the national level.

When the average cultivation income (₹11,628) is compared with the average expenditure on cultivation (₹8,791), the net annual farm business income of a farmer household comes to only ₹2,837 at the all-India level. The picture worsens when state-level data is considered. Alarming, the net farm income is negative in Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu—indicating that in these states, the average annual expenditure on cultivation exceeds the income generated from it.

According to this survey, the declining rate of net income has compelled farmers to fall into the trap of debt. Case studies further illustrate the extent of indebtedness among Indian farmers. A study conducted by H. S. Shergill in the mid-1990s found that as many as 86 percent of the respondent farmers routinely borrowed from various credit agencies for short-term investments in crops. Nearly 27 percent of all farmers borrowed for capital investments in farm machinery. In terms of reliance on borrowed money, smaller landholders were clearly in a much weaker position than larger landholders. While larger farmers also borrowed frequently for both short- and long-term investments, many of them had accumulated savings to fall back on.

The average per-acre outstanding debt of small farmers was ₹3,396, compared to ₹1,398 and ₹1,599 for medium and large farmers, respectively. More recent studies have found even higher levels of indebtedness. Interestingly, despite official efforts to improve access to institutional

credit for cultivators, a significant proportion of short-term borrowing (61.31 percent) across all categories of farmers came from commission agents in grain markets, known as *arhtias*. As many as 63.85 percent of farmers regularly borrowed from them. The primary cooperative credit societies were the next most common source, with 51.31 percent of farmers relying on them for short-term credit. Only 8.85 percent of farmers borrowed from commercial banks for short-term agricultural investments (Shergill, 1998).

Another study, conducted by a team led by Sucha Singh Gill(1985), found that the indebtedness of surveyed farmers who had committed suicide in the Malwa sub-region of Punjab ranged from ₹10,000 to ₹6.5 lakh, with the average outstanding debt being ₹1.25 lakh per farmer household. The cost of informal credit is almost always higher than that of institutional credit, with *arhtias* typically charging a monthly interest rate of 2 to 3 percent. Furthermore, as emphasized by classical literature on India's agrarian social structure (Bhardwaj 1974; Bhaduri 1984; Bardhan and Rudra 1978), informal credit is often tied to other obligations—such as the interlocking of credit with the product market.

The existing literature thus points to a clear link between the worsening economic conditions of rural populations—particularly small farmers and landless laborers—and the growing incidence of suicides in the farming community's data and various studies on farmer suicides clearly highlight the gap between income and expenditure as a major factor leading to indebtedness and, subsequently, suicide. However, these explanations do not capture all aspects of the crisis as to what led these gaps expand or arise. Durkheimian concept of 'anomie' may explain this context of rising gaps between aspirations post liberalised economy that has brought about a sudden change or transformation led by market-driven demands. This argument is echoed in the study by Mohanty (2005, 247) where he argues that the farmer suicides are connected to the changing conditions faced by the rural population following rapid economic growth and the spread of neoliberalism. Particularly this has led to individualisation tendencies amongst small farmers this is an identity that has been conferred on them by the market (Mohanty 2005, 267).

## **Conclusion**

This article's analysis of the consumption led approach to farmer suicide brings to light the problematic ways in which, the neoliberal market forces work to push the farmer to the path of self-destruction. While extensive research has emphasised on the debt factor in farmers suicide, certainly the indebtedness need to be analysed within the larger context of rising aspirations and how these conditions of indebtedness was being created through market led economic transformations. The "disintegration of community" and the emergence of "new consumer aesthetics," driven by technological advancements and intensified by globalization, play a crucial role in creating anomic conditions of living amongst the farmers making them vulnerable to

deaths. These shifts have pushed farming communities into an increasingly precarious and uncertain state of existence where death is being viewed as the only option to claim one's one life . In this way these cases of the farmer suicides shows how death serves the purpose of contemporary biopolitics of development shaped by neoliberal tendencies(Alt, 2019).

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