

Death as Escape: Farmers' Suicides in Sadanand Deshmukh's *Baromaas*

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Death, a permanent termination of the biological functions that sustain a living organism has been defined variously by various philosophers, psychologists, and scientists. Death is the condition of being dead. Death, an event as natural as birth, is an inevitable fact of human life. Death has always fascinated man. The death means, "Annihilation, ceasing to exist, would bring all of this planning and nurturing an end. There would be nothing in life to look forward to- no pressing on with the things you presently take to be significant, no fresh undertaking, no future self to look after, no you at all" (Luper 3). As death means annihilation, then for most of us, most of time, dying would be very bad, painful. However, the ancient philosophers like Epicurus and Socrates tried to convince people that death could not harm us.

Steven Luper quotes the letter of Epicurus (341-270) to Menoeceus, "Death . . . , the most awful of evils is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not"(Luper4). While Socrates considers death harmless and a portal to an afterlife in which we will continue to live well and in that sense unreal. In dying, people get deprived of the good things they would have enjoyed had they lived on. However, as death takes away good, it takes away bad with good. The death provides escape to those suffering from the devastating loss of a loved one or painful degenerative diseases, proving it a very good thing. According to existentialists like Heidegger and Sartre, the awareness of death is a means of heightening sense of urgency in life that it would otherwise lack. Heidegger also claims that the awareness of death confers upon man a sense of his own individuality. (*The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 307, 308) The present paper tries to focus the theme of suicide in *Baromaas* as escape from all kinds of deprivations, frustrations and humiliations.

Sahitya Academy Awarde winner novel *Baromaas* written by Sadanand Deshmukh throws light on the various aspects of the agrarian life of India in general and Maharashtra in particular. Majority rural population of India engaged in farming. Agriculture is a profession that not only includes farming but customs and tradition, overall cultural lifestyle related to it. The author of the novel, Sadanand Deshmukh himself was born in such an agrarian family. His father was a farmer who belonged Marathwada region of Maharashtra. This part of Maharashtra always remained drought-prone. *Baromaas* is his second novel published in 2002, which means 'twelve enduring months'. The farmer community is always under threat either of nature or the money lenders. These money lenders illegally lend money to the farmers and give very inhuman treatments to them when they are not able to pay the debt in time. The farmers are humiliated by such people on one side and there is no minimum support price to the agricultural produce on the other side. The only way remains for the farmers is to commit suicide. Farmers from Maharashtra are among the most hardworking, adoption of scientific inputs is high, basic support infrastructure has much improved over the years

and still high levels of stress. This is one side of the picture. The other side of the picture is not so encouraging. The number of farmers' suicide is very high in the state. The present paper tries to focus on suicide of farmers as an escape from life full of uncertainties, frustrations and humiliations.

Farming is the main occupation in India. Farmer's suicide is the major problem in India and in Maharashtra. They face many natural and manmade calamities though they do hard work. They lose everything due to natural calamities which leads them to commit suicide. National crime records bureau of home ministry of India has declared that 1,66,204 farmers have committed suicide from 1996 to 2005 and 40,000 thousands farmers in Maharashtra have committed suicide since 1997. A well-known economist Dr. Sengupta, who has given a report to central government, says that 'Maharashtra's land is a graveyard for farmers'. Actually farmers are the one who produce food for everyone. But the government's policies in some last years have been favoring capitalists and destroying welfare of agrarian society. There is no proper infrastructure to help farmers and farming.

There is no policy of fixed prices and no guarantee of production. Thus they are exploited by arbitrariness of policy makes on one hand and nature on the other. They have to complete the education of their children and expend money on medical, clothes, house building, marriage and other works in their families. They are not able to manage these all things from the production of farms. Seventy seven percent farmers that committed suicide were literate and educated. All types of farmers, from all regions, from all castes and religions commit suicide. Farmers and workers, related to farming, are divided as unorganized sectors. Money lending is another reason for farmers' suicide. Private money lenders give loans to farmers without any restriction and on high interest rate. Indian farmers are mostly the illiterate people, who don't understand debt policies of government. So the money lenders take the compound interest as they want.

Nobody commits suicide happily. The farmer community is very much conscious about its respect and honour, hence if they get humiliated, they cannot bear it and embrace death. The farmers are considered as the Annadata, but the same people are suffering a lot. After Independence our country was insufficient food grains, the government of India used to import from other countries like the U.S. and European Countries. Our farmers made India excess in food. Farming is considered the main occupation of the country. Today, the condition of the farmers is not so good. Farmers produce the food and give everything to the nation but they have nothing with them. Indian agriculture is under the great depression. The changing technological developments and changing government policies changed the attitude of the people in general and the generation born after 1991 in particular. People are forgetting the fact that man can live without modern technology but cannot survive without food.

The story of the novel moves around a young man named Eknath. He spent his childhood in a small village with his parents and other relatives. His family occupation is farming from his forefathers. His grandfather was a farmer, so his father was. But there is a generation gap of thinking. Eknath's grandfather was strongly against the modern techniques of farming. He believed in the traditional way of farming and was against the use of chemical fertilizers and advanced BT seeds. He even refused to consume food grown on the farm where chemical fertilizers are used. But on the other hand, Eknath and

his father thought of a modern way of agriculture. The farmers do hard work in their farms but natural calamity like famine is always there. It does not leave farmers aside and let them suffer. The natural conditions by and large are against the farmers. Hence there is news in daily newspapers about the killing of self by the farmers. Eknath is post graduate in Marathi literature. His family took great efforts for his education. Though he secured good marks, he could not get the job. Being a member of a farmer's family Eknath did not have money to fulfil the donation of the employer. His younger brother Madhu wanted to sell some piece of land in order to fulfil the demand for donation but everybody was against this idea. Sometimes Eknath thought the same idea. But some part of the land was sold when Madhu got the chance of job of gramsevak. The savkar – money lender cheated Madhu's family by adding extra conditions on the paper. Madhu gave money to the middle man Sathe for his job, but unfortunately died in an accident and the P.A. of the MLA took the money and refused to give any assurance of job to Madhu. His family thus gets badly affected by this betrayal. Madhu made a gang of such unemployed boys and they used to dig for the secret wealth buried by their forefathers. One of the boys his gang Dilip went crazy due to unemployment and his craziness lingered in the novel till the end. Madhu's gang did not get any wealth and became robbers in the end. On the other hand, Eknath wanted to have money in order to fulfill the donation; he did new experiments on the farm. This has created many familial problems in Eknath's life. There was always a quarrel between his mother and his wife. His wife Alka left Eknath and went to live with her parents. The misery became worst when Subhanrao Eknath's father commits suicide due failure of the crops and by accepting the responsibility for the failure of the family. Moreover, Eknath's brother-in-law embraced death as he could not repay the money he took from the moneylender. Actually, the moneylender imposed illegal and unnatural interest which made him impossible pay and he committed suicide.

There is no fixed policy for prices of agrarian products. The government increases the minimum support price of crops every year, but the middlemen don't allow the farmers to share their profit. In the end, the farmers don't get the direct benefit of any of the government schemes. The banks say that they are willing to give all kinds of loans to the farmer with minimum documents. But the ground reality always remains something different. The banks many times demand unnecessary documents and put such conditions before the farmers which they cannot fulfill. In Baromaas also the writer throws light on this issue. Here Balimama, Eknath's maternal uncle wanted a fresh crop loan by renewing the old loan. The bank demands the papers of the farm for the sanction of the loan. The talathi (the lowest rank revenue officer of the system) is avoiding giving the papers by giving unnecessary reasons. Balimama abuses the system. On the one side government says that farmers will get their papers related to the farm at their home as and when the demand. But the talathi wants a bribe from the farmers. Until Balimama gives the talathi fifty rupees he will not give the papers. This is nothing but an insult to the injury of the farmers. Though Balimama gets the papers still is not easy to get his loan renewed. The bank officer rejects his proposal by showing him the waiting list of the farmers who are in the line of getting loans. Thus renewal of the crop loan becomes difficult to work for Balimama. Eknath started working in the farmer's movement. He tells the farmers about the advanced farming and crop techniques on the farm. He tries to convince the farmers about the ways of modern farming. Eknath feels that try new crops

and especially fruit farming. He is in favour of globalization and he says that the government should not impose on exports. He advocates the problems of farmers, loans, debts, loss of production value at APMC. He strongly feels that nature, money lenders and government policies are enemies of farmers and they are responsible for the destruction of farmers. Deprived support of all kind farmers could not break this vicious circle and surrender to death. However death is not a solution but an escape.

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