

PORTRAYAL OF INDIAN AGRICULTURE IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF KOTA NEELIMA

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Abstract

Agriculture had been the backbone of Indian economy. Its Indian agriculture that helped Indian economy to flourish for ages. Moreover, it did not just accelerate the economic development but sustained human existence, being the cradle of Indian civilization. The agriculture of the country underwent sea changes in the due course of time. From being sheerly manual, now it has been machine-oriented and technologically assisted. Facing numerous hurdles like climatic changes, irrigation depletion, poor agricultural infrastructure, hidden unemployment, outdated or overused farming methods, illiteracy among the farmers, debts, addictions, inadequate financial support by the government agencies, the vicious circle of private money lending and many such aggravate the agricultural conditions resulting in agrarian crisis. Farmers, glorified for their physical powers, perseverance, and patience for ages have been weaker, helpless and in need of support and stability in this transformative agricultural phase.

A few writers portrayed this agricultural transformation vividly in their works. For instance, it is renowned American novelist Pearl Buck who presented the predicament of the Chinese farmer Wang Lung in her 1931 novel *The Good Earth*. Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, the 1954 novel that chronicles the life of a tenant farmer Nathan delineates the plight of tenant farmers. In recent years, Sonora Jha, in her novel *Foreign* dealt with the problems of farmers of Vidarbha region mainly. Amidst such, is the voice of Kota Neelima, strong and clear. The novelist, political activist and commentator, Kota Neelima's oeuvre deals with the Indian agriculture, Indian farmers, agricultural transformation, and agrarian crisis consistently, and her fictions and non-fiction works continue presenting the realistic portrayal of them. The three select works of Kota Neelima – *Widows of Vidarbha* – *Making of the Shadow* and the novels *Shoes of the Dead* and *Death of a Moneylender*, brings forth the much-neglected issue of Indian farmers. *Shoes of the Dead* presents the facts related to the suicides of the farmers, her *Death of the Moneylender* and *Shoes of the Dead* – the two widely read novels thematize the agriculture transformation and the aftermaths of that.

Keywords: Indian agriculture, Indian economy, unprecedented hurdles, agricultural transformation,

WIDOWS OF VIDARBHA- MAKING OF THE SHADOWS

Kota Neelima's ' *The Widows of Vidarbha Making of the Shadows*' underline the changing face of Indian agriculture, anxieties, and agonies of the sons of the soil- farmers and the passivity towards agriculture in general. The sixteen interviews conducted by the author of the farm widows not just reveal the hardships and struggles of their lives after the demise of their husbands, but also expose the readers to the ruthless and ignorant government system that conveniently overlooks the plight of these widows. What do the farm widows of Vidarbha, and for that matter most of the farm widows in the country face is the endless struggle for existence, the unending questions of survival, the concern about the future, of themselves and their offsprings, the social and financial problems and many more. One of the gravest issues faced by the nation is the Farmers' suicides. Vidarbha had been recorded as the region in Maharashtra with the highest number of farmers' suicide. Farmers here prefer ending their lives by hanging themselves, or by consumption of the toxic pesticides etc. as they failed to handle the pressure. The poignant and realistic portrayal of the plight of the farm widows and the farmers brings forth the transformed face of Indian agriculture with the passage of time.

SHOES OF THE DEAD

Kota Neelima's Fictional work *Shoes of the Dead* at times comments on the socio-political system of the country along with the agrarian crisis. It portrays the war of an individual – Gangiri Bhadra against the existent socio-political system for farmers, his valiant and thoughtful acts that result in favor of the farmers and finally his penury and powerlessness resulting his tragic suicide. Though ironic that Gangiri Bhadra who relentlessly strives for the betterment of the farmers and attempts to motivate them to live, ends his existence by suicide, it is a realistic portrayal. Thematizing the class struggle of the haves and the have-nots, the novel represents the affluent class by Keyur Kashinath- the son of a seasoned politician. While Keyur possesses everything he aspires for – wealth, power, and position, Gangiri, the archetype of poverty, endless struggle, and lifelong suffering, the novel progenerates the existent social picture. The corrupt and ineffectual political system of the

country fails to govern the agrarian crisis. The rising numbers of suicides of the farmers in Mityala- the constituency of Keyur is his chief concern, not because he was worried about the farmers but was worried about his position as an MLA and his political career. Gangiri whose life takes an unexpected turn with the untimely death of his elder brother, leaves his academic profession, leaves his lucrative, respectable and stable job of a teacher, and takes up agriculture for livelihood. Though he tries his best to revive the profession of farmers, impart dignity and stability to them, the social discrimination, the stumbling block curtails his endeavors. It is commonly observed that the new generation hardly takes agriculture as the career for its inherent challenges, and even if an individual like Gangiri starts on such herculean task, the pressing trails and tribulations of life deter him so much so that he opts for something against which he struggled lifelong – suicides.

DEATH OF A MONEYLENDER

Kota Neelima's 2009 novel *Death of a Moneylender* like majority of her writing deals with her subject of concern – Indian agriculture. Kota has been into journalism for more than fifteen years of her career, and so it is not surprising to see her novels full of journalists apart from farmers. By representation of journalism in her novel, she presents a perspective more to observe the agrarian crisis. Falak Anand, the journalist from Delhi travels to the remote part of the country to cover the unusual story of the death. While the newspaper flood with the news of suicides of the farmers, it is surprising to cover the news of the death of a moneylender. Falak's journey and stay there unfolds altogether a different aspect of the lives of the farmers.

It won't be an exaggeration to say that poverty has been an inevitable part of the lives of farmers. The meagre yields that lead to insufficient earnings compel the farmers to opt for loans. The government banks literally pay no heed to the loan applications of the farmers. The red tapeism in procedures of banks make the farmers wait for their loans to be sanctioned unassured. Consequently, they choose private moneylenders for their immediate financial needs. Private moneylenders sanction their loans instantly at the cost of exorbitant interest rates. The mortgage is always favorable to the moneylenders. Not just the land and the property, but literally every belonging of him is usurped from him. The inability to repay the loan amount crushes the farmers so much so that they are commonly left with no choice than to end their lives. The lobby of private moneylenders constitutes the theme of *Death of a Moneylender*. Still, contrary to the reality of private moneylenders, the deceased moneylender portrayed in the novel is kind-hearted and humane. To free the destitute farmers from the brutal clutches of moneylenders, he sacrifices his life. His tragic death offers hopes and inspiration to live for many farmers.

CONCLUSION

Kota Neelima, being the vigilant observer of socio-political upheavals, senses their repercussions and presents them in her writing boldly and freely. The present state of Indian agriculture is best presented in her works. Her fictional and non-fictional works both are dedicated for the social cause. Kota Neelima believes in writing to bring in changes in the society than questioning it. Through her much-appreciated writing, she attempts to bring in constructive social changes. While in her works, farmers occupy the center-stage, other professionals like politicians and journalists mainly, constitute the well-knit background. By presenting the real picture of Indian agricultural transformation, Kota Neelima brings forth the much-neglected issue of Indian farmers. Indian agriculture is in dire need of urgent attention to it and Kota's writing serve to be the eye-opener in true senses.

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